

A PARENT-CHILD INTERVENTION FOR CONVEYING UNCONDITIONAL LOVE:
A TRANSCENDENTAL PHENOMENOLOGICAL PILOT STUDY

by

Sandra H. Robinson

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Doctor of

Philosophy

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ABSTRACT

Every child wants to know whether their parents love them. The answer to this question is absolutely the most important thing in any child's life. Most parents love their children, but not all know how to convey love in a way that their child *feels* loved. The purpose of this study was to examine how parents can put their feelings of love into action by applying a parent-child intervention of eye contact, focused attention, and physical touch. This transcendental phenomenological pilot study explored the lived experience of four individual parents applying the intervention over a 30-day period, contributing to positive change in the parent-child relationship. Throughout the study, interviews and surveys were conducted to gather data for further analysis. Findings of the study revealed major themes and sub-themes that showed the intervention to be effective in improving the parent-child relationship. These findings were discussed in relevance to extant literature. Implications and recommendations for future research were identified.

Keywords: unconditional love, focused attention, eye contact, physical touch, parenting

Dedication

Thank you, Lord, for calling me to this work, which is yours and yours alone.

To my wonderful family: Thank you for supporting me on this journey. Thank you for your love and encouragement and for making life more meaningful.

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List of Abbreviations

ANOVA – Analysis of Variance

CAMS-R – Cognitive and Affective Mindfulness Scale-Revised

CBCL – Child Behavior Checklist

CES-D – Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale

DASS – Depression, Stress, and Anxiety Scales

ECBQ – Early Childhood Behavior Questionnaire

IRB – Institutional Review Board

MAAS – Mindful Awareness Attention Scale

MLM – Multilevel Modeling

PSI – Parental Stress Index

SPSS – Statistical Package for Social Science

TBI – traumatic brain injury

TPh – Transcendental Phenomenology

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Unconditional love is often used to describe a parent's relationship with their child and carries with it the idea of an inseparable connection between parents and their children.

According to scholars, the child's experience of feeling unconditionally loved is essential for their overall health and well-being (Cordner, 2016; Grossman et al., 2005; Southam-Gerow, 2013). Studies show that parental support during childhood is a powerful predictor of a child's healthy development and adaptive functioning and that lack of parental support leads to poorer outcomes (Luby et al., 2012).

Some scholars have emphasized that part of the problem is that parents may not know how to communicate unconditional love and support to their children (Gottman, 1998). Therefore, counselors must help parents learn these skills (Greene, 2010). One intervention designed to teach parents how to convey unconditional love to their children is Campbell's model found in his book entitled "How to Really Love Your Child" (Campbell, 2015). This approach provided the essential basics in establishing a love-bond relationship between parent and child, which were communicated through (1) physical touch, (2) eye contact, and (3) focused attention. Although the intervention held promise, studies still needed to be done to explore how it was experienced or its effectiveness.

According to the U.S. 2016 National Survey of Children's Health (NSCH), 7.1% of children aged 3–17 years (4.4 million) have diagnosed anxiety, and 3.2% of children aged 3–17 (1.9 million) has diagnosed depression (Ghandour et al., 2019). This statistic indicates nearly one in 20 U.S. children have been diagnosed with anxiety and depression, of which nearly 20% of these children did not receive treatment in the past year (Bitsko et al., 2018). The quality of the parent–child bond is relevant to childhood anxiety (Ainsworth, 1978; Hughes et al., 2008). Some

studies have suggested that the relationship between the children's anxiety and parent factors is likely bidirectional, meaning that anxious children usually have anxious parents. Up to 80% of parents with anxious children also meet the criteria for anxiety disorder (Wei & Kendall, 2014).

There are four potential predictors of anxiety in middle childhood that emerged from the Hudson and Dodd study conducted in 2012: (1) child shows early anxiety, (2) child is behaviorally inhibited, (3) child has caregivers who are more overinvolved/overprotective/negative, (4) child has caregivers who have anxiety disorders (Greene, 2016; Hudson & Dodd, 2012; Siegel, 2018). This study showed that parental anxiety, parenting practices, and information biases are influential in understanding childhood anxiety (Ollendick et al., 2015).

A study conducted in 2018 by Keith King and his team focused on the impact of parenting behaviors on adolescent suicide. The results showed that positive parent-child communication is critical to children's healthy growth and development. In contrast, poor parent-child communication and neglect are associated with increased youth suicide. The study also pointed out that parents who emphasize verbally encouraging their children and providing frequent praise provide protective factors for their children against depression (King et al., 2018).

A child's sense of safety and well-being centers around the availability and responsiveness of their caregiver, whom the child approaches for protection and reassurance when frightened or in need (Bowlby, 1969). Children whose caregivers engage in positive parenting are significantly less likely to develop problem behaviors compared to other children who are anxiously attached to their caregivers (Lieberman et al., 2011). One way caregivers can positively demonstrate responsiveness to their children is through unconditional love, which is the developmental approach that underlies Campbell's intervention (Campbell, 2015) through

physical touch, eye contact, and focused attention. Although research data using this specific approach is almost nonexistent, there is supportive research for each of the individual components.

For instance, the Touch Research Institute at the University of Miami's Miller School of Medicine is dedicated to studying the effects of touch therapy. Their research has found that touch reduces stress, improves immune function, enhances attentiveness, and alleviates depressive symptoms. There have been several studies on eye contact (Andersen, 1985; Breed, 1972; Burgoon et al., 1986), where eye behavior has been shown to be crucial to the relationship experience. Eye contact communicates positive involvement and perceived intimacy with the other person. Focused attention continues to be an area of interest for researchers (Marvin et al., 2000; Shapiro et al., 2006; Siegel & Hartzell, 2003), where parents bring moment-to-moment awareness to the parent-child relationship and qualities such as listening with full attention and nonjudgmental acceptance are applied by the parent when interacting with their child (Duncan et al., 2009). Additional aspects of these individual modules found in Campbell's intervention will be further explored in Chapter Two.

This qualitative transcendental phenomenological pilot study explored the lived experiences of parents applying Campbell's intervention with their six-to-ten-year-old children. As stated above, the intervention was designed to nurture, support, and communicate unconditional love. The purpose of this pilot study was to examine how parents perceive the impact that Campbell's intervention has on both the parent and the child. During the study, a select group of parents were taught how to use eye contact, physical touch, and focused attention to convey to the child that they are emotionally available and responsive to taking care of them.

The parents applied what they learned to the relationship with their child, and the results were shared via a qualitative survey and during an experiential interview.

Background to the Problem

Children who receive unconditional love through physical touch, eye contact, and focused attention from their parents have better stress resilience, stronger self-esteem, and better brain development, promoting healthy emotional and physical growth. The positive impact of unconditional love on the child's physical health is undeniable (Milkie et al., 2015; Solomon & Siegel, 2003; Southam-Gerow, M. 2013). Interventions designed to improve the parent-child relationship are a promising solution (Siegel & Hartzell, 2003). After several years of presenting lectures at numerous conferences on parent-child relationships around the world, Dr. Campbell decided to address these problems with his intervention, which he describes in his book *How to Really Love Your Child* (Campbell, 2015).

Statement of the Problem

A parent's ability to perceive and respond to the emotional cues of their children, such as hunger, pain, or distress, is essential for survival and has been hardwired at the neural level to promote parental care as an innate protective system for children (Siegel & Hartzell, 2003). A caregiver's attention is unconditionally directed toward their children to understand, make sense of, and respond to their child's feelings and behaviors across the life span (Lee et al., 2012). Empathy facilitates parental care of their children and paves the way for successful social and emotional child development (Scharp & Thomas, 2018). However, too much personal distress, induced by emotional arousal, can impede the parent's empathetic behaviors, as it depletes cognitive resources to regulate their own effective arousal, thereby keeping them from effectively attending to their child's needs (Ruby & Decety, 2004).

Empathy, the willingness and ability to understand and care about another person's suffering, requires a loving attitude. The words *love* and *empathy* are used interchangeably in many situations. In this context, love is defined as joyful awareness and a desire to nurture and treasure the child. In this case, love would further mean an attitude that reaches toward the child who is suffering, in a conscious attempt to understand the child's painful feelings and experiences (Breggin, 1999). The brain regions supporting unconditional love are mediated by a distinct neural network relative to a caregiver's love and attachment. Some of these network structures also contain critical components of the brain's reward system. The rewarding nature of unconditional love facilitates the creation of strong emotional links between parents and their children, which contribute to preserving the parent-child relationship (Beauregard et al., 2009; Cooper et al., 2005; Swain et al., 2007).

Several supportive behaviors have been proposed for parents that children perceive as helpful: (1) *emotional support*—behaviors that communicate the child is cared for and loved; (2) *instrumental support*—practical and financial assistance to help with specific tasks; and (3) *informational support*—guidance or advice geared toward solving a specific problem. Additional support includes enhancement of self-worth, shared interests, concerns, and respect. Also, quality time, encouragement, companionship, help with tasks, and advice are highly favored by children (McNeely & Barber, 2010). Family researchers define supportive parenting as nurturing—i.e., showing love, care, and attention; giving praise—i.e., doing enjoyable things together; and sharing concerns with one another (Beauregard et al., 2009).

Engaged time or focused time in shared activities may provide parents the opportunity to transmit love, nurturance, and values from parent to child. These traits are known to promote better self-perception and higher motivation. A caregiver's quality time with the child is thought

to be especially important, even irreplaceable, for the well-being of the child. The expectation that caregivers can live up to these demands of spending dedicated periods of time and intense caregiving around the clock is unrealistic and attempts to do so are exhausting and stressful for them (Campbell, 2015). Other activities, such as spending time together as a family while eating meals together, going on family vacations, and attending family celebrations, enhance a sense of closeness, which leads to better psychological adjustment in children (Milkie et al., 2015).

Summary of the Problem

Every child wants to feel unconditionally loved by their parents (Bowlby, 1988). It is the foundation of every solid relationship. All aspects of a child's development require a foundation of love that is based on the parent's acceptance of their child for who they are rather than what they can do. Unfortunately, many children grow up feeling as though their parents never really loved them. Parents love their children, but they sometimes do not know how to convey love to their children in a way that the child can accept. Each child struggles to figure out who they are—to uncover their skills, beliefs, values, and goals. Knowing that they are loved first allows them to develop their full potential and explore all possibilities of who they are truly meant to be securely and safely (Ollendick et al., 2015). The effect of unconditional love on the parent-child relationship will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Two.

The Problem Statement

There are a range of parenting interventions that focus on improving the parent-child relationship, but not all interventions focus on engaging the parent as the primary delivery agent (Forehand et al., 2013). By developing a shared connection through empathy, it is possible that the child sees their parent as a collaborator rather than a competitor. Also, parental empathy promotes a positive attitude toward the child and promotes a healthier parent-child relationship

(Ashworth et al., 2012). Behavioral problems in children can negatively impact children's relationships with parents, leaving parents to deal with their children's increasing irritability, hostility, and conflict (Booker et al., 2016).

In the absence of effective parenting skills, this can lead to a caregiver feeling helpless, lashing out, retreating, or seeking comfort and protection from the child (George & Solomon, 2011). Children need to know that their parents love them; parents need adequate training and support to learn new skills and interventions that address their children's unique set of circumstances. Identifying the factors that support the child's flexibility and frustration tolerance is important (Ollendick et al., 2015).

Nature of the Study

This study centers around an intervention found in Campbell's book *How to Really Love Your Child* (Campbell, 2015). As described above, the intervention focused on the quality of the parent-child relationship and the primary task of learning how to love a child in such a way that the child *feels* unconditionally loved by their parents. The purpose of the study was to examine how parents can put their feelings of love into action by applying Campbell's intervention. Campbell's theoretical model is similar to Russell Barkley's "special time" model (Barkley, 2013) and Stanley Greenspan's DIR floor-time approach (Greenspan & Wieder, 2005), which will be discussed further in Chapter Two.

Because the goal of the study was to explore how the parent and child experience the intervention and their perceptions of its impact, the study used phenomenological methods (Moustakas, 1994). A phenomenology was fitting for this study because this method sought to unearth an in-depth and nuanced understanding of people's lived experiences. It allowed the researcher to study the participants' first-person point of view through their own perceptions,

feelings, thoughts, and behaviors and then analyze the content of those experiences within a defined situation (Langdrige, 2007; Moustakas, 1994).

Campbell's supportive parenting framework includes the construct of unconditional love, which is distinct from the empathy and compassion constructs of Barkley and Greenspan. Unconditional love is best thought of as an ideal that parents can aspire to with their children. This study posed the question, "How do a select group of parents describe the lived experience, meaningfulness, and impact of applying unconditional love via Campbell's (2015) approach?" This study sought to explore the following assumptions found in Dr. Campbell's book: (1) When parents consistently apply Campbell's method, they will perceive more positive emotional and behavioral outcomes with their children; and (2) When parents consistently apply Campbell's method, they will perceive that the quality or tone of the relationship improves.

Purpose of the Study

The overall purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of how the parent-child relationship changes after consistently applying Campbell's method of unconditional love, using the techniques of eye contact, physical touch, and focused attention. By exploring the lived experiences of parents and children between the ages of six to ten before, during, and after the intervention, new insights were identified to possibly improve parenting skills and enhance the child's ability to receive love.

Conceptual Framework

Theoretical perspectives on the parent-child relationship include major theories such as (1) evolutionary theory, (2) attachment theory, (3) social learning and social cognitive theories, (4) bioecological systems theory, (5) human behavioral genetics theory, and (6) family systems theory. The two primary theories that lent support for this study were attachment theory (Bowlby,

1988; Johnson, 2019; Wallin, 2007) and symbolic interaction theory (Aksan et al., 2009; Kuhn, 1964; Stryker, 1968).

Attachment Theory

Attachment theory supports the understanding of how love between a parent and child affects the child's development. It also addresses the establishment of the parent-child bond, the behavioral system, relationship maintenance, and relationship consequences (Alhusen et al., 2013; Sousa et al., 2011; Sroufe, 2005). The pattern of attachment consistent with healthy development is that of secure attachment, whereby the child is confident in their parent's availability and responsiveness to the child's adverse or frightening situations (Bowlby, 1988). The details of attachment theory will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Two.

Symbolic Interaction Theory

Symbolic interaction is a process of "interpretation of the action" through a person's individual perspectives and empathy-developing abilities, where meaning is attributed to objects or events based on interactions between people (Aksan et al., 2009). Also, these personal perceptions can change over time. Symbolic interaction has three basic propositions: (1) people develop attitudes toward things according to the meaning that those things propose to them, (2) the meaning is inferred from the interaction with other people, and (3) these meanings can change over time based on the interpretive process (Aksan et al., 2009). More details about how this theory relates to the study will be provided in Chapter Two.

Symbolic interaction theory has three core principles in which social constructs are founded: (1) meaning, (2) language, and (3) thinking (Kiff et al., 2011). This theory was applied during this study as a way to look at how children interpret signals from other people and how they are being viewed. Children internalize what they pick up from others and turn it into their

self-view. Children who are nurtured and supported become competent, trustworthy, and likable. However, negative evaluations, neglect, or lack of affection create negative self-images (Kiff et al., 2011).

Key Terms

The following is a list of operational definitions for the relevant terms used in this research study.

Communicating Unconditional Love

In this study, participants applied an intervention designed by Dr. Ross Campbell (2015) to communicate unconditional love from parents to their children. According to Campbell, children recognize their caregivers' feelings toward them by their behavior, whereby caregivers' actions convey unconditional love far more effectively than just words. The intervention entails helping parents understand and accept their child's temperament and helping them to have an attitude of believing in, expecting the best of, and defending their child. It also entails filling their child's "love tank" through eye contact, physical touch, and focused attention thoughts (Campbell, 2015). According to Campbell (2015), these actions by the caregiver communicate to the child that they are truly unconditionally loved and valued.

Communicating *Conditional* Love

According to Campbell (2015), communicating *conditional* love entails withholding praise, warmth, and affection based on the belief that showing too much approval and affection would spoil the child. A caregiver who conditionally loves the child by only showing affection would spoil the child. A caregiver conditionally loves the child by only showing affection when the child does something that is pleasing to them. In turn, the child learns to show affection to the caregiver only when they do something pleasing to the child. Conditional parenting sends the

message that children must *earn* their parent's love; the child must fulfill their parent's expectations before receiving affection and approval. The negative impact of conditional love weighs on the child, creating feelings of worthlessness, anxiety, and depression that carries over into adulthood (Campbell, 2015).

Empathy

Empathy is the parent's ability to perceive and respond to the emotional cues of their child. It facilitates parental care and social and emotional development (Heath et al., 2020). Empathy is exhibited through the loving attitude of the parent and their willingness and ability to understand and care about their child's suffering. Increased parental empathy was the primary mechanism of change in this study (Ashworth et al., 2012).

Parental Influence

A parent's cognition, beliefs, thoughts, and feelings affect their child's development (Greene, 2010; Kazdin & Rotella, 2008; Perry & Szalavitz, 2010). These filters also direct the way parents perceive their children's actions (Grossman et al., 2005). Conversely, children's behaviors affect their parent's thoughts and attitudes. Research indicates that the greatest influence on a child's development is the parent-child relationship (Sroufe, 2005).

Focused Attention

Focused attention is the parents giving their child their full, undivided, uninterrupted attention, which helps the child feel completely loved and valued. Focused attention makes a child feel like they are the most important person in the world to their parents. From the parent's perspective, focused attention is the most *demanding* need a child has because it is hard to recognize and even harder to fulfill because it takes time (Leijten et al., 2018).

Physical Touch

Physical affection from the parent is *crucial* to the child's development from birth to about seven or eight years of age (Kiff et al., 2011). Parents who include appropriate physical touch in their communication with their children convey unconditional love and ensure their children's emotional security (Swain et al., 2007).

Eye Contact

One of the first images to hold an infant's attention is the human face (Schore, 2014). After six to eight weeks of age, the child will begin to search for another person's set of eyes. Eye contact is a form of nonverbal communication that occurs when two people look at each other's eyes at the same time. There is overwhelming evidence in research data that eye contact automatically elicits positive affection reactions. However, this direct gaze with another individual can be complimentary but also oppositional, depending on one's interpretation of the situation (Hietanen, 2018).

Temperament

Temperament is the way a child responds to their environment and the world around them. One cannot change a child's temperament, so parents must adapt their parenting to their child's temperament. However, as the child develops and experiences new things, their temperament may naturally evolve. Reactivity, self-regulation, and sociability all contribute to the child's temperament (Abulizi et al., 2017).

Emotional Self-Regulation

Emotional self-regulation refers to the child's ability to deal with feelings such as anger, frustration, excitement, anxiety, or low mood effectively (Southam-Gerow, 2013). Learning how to regulate emotions and avoid meltdowns is a key developmental skill that parents need to teach

their children. The child's ability to direct their own behavior will impact the quality of their relationships in the future (Greene, 2010).

Assumptions, Limitations, Scope, and Delimitations

All research, including this study, contains inherent strengths and weaknesses. The following limitations exist and should be considered when interpreting the findings of this study. The researcher acknowledges that the nature of the study was more of a pilot study and would require further investigation of the study's results. Furthermore, this study will utilize a sample of children between the ages of six and ten located in the United States. The findings of this study are limited in their application to other populations because the sample used may not represent all age groups of children or other cultures.

However, the assumption is that the participants recruited are representative in terms of the parent-child relationship. Communicating unconditional love as a factor for change is limited to the proposed four-week protocol. As such, a measurement of long-term change using the unconditional love approach was not in view. However, the study provided insights for applications in future studies. During the study, the material was conveyed in person to the participants, and all counseling was delivered at the same location by the same researcher/therapist.

Significance of the Study

The field of professional counseling defines the parent-child relationship as ever-changing and ever-developing (Grossman et al., 2005). It follows the intellectual and cognitive changes that occur as people move throughout their life span, from childhood to adolescence to adulthood. This study intended to further the dialogue about the ways that parents and children interact with one another physically, emotionally, and socially. By promoting the ideal of

communicating unconditional love, improvements may be recognized in the human condition of the child across families, organizations, communities, and cultures. The intervention in this study purposed to communicate unconditional love to a child through intentional use of physical touch, eye contact, and focused attention. This researcher was hopeful that this study would offer helpful information to parents, teachers, educators, and clinicians about the basic problem of children growing up not feeling loved and the overall impact this has on today's society.

Summary

This chapter provided a rationale for the study of the communication of unconditional love and its effect on the parent-child relationship. It further examined the experience and impact of applying Campbell's intervention (physical touch, eye contact, and focused attention) with a sample of parents with children aged six to ten. The background of the current literature was reviewed. Chapter Two reviews research literature related to the impact of parenting practices and styles on the parent-child relationship and childhood behavior, parenting interventions that focus on improving the parent-child relationship, and the research method used in this study. Chapter Three describes the proposed methodology of the study. Information on the participants, the setting, the research design, the treatment, and the measures are included. Chapter Four provides an analysis of the data and the qualitative results. Chapter Five provides a summary, including the conclusions of the study, the implications for practice, and the recommendations for further research.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Parents need adequate training and support to learn new skills that address their children's unique set of circumstances. Dr. Ross Campbell's book entitled *How to Really Love Your Child* (Campbell, 2015) lays out a model of how parents can use physical touch, eye contact, and focused attention to better connect with their child in a way that the child feels loved by their parents. This pilot study centered around Campbell's intervention and explored the research question, "How do parents describe the lived experience of applying Campbell's model?"

Purpose of the Literature Review

The purpose of this literature review is to delve into the existing body of information on empirical studies that have been done using eye contact, physical touch, and focused attention as a way of promoting emotional connection and a sense of unconditional love. The review will highlight the need for and the relevance of the study, which sought to present an effective delivery method for parents to convey unconditional love to their children. The review will also provide a rationale for the research method used in the study.

Steps to the Literature Review

This chapter presents a review of the literature related to this study. To unearth relevant, conceptual, and empirical research, the researcher used keywords such as *unconditional love*, *conditional love*, *conveying love*, *eye contact*, *physical touch*, *focused attention*, *emotion regulation*, *collaborative problem-solving*, *parent-child relationship*, *parent effectiveness training*, *emotional nurturing*, *development of self-esteem*, and *parental love in action*. These terms were first submitted through the EBSCO Quick Search database, referencing the

psychology and behavioral science collection. Additional search engines were used to further explore these same queries: APA PsycNET™, Gale Academic OneFile™, Google Scholar, ProQuest Central™, PsycInfo™, and PsycTherapy™. These terms were also supported by a survey of reference lists from key studies and a review of recent scholarly books. After an exhaustive search, the literature was organized into themes, which are discussed throughout this chapter. These themes include (1) parental love through physical touch, (2) parental love through eye contact, and (3) parental love through focused attention.

Parental Love Through Physical Touch

Campbell recognized that children who grow up in a home where parents use physical contact will be comfortable with themselves and other people, and this is one of the most effective ways to convey unconditional love (Campbell, 2015). Fifteen years prior, Greenspan and Wieder (1999) created “Floortime” for parents and children to feel more engaged and connected to one another. Greenspan identified physical nearness, affectionate touch, and eye contact to help parents stay engaged with their children (Greenspan & Wieder, 1999). Although similar, the differentiation between Campbell and Greenspan was that Greenspan described eye contact and affectionate touch as a technique, whereas Campbell refers to a state of being in which unconditional love promotes physical touch (Campbell, 2015).

Campbell collaborated with another like-minded author in the development of *The Five Love Languages* book series (Chapman & Campbell, 2016). In one of their books regarding children and how each child expresses and receives love through different communication styles, Chapman and Campbell refer to two of the love languages for children as being physical touch and quality time (Chapman & Campbell, 2008). Campbell explained that to convey

unconditional love effectively using physical touch, the parent must show feelings of respect, affection, and commitment toward their child (Campbell, 2015).

Interpersonal touch is one of the main means of communication between parents and children and has long-lasting implications for children's physical and psychological development (Aznar & Tenenbaum, 2016). Research indicates that mothers touch their infants between 33% and 61% of the total time they interact with them, which helps children to regulate perceptions and emotions (Stack & Muir, 1990). Touch is also associated with self-esteem, life satisfaction, and social competence later in the child's life (Aznar & Tenenbaum, 2016). Studies on parent-child touch have focused on the frequency, location, and type of touch, but little has referenced how touch can be used to convey unconditional love between parent and child.

Parental Love Through Eye Contact

Eye contact is looking directly into the eyes of another person to communicate and convey an emotional connection, which can be demonstrated positively or negatively, depending on the current situation (Campbell, 2015). Eye contact allows the parent to first connect with their child on an emotional level to show the child that they are being "seen" (Siegel & Hartzell, 2013). While Barkley's use of eye contact was focused on the child's compliance or noncompliance with parental commands (Barkley, 1998), Campbell stressed conveying unconditional love to the child by the parent putting feelings into action through the crucial use of eye contact (Campbell, 2015).

Since 1965, there have been 109 empirical studies measuring eye contact, distinguishing between direct and indirect eye contact, and using a wide variety of assessment methods (Jongerious et al., 2020). Most of these studies were conducted in the United States ($n=60$) and European countries ($n=33$). There were 80 experimental studies, and 29 were observational

studies, of which eight had a longitudinal design. Studies included different age groups and focused mostly on healthy participants. Other groups were patients with mental disorders or autism or were primary care patients (Jongerius et al., 2020).

For example, Arnold studied eye contact behaviors in children with autism (Arnold et al., 2000). According to Arnold, one of the challenges was that little data existed regarding eye contact in social interactions with children *without* developmental disorders. The aim of the study was to provide normative data on the amount of eye gaze behaviors exhibited by five-to-ten-year-old children *without* developmental disorders as they interacted with one another in small group social settings. Normative data was collected using three conventionally defined behaviors: (1) eye gaze, (2) joint attention, and (3) object engagement. A mixed method of both quantitative and qualitative measures was used; observations were conducted in one-on-one interactions, as well as group sessions over an eight-week period. A multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA) was conducted. In summary, results suggest that eye gaze in child-child interactions is substantially less than that observed in adult-child interactions and that knowledge of eye gaze and joint attention is limited at best.

Other researchers hypothesized that a child's early development of psychopathy is associated with a failure to attend to the eyes of attachment figures (Dadds et al., 2014). Dadd's study observed oppositional defiant (ODD) children to assess them for callous-emotional (CU) traits during a task where the mother was asked to show love to her child. Eye contact and affection were measured for each dyad. There were 75 children and their mothers who participated in the study. The mixed method of qualitative and quantitative measures used in this study consisted of observations during tasks, parent self-report questionnaires, and video tapes, along with the use of both MANOVA and ANOVA methods to test the data. The results of this

study showed that psychopathy is mediated by poor orientation to emotional stimuli, especially the eyes of attachment figures, and that this compromises the child's responsiveness to parental discipline and affection and the development of higher-order empathic processing.

Emotion regulation was the key issue in a study exploring how eye contact between infants and mothers is associated with positive affect during face-to-face activities (MacLean et al., 2014). There were 84 infants and their mothers who participated in this study's still-face paradigm (SFP) procedure, which relies on the quantitative A-B-A method. Mother-child interactions were videotaped and coded for (1) self-regulation, (2) mutual eye gaze, and (3) infant affect measures. The main goal was to explore how mother-infant synchrony influenced infants' affective experiences during face-to-face interactions during the still-face paradigm. Mutual eye gaze was used to better understand the role of synchronicity in emotion regulation. Using multilevel modeling (MLM), the results suggest that an infant's experience of being synchronous with their mother is associated with observable changes in an infant's emotion regulation, along with positive changes in the infant's effective experience, and is apparent in real time (MacLean et al., 2014).

Lohaus (2001) addressed the longitudinal association between eye contact and maternal sensitivity in infants during free-play interactions. The study involved 20 mother-infant dyads, and data was collected over a 12-week period. The free-play interactions were videotaped and later analyzed. The maternal sensitivity rating scale was based on the Ainsworth's Sensitivity Scale (Ainsworth et al., 1978), which looked at how a mother perceived her child's signals, correctly interpreted them, and promptly reacted. In summary, the study found that increased eye contact rates at early age levels may be an early indicator of increased maternal sensitivity and lead to a decrease in the infant's crying.

Turkstra (2005) carried out a study to address the lack of quantitative data on eye-to-face gaze (also known as eye contact) in the literature on pragmatic communication. The study compared two groups of adolescents—16 participants in one group with traumatic brain injury (TBI) and 16 participants in the other “normative” group—using eye contact while engaged in three-minute conversations. It was hypothesized that the participants with TBI would have less eye contact. The conversations were videotaped, transcribed, and later analyzed using a two-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) procedure. The researchers found that there was no difference in the amount of eye contact between the two groups. It also showed that the eye gaze was longer when participants were listening and shorter when participants were talking. In summary, the study noted that eye contact serves a critical role in interpersonal interactions.

Leeb and Rejskind (2004) examined the origins of gender differences in infants and unfamiliar adults. There were 38 boys and 32 girls who participated in the study. All data was analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) and ANOVA. The researchers found that over time, in general, girls and women engaged in higher eye contact than did boys and men. They also found that gender-type behavior was not innate at birth but instead learned in early infancy.

Some studies simply looked at the impact that eye contact could have in reducing symptoms, such as reducing noncompliance in children with ADHD. For example, Kapalka’s study (2004) included parent training on how to make eye contact with their children. The results revealed that obtaining and maintaining eye contact while a parent issues a command to a five-to-ten-year-old child made it more likely that the child would obey the stated command. Moreover, if the parent held their gaze for an additional 20–30 seconds, the likelihood of

compliance was increased even further. This finding had significant implications for parent training programs going forward (Kapalka, 2004).

These studies collectively offer valuable data on how eye contact can have an impact in a variety of ways. Eye contact serves a critical role in interpersonal interactions. First, child compliance increases when parents obtain and maintain eye contact with their child. Likewise, maternal sensitivity rises higher with increased eye contact, and child psychopathy is mediated by poor eye contact with attachment figures. The findings described above, although limited, highlight the value of investigating an intervention that incorporates eye contact as a component of communicating love and acceptance to a child, a component no previous study had explored.

Parental Love Through Physical Touch

According to previous research, physical touch is one of the main means of communication between parents and children and has long-lasting implications for children's physical and psychological development (Aznar & Tenenbaum, 2016). Studies indicate that mothers touch their infants between 33% and 61% of the total time they interact with them, and that touch impacts a child's ability to regulate perceptions and emotions (Stack & Muir, 1990). Touch is also associated with self-esteem, life satisfaction, and social competence later in the child's life (Aznar & Tenenbaum, 2016). Studies on parent-child touch have focused on the frequency, location, and type of touch, but little has referenced how touch can be used to convey unconditional love between parent and child.

For example, Aznar and Tenenbaum (2016) examined touch as one of the main means of communication between parents and children, with 65 mothers and fathers along with their four-to-six-year-old children. Positive touch was examined during a play-related storytelling task and a reminiscence task (i.e., a conversation about past emotions). The researchers explored gender

differences in parent-child positive touch and proximity. Interviews, coding, and mixed-design ANOVAs were used during the data analysis. Results of the study showed that both parents touched their children more in the reminiscence task during the play task and that the four-year-old children were touched more than the six-year-old children. The researchers noted that it was difficult to compare the findings of the present study with previous research because there were no similar observational studies. However, they concluded that parent-child touch interactions need to be considered as a way for parents to communicate emotions to their children (Aznar & Tenenbaum, 2016).

A qualitative study conducted by Bretherton (2005) used attachment theory to gain insight into fathers' parenting experiences, using touch as an indicator of a good parent-child relationship. There were 49 husband-wife couples that participated in the study. Open-ended interviews and questionnaires focused on the relationships with their three-to-six-year-old children, from which themes were then extracted using interpretive induction. The authors reported three main themes: (1) affection, closeness, and attachment; (2) discipline and self-regulation; and (3) play and companionship. They found that fathers emerged as the "playful" parent, engaging in more physical activity than mothers. Fathers enjoyed spontaneous physical interaction with their children, often producing mutual physical and psychological closeness. A follow-up area for research from this study is the idea that fathers' sensitivity while engaging in physical touch is a predictor of children's self-confidence and trust in others during adolescence.

Moszkowski and Stack (2007) explored touch as a modality through which infants and mothers communicate. The participants were 44 mother-infant dyads. A still-faced procedure was used to investigate quantitative and qualitative aspects of infant touch, such as duration, type, and location. The mother-child interactions were videotaped in the participants' homes and

then coded for analysis using one-way and two-way ANOVAs. Types and locations of touch varied based on the mother's availability and the child's affective state. Moszowski and Stack (2007) concluded that infants used soothing and reactive touch from their mothers during distressing times to regulate emotion. He also found that, when mothers were unavailable, infants used self-touch as a means of external regulation.

The effect of interpersonal touch during childhood on adult attachment and depression was explored by Takeuchi and colleagues (2010). Participants were 390 undergraduate students who completed the Adult Attachment Relationship Questionnaire (RQ; Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991), and the focus was the frequency of touch during difficult stages of development. Attachment theory articles (Bowlby, 1969; Bowlby, 1973; Bowlby, 1980) provided the framework for the researcher's proposal that touch is the most fundamental way caregivers express love to their children. The Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale (CES-D) was used to screen for depression. An exploratory factor analysis was performed on the interpersonal touch experiences using the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS). The researchers concluded that children perceive parental touch as an affectionate bond that is viewed as reliable and trustworthy. They suggested that parental bodily touch has a stronger influence on the development of a secure image when it is provided earlier in childhood rather than later.

Specific forms of maternal touch during natural caregiving and mother-child play sessions were examined in a cross-sectional study to determine the role of touch as it evolves during the first year of an infant's life (Ferber et al., 2008). Participants were 131 mother-infant dyads divided into four groups aged 3, 6, 9 and 12 months. Coding was conducted separately for the two sessions and mean-level analyses were computed to assess the development of each type

of maternal touch across the twelve-month period. Each developmental form of touch—affectionate, stimulating, and instrumental—was examined using ANOVA. Results of the study concluded that with the infant’s development of crawling and mobility, mothers allow children more freedom and rely less on physical cues, contributing to the child’s growing independence. The study noted that further research is needed to understand the long-term effects of touch throughout the different stages of childhood development.

These studies reveal that physical touch is a critical means of communicating between parents and children, whereby children perceive parental touch as a reliable and trustworthy affectionate bond. The findings also emphasize the importance of physical touch from mothers to help regulate an infant’s emotions during stress and to promote a child’s self-esteem and social competence. Yet, similarly to the literature presented on eye contact as a means of expressing love to children, none of the studies focused on physical touch as a means of communicating love.

Parental Love Through Focused Attention

Focused attention, also known as mindful parenting, is characterized by a parent listening to their child with full attention, nonjudgmental acceptance of self and child, self-regulation in the parent-child relationship, and compassion during parent-child interactions (Duncan et al., 2009). There is evidence that parental mindfulness and focused attention are significantly associated with parental responsiveness to the child’s needs (Campbell et al., 2015; Parent et al., 2014). Parents who bring focused attention to their parenting situations listen to their children with full attention and nonjudgmental acceptance and constructively regulate their own emotions rather than blame their children. This helps to establish trust and emotional closeness in the parent-child relationship (Ryan & Madsen, 2007).

Previous studies on the implication of focused attention within the family have primarily used clinical samples, suggesting that parental mindfulness was indirectly associated with maladaptive child development outcomes through parenting practices (Garland et al., 2015). Research indicates that only limited work has been done on whether parental-focused attention has the potential to facilitate children's positive development. For example, Zhang and colleagues (2019) explored the concept of mindful parenting to promote focused attention during parent-child interactions. They examined the influence of focused attention on children's emotion regulation. There were 472 parents of children aged three to six years who participated in the study. The parents completed the Mindful Awareness Attention Scale (MAAS; Brown & Ryan, 2003) as well as the Preschooler Attachment Questionnaire to determine the quality of the parent-child attachment. Children's emotion regulation was assessed using the Emotion Regulation Checklist (ERC; Shields & Cicchetti, 1997). The data was examined using a Pearson correlation analysis to study the different variables. Latent structural equation modeling was used to examine the roles of parent mindfulness and children's emotion regulation. The study revealed that parents with higher levels of mindfulness exhibited more focused-attention parenting, promoting a secure attachment relationship between the child and the caregiver. Mindful parenting contributed to children's lower levels of liability and negativity and higher levels of adaptive emotion regulation. The study also showed that parents with higher levels of focused attention tend to have a greater sense of meaningfulness and experience more positive emotions during interactions with their children.

Other researchers, such as Waters (2016), tested the degree to which mindfulness was directly and indirectly related to stress levels in children. Waters examined 68 parent-child dyads to explore their relation. The Cognitive and Affective Mindfulness Scale-Revised was used to

measure mindfulness (CAMS-R; Feldman, 2007), and the stress subscale of the Depression, Stress, and Anxiety Scales (DASS) was used to determine stress levels in children. The data was tested using correlation and multiple regression analysis. The results revealed that both parent mindfulness and child mindfulness were significantly important in the management of children's stress. Focused attention from the parent to the child resulted in reduced stress and anxiety as well as increases in calmness, restful alertness, emotion regulation, and relaxation in children. Waters encouraged additional research exploring how to promote mindfulness and focused attention in families.

Gaertner et al. (2008) conducted a longitudinal study that explored the development of attention across toddlerhood by examining focused attention. The study included 256 children and their mothers. Questionnaire and observational data were collected, and behavioral measures were coded from videotapes for further analysis. The attention-focusing subscale of the Early Childhood Behavior Questionnaire (ECBQ; Putnam et al., 2006) was used to assess toddlers' focused attention. The frustration, sadness, and fear subscale of the ECBQ was used to assess toddlers' emotional expressions and reactions. Hierarchical regression analyses were conducted to predict toddlers' focused attention and maternal socialization. The findings revealed that maternal positivity, warmth, and praise given to the child through focused attention predicted differences in children's attention to their parents across time (Gaertner et al., 2008).

Duncan et al. (2009) proposed that fostering daily focused attention between parent and child would improve the effectiveness of parenting interventions. The researchers introduced participants (n=64 dyads) to a model of mindful parenting wherein parents intentionally brought moment-to-moment awareness to the parent-child relationship. The framework included operational definitions and implications of mindful parenting to support efforts to integrate

mindfulness-based intervention techniques into well-established, evidenced-based family prevention programs. After an initial pilot project with a single intervention group, the study was expanded to a sample of 64 families of fifth-to-seventh-grade students to test the revised curriculum. Parents were taught how to focus their attention through brief mindfulness exercises and included five elements relevant to the parent-child relationship: (1) listening with full attention, (2) nonjudgmental acceptance, (3) emotional awareness, (4) self-regulation, and (5) compassion. The results of the study showed that when applying focused attention, parents experience a fundamental shift in their perspective of what it means to be truly present with their children and have an authentic, caring relationship. Future studies may involve a large-scale randomized trial to test program efficacy and to examine the additive benefits for parent and child psychological well-being.

Finally, Bogels et al., (2013) explored the acceptability and effects of a mindful parenting course, emphasizing parent-child-focused attention in mental health care. Eighty-six parents who were referred to a mental health care center because of parent-child relationship problems participated in the study. The course was conducted in a group format over an eight-week period. Assessments took place pre-test and post-test and at an eight-week follow-up. The modules included in the Mindful Parenting Program were (1) automatic pilot versus nonreactive parenting (present awareness), (2) perception versus interpretation, (3) watching the body during parenting stress (mindful seeing), (4) responding versus reacting to parent stress, (5) recognizing patterns, responding with acceptance of self and child, (6) dealing with difficult emotions, (7) rupture and repair, acceptance and limits, (8) what has been learned, the future, and (9) an eight-week follow-up. Parents' perceptions of their children's emotional and behavioral problems were measured using the Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL; Achenbach & Rescorla, 2001). Parental

stress was measured using the Parental Stress Index (PSI; De Brock et al., 1992). The results revealed that improvements occurred in parental stress, parenting anger, and parenting sadness by practicing focused attention and cultivating nonreactivity. Practicing here-and-now nonjudgmental attention for the child also reduced parent-child conflict. The authors concluded that by using focused attention, parental psychopathology and stress can be improved, which can have a direct positive effect on child outcomes (Bogels et al., 2013). Researchers such as Duncan et al., (2009) conclude that focused attention is a fundamental skill or practice for improving the effectiveness of parenting interventions. However, empirical evidence on the role of focused attention is rare, and a comprehensive model of mindful parenting has not yet been developed.

The literature presented in this section reveals that focused attention is a fundamental parenting skill that is significantly associated with parental responsiveness to children's needs. Focused attention establishes trust and emotional closeness in the parent-child relationship while promoting secure attachment. This research clarifies that children experience reduced stress and anxiety and increased calmness and relaxation when receiving parents' focused attention. The literature also emphasizes that focused attention results in parents experiencing reduced stress and anger and realizing more positive emotions during interactions with their children. Yet again, research exploring quality time as a means of communicating love is lacking. Moreover, there is no research exploring the combination of the three techniques - eye contact, physical touch, and quality time—as described and recommended by Campbell. Hence, this stresses the importance of the present inquiry.

Drawing from what he experienced in his life work as a psychiatrist, Campbell (2015) urged parents to convey love to their children through frequent eye contact, physical touch, and focused attention. Although his experience reflects the worthiness of providing these, no

empirical work to date has explored the use of his intervention. This qualitative, preliminary pilot study addresses this gap by exploring the experiences of parents applying Campbell's method. Although the literature review produced many studies that reflected on the elements used in Campbell's model (eye contact, physical touch, and focused attention), there were no studies that incorporated the use of all three elements in the same study. This pilot study is a starting point in addressing this gap.

The Rationale for the Research Method

Campbell's (2015) intervention has not yet been formally studied. One logical way to start is with a pilot study to explore the lived experiences of parents using this method. As an exploratory study focused on the narratives of participants, it makes sense to apply a qualitative design. After exploring other methods, the researcher selected the transcendental phenomenological (TPh) approach (Moustakas, 1990, 1994).

Husserl (1977) is considered the father of TPh, which forms the basis of all other phenomenological methods (Schwandt, 2001). He believed that the scientific, empirical approach should not be applied to human subjects but instead should focus on the reflection of the common meaning of the lived experience of many individuals (Moustakas, 1994). In contrast, a case study examines a particular case in detail, using psychological testing and analysis, and focuses on groups, institutions, or one individual. Focus groups include many people who are part of a group discussion, sharing ideas with one another in real time, whereas TPh collects information from one individual at a time, so the data is not influenced by others. Ethnography is focused on understanding how people interact within a culture, whereas TPh is focused on exploring how people make sense of their experiences. Grounded theory is a research

method that looks at emerging patterns in data, and TPh instead attempts to understand subjective human experiences.

Although other qualitative traditions could have been used, such as case studies, focus groups, ethnographies, or grounded theories, transcendental phenomenology made the most sense to this researcher as she was interested in exploring the parent's lived experience of applying Campbell's model while interacting with their child. This researcher wanted to capture "the everyday life as it is internalized in the subjective consciousness of individuals" (Schwandt, 2001, p. 226). By using TPh, she could explore and discover parents' experiences applying the intervention in a rich and meaningful way.

There are many studies that have used TPh as the preferred method of inquiry to explore lived experiences. For example, Bornsheuer-Boswell et al. (2013) used a TPh approach to gather, analyze, and report findings in their study of conservative Christian parents' perceptions of child-parent relationship therapy. Likewise, Digon (2023) applied TPh to explore the lived experiences of adolescents from divorced families, specifically parenting challenges when the family structure is altered (McLurkin, 2012). Shelton and Bridges (2022) conducted a phenomenological exploration of adoptive parent experiences, including the effects of the parents' developmental history on their approaches to parenting. Another similar study, carried out by Mol and Buysse (2008), used a phenomenological approach to search out children's influence on parenting styles, along with similarities and differences in children and parent thinking.

The TPh method is particularly effective at uncovering the experiences and perceptions of individuals from their own perspectives (Lester, 1999). It allows for discovering deep issues, allows parents' voices to be heard, and offers insight into their lived experiences. A TPh

approach supports a small qualitative sample while still illuminating issues, themes, and factors (Moustakas, 1994). This method provides a rational path for examining a phenomenon from a pure, fresh vantage point, which was the goal of this study.

Summary

This literature review focused on research findings related to the components of the intervention applied in this study (eye contact, physical touch, and focused attention). Literature on parental eye contact revealed that infant social development (Hains & Muir, 1996), empathic processing (Dadds et al., 2014), nonverbal communication (Jongerius et al., 2020), and emotion regulation (Lohaus et al., 2001) were tied to mutual eye contact between parent and child. Studies on physical touch showed that maternal touch is part of the global mother-infant communicative system in the first year of life (Ferber et al., 2008), and fathers' positive play-related touch was associated with a child's self-esteem and sense of security (Aznar & Tenenbaum, 2016). Research also showed that infants use self-touch to self-regulate when caregivers are not available (Moszkowski & Stack, 2007) and that touch is the most fundamental way caregivers express love for their infants (Takeuchi et al., 2010). The research on focused attention revealed that a nonjudgmental aspect of attention helps reduce stress for both parent and child (Waters, 2016), and present-moment awareness increases the positivity in parent-child relationships (Duncan et al., 2009). Research also revealed focused attention as a core dimension of temperament in children (Gaertner et al., 2008) and that infusing focused attention into existing parenting programs can enhance their effects and mediate family risk and protection during the transition to adolescence (Coatsworth et al., 2010).

Campbell (2015) purported that combining eye contact, physical touch, and focused attention will serve to communicate unconditional love to children. He also believed that doing

so could effectively address many emotional and behavioral problems of children. However, no previous research studying this intervention had been done. This study is a reasonable first step in addressing this research gap by exploring parents' experiences while applying the intervention.

The review also provided a rationale for using TPh to study parents' lived experience of applying Campbell's model. This study focused on understanding parents' perceptions, experiences, and consciousness (Moustakas, 1994). Open-ended survey questions and interviews were used in the study to promote freely written responses, allowing participants to use their own voices to guide and direct the phenomenological process of seeing, reflecting, and knowing.

This study has expanded the literature by exploring parents' lived experience of applying Campbell's model as a means for parents to convey unconditional love to their children. It can be said with a high degree of confidence that the gap between what had previously been explored and the need for more specific studies focused on using Campbell's intervention gave reason for this study.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHOD

The purpose of this pilot study was to examine how parents can put their feelings of love into action by applying an intervention using eye contact, physical touch, and focused attention as described in the book *How to Really Love Your Child* (Campbell, 2015). The goal of the pilot study was to explore how the parents in the study experienced applying the intervention with their children and to understand their perceptions of its impact. The first and second chapters introduced the pilot study and provided a review of the literature related to the parent-child relationship. This third chapter will focus on the pilot study's method, utilizing a transcendental phenomenological research design to assess the relationship between a parent and their child. The pilot study centers around an intervention that focuses on the quality of the parent-child relationship and the primary task of learning how to love a child in such a way that the child *feels* unconditionally loved by their parents. This chapter also provides the background of phenomenology as a research method and its appropriateness for this pilot study. It includes descriptive information regarding the research design, the role of the researcher, the research question, participant selection, and the process of data collection and analysis. Ethical considerations and trustworthiness of the study are also described.

Research Design

This qualitative research pilot study will use a transcendental phenomenological approach and method (Moustakas, 1994) to seek out an in-depth and nuanced understanding of the parent's lived experiences while applying the parenting intervention (Campbell, 2015) with their child. The researcher will study the participants' first-person point of view through their own perceptions, feelings, thoughts, and behaviors and then analyze the content of these experiences within a defined situation (Langdridge, 2007; Moustakas, 1994).

Transcendental Phenomenological Method

Transcendental phenomenology (TPh), largely developed by Edmund Husserl, is a philosophical approach to qualitative research that brings added dimensions to the study of human experiences (Moustakas, 1994). It is based on the idea of the researcher setting aside all preconceived ideas (epochē) to see the phenomenon through an unbiased lens, thereby allowing the true meaning of the phenomenon to emerge naturally (Moustakas, 1994). This method seeks to describe, rather than to explain, the experience from the personal perspective and interpretation of the individual participant. This allows the researcher to gain insight into the participant's motivations and actions.

Phenomenological methods are particularly effective at allowing transcendental reduction to occur naturally by allowing “what might be” to emerge with no preconceptions. Methods such as interviews, conversations, participant observation, and questionnaires are commonly used to generate data that will later be analyzed as part of the study (Lester, 1999).

Other qualitative approaches, such as a case study, narrative inquiry, or focus group, would not be as appropriate for this study. For example, a case study focuses on cause and effect and relies on evidence to prove results. Narrative inquiry approaches a study to link information together and interpret its meaning but is not related to any additional intervention (Creswell, 2013). Focus groups consist of multiple people who have experienced something in common and interact to share their findings. This requires a larger sample size than this study provided. The transcendental phenomenological approach is the best research method for this pilot study because it captures the individual parent's lived experience of applying Campbell's model in a timely fashion and without any outside influence or bias.

Role of the Researcher

As a professional counselor, mother, grandmother, and researcher, I am deeply committed to exploring the parent's lived experience of applying the model (Campbell, 2015), using eye contact, focused attention, and physical touch to improve the quality of the relationship between parents and their children. This phenomenon represents a suitable starting point for an investigation (Husserl, 1931), and the transcendental phenomenological method was the most effective approach to carry out this pilot study.

As the researcher, I was required to "bracket" or set aside my own everyday understandings, judgments, and awareness to start with a pure vantage point (Moustakas, 1994). The phenomenon was perceived and described in a fresh and open way. This way of perceiving called for looking, noticing, and becoming aware without imposing prejudgments on what I saw, thought, imagined, and felt. It was a way of suspending everything that interfered and genuinely looking at the phenomenon as it appeared without taking a position (Husserl, 1977).

Pre-Understandings

Previous experience as a counselor in a clinical setting has allowed me to interact with many parent-child dyads who were searching for better skills and tools to manage their relationship. By accessing my training in attachment theory, I was able to discern possible areas of the parent-child relationship that may benefit from certain parenting techniques. Currently, as a counselor in private practice, I continue to work with family systems and parent-child relationship issues. Participation in this pilot study was offered to current and past counseling clients who met the screening criteria for selection. Other participants were members of my church, where I have served as a counselor and teacher for the past twenty years. Lastly, embracing all aspects of my experience as a mother and grandmother allowed me to provide an

empathetic approach to the participants in my study. My pre-understanding regarding parent-child relationships is that many conscientious, well-intentioned parents earnestly attempt to relate to their child, but they often fail. These parents do not have a general, balanced perspective on how to relate to a child. Almost all parents love their children, but few know how to transfer this love to their children in a way that the child *feels* loved by their parents (Campbell, 2015).

As I began to see this phenomenon play out in counseling sessions, I researched the works of psychiatrists and psychologists who specialized in treatment methods specifically for improving the parent-child relationship. The works that I drew influence from the most were from researchers such as Gottman (1998), Greene (2016), and Siegel (2013). I related to their approach of looking at the problem from the child's experience. In order to help the child, the parent has to be helped first (Siegel & Hartzell, 2013). Parents must have the tools to accomplish their mission of helping their children figure out who they are—their skills, preferences, beliefs, personality traits, and goals. My pre-understanding included the importance of empathy, sharing concerns, and inviting one another to collaborate and problem-solve together as the ingredients for a good relationship between parent and child (Greene, 2016).

Establishing Researcher-Participant Working Relationship

I am a licensed professional counselor and have provided psychotherapy services to clients through my private practice for the past five years at the time of this writing. The focus of my work in my practice has been the treatment of clinical conditions such as anxiety, depression, OCD, bipolar, and mood disorders, as well as relationship-based family system issues for individuals, couples, and families of all ages. My counseling practice, SHR Counseling Services, provides both in-person sessions in the office and online sessions to accommodate the needs of

my clients. The participants of the study worked primarily at home with their children and interacted online for interviews and discussions.

Research Question

The focus of this study was to explore the phenomenon or lived experience of a parent applying an intervention using eye contact, focused attention, and physical touch while interacting with their child to convey love in a way that the child *feels* loved by their parent.

Research Question: How do parents describe the lived experience of applying Campbell's model?

This question is exploratory in nature and was investigated through audio recordings, written feedback forms, and journal notes completed by the participants throughout the study. The data was collected, organized, and analyzed to formulate a synthesis of structural essence and meaning in a systematic way to convey the study's findings (Moustakas, 1994.)

Participants

General considerations for participation in this pilot study included age, race, religion, ethnic and cultural factors, gender, and political and economic factors. Essential criteria included interest in the phenomenon, ability to participate, and agreement to be recorded and have the data published in a dissertation (Moustakas, 1994). Specific criteria included the age range of child participants, availability, willingness, and commitment of the parent to the duration of the study.

Number of Participants and Selection

This pilot study utilized a sample of four parents with a child between the ages of six to ten, located in the United States, and was representative in terms of the parent-child relationship. Each parent-child dyad selected for the study was expected to participate for the duration of the study and provide feedback. After obtaining IRB (Institutional Review Board) approval for this

pilot study, participants were selected based on predetermined criteria, including availability, commitment, accessibility, and need. The request for participation was offered through local community organizations such as churches, schools, and counseling centers. The first six parent-child dyads that meet the required criteria were selected to participate.

Screening Participants

A packet of information about this pilot study was provided electronically and sent to each individual private email address who expressed an interest in participating. The packet included an introduction letter describing the study, the informed consent form, the demographic form, and two standardized measures: the DSM-5 Self-Rated Level 1 Cross-Cutting Symptom Measure–Adult (American Psychological Association, 2013), which assesses 13 mental health domains for adults that are important across psychiatric diagnosis (APA, 2013), and the WHODAS 2.0 (World Health Organization, 2012), which assesses a participant’s ability to perform activities in the areas of understanding and communicating, getting around, doing self-care, getting along with people, performing activities at school, work, home, and participating in society. These two measures helped identify any need for additional services and assessed the appropriateness of participation in this study. Should there have been any significant findings in the results of the assessments, a recommendation would have been made to the participant to follow up with a professional counselor. A brief informal, interactive interview was also conducted with each potential participant to determine whether they would be a good fit for the pilot study and to assess their ability to participate in the actual study exercises.

Campbell’s Intervention

Most parents believe they are meeting the basic needs of their children by providing food, shelter, clothes, and so on. While providing all these basic needs, sometimes love gets

overlooked. Loving parents sometimes need help conveying love to their children (Campbell, 2015). Campbell's intervention seeks to provide parents with the help that they need. To convey love to their children, participants will practice putting love into action using three strategies: eye contact, focused attention, and physical touch.

Eye contact is one of the main sources of a child's emotional nurturing (Campbell, 2015). When applying the intervention, the participant were asked to practice during the week looking directly into the eyes of their child and maintaining pleasant eye contact while having a two-way back-and-forth conversation. The parent's continuous, loving, positive eye contact teaches the child how to cope most effectively in the world around them because they feel unconditionally loved by their parent (Campbell, 2015).

Physical touch such as a hug, playful wrestling, a pat on the back, or holding hands is vital to both boys and girls, especially when they are young. During the week, participants were asked to be purposeful and intentional about integrating physical touch with eye contact while interacting with their child. When the parent shows approval and acceptance to the child through physical touch, it helps the child to accept themselves as well (Campbell, 2015).

Focused attention from a parent to a child consists of the parent giving the child their full, undivided attention in a way that the child feels completely loved and valued by their parent. Each week, participants were asked to set aside dedicated time to practice focused attention, along with eye contact and physical touch, with their child. Focused attention is a precious commodity and cannot be replaced with gifts or favors. Focused attention is the most demanding need a child has, and children do their best when they know their parents are giving them *their* best (Campbell, 2015).

At the beginning of the pilot study, participants received a thirty-minute online orientation on how to apply Campbell's intervention. At that time, they had an opportunity to ask questions and receive one-on-one training. The participants applied Campbell's intervention for a total of four consecutive weeks. During each week, participants recorded their observations in a journal, answered questions on a report form, and submitted them to the researcher.

Data Collection Procedures

Data collection procedures for this pilot study included instruments, the process of collecting and storing the data, and the alignment of these procedures with the transcendental phenomenological approach. All data collection was conducted online through a secure application called Simple Practice, which is the same application used by over 169,000 clinicians (cite). The Simple Practice app implements multiple layers of encryption to ensure security, making sure the data is protected while it's electronically stored or transmitted. Through the app, the participant will be able to post journal comments, post weekly reports, and conduct audio and video sessions.

Feedback Forms

Each week, information about the parent's lived experience of applying Campbell's intervention with their child was gathered using written evaluation surveys provided electronically through the Simple Practice software application. These surveys consisted of open-ended questions rather than prewritten options so the participants could respond freely and in their own voices. The journal feature in the app was used to capture additional written "free form" expressions about their experiences and any concerns they had.

Audio Recordings

Each participant had a set time each week to discuss their written responses with the researcher. Participants were required to sign a written consent form agreeing to the recording of these discussions. The audio discussions provided the participants an opportunity to verify and validate their written responses on their weekly forms. This step required the researcher to be mindful of keeping a focus on the research and avoiding any undue influence (Moustakas, 1994). The recorded weekly audio discussions were preserved for future data analysis to help identify and illuminate specific phenomena as they were perceived by the participants while applying Campbell's intervention.

Data Analysis

The participant data that was generated from the interviews, weekly surveys, journal entries, and audio files throughout this study were processed and analyzed using Moustakas's modification of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method of analysis of phenomenological data. This modified method presented the analysis steps in the appropriate order and included the participants' description of their own experience of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). Once the participant experiences have been transcribed, the researcher (a) considered each statement with respect to significance for descriptions of the experience; (b) recorded all relevant statements; (c) listed each nonrepetitive, nonoverlapping statement (horizons, meaning units); (d) related and clustered the meanings into themes; (e) synthesized the meanings and themes into description of the textures of experience (including verbatim examples); (f) described the structures of the experience through imaginative variation; and (g) constructed the textural-structural description of the meanings and essences of the experience. From the individual textural-structural descriptions of all participants' experiences, the researcher constructed a

composite textural-structural description of the meanings and essences to create a universal description of the experiences as a whole (Moustakas, 1994).

These methods and procedures of transcendental phenomenological analysis included *horizontalizing*, a method of ensuring every statement has equal value and from which meaning units are listed and clustered into themes. From here, the textural descriptions of the experience are developed and constructed into meanings of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). Given the small sample size for this pilot study, the data was processed and analyzed, looking across themes between participants. This approach was useful in identifying relationships between different themes and factors and bringing deep issues to the surface from the participant's perspective.

Horizontalization

Horizontalization entails the researcher being receptive to every statement from the participants and granting each comment equal value. This allows for a natural, rhythmic flow of information between the researcher and the participants (Lafont, 2015). Each statement contributes to an understanding of the nature and meaning of the researcher's presence and helps clarify the thoughts and feelings of the participants' perceived meaning of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994).

Themes, Reduction, and Elimination

The meanings that were derived from the horizontalization process were clustered into common categories, also known as themes. Here, overlapping or repetitive statements were removed (reduction and elimination), and the refined data set provided the information needed to develop the textural descriptions of each participant's experience (Moustakas, 1994). The

researcher was mindful not to introduce their own opinions or bias so as to capture the true essence of each parent's experience.

Validation and Synthesis

In the validation stage, the themes were compared with the original transcripts to ensure the participants' experiences were conveyed adequately by the themes chosen by the researcher, who refined or adjusted theme titles as necessary. The integration of the textural descriptions and the structural descriptions became a synthesis that represented a universal description of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). Due to the subjective nature of the transcendental method, personal feelings and opinions, rather than facts, expressed by the participants were used to examine, investigate, and explore the data (Lafont, 2015).

Trustworthiness

Qualitative research speaks to trustworthiness, which includes four criteria—(1) credibility, (2) transferability, (3) dependability, and (4) confirmability (Sutton & Austin, 2017)—as opposed to validity and reliability, which come from quantitative research. The accuracy of the findings that represent the phenomenon for this study can be found in the interview notes, session recordings, and self-report forms submitted by the participants. To establish credibility and confidence in the truth of the findings, the researcher examined, acknowledged, and refrained from projecting any pre-understandings or biases.

Multiple data collection methods, such as interviews, surveys, and audio recordings, were used to capture the parent's lived experience of the phenomenon during the data collection phase. This data was triangulated for accuracy. Participants were allowed to verify their data during the weekly recorded audio sessions (member checking). To show that the findings of this qualitative pilot study may have transferability and be applicable in other contexts, a deep and

thorough description of the phenomenon, the participants, the context for this study, goals, and findings of the study were provided to increase understanding for possible future research.

To show dependability that the findings were consistent and could be repeated for data collection and data analysis, the processes and procedures was well-documented, and the data was triangulated using multiple data sources to develop a comprehensive understanding of the information (Patton, 1999) and to ensure that the quality of the data was protected. Testing all of the findings against each other in this way corroborated the data and led to a strong consensus on the results of the study (Moustakas, 1994). To demonstrate confirmability that the findings of the study were shaped by the participants and not by researcher bias or interests, the findings and the discussions were audited and aligned with the data to detect any biases or assumptions of the researcher.

Ethical Considerations

The American Counseling Association (ACA) Code of Ethics (American Counseling Association, 2014) provided the ethical guidelines for this study. In addition to the general ethics that all counselors are required to follow, areas of ethical consideration for the researcher when conducting research included confidentiality, ultimate responsibility, and harm avoidance. The researcher obtained informed consent from the participants, reported accurate findings, and protected the participants' data by assigning each participant a pseudonym and storing the data using a secure, HIPAA-compliant application (ACA, 2014). Adherence to these ethical guidelines throughout this study was a top priority.

Summary

The goal of this chapter was to outline the research method that was used to answer the research question. A discussion of the procedure, study participants, data collection, and data

analysis outlined the specifics of how this pilot study was conducted and who would participate in the study. The discussion of ethics ensured that this study would adhere to the ACA protocol for ethics when conducting this study. The goal of Chapter Four is to provide the study results and demonstrate that the methodology described in Chapter Three was followed.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

The purpose of this phenomenological pilot study was to explore parents' lived experience of applying Campbell's intervention for conveying unconditional love to their children. Specifically, the intention of the study was to examine how applying the three elements of the intervention—eye contact, physical touch, and focused attention—impacted the parent-child relationship, from the parents' perspectives. An initial information guide was sent to each parent, explaining the study's intervention and how to apply it when interacting with their child. In addition, data was obtained from the four parent participants (known as co-researchers in phenomenological studies such as this one) through weekly written feedback forms that were completed by each individual and then posted in their online accounts through a software application called Simple Practice (<https://www.simplepractice.com/>). At the end of the study, a final video interview was conducted using an interview guide. The interviews were recorded and transcribed. The transcription printouts were examined to identify any significant data themes. Chapter Three included a detailed description of the process used for data collection and analysis.

The method for data analysis for this research study was transcendental phenomenology (TPh), which is a philosophical approach to understanding the human experience and is based on Moustakas' modification of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method of analysis of phenomenological data (Creswell, 2013). TPh procedures for analysis included the following elements

1. Epoche: setting aside judgment and viewing the phenomenon with a fresh eye
2. Reduction: identifying units of meaning and creating textural descriptions (the what)
3. Imaginative variation: structural themes of the experience (the how)

4. Synthesis: combination of textural and structural to emphasize where and when the phenomenon was observed
5. Consolidation: combining the textural-structural descriptions representing the essence of experience of the whole group

The reduction step included bracketing, horizontalizing, organizing themes, and constructing textural description. The use of horizontalization assigned equal value to each statement that represented a segment of meaning. The segments were then clustered into themes (Merriam, 2009; Moustakas, 1994). The modified TPh sees the researcher as one of the participants and the other participants as co-researchers (Creswell, 1998; Moustakas, 1994).

Guided by this simplified version, I developed a significant statements list, grouped important statements into meaningful units, and described what participants experienced in relation to the intervention, which is the textural description (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994). To protect the confidentiality of all group members, pseudonyms were given to each participant. Next, I transcribed all interviews and read each transcript before beginning data analysis. From this process, there were four themes that emerged. Primary themes and sub-themes that correspond to the study's research question were also identified (Table 4.2), according to the following research question:

Research Question: How do parents describe the lived experience of applying Campbell's model?

Participant Demographics

Chapter Three described the criteria for member selection and participation in this study. There was a total of four parents who participated in this pilot study, resulting in $n=4$. All four parents were recruited through a local church. A summary of the participants' demographic

information is provided in Table 4.1. All parents identified as female, and all parents identified as white, non-Hispanic. All parents indicated their religious affiliation as Christian. All parents identified their sexual orientation as heterosexual, and all reported being currently married. The age range spanned from 25 to 40 years of age, and the annual income ranged from \$40,000 to \$100,000. The following table presents a summary of the research group's demographics.

Table 4.1
Demographic Information of Participants

Variable	<i>n</i>	%
Age		
25–29	1	25
30–35	1	25
36–40	2	50
Gender		
Female	4	100
Ethnicity		
Caucasian, non-Hispanic	4	100
Religion Affiliation		
Christian	4	100
Sexual Orientation		
Heterosexual	4	100
Marital Status		
Married	4	100
Employment Status		
Employed	3	75
Unemployed	1	25
Income		
\$40,000 or below	1	25
\$41,000–\$70,000	1	25
\$71,000–\$100,000	1	25
\$100,000 plus	1	25

Themes Found in the Data

The research question in this study was “How do parents describe the lived experience of applying Campbell’s model?” Although the researcher was the first one to contribute to the research (Moustakas, 1994), the aim of TPh was to describe the essential meanings and structures of the parents’ experiences without imposing any preconceptions or interpretations

(Sheehan, 2014). The process used phenomenological reduction, which included identifying themes and formulating textural description (Merriam, 2009; Moustakas, 1994). The textural-structural description provided the meaning and essence of the experience (Creswell, 1998; Moustakas, 1994). A description was generated for each participant and then integrated into a summary description of the overall group experience (Moustakas, 1994). Participants' lived experiences in relation to the whole were the focus of attention when interpreting the data. There were four themes related to this research question that emerged from the data analysis: (1) prioritization, (2) connection, (3) relationship, and (4) regulation. Individual quotes from the written surveys and the video interviews were included under each theme. From this process, the themes emerged from participants' similar experiences. These subsequent themes and sub-themes are summarized in Table 4.2 below.

Table 4.2
Themes and Sub-Themes Regarding Research Question

Research Question	Themes	Sub-themes
How do parents describe the lived experience of applying Campbell's model?	Prioritization (process)	* Time * Self * Others
	Connection (components)	* Eye contact * Focused Attention * Physical touch
	Relationship (process)	* Intentional * Purposeful * Unconditional
	Regulation (process)	* Patience * Understanding

The study's findings offer a description of the parents' lived experiences of applying the intervention with their children. Each theme reflects viewpoints and the level of importance given to each theme by the parents while these experiences were playing out. Campbell's book *How to Really Love Your Child* (Campbell, 2015) was utilized, along with the writings of other researchers of the parent-child relationship, such as Ross Greene (2016), Stanley Greenspan (2007), Aliza Pressman (2024), and Daniel Siegel (2016), when organizing these themes. Next, reflection and discussion of each theme are provided.

Prioritization

Campbell (2015) posed this question to parents: "What are the priorities in your life? Where does your child fit in?" He explained that children who become a low priority will suffer from some degree of neglect (Campbell, 2015). He went on to explain that focused attention is the most demanding need a child has, and it is the most overlooked need by parents (Campbell, 2015). At a basic level, children want to feel loved and cared for by their parents. Children notice when attention is on them versus other things. If parents prioritize other aspects of their lives instead of spending time with their children, the children interpret their parents' actions to mean those activities are more important. Children who grow up feeling prioritized and loved find it easier to relate to and love those around them as adults (Campbell, 2015).

All four parents in the study group shared that they struggled with prioritization. Mary described struggling with prioritization as "trouble finding quality time" to be with her son, due to having too many demands on her at once. Mary stated the following: "All three of my kids are pretty hungry for my attention. My husband is typically home, but usually it is a struggle where it's just me with the kids. We also have extracurriculars, you know, and I'm a full-time working mom." Mary further acknowledged that she can sometimes get triggered by her son's behavior,

which makes her want to avoid spending time with him. She continued to share that this can cause her to feel shame and lose confidence in her parenting abilities. While acknowledging painful emotions, Mary continued to build tolerance for feelings that were uncomfortable as she learned new ways of interacting with her son.

In contrast, Sally said, “The most enjoyable part of applying the intervention was *prioritizing* him, putting down my activity and giving him more of what he needs and deserves.” Sally shared that she was aware of her child’s need to be “seen, known, and loved” by her, which raised her level of motivation to prioritize time spent with her child. However, even though her desire was to find that special time, she also struggled with prioritization. She described how her view of her son’s lack of empathy for her could sometimes derail her efforts to connect with him. As the study progressed, so did Sally’s interpretation of her son’s responses.

Time

According to Campbell, time is our most precious possession. It is not possible to take care of every single obligation and responsibility in a person’s life as one would like. Urgent matters automatically take precedence in life and control one’s time, which is called the “tyranny of the urgent” (Campbell, 2015). Often, urgent things win out over the important things. Time must be controlled in order to take care of the important things.

When setting priorities, the parents offered insights into how they were viewing the concept of time. Sally described it as a time-management issue, commenting on how doctor and dentist appointments got in the way, and she is always looking for extra “time windows” and wishing to slow down time. Beth shared, “The intervention *slowed down time* for me and my kids,” and Linda commented, “The most challenging part is *time*. Mary shared that she had set a goal of spending time with her son and said, “He thrives on quality *time*.”

Each parent, in their own way, battled within themselves when it came to allocating time with their child. Beth shared she had experienced feelings of guilt when she spent time with her son while her other children had to wait on her for their turn. As she progressed through the study, she began to challenge the guilt she felt and was able to reframe it in a more positive light. Similarly, Linda expressed that she was aware of her own groaning and frustration when feeling there was not enough time to tackle everything. She described her reactions as “frantic.” While participating in the study, Linda specifically noticed that things were still difficult and rushed, but she was not responding with as much frustration and things seemed to be smoother. Mary simply said that the most challenging part for her was time: “Time . . . it just takes more time. When we’re in a hurry, it’s hard to make one-on-one time with my son a priority.”

Self

Caring for oneself, or the lack thereof, was a recurring theme in the feedback received from the participants. Prioritizing self-care helps to manage stress, reduce anxiety, and cultivate a positive mind-set. When a parent cares for themselves, they are more able to model healthy emotion regulation to their children (Campbell, 2015). All four parents expressed feeling overwhelmed at times and needing a way to refuel so they have more to give to their children. Linda expressed, “I know that I’m not at my best at the end of my workday, which is the time my child needs me the most. I have to find a chance to process whatever happened in my workday before arriving home so I can give him a better version of *myself* instead of feeling depleted when walking in the door.” As Linda continued to apply the intervention, she became more mindful of the times of day when she was not as responsive. She shared that she was starting to intentionally reserve energy for the evenings so she could practice the intervention both in the mornings and in the evenings. Mary shared that she was working on not blowing up. She shared,

“I have personally been working with *myself* on remaining calm and not getting frustrated with him.” Mary admitted that she struggles with her own emotions and desires to develop a better version of herself, one where she can stay present with her son without getting triggered. Mary shared that she desires the ability to stay calm and not escalate the situation. The same sentiment was shared by Sally. She commented, “I really have to self-motivate to show up as a mom sometimes because sometimes I just feel like me and wonder if I’m doing it all wrong.” Sally’s belief that there was a specific way for her to parent contributed to feelings of inadequacy. She felt she must be doing something wrong as a parent. She described feeling overwhelmed when trying to regulate herself and communicate with her son at the same time. As she experienced applying the intervention, she realized that self-regulation no longer felt as forced and that communication happened more naturally.

Others

Investing time in others reflects one’s priorities. Less important things have to be resisted in order to experience what really matters, which is whether someone loves and genuinely cares for and unconditionally loves you (Campbell, 2015). Consideration of self, while considering others, was a challenge that all four parents experienced. Parents who participated in the study found that they needed to change their priority systems in order to convey unconditional love to their children. The four participants in the study experienced recognizing commitments and responsibilities to others was part of setting priorities. Mary commented, “There is always a text or email or chore that pulls me in another direction, but this week I tried to focus on my son, and his mood and overall well-being were happier.” Beth said, “I just have to remember that when my children are struggling, I just need to sit down with them and give them the attention that they need.” Sally described it this way: “I find that I am constantly having to choose between

what my children need versus what I would prefer to be doing.” Sally conveyed that she felt a sense of joy and relief once she experienced the results of prioritizing time with her son. The parents discovered the hidden rewards of prioritizing time for others over the lesser important things as they progressed through the study. By making small, incremental changes and being intentional with their choices, they began to see how their investment in their children affected the outcome of their child’s behavior. By placing their child first, they were able to help stabilize the overall parent-child relationship.

Connection

The theme of connection refers to how the parent and child relate to one another and find ways to become more aligned both cognitively and emotionally while the parent is delivering the intervention. Beth described her experience of connecting with her child this way: “This was a great week—it really fostered *connection* with my son.” Mary shared, “The *connection* that I felt with my son was profound.” If a parent is relationally present and relationally respectful and kind toward their child, the timeline to *connect* with the child happens in milliseconds. These types of positive interactions make a child feel safe and connected to their parent (Perry, 2014). Parents who tend to their child’s inner world hold the key to building a strong parent-child connection (Siegel, 2013). The following sub-themes describe how each component of the intervention impacted the parent-child connection.

Eye Contact

Parents and children responded to eye contact in surprising ways during the study, given that eye contact is used primarily to convey love (Campbell, 2015). Sally shared, “Eye contact is hard for me. I’m not good at it and neither is my son.” Similarly, Linda commented, “I think my son thinks it’s dumb, but I hope it will help him later if we can keep up with using the eye

contact thing.” As the study progressed, the responses to eye contact evolved into a more favorable experience, where Beth said, “My son struggled mostly with eye contact because he will look away and I’m like, ‘No, in my eyeballs.’ Asking for eye contact with him is easy for me.” Mary expressed, “I’ve always made eye contact with him. I know if I don’t have eye contact, he is not listening. So that ‘one, two, three, eyes on me’ thing has always been there for us, so that one came easier to me.” To truly connect using eye contact during the study, parents experienced getting down on the same level as the child so the child did not always have to gaze up. It was in this nonverbal interaction, when offering an adoring look or loving glance their way, that the parents felt a positive change in their relationship with their child. During the study, parents began to explore a variety of ways to express eye contact and shared their surprise at how much the child’s hearing improved by simply increasing eye contact.

Physical Touch

Appropriate and frequent physical contact is a precious gift that parents can give to their children. Physical affection conveys love to a child and teaches a child to be comfortable with themselves and other people (Campbell, 2015). Linda shared, “We can just hold up and snuggle together. It’s just a few minutes of being together.” In contrast, Mary commented, “My husband has to remind me to just put a hand on my son’s shoulder or sit on the couch next to him. I don’t always remember to do these things.” Sally said, “My son does not love physical touch much, unless he wants to cuddle.”

Initially, a baby responds to sensations such as touch to help organize their senses and motor responses and develop a sense of security. When a child is deprived of touching or the touching is negative, the child responds with apathy or despondency (Greenspan, 2007). During the study, both parents and children varied in how they experienced interactions with touch.

Children who were overactive to sensation needed more protection and soothing from their parents, whereas other children needed energized, intense interactions. Understanding their child's individual differences allowed the parent to better connect with their child by tailoring their application of touch and increasing their insight into their child's emotional patterns.

Focused Attention

Focused attention is the most demanding need a child has. When a child receives focused attention from their parents, they feel like the most important person in the world (Campbell, 2015). This is the part of connecting that all the parents found to be the most challenging during the study, but also the most rewarding. Linda stated, "This week was wonderful! We got to spend a lot of time together, and I really enjoyed his company and listening to him." Beth shared, "This week I developed a new appreciation for who my child is. Practicing special time helped me to be more patient with him." Mary expressed, "I understand where he is coming from when I intentionally listen to him."

Focused attention is a core dimension of temperament in children. In other words, attentional abilities predict problem-solving and language skills, as well as other areas of functioning, like compliance, emotion-regulation, and social adjustment (Dixon et al., 2000). As the study progressed, parents reported that their children's demeanor and behaviors were increasingly more positive. Sally said, "It truly warmed my heart to feel the connection from just slowing down and spending intentional time with my son." Parents and children alike connected through increased empathy for one another and by identifying with each other's feelings in ways that they were not able to before the study.

Relationship

The fundamental way of relating to a child is rooted in love. Building a good parent-child relationship relies on the parent conveying love to the child in a way that the child *feels* loved (Campbell, 2015). The parent-child relationship begins with being proactive and collaborative (Greene, 2009) and includes healthy boundaries to lend balance and self-control. Good parent-child relationships are comprised of many qualities, a few of which were found, by all four parents in the study, to help their relationships with their children improve over the four-week period. These qualities—intentionality, purposefulness, and unconditionality—are highlighted below.

Intentional

Intentional parenting is an approach to developing safe, stable, and nurturing parent-child relationships (Wentzel et al., 2016). It provides ways for parents to stay present and involved with their child, while building consistent structure and guidelines. Intentional parenting is centered around being responsive and communicating in ways that create warmth and safety for the child. When these traits are not present in the parent-child relationship, children have negative outcomes, such as lowered emotional well-being and lack of academic achievement. Strong, supportive, safe relationships help create the conditions for children's future success (Newland, 2015).

Each parent in the study reported that being intentional with their child produced good results. Sally stated, "Continuing to slow down by spending intentional time with my son, in the simple moments and big, is my aim for next week." Mary shared, "I intend to be 100% there for my son and not let chores pull me in other directions." Beth said, "I am trying to have one-on-one time with just my oldest child, but it is hard." Linda commented, "I want to continue to learn

more about what interests him and join in with his things, even if I don't want to." The intentionality that each parent desired to have with their child continued to increase from week to week as new habits were forming. The parents became more consistent and predictable in how they were choosing to allocate their time, and the children were better able to manage stress. Both parent and child self-regulation improved, as did the overall relationship.

Purposeful

Parenting with purpose means parents are actively engaging with their children with long-term goals in mind as to how their children can become the best versions of themselves. It is about parents listening, discussing, and nurturing their children. It is recognizing and empathizing with their child's point of view and letting the child know their thoughts and ideas are valued. Purposeful parenting is trying to discover the purpose behind the child's behavior so the parent can help them learn and grow in developing language, emotion regulation, and social skills (Campbell, 2015; Greenspan, 2007; Siegel et al., 2014).

During the study, each parent practiced being purposeful with developing a better relationship with their child. Sally said, "These simple interventions have profound impacts," suggesting that when Sally applied the intervention with her child, she was surprised at how quickly she observed positive results in their relationship. She expressed that it was much easier than she thought to create positive change and develop a better understanding of her son. Beth shared, "The intervention reminded me of my son's desire to be seen, known, and loved." Even though Beth still felt guilty about the amount of time she was unable to give to her other children while spending time with her son, she recognized that her son felt special having one-on-one time with her. She noticed that her son's requests to do things together had increased.

Linda stated, “This study not only gives us the benefit of experiencing one another’s love but seeing the other’s feelings more acutely.” Linda recognized that her being aggressive toward her son was not working. She desired to be purposeful in engaging with him in a way that conveyed her love and improved her ability to regulate herself emotionally. As she consistently applied the intervention from week to week, their parent-child relationship improved. Linda shared that she found it easier to relate to her son and the things that he is interested in. She shared that applying the intervention had opened up a part of her toward her son that was not there before.

Unconditional

Unconditional parenting means expressing love that is not dependent on any conditions or circumstances and is not affected by the child’s behavior or actions (Campbell, 2015). Parents must convey their unconditional love to their children before they can teach, guide, or even discipline them. Unconditional love is the *primary* prerequisite for a healthy relationship with a child or everything else is unpredictable—including attitude and behaviors (Campbell, 2015). Parenting unconditionally means the child feels completely loved and valued as if they are the most important person in their parent’s eyes.

During the study, examples of unconditional love were expressed in the responses of the parents’ weekly reports. Mary shared, “We spent a lot of time together this past week. My son lights up with joy when we do things as a family.” Mary had mentioned that she and her son both struggle with their emotions when either one of them is upset and that they had a history of fighting with one another. During the course of the study, Mary was able to reframe her interpretation of her son’s behaviors and develop a more compassionate response toward him and his moods.

Sally said, “My son might not be the most empathetic toward others, but he does care. He just might not know how to show it at this age.” Sally was the most consistent parent in the group in showing empathy toward her son. In week four, she mentioned that their relationship had greatly improved. She recognized that oftentimes during the week her son was upset because she was not fully listening to him. She grew an appreciation for who her child was by really listening to him and understanding where he was coming from and hearing him the first time he spoke.

Regulation

Regulation refers to both the parent’s and the child’s ability to self-regulate emotions, such as love, joy, pain, fear, anger, grief, shame, and excitement, to name a few. Emotional feelings go hand in hand with emotional actions and reactions (Fosha et al., 2009). Children are emotionally sensitive, and they can become emotionally dysregulated easily (Campbell, 2015). Emotion dysregulation in children can be a trigger for some parents, where the parents also become emotionally dysregulated. This response is the interface between emotions and the body, when a person experiences both psychological and physiological responses (Fosha et al., 2009).

During the study, all four parents experienced their child becoming emotionally dysregulated or becoming emotionally dysregulated themselves while interacting with their child. However, Linda had unresolved attachment trauma with her parents and was torn between her need for a relationship with her son and her profound fear of it. She shared, “It feels overwhelming, like I’m trying to regulate *myself* and communicate with him at the same time.” Successful emotion regulation is critical to good parenting. A common challenge for parents is to maintain their own regulated state while caring for their distressed and dysregulated child, while

also facilitating their child's regulation (Rutherford et al., 2015). This requires a high level of patience and understanding—two traits that are needed for parental emotion regulation.

Patience

Patience is a virtue, but for parents, patience is more than a virtue; it is an absolute necessity. Patience helps parents respond calmly and rationally to day-to-day problems and stay focused on emotional stability, even in times of crisis. Patient parents don't respond impulsively but instead take a long-term view of helping their children through the different stages of life. Patient parents use effective problem-solving skills, plan ahead, manage their time well, and accept that struggle and difficulty are part of everyday life (Campbell, 2015; Greenspan, 2007).

All four parent-child dyads experienced applying patience with one another during the study. Mary said, "We didn't fight as much as we usually do. It made our hearts so much softer for each other." Linda shared, "Instead of quickly moving to anger and frustration with him, I was able to slow down and speak calmly to him." Sally commented, "I trust myself more in my parenting decisions and don't feel like I'm being reactive as much."

As the study unfolded over time, the level of anxiety among the parents began to subside and was replaced with a growing confidence in their parenting abilities. The parents became intentional about slowing things down, which allowed their patience levels to increase, thereby allowing their level of tolerance for things that made them uncomfortable to also increase. There was a positive improvement in the overall parent-child relationship due to applying patience, which was recognized as being consistent for all of the participants.

Understanding

Everyone has a desire to be understood by others (Gottman, 1998). Parenting with understanding is to know what the child means and wants, taking a genuine interest in the child as a person. This is the first step toward developing empathy (Goleman, 2007). Parents who seek to understand are more able to consider differing viewpoints from their children. Throughout the

four-week study, the parents experienced a deeper understanding of how their children were feeling during their interactions together.

Mary described her son as her most emotionally challenged child and said that she considers herself to be emotionally challenged as well. She shared, “Sometimes he needs more attention than my other child. I know he feels fulfilled when I turn my attention to him.” Mary’s ability to understand her child’s needs and wants allowed her to establish a more rewarding relationship with him than they otherwise would have had.

The level of understanding between each parent and their child continued to grow as they applied the intervention during the four-week period. The parents demonstrated a higher level of consideration of their child’s feelings over time. Linda described the process as “giving my son a chance to get what he needed to say out versus prioritizing my need to say my stuff first.” As the parents began to understand the reasoning behind their child’s behavior, they also understood what they could do as parents to help their child receive better care.

Summary

This chapter presented the demographic data of participants and findings from the pilot study analysis. The main themes and sub-themes relevant to the research question— “How do parents describe the lived experience of applying Campbell’s model?”—were explored, and how data was organized and kept was explained. Transcendental phenomenological procedures for analyzing the data were described in terms of a five-step process (Merriam, 2009; Moustakas, 1994). Figures depicting emergent themes and sub-themes were included. A detailed description of the demographics of group members was provided. The parents identified several aspects of the intervention components and process that they experienced as helpful and meaningful.

Next, Chapter Five will present a brief overview of the purpose of the study, an interpretation of the findings, and a discussion relating the findings to a larger body of literature on the topic. The recommendations and implications of the findings and tangible improvements to individuals, communities, organizations, institutions, and societies will be included. Areas for future research, evidence of quality in the study, and a personal reflection on the research process will also be discussed.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

This chapter provides a brief overview of how and why the study was done, the research question that was asked, reflections from the researcher, and a summary of the findings. The purpose of this pilot study was to explore the lived experiences of parents applying Campbell's model with their children. Study participants consisted of four females who each identified as a parent to a child between six and ten years of age. The study was guided by the following research question: "How do parents describe the lived experience of applying Campbell's model?" This study implemented a qualitative methodology using a transcendental phenomenological (TPh) approach (Moustakas, 1994) to understand parents' descriptions about their experiences while applying Campbell's intervention. Themes and sub-themes were formed from the data that was collected through weekly written surveys and audio-visual final evaluations. The study concluded with complete agreement from the participants that when the intervention was consistently applied, the relationship between mother and child significantly improved. Chapter Four of this manuscript included a comprehensive presentation of the findings and themes, whereas Chapter Five will discuss the interpretation of the findings, implications of the findings, and recommendations for further research. A final summary of this study is presented in the conclusion.

Interpretations of Findings

The aim of this study was to explore the lived experiences of parents as they applied Campbell's model with their children (Campbell, 2015). The findings of this study were interpreted and evaluated within the context of existing literature and integrate the theoretical frameworks of two primary theories that lent support for this study: attachment theory (Bowlby, 1988; Johnson, 2019; Wallin, 2007) and symbolic interaction theory (Aksan et al., 2009; Kuhn,

1964; Stryker, 1968). The participants for this pilot study were recruited from a local church congregation. Those who met the criteria shared similar demographics (Table 4.1). Data were collected through weekly report forms and a recorded interview at the end of the study. The recording was guided by an interview protocol comprised of open-ended questions to explore the parents' experiences. From this data, the researcher compiled a significant statements list that described what the parents experienced. The researcher transcribed all of the interviews and read each transcript before beginning data analysis. The study's findings offer a description of the parents' lived experiences.

The application of the intervention itself was seen by the parents as simple and highly effective. However, creating a new habit of combining all three elements of the intervention—eye contact, focused attention, and physical touch—at the same time was hard to remember at first. Parents enjoyed sharing activities with their children, which included reading, snuggling, playing board games, and just being present. Finding the time to administer the intervention was a concern echoed by the parents over and over throughout the study.

The findings suggested that over the four-week period, parents developed more empathy for their children and were able to gauge their children's emotions more accurately. The intervention provided parents ways to engage in better, open conversations with their children, effectively “rekindling” the mother-child relationship. One of the most enjoyable experiences for the parents was getting to hear how their children really feel and seeing the amount of minimal effort it took to gain such incredible results. The findings of the study revealed several themes and sub-themes (Table 4.2) that helped answer the research question. The themes included *Prioritization*, *Connection*, *Relationship*, and *Regulation*. These four primary themes each have two or three related sub-themes, which are further discussed within their relative sections.

Prioritization

The first main theme to emerge was *prioritization*. According to literature, anxious attachment style develops in childhood when the caregiver does not consistently attune to the child's emotional cues and to the child's physical and emotional needs for love and safety (Ainsworth, 1978; Bowlby, 1973; Campbell, 2015). The sub-themes that emerged for prioritization were (1) time, (2) self, and (3) others. During the study, parents were consistently challenged with having to choose where and to whom they turned their attention and how to balance their time. Their choices were compounded with the complexity of having multiple children in the home for whom they had responsibility, not just the child in the study. All but one of the parents had full-time jobs outside the home and all were married and had spouses to consider, as well as their own selves. Parents described this difficulty as “giving my child what they need when I don't have it to give” or “feeling depleted and prioritizing time with my child anyway.” All of the parents in the study were considered good, loving parents who had good intentions and wanted good things for their children. Even so, the struggle to divide their time and attention in the best possible healthy way between all of their demands was the parents' overall biggest challenge throughout the study.

This finding aligns with recent research regarding prioritization, where time pressure was a frequent experience reported by 18 employed mothers as participants in a study. The working mothers blamed themselves rather than other forces for their lack of time to devote to their children (Rose, 2019). Similarly, another study with a sample of 349 participants identified financial worries preoccupying parents' time, shifting their attention away from parenting tasks. This affected the availability and allocation of resources, time, and attention to their children (Burlacu et al., 2023). The participants named concerns over the cost of child care and tutoring

versus higher food and energy prices. Mothers who had to work extra hours to cover costs expressed feeling guilty for not being able to give their children the time and attention they deserved (Hoffman et al., 2024).

Time

Recent literature indicates that the effect of time on child outcomes can be measured in three ways: (1) educational, (2) structured, and (3) unstructured (Hsin & Felfe, 2014). For children between the ages of six and ten, educational time has a positive effect on cognitive outcomes but has little effect on behavioral outcomes. However, unstructured time does relate positively to children's behavior (Hsin & Felfe, 2014) and parents' time spent with children could improve children's well-being (Li et al., 2023). Parents cannot reliably know how children spend their time when they are not present, and they worry when they come home that they do not have enough time to spend with their children. This finding corroborates with the findings of applying Campbell's model (Campbell, 2015). Parents struggle to find the time to be with their children, playing games, reading books, going for walks, engaging in unstructured, free play, which helps children develop positive behaviors (Campbell, 2015).

Self

All four parents who participated in the study valued family well-being over personal well-being. This finding corroborates with the recent findings in literature. For example, Martha Newson, an anthropologist at Kent University in England, conducted a study for three months during 2020, with over 13,000 participants from 122 countries. Tuncgenc et al., (2023) studied whether individuals valued themselves more than they valued the family unit. Results showed that individuals idealized family happiness over personal happiness and prioritized family over self.

Others

The four participants in the study recognized that commitments and responsibilities to others were part of setting priorities (Campbell, 2015). As the study progressed, they became more mindful of focusing on their children first. Considering others is part of the process of taking on another's perspective. This empathetic approach can be mutually beneficial in a parent-child relationship and promotes accuracy in understanding one another.

This finding relates to current literature that examines the mediating role of parent-child attachment in the relationship between positive parenting and adolescent life satisfaction. Positive parenting fosters effective communication and interaction between parents and children, which in turn leads to reduced conflict and a stronger emotional bond. A recent study, based on attachment theory and family systems theory, was conducted in China with 5,047 adolescents to explore the impact of positive parenting on adolescents' life satisfaction (Li et al., 2023). This study showed that parents with a positive parenting style who focused on their children created a strong and lasting emotional parent-child bond.

Connection

The next identified theme was *connection*, a shared feeling of affection and understanding between the parent and the child (Perry & Szalavitz, 2010; Siegel & Hartzell, 2013). The parents in the study shared that when they administered the intervention's components of eye contact, physical touch, and focused attention, they felt more connected with their children. These components are the sub-themes for *connection* and were applied during the study to strengthen the parent-child relationship. Parents discovered that direct eye contact accompanied by physical touch such as a pat on the back while engaged in an uninterrupted time

of activity together culminated feelings of unconditional love between parent and child.

According to the participants, the experience of connection also provided improvement in the parent's self-awareness, self-regulation, and sense of accomplishment.

This finding is similar to current literature, in that children desperately need to feel connected in order to know themselves and the world around them. Children who receive affection and emotional support from parents in a secure environment develop a greater window of tolerance for things that are uncomfortable, and parents who play with their children create an emotional connection that is an important part of cognitive, emotional, and social development (Motataianu, 2014; Shao & Kang, 2022; Siegel, 2010).

Eye Contact

Eye contact conveys information that is important for establishing healthy parent-child communication, such as regulating parent-child interactions, promoting targeted activities, and sharing each other's intentions. During the study, some parents shared that using eye contact was difficult for them. Not all parents felt comfortable using eye contact, and some of the children did not respond to it right away. As the study progressed, both parents and children became more familiar with how to use eye contact, and by the end of the study, they had developed an appreciation for how effective it was in growing the relationship.

This finding is aligned with the findings in recent literature regarding eye contact as an effective tool in building good parent-child relationships. Leong et al.'s (2017) study showed that parent-child dyads exhibit more brain-to-brain synchrony while making direct eye contact than when interacting with their eyes averted. Wohltjen and Wheatley's (2021) study suggested that eye contact may actually reduce shared attention, perhaps to allow for individual contributions that allow conversation to evolve.

Physical Touch

During the study, parents and children varied in their lived experiences of using physical touch to communicate and connect. As the study progressed, both parents and children became more accustomed to applying and receiving physical touch and expressed they felt closer to one another and understood each other better. This finding compares favorably with recent literature. Carozza and Leong (2021) reported that early physical interactions with a parent provide a foundation for a child's cognitive and socioeconomic development, and Narvaez et al. (2019) stated that touch is the earliest form of sensory experience for a developing human being. Psychological interest in the effects of early childhood touch traces back to the midtwentieth century and is positively associated with children's well-being (Narvaez et al., 2019).

Focused Attention

Focused attention is the parent giving a child their full, undivided attention in a way that the child feels loved and valuable enough to receive appreciation and uncompromising regard from the parent (Campbell, 2015). According to Campbell, it is the most demanding need a child has and the most challenging thing for a parent to do. Participants in the study confirmed that focused attention was a huge challenge for them, but also a rewarding one.

This finding corroborates with the current findings of Wong et al. (2020) that when parents are attentive, sensitive, and responsive to their children, the parent-child interactions have a positive effect on children's psychosocial development. Wong's study looked at interactions between 1,254 children and their parents while using technology. Parents who used electronic devices were distracted and had reduced parental warmth and responsiveness toward their child. More than 90% of the parents reported that digital devices had interrupted their interactions with their child at least once daily. Children whose parents' use of technology was

high had more psychosocial difficulties and exhibited disruptive behavior in order to recapture parental attention (Wong et al., 2020).

Pew researchers discovered that two-thirds of parents in the United States say parenting is harder today than it was 20 years ago because of technology like social media, tablets, laptops, and smartphones (Auxier et al., 2020). Akram and Farzand (2022) studied “distracted parenting” and found that excessive utilization of technology has had a profound negative effect on the parent-child relationship. The study referenced “absence present” where the parent is physically there but distracted somewhere else. Children’s externalizing behavior was directly related to reduced parent-child interactions (Akram & Farzand, 2020).

Relationship

Relationship became evident as the next theme almost from the beginning of the study. Whether it was the parent’s relationship with their child, or the relationship parents had with themselves, the theme of *relationship* was constant and played an important role. The supporting sub-themes that evolved were *intentional, purposeful, and unconditional*. Children have an uncanny ability to recognize their parent’s feelings (Campbell, 2015), and these sub-themes guided the parents into being the type of parent their child needed them to be. The parent-child relationship dynamically changed throughout the study as the intervention was being applied from week to week. Parents began to clarify and understand their children’s concerns about particular problems more clearly, and the children began to understand their parents’ concerns, which formulated a more collaborative approach to the relationship (Greene, 2016).

Bowlby’s theory of attachment states that children need to be loved and connected to caring adults to become fully human and to reach their own potential (Bowlby, 1969; Ainsworth, 1978). Bowlby explained in his three-volume series on attachment that all humans develop an

internal working model of self and an internal working model of others (Bowlby, 1969, 1973, 1980) and that attachment is a theory of the origin and nature of love. *Unconditional* love initiates a *trusting* relationship between parent and child, and healthy connections and relationships lead to a child's positive sense of self (Schein, 2018). The love that parents had for their children was exhibited through the sacrifices and compromises that the parents made during the study and the changes in their relationships with self and others.

Intentional

Parental intentionality was found during the study to create warmth and safety for the child, as well as providing consistent structure and guidelines. This finding is similar to current literature regarding intentional ways to grow a healthy parent-child relationship. Jaeger et al. (2021) studied intentional parental modeling and found that parents consciously engage in influencing strategies to shape their children's behavior. Their study showed that intentional parenting helps to develop social and emotional skills (Jaegar et al., 2021). Recent literature shows that the relationship has the greatest impact on adolescent behavior and that intentional parenting practices, such as giving advice and encouraging open communication, improve the child's emotion regulation and self-esteem (Morris et al., 2021).

Purposeful

Parenting with purpose is centered around the question, "What does my child need?" This was a recurring theme during the study that parents asked themselves while applying Campbell's intervention. Each parent desired to develop a better relationship with their child and found that the more they understood their child's behavior, the better they could help them learn and grow (Campbell, 2015). This finding is confirmed as well in recent literature. In Amen and Fay's new

book *Raising Mentally Strong Kids*, parents are encouraged to think about what they are trying to achieve in their day-to-day interactions with their children.

Being purposeful is essential to goal setting and understanding what children need from their parents. Goals help determine parents' behavior (Amen & Fay, 2024). A phenomenological study of the lived experience of parents educating morality to their children confirmed that values such as honesty, love, altruism, courage, trustworthiness, and responsibility are first acquired by children under the influence of the moral teachings of the parents (Valavi et al., 2022). The findings of the study indicate that there is a positive relationship between family ethics and parent-child relationships.

Unconditional

Unconditional love is a key component to the primary relationship between parent and child and was experienced by the parents during different stages of the study. This finding corroborates with the findings of Tsang and Lam's (2023) study on unconditional parental acceptance. This current study had 145 parent participants randomly assigned to child-based worth or unconditional self-acceptance conditions. Results showed that parents with unconditional self-acceptance were more likely to provide unconditional acceptance to their children (Tsang & Lam, 2023). In a current study by Sabey et al. (2018), 58 families were interviewed regarding how they demonstrated parental love. Parents were asked, "What kinds of things do you do with your children that shows them you feel loving toward them?" The results underscored the importance of parents being responsive to the specific needs of their children. This finding is consistent with Campbell's model.

Regulation

The theme of *regulation* developed out of the emotional dysregulation that the parents and children experienced in their relationship during the study. Parents found themselves to be emotionally overwhelmed at times, causing their children to become emotionally overwhelmed as well. Emotions have the power to disrupt one's thinking, and continual emotional distress can create deficits in a child's intellectual abilities, interrupting their capacity to learn (Goleman, 1995). The sub-themes of *patience* and *understanding* helped parents regulate their emotions during the study and build tolerance for things that made them uncomfortable when interacting with their children.

Greenspan's Development, Individual, and Relation (DIR) model describes emotion regulation as the foundational skill on which other skills in the developmental ladder rely on, such as social skills, language skills, and problem-solving skills. If one cannot emotionally regulate, then performing the other developmental skills will be difficult (Greenspan, 2007). This is true for the child, but also true for the parent. A parent's control over their own emotional life might be impaired (Goleman, 1995), and parents also have to practice emotion regulation. During the study, parents found that their children tended to "mirror" their emotional states (Zimmer-Gembeck et al., 2022). To expand their child's emotional intelligence, parents realized they had to be good examples and model what emotion regulation looked like. Emotion points the direction to what is important, and cognitive reappraisal helps to evaluate the priorities (Siegel & Hartzell, 2013). Throughout the study, the parents practiced identifying their emotions and their child's emotions, *understanding* situations, and prioritizing events in an emotionally regulated way.

This finding is corroborated by current findings in literature on emotion regulation. Rodas et al. (2024) stated that effective regulation of emotions promotes improved social functioning, psychological well-being, and physical health. The ability to switch attention effectively is an important skill that comes easier for some than others. It involves disengaging from an emotional response, reappraising the situation, and engaging more adaptively (Rodas et al., 2024). Chervonsky and Hunt (2019) points out that the ability to manage emotions effectively is critical to healthy psychological and social development in adolescents. Chervonsky's study looked at different emotion regulation strategies such as reappraisal, suppression, and social outcomes. The participants consisted of 262 adolescent students from five different schools. The results showed that emotional well-being and social interactions have major long-term effects on a person's psychological and social functioning (Chervonsky & Hunt, 2019).

Patience

Parents experienced the effect that increased patience had on their level of anxiety during the study. This finding is similar to current literature's research that patience is important in decision-making and how being impatient may lead to anxiety and depression (Martinez, 2022). Martinez also states that patience aligned with perseverance produces the highest positive results. Patience contributes to increased self-regulation and impulse control, self-compassion, distress tolerance, and empathy in relationships, which is consistent with this study (Worthen, 2018).

Understanding

During the study, the level of understanding between parent and child continued to grow as the parents applied Campbell's intervention. Parents were able to comprehend their children's feelings in a more meaningful way and provide a higher level of care. This finding is related to

the findings in current literature where empathy means accuracy in *understanding* another. This theme established that empathy should be evident when it comes to parents understanding their children (Vann, 2017). Parents who seek first to understand experience a higher satisfaction in life that is beneficial for their child (Li et al., 2023).

Summary of the Findings for the Research Question

The overall purpose of the study was to gain a better understanding of how the parent-child relationship changed after applying Campbell's method of conveying parents' unconditional love for their children, using eye contact, physical touch, and focused attention. The research question, "How do parents describe the lived experiences of applying Campbell's model?" was answered during this study. When parents consistently applied Campbell's method, the parents perceived that the quality or tone of the relationship improved and a more positive emotional and behavioral outcome with their children was realized. New insights, improvements to parenting skills, and enhancing the child's ability to receive love were some of the benefits from the study.

Parents' descriptions of their experiences with conveying unconditional love using Campbell's model were consistent with current research. Campbell shared that focused attention does require time, and sometimes a lot of it, and parents may have to give up something they would rather do (Campbell, 2015). All of the parents in the study had the experience of having to prioritize spending uninterrupted time with their child at the expense of another activity or event that they wanted to do or felt they needed to do. Parents realized that they must convey their love to their children before anything else, or else everything else is unpredictable, especially their child's attitudes and behaviors (Campbell, 2015). The findings demonstrated that increased

emotion regulation helped produce growth in the parents' self-awareness and resilience toward their children's moods and behaviors.

The findings were consistent with literature, demonstrating that the individual components of eye contact (Leong et al., 2017; Mayo et al., 2020; Wohltjen & Wheatley, 2021), focused attention (Akram & Farzand, 2022; Auxier et al., 2020; Wong et al., 2020), and physical touch (Carozza et al., 2021; Narvaez et al., 2019) were elements that helped parents build connection with their children. In contrast, the compassionate parenting that is intentional, purposeful, and patient and prioritizes the parent-child relationship, allowing parents to transfer their heartfelt love from their hearts to the hearts of their children, identified by Campbell as parents conveying unconditional love to their child, was a scarce and infrequent find in the literature.

There were no known studies in literature whereby eye contact, physical touch, and focused attention were applied collectively at the same time with the mindful intent of conveying parents' unconditional love to their children. The study showed that when these three components—eye contact, physical touch, and focused attention—were applied to the parent-child relationship at the same time and in a loving manner, the child felt heard and understood and empathy toward their parents increased. As a result, the child felt loved and was able to reflect love back toward the parent.

Implications for Social Change

This study contributed to the existing literature by examining the parent's lived experience of applying Campbell's method as a viable intervention for parental skills training. While there are other training programs for parents that address similar needs (Bogels et al., 2010). Duncan et al., 2009; Zhang et al., 2019), there are no known formal interventions being

offered to practitioners and parent-child dyads that focus on parents conveying unconditional love for their child through eye contact, physical touch, and focused attention (Campbell, 2015).

The quality of the parent-child bond is relevant to childhood anxiety (Ainsworth, 1978; Hughes et al., 2008). Children whose caregivers engage in positive parenting are significantly less likely to develop problem behaviors compared to other children who are anxiously attached to their caregivers (Lieberman et al., 2011). Campbell shared that both the quality of the parent-child bond and the child's security largely depend on the quality of the marital bond (Campbell, 2015). Although not part of the initial study, the marital relationship for each participating parent played an important supportive role throughout the study, especially since it took place during the Christmas holidays, which tends to be the busiest time of year for young families.

The study's findings seem to imply that applying Campbell's model created a learning environment for parents as well as children. Parents need help to gain skills, feelings, and empathies necessary to reflect critically when parenting their children (Greene, 2016). It is through conversations with others that an individual accomplishes understanding (Merriam, 2009), which indicates why parents in the study found comfort in knowing that they were not alone and that other parents were going through the study with them. Parents ended the study with a balanced perspective on how to relate to their children and a sense of gratitude for what they had learned along the way. Going forward, additional support for parents would be necessary for the intervention to be successful long-term. Training programs, support groups, and self-report journals would be highly recommended as ways to support parents with applying the intervention.

Recommendations for Action

This research study focused on finding new ways to support parents in building good relationships with their children in such a way that the child feels loved and valued by their parents. Throughout the study, determining whether Campbell's method would be a viable parenting intervention was a point of interest. This study's results may interest clinicians and counselors as an accessible and affordable parenting intervention to be used in treating parents with a desire to connect with their children. The dissemination of the research findings from this study will first be published in the Liberty University Library and made available to future researchers. Other possible avenues of sharing the information may come from other forms such as submissions to peer-reviewed journals or manualizing the intervention for future research studies.

Recommendations for Further Study

For many parents, children's behaviors and moods may be triggering or intimidating. Parents could benefit from relevant, meaningful parental training and instruction, which can help anticipate some of the frustration, confusion, and fear that parents may face as they engage with their children. This small pilot study showed that Campbell's model was effective in improving the parent-child relationship. Given the small sample size of only four participants, recommendations for further study include expanding the number of participants, diversifying the demographics, such as types of faith or religion, race, and gender, and introducing different cultures and backgrounds.

Other future studies would benefit from this intervention being available in manual form and having more supportive resources, such as learning videos. The parents commented on the simplicity and flexibility of Campbell's model during this pilot study, so future researchers

would be wise to keep it simple and not complicate it when enacting changes. Simplicity is part of the beauty as to why it works! Future studies could be a catalyst to promote a better understanding of parents' authentic needs and expand the intervention to attune not only to the children but to the parents as well. Given that parental love is valuable for all children, the ways that parents demonstrate their love and the ways that children perceive love need to be explored further, using quantitative measures to better understand diverse family contexts.

Reflection

The concept of showing unconditional love to a child was one that I could easily relate to, given I was blessed with three grandchildren while working on my dissertation. I fought the urge to share with the participants ways to parent their children. As the group began implementing the components of Campbell's intervention—eye contact, focused attention, and physical touch—I was surprised, along with the participants, how quickly the intervention positively influenced the parent-child relationship.

Every child wants to feel loved by their parents, and it was so rewarding to hear during the study that the children were getting more of what they needed from their parents and the parents were feeling more connected to their children. Parents expressing unconditional love to their children seems like such a simple concept, but it took Campbell caring enough about families to document it so parents could understand the steps in *how* to convey love in a way that their child *feels* loved.

The possible effect I had on the participants was being a source of accountability. Given the number of reminders that were sent out asking participants to get their weekly forms in on time, participants actually commented that they enjoyed having a deadline to work toward because it provided structure. As I learned more about the intervention, I began using it with

clients who came to see me in my counseling practice. I found it to be just as effective with marital couples, parents with older children, and individuals who wanted to learn how to build good relationships with others. I believe this intervention will remain an important part of my future counseling services.

Evidence of Quality

To assure accuracy of the data, a transcendental phenomenological (TPh) approach was used to explore the findings of this study (Moustakas, 1994). Data was collected from a sample of the population who experienced the phenomenon of applying Campbell's intervention with their children. The true essence of the phenomenon was what was being studied. Transcendental phenomenological reduction was used to describe the essences of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). The concepts of noema, noesis, noetic-noematic, and epoche were applied (Sheehan, 2014). I, as the researcher, was purposeful about achieving and maintaining an unbiased state. Weekly questionnaires were provided to the participants for their own self-reflection on what it was like that week to apply the intervention. Each participant was interviewed using video at the end of the study. The videos were transcribed for accuracy and used to help identify patterns in the data. Clustering was used in the analysis phase, and reflection allowed for increased understanding of what the emerging themes and sub-themes might be. Samples of the raw data can be found in the appendices.

Summary and Conclusion

This chapter describes the findings of the pilot study and participants' responses about the parent's lived experience, providing insights about demonstrating unconditional love to their children while using Campbell's intervention. The insights provided by this study's findings will help to continue the dialogue about how parents show love to their children and, more

specifically, how children *feel* loved by their parents. I have seen the results of this approach and am excited to see what other researchers may do with this information.

This dissertation set out to explore the lived experiences of parents applying Campbell's intervention with their children. The concept of parents learning to convey love to their children in ways that children *feel* loved and valued was the foundation that drove the research forward. Other than this study, there is no known study that has examined the outcome of applying eye contact, physical touch, and focused attention to build good parent-child relationships. The themes and sub-themes that emerged from the study are corroborated by current literature and reflect different facets of conveying unconditional love. Benefiting from real-life examples provided by parents and children, this study identified common ways that parents and children give and receive love from one another. The results of this study reflect and extend previous conceptualizations of unconditional love and further develop a promising parental intervention that can be used by counselors, psychologists, and other practitioners as a training tool for parents who desire to build better relationship with their children.

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APPENDIX A: Weekly Feedback Form

Please take a moment and provide feedback about your experience this week while applying the intervention (eye contact, physical touch, and focused attention) with your child.

1. Your initials: _____

2. What impact, if any, did applying the intervention have on you this week?

3. What impact, if any, did the intervention have on your child this week?

4. What does this information mean to you?

5. What was the most challenging part for you this week about applying the intervention?

6. Describe how you might apply what you learned this week to the next upcoming week when applying the intervention.

7. Is there anything else you would like to share about this week's experience with the intervention?

APPENDIX B: Consent Form

Consent Form to take part in research: Transcendental Phenomenological Pilot Study

I, _____ voluntarily agree to participate in this research study. I understand that I can withdraw at any time or refuse to answer any question without consequences of any kind. I understand that I will be participating on a weekly basis for four (4) weeks. I agree to my interview being video-recorded. I understand that all information I provide for this study will be treated confidentially. I understand this research study is for the purpose of completing a dissertation and information from this study may be used in the publication of the dissertation. I understand that my identity will remain anonymous.

Signature of Research Participant

Date

Signature of Researcher

Date

APPENDIX C: Screening

Self-Rated Symptoms Measure

During the past two weeks, how much (or how often) have you been bothered by the following problems? Please choose one of the answers below for each item listed.

Rate: none at all (0), slight (1-2 days), mild (several days), moderate (more than half the days), severe (nearly every day).

1. Feeling nervous, anxious, frightened, worried, or on edge? _____
2. Feeling down, depressed, or hopeless? _____
3. Problems with sleep that affected your sleep quality overall? _____
4. Drink at least 4 drinks of any kind of alcohol in a single day? _____
5. Thoughts of actually hurting yourself? _____

Signature of Research Participant

Date

Signature of Researcher

Date

APPENDIX D: Video Interview Guide

1. Describe your experience of applying the intervention with your child.
2. How, if at all, did you experience a change in your relationship with your child over the course of the 4 weeks?
3. What were some of the barriers or challenges that you experienced?
4. Which was the most challenging for you?
5. What part, if any, did you enjoy the most?
6. What is the most important thing you learned during the 4-week period of applying the intervention with your child?
7. How will you hang on to what you learned going forward?
8. What changes would you suggest for future parents who attempt to use this intervention with their child?
9. What was it like for you when the 4 weeks were over?
10. If this opportunity was offered again in the future, would you want to participate again?
Why or why not?
11. Are there any other comments or feedback that you would like to share?

APPENDIX E: Summary of Raw Data

Parents: four

Children: 4 participants (Kelli-m-6 yr), (Emily-m-7 yr), (Callie-m-8 yr), (Skye-m-10 yr)

Number of siblings: Harvey-6-yr (2), Bo-7 yr (2), Ashton-8 yr (1), Jett-10 yr (0, ADHD)

Application:

1. put phone down, intentional with eye contact ... lighter interactions, not as heavy
2. physical touch and quality time were hard to remember to do; eye contact was more natural
3. to apply it was simple; enjoyed making time with just him
4. highly effective when given ample time; mostly felt rushed amidst all the “busy stuff”

Activities:

1. hard to carve out one-on-one special time
2. included reading, snuggling, positive affirmation
3. Was able to just sit with him while he played his games and be present

Relationship:

1. better, open conversations
2. saw how fruitful one-on-one time was for him when he got to do what he wanted to do
3. rekindled our mother-son relationship-sparked fun
4. more empathetic toward him; able to gauge his emotions better
5. Taught me to be a better listener
6. He likes to be close, but I like personal space ... so, I was able to give him more of what he needed using these techniques
7. We both learned how to be calmer
8. I understand him better; intervention helped him re-regulate faster

Barriers/challenges:

1. Finding one-on-one time for just one child when other children are wanting it too.
2. Finding time to do it
3. My child (Harvey) struggled with doing eye contact—he looked away
4. Triggered by his pent-up frustration and anger after school
5. Me slowing down long enough to let him talk
6. My own humanness; being dysregulated at the same time
7. Not being patient enough to discern what his need is in the moment
8. Giving him what he needs when I don't have it to give, feeling depleted
9. When things don't go my way ... feeling disrespected

10. I am not good at eye contact, hard for me, so ... remembering to do it
11. Logistics—prioritizing the time, even when feeling low-energy

Most enjoyable:

1. Prioritizing him; putting down my activities; giving him more of what he needs and deserves
2. Seeing that it does not take that much to help him regulate better and give him some tools
3. Getting to hear how he really feels (after getting past the anger, frustration)
4. The conversations during one-on-one time
5. Just sitting with him while he plays games or watch a show after school – spending time together
6. Being with him—being present; slowing down; undistracted

Most valuable lesson:

1. Noticed a change in his behavior when I do make time for him ... he's more compliant
2. Super important for me to spend one-on-one time with him; I want him to remember I was there
3. Be present—keep showing up to do it better each day

How to hang on to new learnings:

1. Continue to practice it
2. Make sure it is one-on-one, so it feels special, not with other siblings at same time
3. Adjust schedule so he can stay up later than younger siblings and spend time w/ mom/dad
4. Apply to different environments as well as home ... school, church, etc.
5. Re-imagining our family time to focus on individual one-on-one time

Advice for future parent participants:

1. It's good to know that other parents are doing it at the same time as you (support)
2. Encourage other parent to deter siblings from being present during one-on-one time
3. Every child is unique ... have fun with it and try different combinations of intervention
4. Just getting on the child's level and see what they respond to...stay flexible

What changes would you make:

1. Take a survey or diagnostic to uncover parents' vulnerabilities before starting
2. Inventory of self-awareness

What it was like when over:

1. Missed having the accountability
2. Relaxed ... Christmas was over too
3. Feeling encouraged
4. Still continued doing it ... I developed it as a routine; never really stopped

Amount of instruction:

1. Good; flexible; 4 wks was just the right amount of time
2. Maybe add a poster for the refrigerator to remind what the 3 things are

Comments:

1. It was tactical, simple, and easy to implement
2. Good to know other parents are doing it too

Memorable quote:

1. I saw firsthand that my son would respond well to these interventions.
2. I'm trying to break old patterns and create new healthy habits
3. Good relationships don't have to take hours ... just a few minutes here and there consistently
4. Parents need to do their own homework ... not just the children
5. We need to set our children up for success

APPENDIX F: Transcription Example

R: Thank you for participating in the study.

P3: Yes, you're welcome.

R: So, let's start out by you introducing your child.

P3: Yes. So, Harvey, he is my middle. He's six years old. He is very strong-willed and he's very smart, very loving. He's very affectionate and he loves quality time. But he can be compulsive sometimes. And we're working on that.

R: Good. Describe your experience of applying the intervention with your child.

P3: So, I enjoyed making time individually with him. And it was just hard because I have three children that all want that same time. So, while it was nice to have the time with him, I have a fear that it didn't make him feel special because I had to do it with the other two as well.

R: Okay. How, if at all, did your experience change in your relationship with your child over the course of the four weeks?

P3: So, I think I've known that I need to be spending individual time with my children. It's just really hard to carve that time out. But I did see how fruitful that was for him to have that one-on-one attention and to get it to do what he wanted to do. So, um, yeah, I've known like I need to do it more often. So, it was nice to, yeah.

R: What were some of the barriers or challenges that you experienced?

P3: Yeah. So, like I mentioned, just the other two, all three of my kids are pretty hungry for my attention. When they see one getting something, they want it to. So, my biggest challenge was that, and just finding the time to do it, because I'm a full-time working mom, he's in school, we have extracurriculars, you know, my husband is typically home. But I mean, we sometimes have a struggle where it's just me with the kids or something.

R: Yes, so many things that need attention. What part, if any, did you enjoy the most?

P3: The one-on-one time. Like just, you know, the conversation. Sometimes I would just go and lay in bed with him while he watched his show and he just wanted to be with me, so that's kind of the reality. He's kind of always been like that. He hasn't been like clingy, but he always likes as long as I'm just right there, you know? Yeah. He's my most dependent child. My other two are very independent.

R: Yes, that's sweet. What is the most important thing you learned during the four-week period of applying the intervention with your child?

P3: I do notice a change in his behavior when I do make time for him. He's more compliant. I feel it is super important for me to spend that individual time with them, so I mean, that's the

most important thing is I want them to know that I made time for them and they remember that we did spend time together instead of, you know, not being able to have one-on-one time with me.

R: Yes, so important. How will you hang on to what you learned going forward?

P3: I'm definitely going to continue to practice that. I've got to figure out a way where I can make it feel more special. Like, doing it just one-on-one, you know. I talked with my husband, and we have already talked about where we might one night a week, let one of them stay up a little bit later. So, they will all take turns and they're getting, you know, the one-on-one time with both of us. So, I'm going to continue to apply it.

R: Yes, that's good. So, what was it like for you when the four weeks were over?

P3: I think I got in a routine of doing it, so I'm still continuing to do it. So, I never really stopped. You just didn't have somebody pestering you to get your form in (ha).

R: I know. I felt bad because it was during Christmas, and I'd send notes out saying, "Get your forms in."

P3: I needed it. I always say I'm a basket case just because I'm like a duck on top of the water, but underneath I'm like, you know, hectic. So, I do need those reminders. I had to set a timer for this interview tonight because I'll forget. So, I'm glad you reminded me because I would have forgotten.

R: What changes would you suggest for future parents to attempt to use this intervention with their child?

P3: Let's see. Maybe to encourage their other spouse to deter the other two kids from being present. It would have been nice to have that. I'm like, "Can you recognize what I'm trying to do right now?" You bring them into the other room, you know? It's just hard, you know, when you have three of them just trying to make them feel special and get that one-on-one time. Just having the other parent like present and on board to kind of pull the others aside so you can have actually successfully had that time. Because when I'm doing it, I'm feeling pressured, you know, and the others are like "are you done? Are you done? Are you done?" So that's the hardest thing.

R: Yes, that's a good point. If this opportunity was offered again in the future, would you want to participate again? Why or why not?

P3: Yes, I enjoyed it. I'm trying to break patterns. And whether it's patterns that I learned when I was growing up or patterns that I've created, but I'm trying to, you know, be better and be more present and spend more time with my kids and try to spend time with them. So, yeah, I would do it again.

R: Of the three parts of the intervention, focused attention, physical touch, eye contact, which one was hardest for you?

P3: For me? I don't feel like any of them were really hard for me. I feel like Harvey struggled the most with eye contact because he will look away and I'm like, "No, in my eyeballs." But I'm

very physically touchy with my kids. So that's not hard for me. Asking for eye contact is not hard for me.

R: Good. Are there any other comments or feedback you'd like to share?

P3: No, I think that really touched on it. Just, you know, my biggest struggle was not being able to do it without having the other two, you know, poking around, wanting that same attention. But yeah, I don't, other than just, you know, having the other spouse be there and take the other two and to do something to distract them. Which I don't know if that would help either because my kids are always like, "When's mom going to be done?" Yeah, I'm the primary. What can I say?

R: Well, I would like to document for the record that this was during the Christmas holidays, and it was during the time that you were diagnosed with appendicitis and needed surgery. So, I really appreciate you sticking in with the study and completing it and I really enjoyed having you be a part of it.

P3: Yes. Thank you for having me and I will do it again.