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Reflections on theory and measures for fatherhood programs:  
Father involvement and co-parenting outcomes

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Working Paper

Fatherhood Research and Practice Network

Prepared under Administration for Children and Families  
(Office of Policy, Research, and Evaluation) Grant #90PR0006 to Temple University

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The goal of responsible fatherhood programs is to help fathers become more “committed, involved, and responsible fathers.” The target population of these programs has sometimes been referred to as fathers in “fragile families”, or families in which mother-father partnerships face greater risks than more traditional families do in terms of their economic security and relationship stability (McLanahan, Garfinkel, Mincy, & Donahue, 2010). Although there are many unanswered questions about the extent to which these programs achieve this goal, two questions that have not been adequately addressed are: what are the specific outcomes expected from fathers’ participation in programs, and how do we measure those outcomes?

The notion of becoming more committed, involved, and responsible, although many would agree is an appropriate goal of programs, is in need of greater precision in order to assist programs to offer services that yield clearly defined outcomes that are measurable. Researchers, practitioners, and fathers themselves hold many views about what it means to be a “responsible” father (i.e., a “good” father). For example, does responsible fathering mean that nurturing is just as important as providing financial support? Further complicating the issue is that definitions of good fathering may vary based on the cultural background of the father. Moreover, there is even less clarity about what it means to be a good father among men who do not reside with their children and who may have limited contact with them. Although there is ample evidence that the nurturant fathering model (i.e., the increasingly predominant model of fathering in the United States that urges fathers to regularly participate in nurturing activities with children) is not specific to a single social class (Fox, Sayers, & Bruce, 2001), it is not a reality for many fathers (Marsiglio, Roy, & Fox, 2005). Many fathers face barriers to involvement with their children (Sayers & Litton Fox, 2005) and others may not subscribe to the nurturant fathering model.

At the core of evaluating responsible fatherhood programs is the way in which effective fathering is conceptualized and, consequently, measured. There have been a number of attempts among researchers, policy makers, and practitioners to identify outcomes for responsible fathering and to develop measures of those outcomes. The present paper synthesizes this information and makes recommendations about next steps in regards to outcomes and measurement. The focus of this paper is on two dimensions of fatherhood: fathers’ involvement and engagement with children, and fathers’ co-parenting relationships with the child’s mother. This is not to say that the other dimensions of responsible fathering, such as economic support are less important. In addition, the present paper suggests that outcomes and measures of responsible fatherhood programs should be developed with a basis in theory. To preview the conclusion of this paper, we argue that the field should move towards conceptualizing outcomes and measures of father involvement and engagement that are based in family systems, attachment, and risk-resilience theories. Finally, the present paper reviews a number of outcome measures that may be useful for fatherhood program evaluations. We do not suggest that these are the only or the best possible measures to use, but they are promising measures that may prove to be useful for the field.

## Background

Early attempts to conceptualize fathering were intended to define what it means to be a responsible father rather than suggesting actual outcomes for responsible fatherhood programs. The early definitions were useful because they included components that were relevant to married fathers as well as to unmarried fathers. For example, Levine and Pitt (1995) defined a responsible father as a man who (1) waits to make a baby until he is prepared emotionally and financially to support his child, (2) establishes his legal paternity if and when he has a baby, (3) actively shares with the child's mother in continuing emotional and physical care of their child, from pregnancy onwards, and (4) shares with the child's mother in the continuing financial support of the child, from pregnancy onwards. Doherty et al. (1998) developed a similar model of responsible fathering for married and unmarried fathers that includes four components: (1) establishing paternity, (2) being present in children's lives, (3) providing economic support, and (4) being directly engaged with children. These definitions of responsible fatherhood had considerable influence on the development of fatherhood programs.

Another effort to conceptualize fathering was conducted by the Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics, which convened a series of conferences in 1996 and 1997 for the purpose of assessing the state of research on fatherhood, fertility, and family formation in the United States (Tamis-LeMonda & Cabrera, 1999). These conferences led to an initiative known as the Developing a Daddy Survey project (DADS). The overall goal of this project was to increase "comparability across surveys, and provide an integrated view of father involvement that can inform the field and serve as a guide for future projects that measure father involvement" (Cabrera et al., 2004, p. 418). One outgrowth of the DADS project was the coordination of the development of a set of survey items assessing father involvement that could be used to inform three national studies that at that time were new, including the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study (FFCW), the Early Childhood Longitudinal Survey—Birth Cohort (ECLS-B), and the Early Head Start National Evaluation Father Studies (EHS). Reflecting the state of the art in fatherhood research, the studies on fatherhood represented in the DADS data sets were guided by Lamb, Pleck, Charnov, and Levine's (1985, 1987) model of father involvement (i.e., Bronte-Tinkew, Moore, & Halle, 2002; Cabrera, Brooks-Gunn, Moore, West, & Boller, 2002). This model stipulates that father involvement is best captured by assessing three dimensions: fathers' direct engagement with children, accessibility to children, and responsibility for children. Engagement refers to fathers' shared interactions with their children, accessibility refers to a father's availability to a child whether or not he is directly engaged with that child, and (c) responsibility refers to a father's organizing and planning activities in relation to a child and provision of resources to that child.

Other approaches to identifying outcomes focused on the goals of programs for fathers. Based on extensive interviews with practitioners, the National Center on Fathers and Families identified six indicators of responsible fathering: (1) presence, (2) caregiving, (3) children's social competence and academic achievement, (4) cooperative parenting, (5) fathers' healthy living, and (6) material and financial contributions (Gadsden, Fagan, Ray, & Davis, 2004). These indicators were meant to assist programs to identify possible outcomes for their programs as well as to suggest relevant outcome measures. The Fathering Indicators Framework was never developed into a specific measure of fathering, however.

More recent conceptualizations have identified outcomes for fathers based on three areas that are regarded as important components of responsible fatherhood programs: fathers' amount of time with children and effective parenting behavior, provision of economic security to children, and co-parenting/healthy partner relationships (Administration for Children and Families, Office of Family Assistance, 2009). The Office of Family Assistance identified specific outcomes within each of these

areas. For example, effective parenting outcomes include fathers (1) learning new parenting skills such as positive discipline techniques and cultivating a child's independence, (2) utilizing new parenting skills with their children, (3) increasing their understanding of child development, and (4) fathers increasing their consistency in providing formal, as well as informal and non-monetary support for their children.

### **Theoretical foundations**

One concern in regards to identifying outcomes and measures for responsible fatherhood programs is that the underlying theories informing these programs are not always clearly stated. There may be a number of reasons for the lack of theory, including no incentive to use theory, guidance on how to do so, or understanding of why theory is important in developing a program. One of the functions of theory is precision: "thinking theoretically forces one to clarify what concepts and relations really mean and what they include and exclude" (Klein & White, 1996, p. 18). A clear theoretical approach brings precision to expected outcomes and measures. A few programs (and the outcome measures used by those programs) have been developed with a clearly stated basis in theory. For example, the Supporting Father Involvement program was developed using the family systems risk-protection-outcome model (Cowan, Cowan, Pruett, Pruett, & Wong, 2009). This theoretical perspective assumes there are multiple systemic factors that shape fathers' engagement with their children. Cowan et al. suggested that father engagement is associated with risk and protective factors in five areas of family life: (1) individual members' emotional health, (2) inter-generationally transmitted patterns of couple and parent-child relationships, (3) quality of relationships between parents, (4) the quality of mother-child and father-child relationships, and (5) the balance between life stressors and social supports outside the immediate family.

Gender theory has also been used in the development of several fatherhood initiatives. For example, Fagan and Iglesias (1999) employed a microstructuralist model to develop and test the effects of a paternal involvement Head Start program on fathers and families. This perspective on human behavior suggests that structural conditions in society promote behavior that is normally attributed to gender (Fassinger, 1989; Risman, 1989). According to this theoretical approach, fathers and mothers behave more similarly if they are exposed to similar expectations and positions in society (Risman & Schwartz, 1989). For example, the microstructural model predicts that paternal exposure to programs that encourage father involvement in school is likely to place expectations on fathers to strengthen their connections to their children. Given the salience of school to children, it can be expected that such exposure will lead to stronger father-child connections that are likely to carry over to the home environment.

Programs have also been developed based on attachment theory. The goal of the Baby Elmo program is to provide a parenting program fostering children's secure attachments to teenaged incarcerated fathers, father-child interactional quality, and positive father child relationships (Barr, Morin, Brito, Richeda, Rodriguez, & Shauffer, 2013). The program is intended ultimately to improve developmental outcomes for both the child and the incarcerated teen father. This program has not yet been subjected to a rigorous evaluation.

Given the lack of theorizing in the development of responsible fatherhood programs, we think it best to turn to other sources of information, such as basic research findings, to identify potential outcomes for such programs. At the same time, we think that theory should continue to play a significant role in identifying outcomes and measures for responsible fatherhood programs. Thus, we urge continued exploration of theoretical points of view to assist in the identification of those outcomes and measures.

### **Findings from basic research**

An important finding in the basic research literature is that there are stronger associations between quality of father-child interactions and child outcomes than there are between quantity of fathering and child outcomes (Lucassen et al., 2011; McDowell & Parke, 2009). These findings apply to both nonresidential fathers as well as to fathers who reside with their children. A recent meta-analysis of 52 studies of nonresidential fathers showed that amount of nonresidential fathers' contact and financial provision were not significantly related to overall child wellbeing (Adamsons & Johnson, 2013). However, various measures of quality of nonresidential fathers' involvement with children (e.g., measures of father-child closeness, trust, and support) were significantly, although modestly, associated with children's social, behavioral, academic/cognitive, and emotional/psychological outcomes. Moreover, the types of activities in which nonresident fathers were involved and the quality of the time spent with children, not the amount of time itself, were significantly related to child outcomes (Adamsons & Johnson). These findings are consistent with a similar meta-analysis conducted about one decade earlier (Amato & Gilbreth, 1999). These findings point to the need for responsible fatherhood programs to address fathers' quality of involvement with children. This is not to say that amount of father contact and accessibility to children should be ignored. Clearly, quality of fathers' engagement with children has little meaning if fathers are unable or choose not to see their children.

This rich body of research has significant implications for responsible fatherhood programs: fathers should seek to increase the quality of their involvement with children in addition to increasing the amount of contact. It is important to note here that being a nonresidential father does not equate with low quality fathering. Nonresidential fathers are often just as capable as residential fathers in providing positive parenting to their children. However, the nonresidential fathers being served by responsible fatherhood programs often experience a multitude of risk factors, such as incarceration, early childbearing, unemployment, low levels of academic achievement, and substance abuse, and these sources of risk are frequently associated with less competency in parenting (Cabrera, Fagan, Wight, Schadler, 2011; Dunn, 2004; Harper & Fine, 2006). It is thus important for responsible fatherhood programs (and outcome measures) to address fathers' risk in addition to helping fathers increase access to children and effective parenting behavior.

Another important finding in the basic research literature is that nonresidential fathers' involvement with children is closely tied to the quality of fathers' relationships with other family members, and especially with the mother (Bronte-Tinkew & Horowitz, 2010; McHale & Irace, 2011; Waller, 2012). Recent research has shown that quality of co-parenting relationships influence father engagement more strongly for never-married, nonresidential parents (those who typically receive services from fatherhood programs) than for cohabiting and married parents (Fagan & Palkovitz, 2011). Similarly, researchers have found that co-parenting support is more strongly associated with adolescent fathers' engagement with children compared with older fathers' engagement with children (Fagan & Lee, 2011). These findings suggest that the co-parenting relationship is a particularly important family context factor for facilitating fathers' ongoing engagement with their children among fathers who are likely to be served in the responsible fatherhood field. Fathers in fragile families may have little chance of staying involved with their children over time if they do not maintain at least an adequate co-parenting relationship with the mother. It is thus important for responsible fatherhood programs to address outcomes associated with family processes, in particular, the quality of the mother-father co-parenting relationship and fathers' support of maternal parenting.

### **Rationale for applying family systems theory**

In light of findings showing that the quality of the co-parenting relationship is a strong correlate of nonresidential fathers' engagement with children, we suggest that family systems theory is an important foundation for conceptualizing outcomes and measurement tools in the responsible fatherhood field. Family systems theory suggests that families consist of interdependent components (Cox, Paley & Harter, 2001). Specifically, the family is comprised of subsystems that exert influence on one another. This understanding necessitates considerations of the father-child, mother-child, father-mother, and mother-father-child subsystems as they exert direct and indirect influence on one another. Interdependence among subsystems suggests that the mother-father and father-child subsystems have reciprocal influences upon each other. Another important tenet of family systems theory is that family functioning is influenced by the broader societal context in which families reside. In the case of fathers in fragile families, the broader community and legal environments exert significant influence on the various subsystems of the family.

One rationale for applying family systems theory to responsible fatherhood programs is that nonresidential fathers are unlikely to be involved with their children unless family members accept the father as part of the family system. According to family systems theory, well-functioning families establish boundaries between the family and environment so that the system can function as optimally as possible (Nichols & Schwartz, 1998). Family members may construct boundaries that exclude fathers from participating with children, and when this happens fathers are likely to have fewer opportunities to interact with their children (Stevenson et al., 2013). In some instances, mothers establish boundaries that exclude fathers because of their violent or neglectful behavior towards family members. In other instances, children establish boundaries based on their desires to have contact with the father. The legal system may also exert influence on family boundaries by establishing or failing to establish parenting time order for fathers. Regardless of the process, fathers who are excluded from the family system are limited in the extent to which they can be involved with children.

A second rationale is that family systems theory recognizes the interdependence between nonresidential fathers and *all parts* of the family system. We have emphasized the significance of the mother-father co-parenting relationship and its influence on father-child relationships. However, it is also likely that the quality of the father-child relationship may have reciprocal effects on the father-mother co-parenting relationship (Cabrera, Shannon, & LaTaillade, 2009; Jones, Dorsey, Forehand, Foster, Armistead, & Brody, 2005). For example, mothers may be more willing to include fathers in decisions about children when they observe the father being consistently involved in a positive manner with his children over time or when he pays child support and makes economic contributions to the children. Furthermore, there are likely to be other effects on family subsystems when fathers become more involved with their children. For example, fathers' positive effects on their biological children (i.e., reduced child aggression) may result in improved sibling relationships between their biological children and children in the family with whom they do not have a biological relationship.

A third rationale for applying family systems theory to responsible fatherhood programs is based on the principle that there are many avenues to achieving change within families (principle of equifinality, Nichols & Schwartz). This principle suggests that father-child relationships may improve as a result of fathers engaging in more positive behaviors with their children. Their relationship with children may also improve as a result of improved co-parenting relationships with the mother, or they may improve as a result of increased payment of child support. The idea that there is not one best approach to influencing the father-child system is consistent with the responsible fatherhood field's inclusion of multiple programmatic services for fathers.

On the basis of a growing research literature suggesting close linkages between the quality of the mother-father relationship and father-child relationships (Bronte-Tinkew & Horowitz, 2010; Cabrera, Scott, Fagan, Steward-Streng, & Chen, 2012; McHale & Irace, 2011; Waller, 2012), we suggest that the evaluators of fatherhood programs should consider measuring the following outcomes: quality of the co-parenting relationship and family social support. Social support has been defined as the provision of psychological and material resources for the purpose of helping the individual to cope with stressful and challenging life circumstances and tasks (Cohen, 2004). Research on low income at risk families has suggested that social support from individuals in the father's extended family is a vital resource for reducing fathers' parenting stress and promoting paternal engagement with children (Fagan, Bernd, & Whiteman, 2007; Roy, Dyson, & Jackson, 2010). Social support from paternal kin may be especially important for some nonresidential fathers because of the fathers' lack of previous involvement with their children and their inexperience in providing direct care to children.

**Measuring father-mother co-parenting relationships.** Most measures of co-parenting have been developed for use with co-residing parents (Feinberg, Brown, & Kan, 2012). For example, Cowan et al. (2009) used one item from the Couple Communication Questionnaire (1990) to assess mothers' and fathers' conflict about discipline in the Supporting Father Involvement program. However, this program targeted co-residing couples, and the measure of conflict in discipline may not be as relevant to nonresidential fathers who see their children infrequently.

The Parenting Alliance Measure (PAM) is a promising measure for use in responsible fatherhood programs, in part because it was created to be appropriate for nonmarital parents. Cohen and Weissman (1984) defined parenting alliance as the capacity of partners to "acknowledge, respect, and value the parenting roles and tasks of the partner" (p. 35). Two important components of parenting alliance include trusting one's co-parent and the extent and quality of communication between co-parenting partners. Researchers have suggested that co-parenting alliance is essential for understanding a family's strengths (McBride & Rane, 2008; McHale, 2009; Van Egeren & Hawkins, 2004). The PAM (Abidin & Konold, 1999) is a 20-item measure used to assess the perceived working alliance between fathers and mothers. Sample items include, *My child's other parent makes my job of being a parent easier* and *When there is a problem with our child, we work out a good solution together*. Participants rate each item on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*). The measure was developed using an ethnically and socioeconomically diverse community sample, including White, Black, Latino, and Asian fathers, and it has shown high internal consistency reliability for fathers' reports (Abidin & Konold, 1999). The PAM has been used in a number of studies involving low income, nonresidential, never married fathers (Coates & Phares, 2013, Fagan, 2008). The PAM showed adequate predictive validity in a longitudinal study of African American and Hispanic adolescent fathers (Fagan, 2013). Coates and Phares found that the PAM was significantly associated with paternal involvement among African American nonresidential fathers residing in low-income neighborhoods.

Although the PAM has been used by several studies of fathers involved in responsible fatherhood programs (e.g., Fagan), we think there is still a need to develop new measures of co-parenting that are sensitive to the population of fathers (and mothers) involved in these programs. The PAM addresses only one component of co-parenting (alliance), and researchers have noted that co-parenting is a multidimensional construct (Feinberg et al.). There is also reason to expect that there may be significant differences in the ways that parents in nonresidential family structures and co-residential family structures engage in co-parenting. These differences may be particularly salient for mothers and fathers who are unmarried and low income and who are likely to have even looser ties to each other than parents who were once married and no longer live together. The Fatherhood Research and

Practice Network (FRPN) is currently in the process of developing a measure of co-parenting that is sensitive to fathers in fatherhood programs. This measure is forthcoming and will be available on the FRPN website.

**Measuring family social support.** A promising measure for assessing family support in responsible fatherhood programs is the Family Support Scale (FSS; Dunst, Jenkins, & Trivette, 1984). The FSS is an 18-item measure designed to assess the degree to which different sources of support help families to raise young children. Anderson, Kohler, and Letiecq (2005) modified slightly the FSS for their study of low income nonresidential fathers attending a responsible fatherhood program by adding six items of support to the original scale. These additional items assessed the helpfulness of friends of the father's parents, the father's current partner, her parents, her relatives, her friends if different from the child's biological mother, and other fathers. This modified scale uses a 5-point Likert-type scale anchored by *not at all helpful* (0) and *extremely helpful* (4) to rate the helpfulness of specific individuals or groups in raising their families during the previous 6 months. Three subscales of support are obtained from the modified FSS: familial supports (e.g., parents, partner, own children), extra-familial supports (e.g., friends, coworkers, social groups), and professional supports (e.g., teachers, doctors, therapists, social service agencies). A total FSS score can also be computed by summing all 24 items, with scores ranging from a low of 0 to a high of 96. Anderson, Kohler, and Letiecq (2005) established the reliability and validity of the modified FSS using a sample of nonresidential fathers attending a responsible fatherhood program; Cronbach's coefficient alpha was .91 for the total FSS scale.

#### **Rationale for applying risk-resilience theory**

The risk and resilience perspective offers another important theoretical foundation for identifying outcomes and measurement tools for fatherhood programs. Risk has been defined as individual or environmental conditions that hinder a consistent pattern of positive behavior and wellbeing (Fraser, 2004). The types of risk experienced by fathers in low income nonresidential families (e.g., incarceration) are often substantial and may be strongly associated with lower levels of father involvement with children. Waller and Swisher (2006) found that fathers with high levels of risk may passively withdraw from being involved with their children. These men may have too many problems of their own to become involved with their child. There is also evidence that fathers with high levels of risk also experience more parenting stress, which tends to be negatively related to father engagement with children (Bronte-Tinkew, Horowitz, & Carrano, 2010). It has been suggested that mothers also select out of relationships they perceive to be "unhealthy" because they view these fathers as having little to offer their children. For example, qualitative research with low-income unmarried, nonresidential fathers showed that mothers want their baby's father to be involved with the child, but only if the father does not have too many problems of his own and can provide for his children (Roy, Buckmiller, & McDowell, 2008). It has been suggested also that high levels of father risk during the first years after the birth of the baby have long-term negative effects on later paternal engagement with children (Cabrera, Fagan, & Farrie, 2008). Fathers may have a difficult time recovering from the negative effects of their risk as the child grows older because they have not been able to form early bonds with the child or because their relationship with the mother was poor.

Among the risk factors typically examined by fatherhood researchers, lack of a legitimate means for securing a living wage has been found to be a significant correlate of low-income and minority fathers' low-level involvement with children (Coley & Chase-Lansdale, 1999). Qualitative research has revealed that unemployment was a barrier to many low-income nonresidential fathers' involvement with children because they were unable to provide a stable place for their children to live or stay with them (Icard, Fagan, Lee, & Rutledge, 2014). Low levels of fathers' education have also been shown to be



negatively associated with father engagement with children (Nelson, 2004). Fathers who experience escalating or persistent problems with drug and alcohol abuse are at higher risk and therefore less engaged with children (McMahon & Rounsaville, 2002). Being convicted of a crime and subsequent incarceration can have a decidedly detrimental influence on paternal involvement with children (Western, Lopoo, & McLanahan, 2004). Many fathers have difficulty reunifying with children following a period of incarceration (Roy & Dyson, 2005). Emotional health problems such as major depression also compromise men's engagement with children (Phares, 1997; Wilson & Brooks-Gunn, 2001).

There is also growing evidence from studies based on risk-resilience theory (and family systems theory) that fathers' risk affects children's developmental outcomes through their influence on mothers. Studies have revealed that fathers' risk factors (e.g., drug/alcohol use, incarceration) are *indirectly* related to young children's positive and negative social behaviors (Cabrera et al., 2011). That is, higher risk fathers are more likely to have children with fewer positive and more negative social behaviors *because* their risk is associated with reduced quality of mother-child interactions. These results highlight the importance of taking a risk-resilience approach to understand potential outcomes for fathers attending responsible fatherhood programs.

**Measures of fathers' risk.** The Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study (FFCW) developed a set of risk measures that we think hold promise for use in responsible fatherhood evaluations. To assess *employment risk*, fathers were asked whether they did any regular work for pay in the last week, and how many hours they worked during this time period. These data can be used to construct a measure of unemployment. Risk variables measuring problems with *drugs and/or alcohol* addressed whether *drinking or drugs ever interfered with fathers' work or personal relationships*. To measure fathers' *convictions*, fathers were asked if they were convicted of a charge in the last 6 months, the number of times they had been convicted, and the date of their most recent conviction. Fathers' antisocial behavior was assessed using the FFCW items asking whether they engaged in *selling stolen goods, selling or delivering drugs, or other hustles to make money*. The fathers' depressive symptoms were measured using questions from The Center for Epidemiological Study's Depression scale (CES-D, Radloff, 1977). Eleven questions were presented to fathers that are indicators of depressive mood. Fathers were asked to indicate how often they experiences a range of feeling states, such as not feeling like eating or having sleep restlessness. Scores for each item ranged from 0 to 7, where higher scores indicated more depressive symptoms. The CES-D showed high levels of concurrent validity (Wells et al., 1987).

### **Rationale for applying attachment theory**

There is also a need for theoretical perspectives that focus specifically on the quality of the father-child relationship, because, as noted earlier, quality of the relationship is linked to child outcomes. In this section of the paper, we suggest attachment theory is a useful perspective for responsible fatherhood programs. An important tenet of attachment theory is that parents who are emotionally available and responsive to their children are more likely to have children who are securely attached to their parents. Attachment theory emphasizes the father's sense of closeness to the child and his sensitivity to children's emotional development. Children's secure attachment to the caregiver is considered by researchers to be a hallmark of socio-emotional growth and development in young children (Ainsworth, 1973). Attachment theory also suggests that the thoughts and feelings that fathers (and mothers) have toward their children are linked to the quality of parenting (Ainsworth). Fathers who have positive feelings about their child are likely to be more responsive and sensitive to their infants than fathers who do not have positive feeling toward the child (Grossmann et al., 2002).

The rationale for applying attachment theory to program outcomes and measurement is as follows. First, most fathers being served by responsible fatherhood programs do not reside with their children and while it is true that children tend to form attachments with those caregivers who provide the majority of their care, a growing body of research shows that children also form attachments to fathers as secondary caregivers (Portu-Zapirain, 2013). However, recent research has also shown that frequent overnights with nonresidential fathers was significantly associated with attachment insecurity among infants (Tornello, Emery, Rowen, Potter, Ocker, & Xu, 2013). It may thus be important to assist nonresidential fathers to gain a better understanding of parenting behaviors that foster secure attachments in their children.

Second, programs may have limited success in teaching a variety of parenting skills (e.g., supporting children's literacy) when fathers have few opportunities to apply those skills. Also, fathers are less likely to learn new skills if they are not able to practice them at the time they are attending parenting classes. On the other hand, the parenting behaviors associated with child-father attachment relationships are based on fathers' attitudes toward the child, knowledge of the importance of behaviors such as being emotionally available and responsive to the child, and helping fathers to respond to children in an attentive, consistent, and supportive manner. It has also been suggested that attachment related interventions involve focusing on the parent's working model of attachment relationships rather than focusing on the child's working model (Kindsvatter & Desmond, 2013). Such approaches are appropriate for many nonresidential fathers who have had limited involvement with their own biological fathers during childhood and who may be struggling with the attachment bonds with their own fathers.

Third, many fathers come to responsible fatherhood programs experiencing considerable emotional distress associated with not being involved with their own children (Anderson, Kohler, & Letiecq, 2002). This emotional distress is similar to what many nonresidential fathers experienced during their own childhood as a consequence of having little involvement with their own biological fathers (Coates & Phares, 2013). For many fathers, the healing process involves finding ways to have closer relationships with their own children (i.e., becoming emotionally available to their children) as a way to prevent transmitting feelings of loss to their children (Franklin & Davis, 2001). For fathers who have conflictual relationships with their child and the child's mother, this may mean reaching out in small ways to children to let them know that they care about them and wish to be more involved in their lives. Over time, fathers may obtain more positive responses from children and families and start to build trusting relationships with the child.

Fourth, interviews with practitioners conducted by the National Center on Fathers and Families revealed that fathers' connectedness to the child is one of the highest priority goals of programs that work with nonresidential fathers (Gadsden, Fagan, Ray, & Davis, 2004). The quality of the father's emotional attachment to the child was rated as being *very important* by more practitioners than any other indicator of fathering. In light of these findings, we suggest that attachment theory is an important theoretical framework from which responsible fatherhood programs should be conceptualized. Again, we reiterate that responsible fatherhood programs should be responsive to multiple ways of thinking about fathering. Clearly there are other theoretical perspectives that are important, and these should be taken into consideration in developing programs for fathers, identifying outcomes, and considering measures.

**Measures of father involvement based on attachment theory.** As noted earlier, there is some consensus among researchers and practitioners that quality of father involvement is an important

outcome (and measure) for responsible fatherhood programs. There are clearly many ways to assess quality of fathers' engagement with their children. For example, the Parent/Caregiver Involvement Scale (P/CIS; Farran, Kasari, Comfort, & Jay, 1986) was used to measure quality of father-child interaction during play in an evaluation of a responsible fatherhood Head Start program (Fagan & Iglesias, 1999). This instrument measures the quality and appropriateness of the interaction between a caregiver and a child between the ages of zero to five. The protocol for this measure begins with videotaping the caregiver and child in free play together for 20 to 30 minutes (Munson & Odom, 1996). After, the videotape is scored by a trained observer. An advantage of using this type of measure is that it avoids problems with rater bias when, for example, fathers answer a set of questions about their child's behavior. A significant challenge with using observational measures is that they are costly and may not be easy to administer when fathers have limited access to their children.

Measures of children's attachment to parents are typically based on observations of children with the parent. Programs can also use self-report measures of father-child relationship closeness because this variable is an important indicator of the quality of father-child attachment relationship (Driscoll & Pianta, 2011). As with mothers, fathers who form close and warm relationships with their children are likely to have children who are securely attached to them (Parke, 1981). Furthermore, the close relationships between fathers and children are associated with child adjustment throughout the childhood years.

One measure that could be used to assess the quality of the father-child relationship is the Child-Parent Relationship Scale (CPRS, Pianta, 1992). The CPRS is a self-report instrument completed by mothers or fathers that assesses their perceptions of closeness and conflict in their relationship with their son or daughter. The scale consists of 15 items which are rated on 5-point Likert scales and the ratings can be summed into groups of items corresponding to conflict and closeness subscales. Sample closeness items include: "I share an affectionate, warm relationship with my child," and "My child values his/her relationship with me." Sample conflict items include: "My child and I always seem to be struggling with each other," and "My child is uncomfortable with physical affection or touch from me."

One advantage of the CPRS is that it can be used with fathers of children across a wide range of ages (it is applicable to children ages 3-12). This is an important criteria for selecting measures for responsible fatherhood programs because fathers are eligible to participate in the program if they have any minor children. Another advantage of the CPRS is that the items are written for adults with basic reading levels. In addition, the measure is short and can be completed in just a few minutes. A shortcoming of this measure is that it is self-report and is likely to be influenced by rater bias. Fathers tend to overestimate the quality and quantity of their parenting behavior. Observations of the father-child relationship would be ideal, but they are not particularly feasible since fathers may not have permission from the child's mother to include the child in an observational study.

The CPRS has been shown to have strong stability across developmental periods (preschool to elementary school) in a study of fathers and mothers (Driscoll & Pianta (2011). The measure has also been shown to have adequate predictive validity using fathers' self-reports of closeness in relation to maternal reports of child social competence in a sample of Chinese families (Zhang, 2013) and adequate construct validity when paired with observations of father-child interaction (Vazsonyi & Huang, 2010). Fathers' self-ratings of CPRS closeness and conflict are on the average lower than mothers' rating on these variables, however, we note that fathers' rating show higher levels of variability (i.e., larger SDs) than do mothers' ratings (Driscoll & Pianta ; Zhang).

**Measuring quantity of father involvement with children.** As noted earlier, there is some consensus among researchers and practitioners that quantity of father involvement is an important outcome (and measure) for responsible fatherhood programs, although in this paper we have suggested that measures of quality of fathering should be included as well. As stated earlier, quality of fathers' engagement with children has little meaning if fathers are unable or choose not to see their children. At this time there are very few validated measures of amount of nonresidential fathers' involvement with children (for exception, see Cabrera, Ryan, Mitchell, Shannon, & Tamis-LeMonda, 2008). Oftentimes, researchers have instead used measures which were designed for residential fathers.

Measures for assessing quantity or amount of father involvement often utilize self-reported data from either the mother or father. Block et al. (in press) utilized self-reported data in their mixed-method assessment of a parenting program for incarcerated fathers. In this study fathers' frequency, or quantity of contact was assessed using a brief survey. This survey provided five answer choices: "I don't (call/write/visit) at all", "Less than once a month", "Once a month", "Once a week", and "More than once a week." Responses to these data were then collapsed into a dichotomous scale: "no reported contact" and "reported contact."

The time diary is another self-report measure for evaluating quantity of father engagement that has been used in responsible fatherhood evaluations. This measure is theoretically grounded in Lamb's (1986) work regarding fathers' accessibility and direct interaction with children. To assess these areas, fathers are asked to recall the nature of parent-child interactions on a typical day (Barnett & Baruch, 1988). In Fagan and Iglesias' (1999) adaptation of this measure, trained interviewers telephoned participating fathers three times at pretest and post-test, asking fathers to describe their parent-child interactions on the same day. The interviewer probed the participant to explore what specifically took place between the father and child, while recording the father's report verbatim. This version differed from the traditional time diary protocol since fathers provided information on the same day of the interaction, and were not asked to report the details of what they considered to be a typical day (Fagan & Iglesias). The time diary demonstrated strong construct validity when paired with other validated measures of paternal engagement with children among African American and Hispanic fathers.

The Relationship with the Child questionnaire (Coley & Morris, 2002) is also a promising measure for assessing quantity of father involvement because it is one of the few measures developed for both residential and nonresidential fathers. Based on the Lamb, Pleck, Charnov, and Levine (1985) conceptualization of paternal involvement, this instrument measures three aspects of father involvement: responsibility, accessibility, and engagement. Coley and Morris (2002) developed this measure of father involvement by adapting questions from previous studies (Cabrera et al., 2004; Coley & Chase-Lansdale, 1999). To assess responsibility, fathers are asked: (1) *How much responsibility do you take for raising the child?* and (2) *How much does your help with financial and material support of the child help the child's mother?* These questions are rated on a 4-point Likert scale (1 = none, 4 = a lot); higher scores suggest greater paternal responsibility. To measure accessibility, fathers are asked: (3) *How often do you see or visit with the child?* and (4) *How often does the child see or visit with your family?* These questions are rated on a 9-point Likert scale (1 = never, 9 = every day), with higher scores indicating greater paternal accessibility. To measure engagement, fathers are asked: (5) *How many hours per week do you take care of the child?* and (6) *How much does your involvement make things easier for the [child's mother] or make [her] a better parent?"* (1 = none to 4 = a lot). Studies have shown strong predictive validity and internal reliability for the Relationship with the Child questionnaire (Hernandez & Coley, 2003).

To the best of our knowledge, there is no existing validated measure to assess the quantity of unmarried nonresidential fathers' participation in *child-related activities*. The Relationship with the Child questionnaire does not ask fathers about specific activities in its measure of engagement. Although some researchers have included other measures that address a wide range of father-child activities in studies of unmarried nonresidential fathers, the list of activities have been adapted from measures developed for married and residential fathers. Based on studies showing that the types of activities in which nonresident fathers engage their children are significantly related to child outcomes (Adamsons & Johnson, 2013), we think that there is a need to develop a new measure that takes into consideration the appropriateness of activities which are likely to be carried out by unmarried nonresidential fathers who may have limited contact with their children. Moreover, new measures of engagement activities should take into account the child's stage of development and ethnic and racial influences in fathering behavior.

#### **Additional issues to address in measuring outcomes**

Researchers and practitioners are faced with the problem of which child to target when asking fathers in fragile families to assess their involvement with children. This issue applies also to assessing fathers' co-parenting relationships. This is a challenging issue for evaluators because some fathers have more than one child, and the children may be living in different households with different mothers. Evaluators have approached this challenge in a variety of ways. The Parents and Children Together (PACT) evaluation includes a series of paternal involvement questions about each of the father's biological children (Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, 2011). A problem with this approach is that the survey can become very lengthy, forcing evaluators to limit their surveys to single item measures rather than multi-item validated measures of father involvement with children. A number of evaluators have asked fathers to focus on one target child, often their youngest child, when answering survey questions about father involvement. It seems appropriate to focus on the youngest child because nonresidential fathers being served by responsible fatherhood programs are likely to seek increased involvement with this child. However, a shortcoming with this approach is that the assessment may ignore changes in fathers' parenting behavior with other children. The time diary approach has several advantages—fathers describe their involvement with any (or all) of their children on a given day, and they do not need to answer questions about children with whom they did not have any involvement. This approach, however, requires that fathers either write into a diary independently over the course of several days (which may not be feasible for fathers in fragile families), or that they complete multiple telephone interviews over the course of a number of days as a means of assessing parenting behaviors which may occur on an infrequent basis (i.e., having sporadic contact with nonresidential children). Administration of multiple interviews by cell phone at pretest, for example, may not be feasible for fathers who are being recruited within short time frames to attend responsible fatherhood programs.

An alternative may be to have fathers complete a series of measures in relation to several of their children (and where appropriate, in relation to several mothers if they have more than one child in separate households). Fathers could complete survey items which ask about their youngest child and one other child (if there is a second child). The FRPN conducted a series of 8 focus groups with fathers (interviewing about 70 fathers total) and practitioners (5 total) in 2014, and we learned it is important to ask fathers about more than one of their children. Some fathers have only one child, but others have two or more, and their relationships with those other children are often very different than their relationship with the youngest child. After trying several different approaches to identify which second child to ask about, we settled on the second youngest child. We found that when fathers had to think about a second child younger than 18, this child frequently turned out to be the second youngest.

### **Conclusion**

In this paper, we have suggested that measures should be based on well-conceived outcomes for responsible fatherhood programs, and the identification of outcomes should have a strong foundation in theory. We have made several suggestions for possible outcome measures, and in one instance (quantity of father involvement) we have suggested the development of a new measure of father involvement with a focus on nonresidential fathers' engagement activities with children. We think there are currently several promising measures that can be used to assess quality of fathers' involvement with children, fathers' co-parenting relationships, and family support (Child-Parent Relationship Scale, Parenting Alliance Measure). These measures will need to be subjected to further testing to determine their value for assessing outcomes among fathers attending responsible fatherhood programs. This testing should include conducting confirmatory factor analysis to examine the factor structure of these scales among never married nonresidential fathers. In addition, measurement equivalence should be assessed to determine whether the behaviors included in the measure have the same purpose and relationship to other variables when the instrument is completed by fathers, mothers, and children. Finally, these tests should be conducted with different racial/ethnic groups to determine the validity of the measures for use with minority groups served by responsible fatherhood field. The FRPN is currently conducting research to identify appropriate measures (or to develop new ones) for the fatherhood field. The measures will be made available on the FRPN website in the near future.

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