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## Fathering Behavior within the Context of Role Expectations and Marital Satisfaction: Framework for Studying Fathering Behavior

Mark Trahan

*University of Houston Graduate College of Social Work, mark\_trahan@hotmail.com*

Monit Cheung

*University of Houston Graduate College of Social Work, mcheung@uh.edu*

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Familial relationship, a variable aiming at studying human interactions within specific cultures, has been well researched in terms of its association with the psychosocial and behavioral outcomes for children and adolescents. The investigation usually begins with the study of the human interactions among regular personal contacts between children and their primary caregivers to identify potential ideal outcomes for children. Both the quality and quantity of these interactions demonstrate the influential power of parental authority, and other aspects of the parents' relationship, in the development of positive mental health outcomes for their children (Belsky, Gilstrap, & Rovine, 1984; Rohner & Veneziano, 2001; Sarkadi, Kristiansson, Oberklaid, & Bremberg, 2008; Stolz, Barber, & Olsen, 2005; Verschueren & Marcoen, 1999). While motherhood has been much of the focus within familial research, father research illuminates the need for greater understanding of the effects of fathering on emotional and developmental outcomes for children. A meta-analysis study of fathering research over the past decade illustrates that fathering has become highly influential in a child's psychological and behavioral outcomes (Rohner & Veneziano, 2001). In child welfare research, studies of nonresident fathers identify issues related to child protection concerns, incarceration, drug abuse, crime, poverty, and couple relationship issues but neglect the value of engaging fathers (Maxwell, Scourfield, Featherstone, Holland, & Tolman, 2012; National Fatherhood Initiative, 2012; Reynolds, 2011; The Urban Institute, 2006). In future research, fathering behaviors and their participation in promoting child welfare must be included in studies that clarify the outcomes of fathers' influence on child development.

Since 2000, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (USDHHS) has spearheaded the National Responsible Fatherhood Initiative to support projects that promote fathering as a crucial protective factor to vulnerable children (USDHHS, 2000). Through national efforts in its Children's Bureau, this multifaceted initiative has many interdepartmental projects aiming to encourage "fathers to be present in their children's lives, taking an active and responsible role in raising and supporting them" (Administration for Children and Families, 2012). There are 10 major national interdepartmental components on "Promoting Responsible Fatherhood" as reported on the USDHHS (2011) federal research site:

1. **Responsible Fatherhood Grants:** The Claims Resolution Act of 2010 provides funding of \$150 million in each of five years for healthy marriage promotion and responsible fatherhood. Each year, \$75 million may be used for activities promoting fatherhood,

such as counseling, mentoring, marriage education, enhancing relationship skills, parenting, and activities to foster economic stability.

**2. Effective Parenting:** Involved fathers provide practical support in raising children and serve as models for their development. Children with involved, loving fathers are significantly more likely to do well in school, have healthy self-esteem, and exhibit empathy and pro-social behavior compared to children who have uninvolved fathers. Committed and responsible fathering during infancy and early childhood contributes emotional security, curiosity, and math and verbal skills.

**3. Access, Visitation, Paternity, and Child Support:** About half of all children spend some part of their life apart from one or both of their parents, and most often the parent who does not live with the child is the father. The laws that cover these relationships are the responsibility of the state (family law), but the federal government does provide states with funding to assist in the development of programs that help establish paternity, collect child support, and provide nonresidential parents with access to their children.

**4. Research, Evaluation, and Data:** Good research and program evaluations assess program performance, measure outcomes for families and communities, and document successes. Information on previous and current research and evaluation efforts can help programs and researchers to direct limited resources where they are most needed, and most effective, in assessing results.

**5. Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation:** ASPE is the principal advisor to the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services on policy development and is responsible for major activities in policy coordination, legislation development, strategic planning, policy research, evaluation, and economic analysis. Pertinent fatherhood topics found there include: child welfare, employment, family and marriage issues, and violence.

**6. Healthy Marriage:** Healthy marriage services help couples, who have chosen marriage for themselves gain greater access to marriage education services, on a voluntary basis, where they can acquire the skills and knowledge necessary to form and sustain a healthy marriage.

**7. Economic Stability:** Resources for helping fathers improve their economic status by providing activities, such as Work First services, job search, job training, subsidized employment, job

retention, and job enhancement; and encouraging education, including career-advancing education.

**8. Incarceration:** The Department of Justice has estimated that over 7.3 million children under age 18 have a parent who is in prison or jail or on probation or parole. Given these numbers, it is important to understand how children and their caregivers are affected by the criminal activity of a parent and their subsequent arrest, incarceration, and release. Additionally, it is important to know which services and assistance might be available to those under criminal justice supervision to help them be better parents and to return successfully to the community.

**9. Program Development:** The principal implication for fathering programs is that these programs should involve a wide range of interventions, reflecting the multiple domains of responsible fathering, the varied residential and marital circumstances of fathers, and the array of personal, relational, and environmental factors that influence men as fathers.

**10. Other Research Resources:** Federal information relating to fatherhood research is spread throughout multiple departments and agencies. This area includes other Web sites that have federally sponsored research related to responsible fatherhood.

With these resources, outreach efforts are also planned and launched at both federal and state levels. All efforts target the involvement of fathers in protecting children and enhancing a healthy and stable environment for children.

In an Information Memorandum (IM) issued by the USDHHS (2012), Bryan Samuels, Commissioner of the Administration for Children, Youth and Families, suggests a series of preventive measures that go beyond child safety and permanency. This IM includes a comprehensive framework that covers all aspects of child developmental needs such as parental attachment, which sets the stage for fathering as a well-being issue for children.

Previous studies support the finding that a father's participation in a child's life is regarded as a significant factor in the enhancement of a couple's relationship. However, the investigations between paternal behavior and marital satisfaction paint an incomplete picture since one third of American children are residing in father-absent homes (National Fatherhood Initiative, 2012). It is, therefore, essential to study various fathering models, including biological fathers, fathering figures, and nonresident fathers, to explore the impact of their paternal participation on their children's mental health. Considering child welfare studies with

results supporting the mother's promotion of responsible fatherhood, researchers must examine ways to engage fathers and link perceived role expectations to actual paternal support (Gordon et al., 2011).

Factoring responsible fatherhood as an expected outcome through the Children's Bureau's national initiatives, literature reveals variables linking fathering participation in childrearing, including those that measure the presence of fathering figures, to fathering outcomes for children. Since fathering is a process, additional variables such as men and women's perception of fathering roles, parenting efficacy, marital/relationship satisfaction, and parenting alliance when fathers are nonresident but still involved must be included to form the "father factor" in paternal involvement studies. With a focus on child well-being, these variables can be included in a research framework as predictors and moderators of fathering participation to be included for future research for examining how fathering behaviors may affect a child's mental health well-being.

### **Presence of Fathering Figures**

Highlighting the importance of father figures in child's lives, the United States Children's Bureau formally added fathering as an important component in child welfare research in 2000 (Rosenberg & Wilcox, 2006). The Children's Bureau and other units under the auspice of the USDHHS (2006) published a user's guide entitled "The Importance of Fathers in the Healthy Development of Children." This guide identifies fathers' vital roles in their children's holistic development and recommends strategies for the healthy parental involvement and engagement of fathers who do not live with their children. For these fathers, such as military fathers, fathers in prison, fathers in divorce, teen fathers, and other nonresident fathers, the guide provides tips and hints on how to spend time with their children under these unusual circumstances.

In 2010, the Children's Bureau highlighted the expansion of six major Father Engagement collaborative projects: 1) Engaging Fathers Project; 2) Community Roundtable on Responsible Fatherhood; 3) The National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse (NRFC) ; 4) Involving Dads in Family Group Decision-making; 5) Father Involvement in the Illinois Integrated Assessment Program; and 6) Fathers as Family and Community Resources. Each project demonstrates the importance of engaging every member in a child's family, to help the child develop into a healthy and responsible individual. For example, the NRFC (2012) has been providing resources and support to enhance "the development, promotion, and distribution of a media campaign to encourage the

appropriate involvement of parents in the life of any child and specifically the issue of responsible fatherhood, and the development of a national clearinghouse to assist States and communities in efforts to promote and support marriage and responsible fatherhood” (NRFC, 2012). The Children’s Bureau (2012) also highlighted the functions of the National Quality Improvement Center on Non-resident Fathers, one of which is the new slogan, “bringing back the dads.” The slogan supports engaging fathers and encouraging mothers to welcome a child’s father back into the child’s life. With the presence of fathers, child welfare agencies will not be blamed to produce “ghost” fathers, changing the uninvolved and invisible father to an important figure in a child’s life (Brown, Callahan, Strega, Walmsley, & Dominelli, 2009, p. 28).

Recent child protection work has expanded its efforts to case planning and educational curriculum to equip social workers with skills to work closely with and involve fathers (English, Brummel, & Martens, 2009; Scourfield et al., 2012). Fathering becomes an important social construct to study because of its multiple influences on children.

### **Men’s Perception of Fathering Roles**

Current research on men’s perceptions provides data regarding the way men view the importance of fathering roles. Olmstead, Futris, and Pasley (2009) explored men’s perceptions of roles in a qualitative analysis of role qualities. From qualitative interviews, seven fathering roles emerge: provider, disciplinarian, teacher, protector, supporter, caretaker, and co-parent (Olmstead et al., 2009). Among these, the teacher, provider, and supporter roles appear to remain more central to perceptions of fathers than other role identities. Summers et al. (1999) also evaluated the perceived paternal role identities by both mothers and fathers in a low-income sample and found eight major themes in fathering roles: financial providing, support or being there, caregiving, play and activities, teaching, discipline, providing love and affection, and protecting. Role perception that addresses these themes is an important starting point to studying fathering behaviors.

These themes address a gap between men’s perception and their actual engagement in fathering roles. Identity theory provides an explanation of how men conceptualize roles influencing their choice of actions or decisions (Stryker & Burke, 2000; Stryker & Serpe, 1994). *Identity theory*, developed from the work of James (1890), recognizes that multiple competing social roles result in multiple “identities,” which are based upon social expectations and lead to social behavior (Stryker & Burke, 2000). Mead (1934) uses this concept to explain how the society

shapes the self and how the self-image shapes behavior. Mead's work conceptualizes these choices of behavior within the parameter of social interactions, in which people form relationships with others, thus developing a social role. Due to the difficulty of operationalizing this concept for research, Stryker (1980) developed a model for understanding the mechanism by which it occurs. Since various social roles often exist within each person's life, a new question surfaced, namely how behavioral choices are made within the context of multiple social roles (Stryker, 1968; Stryker, 1980).

Role identity, role efficacy, and role salience are interconnected. Social roles include a set of expectations attached to social relationships, whereas identities are the internalized set of expectations from multiple social contexts (Stryker & Burke, 2000). *Salience* is the resulting mechanism by which choices are made among various social identities. The more salient the role, the greater the likelihood it will be incorporated into the decision-making process. Therefore, *identity salience* is defined as "the probability that an identity will be invoked across a variety of situations, or alternatively across persons in a given situation" (Stryker & Burke, 2000, p. 286). For instance, a father who is a provider in several contexts may find this identity or role salience in the fathering identity with his children.

In addition to role salience, the commitment to a particular role or identity is meaningful. *Commitment* is defined as the degree to which the costs would outweigh the benefits of losing the role, by not fulfilling the social expectations required to maintain the role. Thus, the commitment to the role is also correlated to the level of salience (Stryker & Serpe, 1994). A higher commitment to a social role results in higher salience; thus, it is more influential in behavioral choice (Callero, 1985; Nuttbrock & Freudiger, 1991; Stryker & Serpe, 1982).

The idea of role salience and commitment relates to the way a father conceptualizes his participation in his child's activities. In the child welfare context, this concept may apply to a father's history of gender role expectation, i.e., provider, nurturer, disciplinarian, or the absence of a role. A father's commitment to that role will determine the level at which he personally desires fulfillment of that role with the child. Building salience and commitment to role expectation can be a gateway to empowering fathers to participate further in their child's life. In situations where the father is a nonresident father, understanding the father figure's own personal set of role expectations and commitment to the child, while empowering him by expanding his knowledge of other roles, will provide him with a greater capacity for parenting participation.

In a study about responsible fatherhood, Wood, Moore, Clarkwest, Hsueh, and McConnell (2010) identify five measures to check the intensity of fathers' involvement in a focal child's life, which includes "father spent time with focal child daily," "father provided focal child with substantial financial support," "father lived with focal child," "father's engagement in caregiving," and "mother's perceptions of importance of father's involvement" (p.38). All of these measures provide a strong premise that fathers can be connected if they are encouraged and feel welcome to be engaged.

### **Women's Perception of Fathering Roles**

With respect to parenting participation, a mother's support of the paternal role has been found to be increasingly more important than paternal support of the mother, with or without marriage as a moderator (Braver & O'Connell, 1998; Fagan & Barnett, 2003; Madden-Derdich & Leonard, 2000). Recent literature supports the idea of involving mothers in the promotion of responsible fatherhood. For example, Coates, Batsche, and Lucio (2011) interviewed a group of 10 adolescent mothers. They find that "being there" (p. 137) is an important characteristic of a responsible father. The results of their study support the idea that mothers' perception of fathers' involvement must be positively communicated in order for the father's *being there* to be effective. This idea of positive communication from the mothers connects perception to action throughout the entire process of parenting.

When a role is recognized and validated by a mother, the likelihood that a father will commit to this role increases. Burke and Reitzes (1991) conceptualize commitment as the force with which the value of social identity moderates life balance. They also view social identity as a "reflected appraisal" process characterized by an assessment of various aspects of social interactions (input) and responses to certain behavior (output), with an act to balance the response between environment and behavior (p. 242). The life goal of being a parent becomes the maintenance of equilibrium or prevention of incongruence between the environment and responsive behavior. An individual may only respond partially or under certain circumstances, due to a lack of commitment to enhancing social identity. When commitment is higher, there will be a shared meaning in this relationship and thus contribution to a better view of this social identity (Burke & Reitzes, 1991). When mothers believe that fathers should be involved in a nurturing capacity, the fathers' sense of self will be correspondingly increased (Rane & McBride, 2000). It appears that the expectation or influence of a mother's perceptions of a father's

role is predictive of the father's own capacity to see this role as central to his manhood, resulting in an increased commitment to the fatherhood role throughout the child's life cycle.

In a study by DeLuccie (1995), a mother's permission to paternal access of the child, or maternal gatekeeping, effects maternal support and expectations of father involvement. However, in the research, maternal gatekeeping is conceptualized to include a component of physical restriction and maternal resistance. Recent literature characterizes maternal gatekeeping as a mother's preference to intentionally or unintentionally restrict or exclude fathers from child care responsibility (Fagan & Barnett, 2003; Hawkins et al., 1999; Madden-Derdich & Leonard, 2000). In child welfare cases, there are a multitude of combinations of parenting structures that could change the dynamic of a father's participation. A father outside of the home may participate differently than a father who lives within the home. In order to make this theory relevant, especially within the construct of child welfare, the concept of restricting fathering participation must be explored to understand the relationship between a mother's expectations of a paternal role, in combination with family structure, and how this may shape impulses to restrict or protect. Instead of a punitive or pejorative concept being attached to maternal support, or nonsupport, of paternal involvement, it would be helpful to understand the threshold at which women feel they must restrict fathering contacts and how mothers can relax their role to be able to encourage fathers' participation.

### **Parenting Self-Efficacy**

While role theorists have focused on role salience and the development of role hierarchies, another concept that may attribute to the commitment of a role is the level of confidence in the role. Based on previous research, Sevigny and Loutzenhiser (2010) define parenting self-efficacy as an "individual's appraisal of his or her competence in a parental role" (p. 179). Because parenting self-efficacy is perhaps a contributor to role identity, it may provide another construct by which to understand fathering behavior. Sevigny and Loutzenhiser (2010) call this parenting self-efficacy (PSE) in fathers, which is positively associated with marital satisfaction and income level but negatively associated with stress and depression. In low-income families, financial stress and depression may contribute to lower fathering self-efficacy, resulting in a lack of male parenting confidence.

Tremblay and Pierce (2011) find that the timing of parental participation in fathering activities changed both mothers' and fathers' perception of fathering efficacy. Fathers' perceptions of their own role as

a parent from 2 to 18 months post-birth are usually unstable. However, the more that mothers perceive that fathers are participatory at 2 months, the more a father perceives himself as self-efficacious (Tremblay & Pierce, 2011). However, at 5 months, fathering participation has no effect on maternal perception of fathering efficacy; therefore, earlier participation leads to greater gains in long-term fathering participation and marital satisfaction. Since fathering is critical to child development, researchers must find answers to this question: In various family structures, how does timing of father's participation affect parenting outcomes?

### **Paternal Involvement**

Fathering is primarily a social construct, molded by context within the family and community, where fathering interventions must incorporate various elements including marital, economic, communal, and father-to-father interventions. The Children's Bureau adopted Doherty, Kouneski, and Erickson's (1998) concept of *responsible fathering* to start the Fatherhood Initiative, which has been embraced by policy makers since 2000. This initiative generated more discussions about how to engage nonresident fathers in the parenting process so that absentee fathers can be brought back into a child's life (Sheldon, 2009). This concept of responsible fathering was introduced by Lamb, Pleck, Charnov, and Levine (1985), when they proposed three dimensions of fathering: interaction, availability, and responsibility. In an attempt to propose an empowering paradigm, Levine and Pitt (1995) define *responsible fathering* as waiting to make a baby until emotional and financial support has been established, invoking legal paternity when a child is born, and sharing responsibilities for the child with the mother, including both childcare and financial responsibilities. In child welfare contexts, this model adds the complexity of fathers' roles in certain circumstances when: 1) a dual earner is present, 2) a child has special needs that require significant fathers' participation, and 3) maternal gatekeeping function interferes with father participation (Levine & Pitt, 1995; Walker & McGraw, 2000). In addition, recent research supports the promotion of responsible fathering in this model, as fathers' involvement in parenting will increase children's resiliency to deal with trauma, crime, and poverty issues (USDHHS, 2012).

Belsky (1984) proposed a construct by which parenting may be analyzed within multiple contextual factors, including parental personality and developmental history, marital relationship, social network, work and child characteristics. In this construct, the marital relationship is a primary system of support. A positive and stabilized union resulting in satisfaction

lowers stress levels, leading to better child behavioral outcomes. However, many children in the child welfare system have not experienced positive and stabilized relationships due to absence of a parent, parental conflict, family violence and other domestic issues. Emotional stabilization, as well as appropriate warmth and nurturing within the intimate partnership, may not be readily available. In a study about post-divorce families, Lau (2006) finds that, in 69 families, nonresident mothers tend to provide more nurturing support to their children, while nonresident fathers tend to overfocus on discipline. While studying fathering behaviors in these environments, many researchers pay attention to marital interaction that may lead to positive child mental health outcomes (Tanner Stapleton & Bradbury, 2012). However, if a marital relationship does not exist, other factors such as the quality of bond between a father and child, problem-solving interactions between parents and their children, and role modeling of acceptance by a caregiver may help inform interpersonal dynamics that shape and affect child behaviors.

In the studies about fathering roles, Hawkins and Dollahite (1997) propose a generative model based upon the developmental stage approach proposed by Erik Erickson. They reframe a deficit fathering paradigm, which portrays fathers as inadequately equipped, to a role expectation beginning with cultural expectation of role fulfillment. Fathering is thus conceptualized as an adaptation to sociocultural change and a change in child care responsibilities. In their model, fathering behavior can be encouraged with a strengths perspective, in which fathers bring unique contributions and individual desire and in which they benefit from active engagement. There is a reciprocal connection between father and child, in that a father's participation in his child's education and other networks may create social capital that ultimately contributes to the child's healthy development. Through case reviews and a social worker survey, English et al. (2009) confirm the importance of fathering in a child's life and encourage the use of data to effect changes in child welfare policies and practices that involve fathers and noncustodial parents in child protection proceedings. Their quantitative data support that "when fathers are located and identified as a resource, there are incremental increases over time in fathers' involvement in case planning" (English et al., 2009, p. 233).

Knowing it is difficult to measure father involvement, Palkovitz (1997) reconceptualizes men's participation in the lives of their children through the use of a concept of paternal involvement to demystify the reliance upon measuring the quantity of interactions, clarify the assumption of relative proximity to the child, and encourage cultural

considerations. Similarly, Marsiglio, Amato, Day, and Lamb (2000) analyze the fathering role from a constructionist view and acknowledge that responsible fatherhood is conceptualized as a source of social capital, including its benefits to the child's cognitive development. As a resource, a father plays an important role in his child's social recognition. By broadening the view of paternal involvement, Palkovitz (1997) addresses possible roles that may be fulfilled by a father despite his nonresident status. He identifies multiple ways a father could be involved, including planning, providing, protecting, providing emotional support, communicating, teaching, monitoring, processing children's concerns, running errands, being available, giving affection, caregiving, maintaining a close relationship, and sharing activities and interests. By including a cognitive dimension, he included a father's thoughts about his child as a paternal activity. All of these variables are essential to support father involvement.

### **Father's Perception of Marital Satisfaction**

As a body of research, marital satisfaction and father involvement have had mixed results over the past two decades (Lee & Doherty, 2007). Research correlating marital satisfaction with fathering participation have found positive relationships (Belsky, Rovine, & Fish, 1989; Blair, Wenk, & Hardesty, 1994; Feldman, Nash, & Aschenbrenner, 1983; Kerig, Cowan, & Cowan, 1993; King, 2003; McBride & Mills, 1993; Parke & Tinsley, 1987), negative relationships (Nangle, Kelley, Fals-Stewart, & Levant, 2003), and no relationship (Aldous, Mulligan, & Bjarnason, 1998; Grych & Clark, 1999), creating a confusing research picture for their interaction.

Most research indicates that a father's level of marital satisfaction relates to his level of fathering participation. Fathers' quality of participation tends to be more affected by poor marital satisfaction (Blair et al., 1994). In a study with a sample of a low-income male population, father involvement was related to marital satisfaction and a co-parenting alliance (Rienks, Wadsworth, Markman, Einhorn, & Moran Etter, 2011). Men, compared to women, engage in fewer parent-child interactions (Finley, Mira, & Schwartz, 2008). Feldman et al. (1983) finds that marital quality is one of the most powerful predictors of fathering involvement. Men often respond to marital trouble by withdrawing from their spouse (Gottman & Levenson, 1988) and their children (Howes & Markman, 1989). Some studies have been able to show that these interactions may be related to child gender differences (Kerig et al., 1993; Parke & Tinsley, 1987). Parental negativity was found to be highest among fathers of daughters, who have poor relationships with their spouses (Kerig et al.,

1993). The gender of the child appears to be a moderator regarding the interaction effect between marriage satisfaction and parenting.

Earned status is another moderator in marital satisfaction and parenting. Grych and Clark (1999) find that marital quality is related to levels of parental stress, especially over time, and is only related to paternal involvement during the stage of the child's infancy. Fathers whose wives were not earners exhibited associated levels of paternal warmth and marital satisfaction, while fathers whose wives worked part- or full-time had a negative association between warmth and marital satisfaction (Grych & Clark, 1999). For families where the husband was the primary breadwinner or the wife worked part-time, more paternal involvement in childcare activities resulted in greater marital quality. Focusing on the complexity of parenting responsibilities, Helms, Walls, Crouter, and McHale (2010) also find that co-providers (with similar or equal income levels) in the same household have higher role-related stress than other dual-earners. These studies support the finding that employment moderates the frequency and type of parental involvement.

Rienks et al. (2011) find that the key predictors of fathering participation among a low-income sample are religiosity, ethnicity, income, and parenting alliance. Contradictory to usual stereotypes, low-income minority men are more likely to participate with their children than higher income earning Caucasian men. Among these predictors, parenting alliance is found to have the greatest effect (Rienks et al., 2011). Parenting alliance, while different than marital satisfaction, is an important by-product of a higher quality union. Supporting this idea, Rienks et al. (2011) established that an intervention (such as a marriage workshop) on marital quality was effective in increasing fathering participation. In situations where nonresident fathers are participating with a child, parenting alliance may be a key indicator of his level of parenting satisfaction and access to the child.

These cited studies do not address alternative family structures but leave a question about whether parenting alliance is a significant factor in fathering participation when the father is nonresident or currently not connecting with the child's mother. They lack clarification pertaining to how couples who are not intimately engaged but have a child in common navigate alliances with regard to parenting. Researchers need to study how to empower nonresident fathers and single fathers to be productive parents, particularly related to their roles and participation in ensuring child safety and emotional stability.

### **Fathering Outcomes for Children**

Fathering plays an important role in outcomes related to a child's mental health, educational outcome, aggressiveness, and delinquency, family relationships, and social and economic outcomes (Flouri, 2005). Specific outcomes regarding behaviors, especially related to anxiety and behavioral problems, have been linked to the quality of the bond between fathers and their children (Verschueren & Marcoen, 1999). Even after controlling for mother's involvement, father's participation and bonding with a child typically results in positive mental health outcomes and lower levels of psychological problems (Belsky et al., 1984; Barnett, Marshall, & Pleck, 1992). Father involvement is also connected closely with positive child welfare outcomes; for example, involved fathers who spend more time to work with another parent in their child protection case tend to have their child spend less time in foster care (Burrus, Green, Worcel, Finigan, & Furrer, 2012).

Children experiencing positive relationships with their fathers report fewer behavioral problems, as well as less internalized and externalized distress (Dubowitz et al., 2001; Stocker, Richmond, Low, Alexander, & Elias, 2003). Among adolescents, social initiative is determined more by fathers' support than by mothers' support of children (Stolz et al., 2005). In addition, fathering love has been found to be a strong predictor of sons' psychological adjustment during adulthood, adolescent internalization of values, and African American youth social adjustment (Barnett et al., 1992; Brody, Moore, & Gleib, 1994; Rohner & Veneziano, 2001; Veneziano, 2000). Similarly, a father's low level of warmth has been linked to depressed mood in daughters (Heaven, Newbury, & Mak, 2004).

While many studies focus on fathering participation, as defined by roles such as financial support and participation in childcare, Rohner and Veneziano (2001) substantially demonstrate in a meta-analysis study of father-child outcomes that fathering love is a vital part of the development of a child. Fathering love, which includes acceptance as conveyed by appreciation, affection, and emotional engagement, is an influential variable in determining child outcomes. Although amount of interactions between fathers and their children may be crucial for physical bonding outcomes, the quality of a father's love, including acceptance, appears to have even more consequential effects on the psychological outcomes for the child (Rohner & Veneziano, 2001). Maxwell et al. (2012) in a 2000-2010 meta-analysis study that indicates the importance of father participation in child welfare identify two promising indicators from family support and child protection practice contexts: "early identification" of fathering figure and "early involvement of fathers" (p. 160). Fathers'

participation is a significant step toward producing positive child welfare outcomes, but little is known about how engaging fathers may positively affect outcomes.

### **The “Father Factor”**

Before positive outcomes are identified, it is important to measure how the perceived paternal roles can predict fathers’ actual participation in parenthood. The Children’s Bureau (2012) identifies, through its funded projects, a number of fathering interaction variables that positively correlate with fathers’ involvement in improving their children’s lives. Clark and Cox (2011) find that educational tools are essential to train child welfare professionals about the unique needs and perspectives of nonresident fathers. From these projects and tools, researchers must address the “father factor” in two dimensions: 1) resiliency factors against poverty, emotional or behavioral problems, incarceration, crime, sexual activity and teen pregnancy, child abuse, drug and alcohol abuse, and childhood obesity, and 2) protective factors for the attainment of proper education, maternal health, and child health (National Fatherhood Initiative, 2012).

Reynolds (2011) identifies many factors that contribute to nonresident fathers’ support when the child is under the conservatorship of the child welfare system. These factors include fathers’ frequent interactions with children, as measured by the number of visits with children and the number of school visits. Without being involved physically with the mother due to the reasons previously illustrated, a nonresident father’s willingness to interact with the child welfare system becomes a support factor that could positively enhance child outcomes.

With a focus on family-centered practice, child welfare professionals must examine the father factor, as conceptualized as paternal roles and father’s involvement in a child’s life, from both the mother’s and father’s perspectives. Also, fathering must be studied as a process, as it can be provided by fathers, encouraged by mothers, and supported by other fathering figures.

### **Framework in Graphic Formation**

This literature review has helped both practitioners and researchers appreciate the formation of a research model that shows the relationship between fathering participation and its contributing and explanatory variables. These variables are measured by two domains as characterized by actual behavior and individual perceptions of behavior (see Figure 1). Beyond direct measures of father’s behaviors, the family-centered concept is built in to measure the perceptions from both fathers

and mothers, even though not all parents are living together with their children. There are two new emerging concepts related to mothers' reaction toward fathering behaviors: 1) maternal gatekeeping, under the mother's characteristics, that may promote or hinder the father's involvement, and 2) maternal resistance, within the marital connection construct, that may restrict or moderate a desired level of father involvement. The responsible fatherhood concept must be measured in terms of a perceived need to get involved and the father's participation and actual involvement. These perceptions and actions from both parents, regardless of their marital and residence statuses, may affect fathering behavior. This framework will help researchers determine the conceptualization and operationalization of *responsible fatherhood*.

### **Implications for Family-Based Research**

Although not all men play the dual roles of being husbands and fathers, their fathering roles are related to the perspective of these two roles with their children due to maternal involvement. Based on identity theory, the conceptualization of role identity is spawned from salience of the role and commitment to the role. These concepts produce a role hierarchy and determine how men make decisions about their fathering participation and their many family and social roles. With regards to these decisions, a key indicator of marital satisfaction is the degree to which a male is willing to accept influence from his spouse (Gottman, Coan, Carrere, & Swanson, 1998), even though the term "marital" may not always refer to being married. Marital satisfaction is thus conceptually defined as "relationship satisfaction" when fathers with a nonresident father status are taking care of their children as parental allies. One element in a content relationship between the father and the mother is their willingness to negotiate decisions together, even if there may be disagreements regarding outcomes.

Because identity theory postulates that decisions come from role identity and their salience to a person's life, it appears that these decisions do not occur in isolation and that roles are malleable, and conceptualized, within a context of a social relationship through which they may be negotiated, changed, or transformed for the sake of the union and the individuals involved. If this is the case, the expectations of the parental roles are crucial to understanding the interaction in a partnership and explaining behavior. While a man may have an expectation of his role as a father, he may not actually behave according to these standards, either because he is no longer in the marital union or because he perceives he is not encouraged to take part in the parenting process. For a father, the

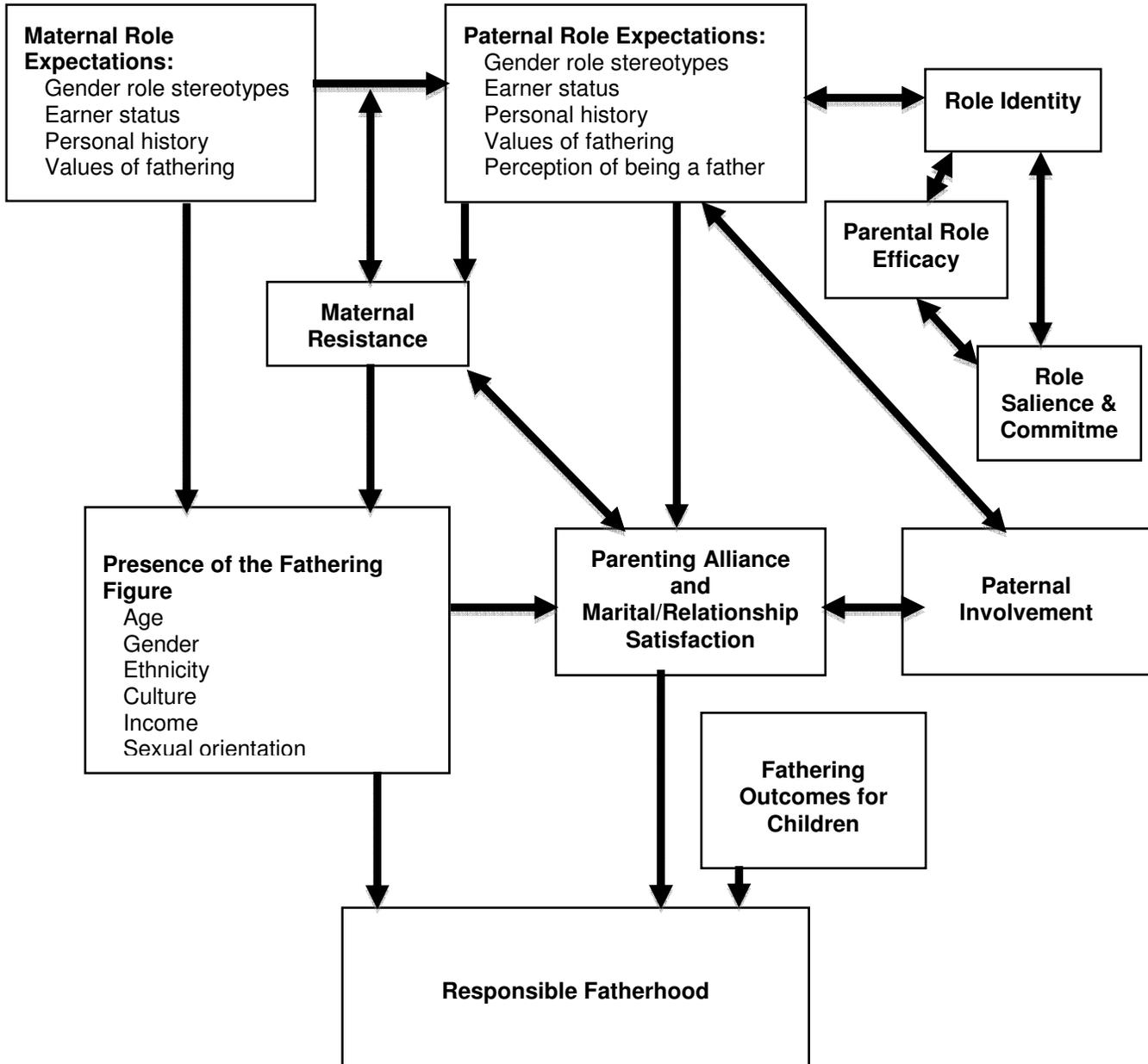
degree to which his expectations meet his actual performance may be a condition that influences his parenting self-efficacy, relationship with the mother, and his parenting behavior. As a framework, this connection leads to an understanding of how the “father-finding” or father engagement strategy can be promoted with help from the mother (Children’s Bureau, 2010).

While much research has been completed about the way in which traditional and nontraditional gender roles have been conceptualized in relation to fathering behavior and marital satisfaction, little research has focused on the world of individual perception of these roles, particularly when the father is no longer connected to the child’s mother. Therefore, it remains crucial to explore the following questions: 1) Does the difference between individual perceptions of fathering roles and the actual behaviors have a bearing on the performance of these roles? and 2) Does the difference between maternal expectations of fathering behavior and actual behavior result in differences in parenting alliance or relationship satisfaction? By establishing how role expectations, along with the commitment to them, influence fathering participation, researchers can conceptualize how intimate partners come to an agreement about their parenting roles and how single fathers maintain these roles. In developing interventions that promote congruence between these two domains, men will be encouraged to participate more in the lives of their children, regardless of their current marital status and whether or not they live with their children.

This research framework will create a new basis for a deeper level of research in understanding the interaction between fathering roles, fathering behavior, and relationship satisfaction, from which to study paternal interactions with children and fathers’ commitment and action. It takes into consideration a family-centered model that does not treat *family* with a traditional definition, i.e., a family becomes a means of life connection that is not always or solely measured by the physical distance between and among its members. As a result, the role fulfillment of a father, as measured by his parenting participation, becomes more essential than the father’s mere presence. In practice, the family engagement initiative proposed by the Children’s Bureau can be measured within the process of assisting fathers to engage actively in a child’s life, with a strong emphasis on involving fathers, with the help of mothers, for promoting positive child outcomes. A deeper understanding of individual perception of parenting expectations is required to study the formula related to increasing male participation in parenting. When these expectations are navigated, better interventions may be utilized to

increase fathering participation and thus reduce maternal resistance and  
promote children's mental health.

Figure 1. Research framework for studying fathering behavior



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