The Influence of Promise Keepers on Fathers’ Involvement with their Children

Michael J. Walcheski
Western Michigan University

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THE INFLUENCE OF PROMISE KEEPERS ON FATHERS’ INVOLVEMENT WITH THEIR CHILDREN

by

Michael J. Walcheski

A Dissertation
Submitted to the
Faculty of The Graduate College
in partial fulfillment of the
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THE INFLUENCE OF PROMISE KEEPERS ON FATHERS' INVOLVEMENT WITH THEIR CHILDREN

Michael J. Walcheski, Ph.D.
Western Michigan University, 1998

This study explores the influence of Promise Keepers (PK) on fathers' involvement with their children. The large numbers of men involved with PK and the anecdotal success of fathers and their families have created considerable dialogue in the popular press. However, there have been no empirical studies to date that contribute data about the influence of PK on father involvement.

The conceptual framework informing this study combined father involvement and postmodern feminist perspectives. A father involvement perspective emphasizes fathers' presence, their capability and strengths, the moral dimension to fathers' responsibility for their children, and factors that establish responsible fathering. A postmodern feminist perspective emphasizes the multiple and varied experiences of women, a changing family ideology, and the gendered experiences of family life.

Qualitative interviewing was the main method of data collection. Joint and individual semistructured interviews were conducted with 18 couples. Criteria for inclusion in the study included men who had attended a day-and-a-half PK conference, couples in a heterosexual marriage, parents of at least one child 10 years old or younger, and agreement to participate in one individual interview and one couple interview. The 36 participants (18 couples) were Caucasian and ranged from working to upper-middle class. They ranged in age from 33 to 43 years old. Length of marriage ranged from 3 to 21 years.
When describing what led to attending a PK conference, the men in this study identified experiencing a dissatisfaction with their lives and an emotional distance from their families. They hoped that PK would address their dissatisfaction and loneliness by guiding them as fathers and offering opportunities to form friendships with other men. PK appeared trustworthy to the participants in this study because of its Christian foundation.

As a result of participating in PK conferences and accountability groups, the men in this study increased their communication and time spent with their children and sought to intentionally develop relationships with their children. All of the participants expressed satisfaction with this change in fathers' involvement with their children; however, changes in a traditional ideology of family life did not accompany the fathers' increased involvement in the lives of their children.
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The process of research is never accomplished in isolation, although at times isolation is a by product for the researcher, his family, and friends. Many people have joined me in this research journey as participants, faculty, friends, and family. Those couples whose lives are described in these pages graciously gave of themselves without hesitation despite their busy schedules. I am thankful for their willingness to reflect on their experiences with Promise Keepers, and their commitment as mothers and fathers to their children. Their interest in the project and dedication to their families inspired me throughout this project.

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Michael J. Walcheski
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CHAPTER I

OVERVIEW

Father involvement has become a focus of research and discussion (Blankenhorn, 1995; Doherty, Kouneski, & Erickson, 1996; Dollahite, Hawkins, & Brotherson, 1997; LaRossa, 1997; Levine & Pitt, 1995; Levine & Pittinsky, 1997; Palkovitz, 1997; Palm, 1997) in recent years. Attention to fathers and their degree of fathers' involvement with their children has prompted inquiry into increasing and supporting father involvement. As a result, organizations have emerged to provide such resources (e.g., National Center for Fathering, Fatherhood Project, National Fatherhood Initiative).

The research has shifted from the study of father absence to the study of father presence (Levine & Pitt, 1995). Researchers have gathered considerable data that show father involvement to be a “content free” construct that defines father involvement only in terms of quantity of time fathers spend with their children. Only recently has research begun to extend itself beyond those parameters to uncover specific activities and determinants of father involvement.

This investigation also intends to go beyond studying time fathers spend with their children by investigating the influence of Promise Keepers (PK) on fathers' involvement with their children.

Married fathers who had attended a PK conference and their wives were interviewed to see how PK had influenced involvement with their children, including any struggles or obstacles they had encountered. An involvement perspective, based
on recent developments of generative and responsible fathering models, and a
postmodern feminist perspective formed the conceptual framework of this study. The
following sections address the rationale for this study, significance of this study, the
research question, and a definition of terms.

Rationale for This Study

This study was designed to obtain parents' assessment of the influence of PK
participation on fathers' involvement with their children, and to consider how PK
may function as family life education. Father presence warrants empirical study
because of a shift in expectations for fathers to be more involved in the lives of their
children (Schwartz, 1994) and because of the hope that focusing on father presence
may encourage it (Doherty et al., 1996). In addition, the popularity of PK and its
direction to men to involve themselves with their families argue for considering PK as
an alternative form of family life education.

Theoretical Shift in Research on Father Involvement

Theoretical discussions regarding father involvement are shifting from an
absence-based to a presence-based perspective. First, popular belief and scholarly
models that stress a limited, deficit driven model of father involvement, such as
Blankenhorn's (1995) and Popenoe's (1993, 1996), have occupied part of the
discourse on fatherhood. These deficit models suggest that fathers are willingly
uninvolved with their children, and, when involved, are inadequate in their
performance as fathers (Dienhart & Daly, 1997; Doherty, 1991, 1997; Doherty et al.,
1996; Dollahite & Hawkins, 1997; Gerson, 1997a). Although this description is valid
for some fathers (Dollahite & Hawkins, 1997), deficit models of father involvement
may result from narrow conceptualizations of involvement and methods that examine only the quantity of time fathers spend with their children (Palkovitz, 1997). Second, although recent descriptions of fathers in America have promoted this deficit thinking (e.g., Blankenhorn, 1995), other descriptions suggest that fathers can and do want to be involved with their children (Snarey, 1993). Responsible and generative models of father involvement, collectively referred to, for the purpose of this study, as an involvement perspective, offer another view (Doherty et al., 1996; Dollahite et al., 1997; Levine & Pitt, 1995; Palkovitz, 1997). An involvement perspective stresses the responsibility and capability of fathers to be meaningfully involved with their children.

Responsible and generative models of father involvement share three elements in common: first, these models stress a norm of moral obligation and responsibility to fathers’ involvement with their children; second, the models emphasize contextual factors as important influences in father involvement; and finally, the models state the primary reason for responsible or generative fathering is the children’s need. The movement away from deficit models toward models based on strengths and the assumption that fathers can be meaningfully involved with their children may promote increased involvement of fathers with their children (Doherty et al., 1996; Levine & Pitt, 1995). A focused perspective on the inadequacies and shortcomings of fathers, albeit accurate in some instances, may not develop the kind of change that a focus on the strengths and contributions of fathers may have on family life (Doherty, 1991).

Promise Keepers

The large attendance at PK conferences and the media-documented responses from men and women after fathers have participated in a conference argue for empirical examination of PK (Murphy, 1997). Over the past 7 years, PK conferences
have captured the attention of 2.7 million men (Goodstein, 1997), the popular media, and other organizations interested in promoting father involvement. Attendance at PK conferences has grown from 4,200 at one site in 1991 to 1.1 million at 22 sites in 1996. A recent PK rally in Washington, D.C., in October 1997, attracted between 700,000 (King, 1997) and 1.25 million men (Canfield, 1997). Except for demographic data, few empirical studies have documented the influence of PK and its effect on men, women, and their families. Interviewed by the Washington Post, Dr. Mary Stewart Van Leeuwen, a scholar at the center for Christian Women in Leadership at Eastern College, St. Davids, Pennsylvania, stated "more data is needed to understand PK's effect on the family relations" (Murphy, 1997, p. 2). An official from the PK organization acknowledges the lack of hard data: "So far the movement has assessed its impact anecdotally, from what we hear from men, wives and pastors" (Murphy, 1997, p. 2).

Family Life Education

Studies suggest that until recently, parent education had not been specifically directed toward fathers (McBride, 1990; McBride & McBride, 1993; McBride & Mills, 1993), and fathers' participation in parent education has been limited (Meyers, 1993; Palm & Palkovitz, 1988). "Little empirical work has been done, examining the various factors associated with father involvement and how parent educational programs and support designed specifically for fathers may influence this involvement" (McBride, 1990, p. 250). McBride and Mills (1993) further state:

Parent educators must explore the development of education and support programs designed specifically for fathers. Such programs can help men struggling to meet the demands of changing expectations for fatherhood and help sensitize them to multiple aspects of active father involvement. (p. 474)
Until recently, family life education had used primarily an instrumental/technical paradigm, designed to meet the needs of individuals and families with information, skills, and methods derived from empirical research about families (Morgaine, 1992). Other means of providing family life education include an interpretive paradigm, useful in helping family members understand how meanings and values vary according to subjective experiences, and a critical/emancipatory paradigm, useful in helping families gain insight into the connection and discrepancies between sociocultural messages, expectations and ideals, and the realities of everyday life (Morgaine, 1992).

With its examination of societal messages, PK reflects, to some extent, Morgaine's third paradigm, critical/emancipatory. A consistent message from PK to fathers is that they need to relinquish beliefs that support a detached and uninvolved relationship with their children and instead adopt beliefs and behaviors that reflect involved and committed relationships with their children (Abraham, 1997). Examination of the current constructed notions of fatherhood from a critical/emancipatory perspective supports a patriarchal but father absent ideology (Luepnitz, 1988), such as “breadwinner,” “disciplinarian,” and “in charge.” A critical/emancipatory family life education model would engage fathers in examining how these messages have influenced their everyday lives (e.g., if I am a good provider, then I am a good father. If I am a disciplinarian, then I am a good father.). Within such an educational model, fathers could reflect on how much they had “bought” into these “ideals” and could examine competing ideals, such as “involved father.” There are many ways in which the societal ideal is incongruent with men’s involvement as fathers (e.g., someone in the family needs to have full-time work to provide health care benefits; employers think workers should make families accommodate to work,
not work to families; men lack role models and experience with children; and other men may send nonsupportive messages). A critical/emancipatory family life education model brings to the forefront discrepancies between the conduct of fathers and the culture of fatherhood (LaRossa, 1988).

Significance of the Study

Data collected for this study will be some of the first gathered that explores the influence of PK on father involvement. Lack of empirical research on PK is notable, given its swift growth in popularity among many men. This study examined the usefulness of an involvement perspective to explain fathers’ everyday accounts of their involvement with their children. Results will help clarify the extent to which responsible and generative fathering models are capturing the participants’ fathering experience. This study also examined PK as a form of family life education by considering men’s attraction to PK and their expectations and assessment of it. Results will help identify men’s preferences for family life education that will facilitate the “design of effective father friendly” programming (Palm, 1997, p. 181).

Definition of Terms

For this study, Involvement Perspective refers to a combination of models that stress the responsibility and capability of fathers to be meaningfully involved with their children. This perspective incorporates the literature on responsible fathering (Doherty et al., 1996), generative fathering (Dollahite et al., 1997), and expands the ways to conceptualize father involvement (Palkovitz, 1997).
Fathers refer to male participants in this study who have attended at least one PK conference, are part of a couple in a married heterosexual relationship, and have at least one child 10 years old or younger.

Father Involvement, for this study, includes the thoughts, feelings, and actions of fathers on behalf of their children. Involved fathers have assessed their strengths and weaknesses, act in the best interest of their children, and respond to the developmental needs of the family. Involvement may not always be visible, yet can represent significant amounts of time, influence, and energy (LaRossa, 1997; Levine & Pittinsky, 1997; Palkovitz, 1997).

Promise Keepers refers to a large Protestant, evangelical organization formed in 1990, with a stated mission of “uniting men through vital relationships to become godly influences in their world” (Promise Keepers, 1997, p. 24). Primarily through stadium conferences, PK encourages men to live “godly lives,” as defined in seven basic promises of commitment to God, families, and fellow human beings.

Research Question

Previous study of father involvement has been restricted to how much time fathers spend with their children. Recently, however, scholars are urging the study of father involvement to include content, quality, and the meanings of father involvement (Doherty et al., 1996; Dollahite & Hawkins, 1997; Palkovitz, 1997; Pleck, 1997). The overall research question of this study is: What is the influence of PK on fathers’ involvement with their children? More specifically, Why did fathers attend a PK conference? What did the fathers expect from attending the PK conference? What did fathers learn from attending the PK conference and did they
change their involvement with their children? And how did the fathers assess the PK conference experience?

Summary

There has been considerable discussion in the popular press regarding the benefits and deficits of PK; however, no empirical studies to date have contributed data on PK influence on family life and father involvement. The large numbers of men involved with PK and the anecdotal success of fathers and their families provide the opportunity to contribute data to family life education. This study addresses the lack of empirical data by interviewing fathers who have attended a PK conference and their wives, exploring PK’s influence on father involvement, and considering the attraction, expectations, and assessment of PK as a form of family life education. The results of this study will contribute to the qualitative understanding of an involvement perspective and give clearer direction for constructing family life education for fathers.
CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Overview

This chapter begins with a review of the social construction of fatherhood throughout history and a discussion of the conceptual framework guiding this study. An involvement and a postmodern feminist perspective of father involvement form the conceptual framework of this study. The conceptual framework emphasizes the strengths of fathers (Doherty, 1991) and fathers’ involvement with their children (Dollahite et al., 1997) and draws attention to the gendered nature of family experiences (Baber & Allen, 1992; Thorne & Yalom, 1992). This chapter concludes with a discussion of PK as a form of family life education; a description of PK, its organizational concepts and claims, and critiques from the popular literature; plus a discussion of the scarcity of empirical literature regarding PK and father involvement.

Social Construction of Fatherhood Throughout History

This section will review historical ideals of fatherhood through a social constructionist view of father involvement. A social constructionist perspective reveals that meanings given to father involvement are neither consistent across time nor homogeneous across cultures, but rather vary from era to era and from context to context (Gergen, 1985; Kimmel & Messner, 1989; Shotter, 1993). As demonstrated in the following section, the construction of father involvement with children has
changed and evolved across American history (Griswold, 1997; LaRossa, 1997; Pleck & Pleck, 1997). Moreover, multiple models within identified historical periods of father involvement have coexisted and have evolved from contextual constraints and cultural and political expectations. A social constructionist perspective challenges a popular notion of a single model within each period (Daly, 1993; LaRossa, 1997; Pleck & Pleck, 1997). During the industrial revolution, for example, some fathers' involvement deteriorated and grew distant or nonexistent due to economic factors and opportunities, while other fathers' involvement did not change (Griswold, 1997). In every period of American history economic changes, changes in the family, domestic patterns, and family members' roles led to differing expectations as to the nature and degree of father involvement (LaRossa, 1997; Pleck & Pleck, 1997).

The meanings of father involvement vary, according to the preference of those who use them, evolve as the culture and context change (Gergen, 1985), and are subject to reinterpretation and reconstruction (Arendell, 1997). Daly (1993) suggests, for example, that changes in cultural expectations, ranging from none or very little father involvement to higher levels of father involvement, have shaped and changed the definition and expectations for father involvement. Each generation molds its cultural ideal of father involvement according to its own time and conditions (Griswold, 1997; LaRossa, 1988; LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993; Pleck & Pleck, 1997).

Cultural meanings ascribed to father involvement are continuously being reshaped and redefined, are subject to collective definition, and are based on tradition, practice, and ideology (Arendell, 1997). Expectations of father involvement are interwoven in the daily lives of fathers. Descriptions of father involvement constitute forms of social patterns (Gergen, 1985). Generative fathering, for example,
makes the assumption of contextual agency. Contextual agency refers to fathers making choices within a context of many factors that influence decision making (Dollahite et al., 1997).

Father involvement is a product of the meanings, beliefs, motivations, attitudes, and behaviors of all the stakeholders involved in the lives of children (Doherty et al., 1996). Individual definitions of father involvement are shaped by experiences in the family of origin, socioeconomic status, ethnic or minority group membership, and beliefs about the contemporary family (Arendell, 1997). Individual meanings are also shaped by the multiple meanings of masculinity that are neither transhistorical nor culturally universal and that vary from culture to culture (Kimmel & Messner, 1989) and within cultures during similar periods (Pleck & Pleck, 1997).

The social constructions of fatherhood have varied over time and are best described as “histories of fatherhood,” rather than a history of fatherhood (LaRossa, 1997, p. 21). Stage descriptions of fatherhood often fail to capture the ethnic and racial diversity of father involvement in American society (Pleck & Pleck, 1997). Another concern about historical accounts of father involvement is the discrepancy between the real and imagined (LaRossa, 1988). In order to avoid a narrow view of fatherhood history, LaRossa (1997) suggested that a historical view developed that is usable and that clarifies the similarities and differences of late 20th century father involvement with other types of involvement in history. A broader view of father involvement may help in building on what has come before, instead of assuming that variations of father involvement are occurring for the first time (LaRossa, 1997).

In writing about the history of dominant fatherhood ideals and images in the United States, Pleck and Pleck (1997) contend that the image of modern fatherhood has unfolded through four chronological periods: a stern patriarch during the
Colonial period, a distant breadwinner between 1830 and 1900, a friendly dad and sex role model between 1900 and 1970, and an equal co-parent from 1970 to the present. Although Pleck and Pleck (1997) describe four eras of ideals, they also contend that there were multiple descriptions of fathers within each era.

Other recent historical accounts also describe changes. These accounts vary in specific emphasis, duration, and description of fatherhood ideals and images (Griswold, 1993; LaRossa, 1997; Pleck, 1997). Griswold (1993) traces the development of fatherhood in chronological stages similar to Pleck and Pleck (1997), although in much greater detail. LaRossa (1997) provides a brief description of the history of fatherhood leading up to the 1920s and 1930s and places a focus on that time as a pivotal turning point for the development of contemporary images of fathers in the late 20th century. A shorter description of the development of fatherhood, separated into three periods, is discussed in Griswold (1997): Colonial America, the 19th century, and the 20th century. Griswold (1997) further describes themes of generative fathering for the future. Pleck and Pleck's (1997) four chronological stages, which concisely describe dominant ideals across four eras of fatherhood, are discussed below.

A Stern Patriarch (Colonial Period)

During the Colonial period, the dominant ideal of fatherhood was a stern patriarch, who was viewed as the domestic spiritual leader and head of the household. The father served as the example of moral character, a primary agent in developing children's character, and a primary educator of the children. While Colonial forebearers expected an involved, active, and stern father, they also denounced a cruel father (Pleck & Pleck, 1997).
A Distant Breadwinner (1830–1900)

The changes in the ideal of fatherhood occurred between the American Revolution and 1830s, due mostly to economic changes brought about by the Industrial Revolution. Work took the father off the farm and away from home. The father's role became passive, and the mother was assumed to be the primary parent. As educator and character developer, she became the central agent. The father was still expected to set the moral standard, provide punishment, and protect the family. In this phase, breadwinning became the prime criterion in defining good fathering (Pleck & Pleck, 1997).

A Friendly Dad and Sex Role Model (1900–1970)

Authors vary as to dating the emergence of the ideal father as friendly and a sex role model. Some authors (Griswold, 1993; LaRossa, 1997) place the date near the beginning of the 20th century, while others (Pleck, 1987) note the appearance of this ideal in the 1950s. This new ideal emphasized a close, rather than distant, relationship, relying mainly on fun-filled activities with children. Fathers were expected to be involved in child rearing primarily as disciplinarians, but not to share equally in the tasks and responsibilities of child rearing. Father involvement during this period was considered good for the growth and development of the child; fathers were considered to make a different and unique contribution (Pleck & Pleck, 1997).

As regard for fathers began to rise, the luster on motherhood began to tarnish because it was believed that "over involved" mothers produced effeminate boys (Kimmel & Messner, 1989; Pleck & Pleck, 1997, p. 41). At the turn of the century, early family professionals had promoted the notion of the ideal dad as a close parental
figure who took on mainly entertaining activities with children. However, during the 1920s, magazine cartoons portrayed the father as incompetent in dealing with children, pointing out the foibles of the ideal dad (LaRossa, 1991). During the 1920s and 1930s, a common thought was “too much mother dominated child rearing produced unmanly boys” (Pleck & Pleck, 1997, p. 42) and more father involvement was necessary. The Depression and loss of employment gave some men more time to spend with their children. Employed men found satisfaction in both providing for the family and spending time with children, although spending less time than unemployed fathers (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993). A central belief emerged in the father-child relationship during the Depression that suggested that breadwinning was preferable to involvement by fathers with their children (Pleck & Pleck, 1997). With the advent of World War II, the problem of unemployment for men nearly disappeared. However, the absence of some fathers due to World War II and the failure of some men to pass army physicals prompted a discussion that mothers were overprotective and had softened their sons. If mothers were thought to be too overprotective, fathers were said to be too passive, “failing to punish their children, make decisions, and were too concerned with being liked by their children” (Pleck & Pleck, 1997, p. 43). The 1950s saw a shift from passive and absent fathering to considering involved fathering as creative and enjoyable, something more meaningful than work.

An Equal Co-parent (1970–Present)

The equal co-parent ideal emerged in the 1970s, primarily advocated by feminists in response to the growth of maternal employment and the demand by employed women that husbands share in housework and child care (Griswold, 1997; LaRossa, 1988; Pleck & Pleck, 1997). In this ideal of fatherhood, fathers should be
highly involved as part of an egalitarian relationship between husbands and wives. Fathers were expected to carry an equal share of child rearing. It was thought that an increase in father involvement would help make boys less gender stereotyped and more nurturing. The failure to attain this ideal has been noted by researchers, who identify a discrepancy between the cultural ideal and actual conduct of fathers (Hochschild, 1989; LaRossa, 1988).

Two other trends have emerged along with the co-parent ideal: the "deadbeat dad," who is described as negligent of his paternal responsibilities; and a "backlash" against the women's movement, favoring a reassertment of paternal authority and return to stern patriarchy (Fauldi, 1991). Currently, it appears that these trends compete for the attention of fathers in regard to their involvement with their children (Arendell, 1997; Doherty, 1997; Dollahite & Hawkins, 1997; LaRossa, 1997).

Summary

Father as breadwinner has been assumed to be the overwhelming dominant image of the American father, yet it was not the dominant trend in the beginning of American society and is under considerable challenge in the late 20th century (Pleck & Pleck, 1997). The "stem patriarch" ideal of colonial America, the "friendly dad" of the turn of the century, and the "co-parent" of today shares the expectation that fathers will be active and involved. Previous ideals have assumed and reinforced a gender division of labor on domestic and breadwinning responsibilities (Pleck & Pleck, 1997). The ideal co-parent assumes that fathers and mothers must share the tasks and responsibilities of child rearing equally and that their roles are interchangeable. Pleck and Pleck (1997) suggest that more and newer ideals of fatherhood will emerge because of ongoing changes in the economy, culture, and
family. As these new ideals emerge, they will incorporate the multiple ideals of the past, while giving way to multiple ideals for the future (LaRossa, 1997; Stacey, 1992).

Conceptual Framework of the Study

Introduction

Two theoretical perspectives comprise the conceptual framework of this study: an involvement perspective (Doherty et al., 1996; Dollahite et al., 1997; Levine & Pitt, 1995), and a postmodern feminist perspective (Baber & Allen, 1992; Thorne & Yalom, 1992). The involvement perspective highlights responsibility (Doherty et al., 1996), systemic contextual factors, and a prescriptive ethical dimension of father involvement (Dollahite et al., 1997; Palkovitz, 1997). For the purpose of this study, a postmodern feminist perspective brings attention to the variety of family forms (Thorne & Yalom, 1992), power differentials, multiple and varied experiences of women, and social change in the involvement perspective (Doherty et al., 1996; Hochschild, 1989, Levine & Pittinsky, 1997; Schwartz, 1994; Stacey, 1992). Concepts and sources related to the conceptual framework are noted in Table 1 to guide reading and understanding.

Involvement Perspective

Over the past 7 years, an involvement perspective has emerged that focuses on the strengths of fathers and fathers’ involvement with their children. This section examines five factors of responsible fathering (Doherty et al., 1996), four
Table 1
Conceptual Framework

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<tr>
<th>Perspective</th>
<th>Concepts</th>
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<td><em>An Involvement Perspective</em></td>
<td><strong>Responsible fathering</strong>&lt;br&gt;• Systemic contextual factors: father, mother, child, coparental and contextual.&lt;br&gt;<strong>Generative fathering</strong>&lt;br&gt;• Dimensions of involvement: context, responsibilities and capabilities, and consequences.&lt;br&gt;• Expanded ways of father involvement.</td>
<td>Doherty et al., 1996&lt;br&gt;Levine &amp; Pitt, 1995&lt;br&gt;Dollahite et al., 1997&lt;br&gt;Palkovitz, 1997</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>A Postmodern Feminist Perspective</em></td>
<td><strong>Multiple and varied experiences of women</strong>&lt;br&gt;• Family life that oppresses women and offers confirmation and fulfillment.&lt;br&gt;<strong>Challenging the ideology of the monolithic family</strong>&lt;br&gt;• Couple styles and pluralistic families.&lt;br&gt;<strong>The differentiation of family experiences.</strong>&lt;br&gt;• Household responsibility and child rearing.</td>
<td>Baber &amp; Allen, 1992&lt;br&gt;Thorne &amp; Yalom, 1992&lt;br&gt;Stacey, 1992&lt;br&gt;Schwartz, 1994&lt;br&gt;Doherty, 1992&lt;br&gt;Thorne &amp; Yalom, 1992&lt;br&gt;Hochschild, 1989&lt;br&gt;Stacey, 1992&lt;br&gt;Levine, 1997</td>
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components of generative fathering (Dollahite et al., 1997), and an expanded view of the ways fathers are involved in the lives of their children (Palkovitz, 1997).

**Responsible Fathering**

A responsible fathering component is important to the proposed study of father involvement because it considers systemic contextual factors that contribute to father involvement (Doherty et al., 1996). The term *responsible* describes a set of desired norms for evaluating fathers' behavior that conveys a moral meaning.
(Doherty et al., 1996; Levine & Pitt, 1995). The term moral meaning is used here to mean "that some fathering can be judged irresponsible or nonresponsible" (Doherty et al., 1996, p. 3). The term systemic is used to "refute the idea that fathers' involvement is primarily a characteristic or behavioral set, but is a multilateral process that involves the meanings, beliefs, motivations, attitudes, and behaviors of all the stakeholders involved in the lives of children" (Doherty et al., 1996, p. 2).

The responsible fathering model here clarifies factors that identify and influence responsible father involvement (Doherty et al., 1996). Responsible fathering is a model meant to reflect systemic thinking regarding all the stakeholders in the lives of children in a "dynamic process, rather than a set of linear, deterministic influences" (Doherty et al., 1996, p. 14). The prime justification for promoting responsible fathering is child need (Doherty et al., 1996). The responsible fathering model describes five ecological factors that influence father involvement: the father, the mother, the child, the co-parental relationship, and the larger contextual factors in the environment. Individual, relational, and contextual factors have an additive and interactive effect on father involvement.

**Father Factors.** Father factors, such as role identification, skills, and commitment, influence father involvement. The unavailability of clear models, changing expectations, and multiple descriptions of father involvement have caused confusion among fathers. This confusion has prompted a search for behaviors that have resulted in fathers' constructing for themselves models of involvement from many sources (Daly, 1993). The fathers' age may be related to involvement in that older fathers are more engaged with their children (Pleck, 1997). Doherty et al. (1996) suggest that support from mothers and the larger contextual setting, coupled
with individual commitment to knowledge and skills, may serve to overcome factors that inhibit father involvement. Studies of early socialization suggest that fulfilling care-taking experiences earlier in life contributed to father involvement later (Pleck, 1997). A father’s own family of origin experiences, specifically his relationship with his own father, may shape the type and nature of his involvement (Doherty et al., 1996). Fathers’ involvement may reflect their own fathers’ involvement or compensate for their fathers’ lack of involvement (Lamb et al., 1987; Pleck, 1997). This multigenerational effect may contribute to role identification, sense of commitment, and self-efficacy (Daly, 1993; Snarey, 1993).

Fathers’ beliefs regarding egalitarian relationships do not necessarily translate into father involvement (Marsiglio, 1991); however, belief that the father’s role is important to child development is associated with higher father involvement (McBride & Mills, 1993). Involvement has also been related to fathers’ beliefs about men’s competence with children and men’s ability to be close to children (Lamb et al., 1987). Studies report that interventions to encourage skill development have increased father involvement (Pleck, 1997).

Paternal identity can be thought of as an integration of the father’s individual development, personality characteristics, and beliefs related to fathering. Father involvement is not affected by the number of hours worked, but is increased if fathers have “fluid employment trajectories” and if they view the “breadwinner obligation as shared with their wives” (Pleck, 1997, p. 91). In general, fathers do not take advantage of work leave policies, but report taking short “informal” parental leaves using vacation, sick leave, and other discretionary time off (Pleck, 1997).
Mother Factors. Mother factors suggest that mothers, at times, serve as gatekeepers of father involvement (Doherty et al., 1996). Father involvement may be based on the “mothers’ attitudes, expectations, and support for father involvement, and the extent of involvement in the labor force” (Doherty et al., 1996, p. 12). Studies suggest the proportional amount of father involvement is greater when mothers are employed, and fathers are more involved when mothers have more education (Lamb et al., 1987; Pleck, 1997). Fathers also are more involved when their wives have positive relationships with their own fathers and when their mothers hold liberal attitudes toward gender. Doherty et al. (1996) suggest that the evolution of a social consensus on responsible fathering will involve a consensus that responsible mothering means supporting father involvement.

Child Factors. Doherty et al. (1996) include child factors for the completeness of the responsible fathering model. Child factors may not be as salient as other factors influencing involvement; however, fathers tend to be more involved with older and male children (1996). Doherty et al. state further research is needed regarding how children’s “beliefs and meanings about father involvement influence mothers and fathers’ expectations and behavior” (Doherty et al., 1996, p. 13).

Co-parental Factors. Co-parental factors have a tremendous influence on father involvement. The quality of father involvement is correlated with the quality of the parents’ relationship (Doherty et al., 1996). Parental conflict tends to result in fathers’ withdrawing from relationships with the children, while mothers do not show a similar withdrawal. For many men, “marriage and parenthood are a package deal” (Doherty et al., 1986, p. 11). Higher father involvement occurs more in good marital relationships than in poor ones (Pleck, 1997). One explanation that links father
involvement to marriage or adult-adult relationships is the unclear expectations for fathering (Doherty et al., 1996). Because the expectations for father involvement are less clearly stated for fathers than for mothers, father involvement will be shaped by the expectations of the mother and external influences, such as extended family, culture, and larger social institutions (Doherty et al., 1996).

Contextual Factors. Contextual factors (e.g., mother, extra-familial, and social support) may positively or negatively influence father involvement. Most research on social support as a contextual factor has focused on mothers as sources of social support for father involvement (Doherty et al., 1996). Related to the co-parental and mother factors, mothers’ support for fathers’ involvement was primarily related to employment characteristics and marital dynamics (Pleck, 1997). There is limited research on extrafamilial support for father involvement; however, Pleck (1997) reports highly involved fathers encounter negative attitudes from acquaintances, relatives, and co-workers, but still seek out supportive communication with others reinforcing their involvement. There is a need for more study regarding the role of other fathers and men as a source of support for father involvement (Doherty et al., 1996).

Responsible Fathering and This Study. The responsibility model in this study was used to set a foundation for thinking about father involvement from a father presence perspective, rather than a father absence perspective. The responsible fathering model was used in this study to identify PK’s influence on fathers involvement with their children. Factors considered in this study were the role of other men as models for each other, fathers’ desire for knowledge and skills, and the influence of mothers on father involvement. The influence of mothers was important
to the fathers' involvement. The co-parental factor of the parents' relationships was related to the previously mentioned role of mothers' influence and the quality of the couples' relationship on father involvement.

This section reviews father, mother, child, co-parental, and contextual factors that interact to influence fathers' responsibility and involvement with their children. The next section discusses generative fathering as an approach to involvement that employs an ethical appeal to fathers.

**Generative Fathering**

In a generative fathering perspective, "Fathering meets the needs of children by working to create and maintain a developing ethical relationship with them" (Dollahite et al., 1997, p. 18). The concept of generative fathering builds on the recent work of Snarey (1993), who, building on Erickson's concept of generativity (Erikson, 1974, 1980, 1982), developed an approach to theory, research, and intervention designed to understand father involvement better and encourage generative fathering. By building on the ideas Erikson set forth in his psychosocial stage of middle adulthood, a balance of generativity over self-absorption, Snarey (1993) advanced the notion that generative fathers create, care for, and promote the development of others in a context of obligation and responsibility. The term *generative fathering* can be thought of as an ethical position because it begins with the next generation in mind (Snarey, 1997) and asserts that the relationship between fathers and children has moral significance because "fathers directly experience the moral claims of their children and are personally obligated to their children" (Snarey, 1993, p. 357). The term *ethical* suggests what may be "possible and desirable" for father involvement (Dollahite et al., 1997, p. 18). The terms *possibility* and *desirable*
are meant to convey a sense of "what can be (idealism) and ought to be (moralizing)"
(Dollahite et al., 1997, p. 18). Scholars who use a generative fathering model do not
claim to be value neutral or objectivist and question whether such a position is
possible (Dollahite et al., 1997).

The purpose of generative fathering is to conceptualize optimum ways of
parenting. Generative fathering is based on four assumptions: (1) fathers can care and
build relationships with human beings across the generations; (2) generational ethics
cultivate responsibility beyond their own children and include the next generation of
humanity; (3) fathers make choices within a context of influence from a variety of
factors (Slife & Williams, 1995, as cited in Dollahite et al., 1997); and (4) fathers are
obligated, responsible, and capable of caring for their children in meaningful ways
(Dollahite et al., 1997).

Generative Contexts and Work. The characteristics of generative fathering
involve four conditions and constraints of the "generative context" that lead to
categories of "generative work" (Dollahite et al., 1997, p. 24). The first condition is
the dependency of children and the ethical obligation of both parents to care for the
next generation, to act as moral agents for the benefit of the next generation. Second,
limited resources, such as material, human, and time, are constraints that fathers must
continuously negotiate for the current and future generation. Third, the inevitability
of developmental change (Erikson, 1982, as cited in Dollahite et al., 1997) is constant
and complex throughout a child's life and leads to the work of fathering as
maintaining supportive conditions and adapting to varying situations across time and
circumstances (Snarey, 1993, as cited in Dollahite et al., 1997). Finally, the complex,
dynamic, and influential webs of interdependent relationships are integral components
of involvement. Fathers facilitate relationships between children and the people in their lives, encourage understanding between the child and others, and help children understand the needs of people around them (Gilligan, 1993).

**Responsibilities and Consequences.** The responsibilities and capabilities of fatherwork represent those activities that fathers should and can do. These are the antecedents to the expected consequences of generative fathering: moral, productive, mature and loving fathers and children. “Fathers have the ethical imperative, desire, and ability to commit, to choose, to create, to consecrate, to care, to change, to connect and to communicate to meet the needs of the next generation” (Dollahite et al., 1997, p. 30).

**Generative Fathering and This Study.** Like the responsibility model, generative fathering was used to set a foundation for thinking about father involvement from a father presence perspective, rather than from a father absence perspective. The approach to fathers' involvement that considers an ethical obligation of fathers to care for their children was central to this study. The changing conditions and contexts of children necessitate greater father involvement, combined with an emphasis on fathers’ responsibility and capability, provided a basis for looking at PK influence of fathers’ involvement with their children from a father presence perspective.

This section reviews generative fathering as an ethical appeal to fathers’ involvement. The beliefs that fathers can care for their children, make choices that extend that care, and are responsible and capable to be meaningfully involved are fundamental concepts to generative fathering. The next section discusses an expanded view of father involvement.


**Expanded Father Involvement**

After reviewing 30 years of research on father involvement, Pleck (1997) called for an expanded conceptualization of father involvement. Important categories of father involvement exist beyond temporal and observable phenomena (Palkovitz, 1997). Potential categories of involvement require elaboration (Pleck, 1997) because narrow conceptualizations of father involvement have excluded important aspects of men's caring for children that are necessary in an increasingly complex world (Dollahite & Hawkins, 1997).

This shift in conceptualization is expanding research efforts by including qualitative accounts of father involvement. These accounts document the ways fathers are involved in their children's lives and the significance of their involvement (Pleck, 1983, 1985, 1997; Radin, 1994; Snarey, 1993). The study of father involvement can benefit from research seeking to understand paternal involvement as activities likely to promote children's development (Pleck, 1997).

Paternal behaviors and characteristics (i.e., masculinity, power, control, warmth, responsiveness, independence training, and playfulness) have been quantitatively studied (Plek, 1997). Research has cast father involvement as a "content free" construct, focusing only on the quantity of fathers' involvement with children (Pleck, 1997).

Previous studies of the levels of father involvement relied on time use data and refer to relative father involvement in two ways: as a proportion of the mother's involvement and as involvement in absolute terms. Over the past 30 years, increases in absolute paternal involvement have been small, and father involvement continues to be well under that of mothers (Hochschild, 1989; Levine & Pittinsky, 1997);
Stacey, 1992). Pleck (1997) reports that, although there have been “clear increases” in father involvement, fathers are a long way from parity with mothers (p. 75).

Broadening the conceptualization of father involvement (Palkovitz, 1997) can provide a deeper, phenomenological understanding of father involvement (Doherty et al., 1986; Palkovitz, 1997; Pleck, 1997). Ways to be involved in child rearing, sources, domains, continua, and conditions for modifying involvement (Palkovitz, 1997) are described here as expanding the dimensions of father involvement.

Ways of Involvement. The ways in which fathers are involved are numerous, although not always revealed by studies (Palkovitz, 1997). Father involvement is more extensive than typical assessments of involvement might suggest (Palkovitz, 1997). These areas of involvement, not “mutually exclusive or exhaustive,” include communication, teaching, monitoring, thoughts, errands, caregiving, child-related maintenance, shared interests, availability, planning, shared activities, providing financially, affection, protection, and emotional support (Palkovitz, 1997, p. 208). By expanding the conceptualization of father involvement, generative fathering that is rooted in the needs of the child, rather than in a prescribed list of duties and activities, is validated and supported (Palkovitz, 1997).

Characteristics of Father Involvement. Characteristics of father involvement seem to be multiply determined, with no single variable being influential across contexts (Pleck, 1997). Factors promoting father involvement may operate interactively and additively. Sociodemographic characteristics of father involvement can be summarized, as fathers are more involved with their sons than their daughters, particularly with older children (Marsiglio, 1991). Although the research in this area is mixed, fathers with large numbers of children are proportionately more involved
with their children (Pleck, 1997). Fathers are more involved with first-born than later-born children, with infants born prematurely, and with infants who have difficult temperaments (Pleck, 1997). Socioeconomic characteristics, race, and ethnicity have not been found consistently related to fathers' involvement with children (Doherty et al., 1996; Pleck; 1997).

**Domains of Involvement.** Involvement encompasses multiple domains of functioning. The domains studied in parental involvement have usually been behavioral (Palkovitz, 1997). Palkovitz (1997) contends that fathers and mothers are invested and involved through a variety of cognitive processes, such as planning and worrying, and through affective processes, such as loving and encouraging. Specifically, there are behavioral, affective, and cognitive components of every way of involvement (Snarey, 1993).

**Continua of Involvement.** Involvement with children cannot be easily described as an either-or arrangement, but may be better conceptualized as multidimensional, with degrees of involvement at various points in the lifespan of parenting (Palkovitz, 1997). Various dimensions of parenting can be thought of as existing along a series of continua. These continua include appropriateness, ranging from inappropriate to highly appropriate; observability, ranging from covert to overt; degree, ranging from none to high; time invested, ranging from low to high; salience of involvement, ranging from low to high; proximity, ranging from far away to in the same room; and directness, ranging from direct to indirect (Palkovitz, 1997). Looking at involvement along continua suggests that different parents may be involved in unobservable and observable involvement (Palkovitz, 1997). For example,
planning for and making a doctor appointment is unobservable involvement, while
taking the child to the doctor is observable involvement.

Modifying Effects of Involvement. Conditions that moderate involvement
may vary involvement across time and development periods of children. These
conditions establish a framework of ongoing priorities and commitments as part of
the parents' life circumstances such as paid and unpaid work. Father involvement is
also modified by parental strengths and weakness, and contexts related to sole or
shared responsibility for care giving. The specific setting and individual differences
will also have a modifying effect on father involvement. For example, fathers
construct their parenting differently based on their perceptions and meanings of being
a father (Palkovitz, 1997).

Expanded Father Involvement and This Study. Like the responsibility model
and generative fathering, expanded father involvement was used to set a basis for
thinking about father involvement from a father presence perspective, rather than a
father absence perspective. The expanded involvement perspective was used in this
study to broaden a view of fathers' involvement with his children that was inclusive
of behavioral, cognitive, and affective domains. Involvement that was descriptive
along a continuum (for example, time of involvement may range from low to high)
and conditions (for example, developmental status of the child) that modify fathers'
involvement provided a basis for looking at PK's influence on fathers' involvement
with their children from a father present perspective.

The previous section has discussed an involvement perspective to father
involvement. The next section will complete the conceptual framework with a
discussion of a postmodern feminist perspective on father involvement.
A Postmodern Feminist Perspective

A postmodern feminist perspective is important to this study of father involvement because, particularly since the 1970s, postmodern feminism has contributed to the shaping of fathers’ involvement with children (LaRossa, 1988, 1997; Pleck & Pleck, 1997) and will continue to have a shaping influence on their involvement in the future (Griswold, 1997). Postmodern feminism and the large surge of women entering the work force during the late 1960s and early 1970s presented unique opportunities for father involvement. “No force will reshape day-to-day fathering more significantly than the movement of mothers into the labor force” (Griswold, 1997, p. 84). Men were slow to realize the benefits, but the opportunity for day-to-day relationships with children and sharing of hands-on child care with spouses was possible. Postmodern feminist assumptions about the need and importance of fathers as caregivers has had some support among governmental officials, the media, and mental health professionals (Griswold, 1997). Although some have seen a postmodern feminist influence as “culturally superfluous,” there are others who see this influence as helpful in opening new opportunities for father involvement (Griswold, 1997, p. 85).

Postmodern Feminist Perspective

A postmodern feminist perspective begins with the multiple voices of women and the idea that gender is not deterministic of women’s value, experiences, identity, or status (Baber & Allen, 1992). A postmodern feminist perspective asserts that women are active constructors of their own reality and meaning, influenced by factors such as “age, race, physical attractiveness, sexual orientation, and family
status" (Baber and Allen, 1992, p. 10). Women do not share identical experiences or life courses; instead, women's lives are best described as varied experiences that are "complex and contradictory" (Baber & Allen, 1992, p. 12). Baber and Allen (1992) describe women's sense of self and relationships with others as constantly changing and being rearranged through their interaction with others. A process that is constantly changing, gender is a primary influence on how life is experienced. The family life experienced by women is complex. Meeting needs in one relationship may conflict with meeting needs in another relationship, both within the same family. The matter of oppression for women refers to systems of power that exclude women from possibilities that promote their growth and welfare, give them access to resources, and provide them ample opportunity for positions of power (Baber & Allen, 1992).

Even though women may appear to dominate the family arena, the power to do so is limited by their male partners. "What makes this problematic is the fact that for many women the very aspect of family life that oppresses them also offers confirmation and fulfillment" (Baber & Allen, 1992, p. 7).

In their collection of articles discussing feminist thinking about the family over the past 30 years, Thorne and Yalom (1992) identify five themes that reflect feminist thinking about the family. Two of these themes will be used to analyze the influence of PK on fathers' involvement with their children. These themes include questioning the ideology of the monolithic family and revealing the gendered nature of family experiences.

**Questioning the Ideology of the Monolithic Family**

A postmodern feminist perspective has challenged the hegemony of the nuclear family, with a breadwinner husband and a full-time wife and mother, as the
only legitimate family form. Feminist analyses have documented the large "variation of households and family trajectories" (Coontz, 1995; Stacey, 1992). Households have recently varied in composition due to economic shifts related to the increased employment of women, higher divorce rates, lower birth rates, longer life spans, and patterns of unemployment in both women and men (Griswold, 1997; LaRossa, 1997; Pleck & Pleck, 1997; Thorne & Yalom, 1992).

A single culturally dominant family pattern does not exist (Baber & Allen, 1992; Stacey, 1992). Rather, the pluralistic family, characterized by diversity of family forms and tolerance, is the prevailing trend (Doherty, 1992). Family forms, including dual career families, never married families, postdivorce families, step families, and gay and lesbian families are noted for valuing flexibility (Doherty, 1992). People have developed a variety of households that are constantly changing because of personal and occupational conditions (Stacey, 1992). New family forms evolve that may or may not resemble the traditional family form. The new family form does not replace the previous form and become the next in a predictable progression of family history. Rather, Stacey describes this evolution of families as moving "forward and backwards into an uncertain future" (p. 94).

The movement from traditional to pluralistic families is also captured in Schwartz’s (1994) study of couple relationships, in which she identified traditional, near peer, and peer marriages. The traditional couple is characterized by the division of male and female roles into separate spheres of influence and responsibility, with the final authority given to the husband. A near peer couple is characterized as admiring peer relations between men and women but as being unable to figure out how to reach a peer marriage. In a near peer marriage, both partners are likely to work and believe in gender equality; however, the woman does more housework and
child care than the man, and he has final authority in a way that the woman does not. A peer couple is characterized by no more than a 60/40 split of household duties and child raising, and by equal authority in making decisions. These partners have equal control over the family economy and access to discretionary funds. Peer couples tend to be more middle class than working or upper middle class (Schwartz, 1994).

Schwartz (1994) argued that there are benefits and deficits to each style, depending on the amount and nature of change and sacrifices a couple is willing to make. However, Schwartz expresses the benefits, for example, intimacy and friendship, in peer marriages as outweighing benefits of traditional or near peer marriages. Although peer marriages are not without challenges, Schwartz contends traditional couples “sacrifice the elemental goals of intimacy, deep friendship, and mutual respect, goals that peer marriage better serves” (p. 3).

The Gendered Nature of Family Experiences

Feminist analyses have differentiated family experiences and identified the multiple experiences of family life in light of patterns of power and conflict (Schwartz, 1994; Stacey, 1992; Thompson, 1992). The differences experienced by women and men within the family have often “been distorted or denied” because of various descriptions of the family (Thorne, 1992, p. 13). “Feminists argue that the specifics of daily living cannot be understood without inquiring into the dynamics of gender” (Thorne, 1992, p. 14).

Members’ experiences within the same family vary according to gender. Home is often not a refuge for women nor a place of leisure; it is a location of work (Thorne, 1992). The gap between men and women’s participation in household work became known as the women’s “second shift” (Hochschild, 1989). A review of the

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data used to describe the second shift continued to find "a glaring differential between the share of child care and household work done by mothers and fathers" (Levine & Pittinsky, 1997, p. 25). Moreover, though the difference in amount and nature of housework and child care undertaken by men and women has slightly narrowed, "it is still mothers, on the average, who take the responsibility for worrying about what has to get done, when, and by whom . . . and the of jobs at home that women are more likely to end up with are the least discretionary jobs . . . the unpleasant chores" (Levine & Pittinsky, 1997, p. 27).

A Postmodern Feminist Perspective and This Study

The postmodern feminist perspective brings attention to the variety of family forms, the assumption of the traditional family form, and the potential for missed connectedness between family members. The relationships that women carry on with others and themselves are constructed and reconstructed through social interaction. The experiences of family life for women are contradictory in that family life oppresses and confirms women in their families. The gendered nature of family experiences is central to this study, as it exemplifies the gendered characteristics of the traditional family form.

Promise Keepers as a Form of Family Life Education

Goals of Family Life Education

Family life education has multiple definitions reflecting the complexity of the field and the diversity of approaches in education about families and parenting (Arcus, Schvaneveldt, & Moss, 1993; Arcus & Thomas, 1993). Family life education
may be thought of as "professional education and support services to fathers in a variety of settings and formats, from individual counseling sessions and small groups to massive gatherings organized by religious leaders" (Palm, 1997, p. 169). Family life education exists in social service agencies, health care organizations, and educational and religious institutions. "The diversity of settings has typically been seen by most family life educators as appropriate in order to provide services across the life span and to provide for a variety of perspectives in meeting the needs of as many individuals and families as possible" (Arcus et al., 1993, p. 18). Family life education can range from weekly class sessions to large gatherings, moving beyond traditional ideas of family life education (e.g., Active Parenting, Systematic Training for Effective Parenting, Parent Effectiveness Training) to interactive technology based programs (e.g., Parenting Wisely, Active Parenting), to massive gatherings (e.g., PK conferences).

Six characteristics define family life education and provide a context for family life education for supporting and educating fathers (Arcus et al., 1993). First, family life education arises from several disciplines, such as social work, child development, child psychology, early childhood education, health care education, religious education and ministry, family and consumer science, and family social science (Arcus et al., 1993; Palm, 1997). The concepts relied on in family life education stem from "diverse disciplines and fields of study that focus on individuals and families in particular ways" (Arcus & Thomas, 1993, p. 11).

Second, family life education is concerned with meeting the needs of individuals and families (Arcus et al., 1993). Identified needs either stem from individual participants or are predetermined by a specialist (Arcus & Thomas, 1993). Meeting the needs of individuals and families, for example, can involve defining
"good parenting" for fathers through appropriate communication and discipline
techniques (Palm, 1997, p. 169). Family life education, however, struggles with
defining "good parenting" because of the wide range of needs of parents and children
(Arendell, 1997). Meeting the needs of individuals and children also focuses on
“improving relationships” between parents and children (Palm, 1997, p. 169).

Third, family life education focuses on individuals and families throughout the
life span. Where once this focus concerned mothers and parent education, it now
includes all family members over the life span, normative and nonnormative
developmental issues in child development, and family life and the common
transitions and stresses that families face (Arcus & Thomas, 1993; Palm, 1997).

Fourth, family life education presents and respects different individual, family
system, and cultural values (Arcus et al., 1993; Arcus & Thomas, 1993; Palm, 1997).

Fifth, family life education takes an educational rather than therapeutic
approach. Family life educators define the “purpose of family life education is to
educate or equip rather than repair” (Arcus & Thomas, 1993, p. 12). The purpose of
education empowers learners to use the knowledge to their benefit (Arcus et al.,
1993). Finally, family life education focuses on “individual parent and family
strengths” as the place to begin work with a family (Palm, 1997, p. 170).

Until recently, parent education has not been specifically directed toward
Systematic research on the effectiveness of programs for fathers has been scarce
(McBride, 1991). The few programs designed for fathers, however, have had some
positive impact on various aspects of family life (McBride, 1991). Challenges and
issues for family life education with fathers include research that explores the impact
of family life education programs on father involvement, the efficacy of methods and formats, and goals to pursue with fathers.

**Parallels Between Family Life Education and Promise Keepers**

Given the characteristics of family life education (Arcus et al., 1993; Morgaine, 1992), PK conferences could be considered an alternative form of family life education. The stated mission of the PK organization is an effort to “[build] strong marriages and families” (Promise Keepers, 1997, p. 26) and encourage each father “to be a faithful and committed father to his children” (Abraham, 1997, p. 24). PK conferences are large, religious, ecumenical gatherings for men, focused, in part, on challenging fathers to be more involved with their families and children (Abraham, 1997).

PK reflects to some degree a critical/emancipatory paradigm (Morgaine, 1992) that points out current messages that have influenced father involvement. A critical/emancipatory paradigm encourages fathers to examine these messages and how they influence their everyday lives. Fathers then can assess to what degree they have bought into these messages. PK conferences urge fathers to relinquish uninvolved and detached beliefs about fathering and advocate involved and committed relationships with their children.

To some degree, PK conferences parallel the six characteristics of family life education previously discussed. First, PK speakers represent a variety of disciplines and rely on knowledge from multiple disciplines. Speakers are listed in a printed program for each conference by name, title, and occupation (Promise Keepers, 1997). Typically, most of the conference speakers are clergy, marriage and family therapists, clinical directors, and leaders from various family oriented organizations.
and ministries (Abraham, 1997; Janssen & Weeden, 1994). Very little is known about the background, specific training, and orientation of the speakers to family life literature. All speakers are Christian men, however, who interpret their knowledge of the family through the lens of an evangelical Christian tradition.

Second, a primary goal of PK is to make better husbands and more involved fathers. The needs of the conference participants are defined and articulated by the PK leaders and speakers. For example, PK defines "good parenting" as fathers who are involved, not simply by being good breadwinners, but by making their families and children the top priority in their lives (Abraham, 1997). Improving, reestablishing, and building relationships with wives and children are core principles in PK (Abraham, 1997). PK participants are exhorted to address obstacles (e.g., work) they have created that compete with family involvement.

Third, PK conferences emphasize reuniting fathers and children of all ages through greater involvement, although they do not directly address individuals and families across the life span. Fathers are challenged to move beyond mere helping with the family, to providing support and participation in meeting the expected and unexpected stresses and challenges of family life (Abraham, 1997).

Fourth, men are exhorted to respect differences in individuals, families, and cultures (Abraham, 1997), but there are clear limitations to accepted differences. Critics do not find, for example, the degree of openness in respecting differences in religious and sexual orientation that are found in family life education's broader definition (NCFR, 1998). While a variety of approaches has been used in family life education regarding how values are addressed (Arcus & Thomas, 1993), PK teaches a given set of values to conference participants (Abraham, 1997) that draws from conservative/legalistic Protestantism (Bawer, 1997). Conservative/legalistic
Protestantism draws on fundamentalist ideas that promote and reify theologically a traditional family form.

Fifth, PK consists of a one-and-a-half day conference, with discretionary follow up meetings. Inspirational messages at PK conferences appeal to participants' thoughts, beliefs, and emotions (Arcus & Thomas, 1993). Finally, fathers are addressed as capable members in their families and are encouraged to see themselves as adding to the strengths of their families (Abraham, 1997). Identifying their weaknesses and recognizing the strengths they as fathers bring to the family are emphasized (Abraham, 1997).

A discussion of PK follows this section and includes a description of the organization, a description of the seven organizing promises of the organization, and a review of the claims and critiques of PK.

Promise Keepers

Introduction

The PK movement was launched in 1990, when founders Bill McCartney and Dave Wardell brainstormed the idea of bringing together thousands of men in Colorado for Christian discipleship (Miller, 1996) and for instruction on how to become “men of integrity” (Mattox, 1995, p. 1). PK is a large Protestant, evangelical organization devoted to encouraging men to be, among other things, responsible fathers and husbands. Protestant is defined here as representative of all Christian denominations not of the Roman Catholic or Eastern Orthodox church (Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary, 1993). Evangelical includes Christian denominations that base their teachings on the Bible, particularly the four Gospels,
and on fundamentalist interpretation of scripture (Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary, 1993). Through stadium conferences, accountability groups, education seminars, and resource materials, PK encourages men to live “godly lives,” defined as upholding seven basic promises of commitment to God, their families, and fellow human beings. PK seeks to unite Christian men of all races, denominations, ages, cultures, and socioeconomic groups, believing that accountable relationships among men are critical in helping one another become “promise keepers” in their relationships with God, their wives, their children, and each other (Promise Keepers, 1997).

PK currently states its mission as: “Promise Keepers is a Christ centered ministry dedicated to uniting men through vital relationships to become godly influences in their world” (Promise Keepers, 1997, p. 24). Attendance at PK conferences has grown from 4,200 at one site in 1991, to 1.1 million at 22 sites in 1996. Since its beginning, PK has grown to include more than just a day-and-a-half stadium conference for men. Year-round activities include conducting educational conferences and seminars, providing leadership and materials for local small support groups, generating hands-on service programs in the inner city, developing resource materials for personal study and men's groups, and building support for local clergy (Promise Keepers, 1997). The all-male PK has stimulated parallel groups for women, who refer to themselves as Heritage Keepers, Suitable Helpers, Promise Reapers, Chosen Women, and Covenant Keepers (Swomley, 1997).

The National Center for Fathering (NCF) in Shawnee, Kansas, is an organization founded by Dr. Ken Canfield to conduct research on fathers and fathering and to develop practical resources to educate and support fathers. The National Center for Fathering receives its funding from three sources: resource sales,
foundation grants, and gifts from individuals. NCF gathered data on men over 18 who had attended PK conferences in 1995 and found that 88% of attendees were married, 5.2% were divorced, and 20% had parents who were divorced. The mean age of attendees was 37.7, and 84% were Caucasian. A description of PK participants versus national data on men is shown in Table 2 (U.S. Census Bureau, National Population Estimates, 1997). According to the national data, the percentage of men over 18 married was 63%, with a mean age of 34.4. A majority (83%) were Caucasian. Eight percent were divorced.

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographic</th>
<th>Promise Keepers</th>
<th>U.S. Census Data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Men in U.S. population over 18</td>
<td>727,342</td>
<td>92,008,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men married as of 1995</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men divorced in 1995</td>
<td>5.2%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean age of men</td>
<td>37.7</td>
<td>34.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of men who are Caucasian</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>83%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Seven Organizing Promises

The central organizing feature of PK is a commitment to seven promises. The emphasis is on keeping promises, rather than just on making them. On an individual level, each participant is challenged to look at his own life in light of the seven promises. PK advances the assumption that it is the breaking of promises that damages the relationships men have with each other, their wives, their children, and
their community (Abraham, 1997). On an organizational level, the seven promises serve as a structuring element for each of the stadium conferences. Each year, a separate theme and focus are developed for the conferences, although each of the seven promises shapes the 7+ hours of exhortation by speakers to participants. The seven promises can be viewed as a list of goals men can pursue throughout their lives and are intended to act as a guide that can transform men, families, relationships, and communities (Abraham, 1997). The first three promises concern an individual’s ethics and conduct and include men’s relationship to God, relationship to a few close males, and the practice of moral and sexual purity. The last four promises focus on a man’s relationship to groups and to society at large. These commitments are to build strong marriages and families, support the mission of their churches, move beyond racial and denominational barriers and prejudice, and encourage other men to do likewise (Abraham, 1997; Promise Keepers, 1997).

Specifically, the fourth promise, “A Promise Keeper is committed to building strong marriages and families through love, protection, and biblical values” (Promise Keepers, 1997), is designed to emphasize the husband-wife relationship and help men be better fathers to their children (Abraham, 1997). “Whether a Promise Keeper is married or not, he is expected to honor women overall, hold a high view of marriage and motherhood, and support the structure of the traditional two-parent family” (Abraham, 1997, p. 57).

**Claims and Critiques**

The promise of commitment to building strong marriages and being better fathers is not without controversy. Since its inception, reaction to the PK movement has been widely mixed. Journalists and authors gave heightened recognition to PK in
the popular literature as the organization grew and filled its first football stadium to capacity with 50,000 men in 1993. Early writing about the movement seemed to cast its value as all or nothing. Some said the PK movement was a late answer to the crisis of the absent father (Frost, 1996), while others attacked the movement and dismissed it by guilt through association with the religious right (Abraham, 1997; Swomley, 1996). Both claims and critiques have softened over time, offering caveats that no longer label the movement or the participants in one category or another (Pharr, 1996; Rabey, 1996). One writer suggested, for example, that one can watch a one-and-a-half day PK conference and find both a reaction against feminism and an accommodation to it. One can find accusatory remarks regarding “extreme women’s groups” and calls to “see wives as equal partners” (Schapiro, 1995).

One of the most common critiques of PK suggests that the movement attempts to reassert male authority in the family (Novosad, 1996; Van Biema, 1995) or to establish a “kinder and gentler patriarchy” (Kimmel, 1997, p. 48). A great deal of the criticism regarding PK falls under the umbrella of patriarchal control, especially the organization’s hierarchal approach toward male leadership and “headship” (Rabey, 1996). Some suggest the leaders have invoked a gender war, that the enemy is a pervasive feminine influence (Novosad, 1996). Others suggest the organization promotes misogynistic messages (Mattox, 1995) and antiwomen ideology (Swomley, 1996). For example, one prominent PK conference speaker made constant reference to “handling” wives (Feuerherd, 1996) in a prowife presentation.

Some say PK is becoming a “powerful vanguard in religious right activity” that intends to “‘take America for Christ’ and become ‘the strongest voice in America’ thus threatening a democratic and pluralistic society” (Feuerherd, 1996; Novosad, 1996). Others suggest that PK’s charge to fathers is authoritarian, placing...
emphasis on discipline, command, and control (Novosad, 1996). However, critics also suggest a difference between the organization's leaders, those who organize and plan, and its participants, who are searching for solutions to social and economic instability (Pharr, 1996). One of my conclusions, after attending a weekend conference, is that PK participants are not foot soldiers of any one ideological position. Rather they seem to be men who are intent on making good on their responsibility to their families. One common claim of PK suggests that it fills a spiritual void (Neill, 1995) and encourages men to become involved with wives and children. Quoting Michael Lamb, head of the social and emotional development at the National Institute for Child Health and Human Development, one author writes, "Effort toward more engaged fathers in their families is considered a positive development" (Frost, 1996, p. 2). Other writers have observed that the primary goal of PK is to deepen the commitment of men to respect and honor women (Abraham, 1997) and enter meaningful relationships (Van Biema, 1995). Some suggest that the message is not to reinvent the macho man, but rather recreate him as vulnerable, humble, transparent, and somewhat less than perfect (Mattox, 1995).

The strongest proponents of PK seem to be the wives, mothers, sisters, and daughters of the men who have attended (Miller, 1996). Some say they see the positive changes and realize the influence it has in their lives and families (Miller, 1996). Others suggest that challenge and accountability are part of the success of men's involvement, once they return home (Feuerherd, 1996). Another claim of PK is an effort to put the brakes on some of the 20th century's more destructive trends, specifically the escalating divorce and illegitimacy rate in our society (Rabey, 1996). Some reaction to the criticism that PK will rob wives of their identity and demote them to "little women status is unfounded" (Miller, 1996, p. 2), and others suggest
that PK emphasizes the husband’s service to the wife over family leadership (DeCelle, 1996). One journalist interviewed a skeptical wife of a PK participant. She stated that PK teaches men “to see women as equals” and that she interpreted being the “head of a household” as meaning “putting others’ needs first, rather than living a life of self-satisfaction” (Shapiro, 1995, p. 2). If men return home from PK changed (Abraham, 1997), how does this affect the lives of the fathers, women, and children? This study looks at the influence PK has on fathers’ participation in the family and their involvement with the children. Did PK influence fathers’ involvement with their children, and how did PK influence the way fathers participated in their families?

Research on Promise Keepers

The popular literature’s reports and comments on PK have grown with the men’s conferences. There have been 71 articles and essays electronically catalogued from the popular literature. The amount of scholarly literature has been scarce. To date, the ERIC system shows no articles using the search terms of “Promise Keepers” or “Promise keepers.” The social science data base, PsycInfo, which monthly updates its data from 1300 journals on psychology and related fields, showed no articles using the search terms of “Promise Keepers” or “Promise keepers.” The social science data base, Sociological Abstracts, which bimonthly updates its data from 300,000 records covering sociology, social work, and other social sciences, showed one article (Jordan, 1996) using the search terms of “Promise Keepers” or “Promise keepers.” This article addressed PK and racism, and did not address father involvement and Promise Keepers. The social science data base Social Science Abstracts, which monthly updates its data from 400 international periodicals on sociology, anthropology, geography, economics, political science, and law, showed two articles
using the search terms “Promise Keepers” or “Promise keepers,” in the popular literature (Economist, 1995; Mattox, 1995). Besides electronic searching procedures, e-mail correspondence was sent to five researchers in father involvement. Three responses were received that indicated that they were unaware of published or unpublished articles regarding father involvement and Promise Keepers.

Summary

This study explores the influence of Promise Keepers on fathers’ involvement with their children, using a conceptual framework that includes an involvement perspective of father involvement and a postmodern feminist perspective of the family. The conceptual framework places an emphasis on the strengths of fathers (Doherty, 1991) and fathers’ involvement with their children (Dollahite et al., 1997), without doing so at the expense of individual family members, specifically women and children (Thorne & Yalom, 1992). While the focus of this study was on the influence of PK on fathers’ involvement with their children, a postmodern feminist perspective provided a way to understand this influence on family forms and the gendered experiences of individual family members.

The focus on expanded ways of involvement provides a wider lens with which to view the involvement fathers have with their children. This expanded view gives a deeper understanding to father involvement moving beyond traditional categories and building on the strengths of fathers, rather than on deficits (Palkovitz, 1997). A goal of this study was to go beyond a checklist description of father involvement and to describe and explain the influence of PK on the nature and experiences of fathers’ involvement with their children. The next stage of father involvement is neither a
return to a past ideal nor a predictable step in a sequence; instead, it is an unfolding of many ideals and images of fatherhood (Levine & Pittinsky, 1997; Stacey, 1992).
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Overview

Research has quantified, through time diaries and more precise time charting (McBride, 1990), fathers’ involvement with their children (Pleck, 1997). Yet few studies have focused on the meanings fathers hold of involvement with their children (Doherty et al., 1996; Pleck, 1997). Further development of an involvement perspective rests on studies of father involvement to capture difficult to quantify constructs (Dollahite & Hawkins, 1997).

Qualitative research methodologies are used when researchers desire access to people’s belief systems and interpretation of phenomena (Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Taylor & Bogdan, 1984). Qualitative family research is particularly concerned with experiences within the family and between families and outside systems (Gilgun, 1992). The goal of this qualitative research study was not to discover how many or what kind of person participates in Promise Keepers conferences. Rather, the goal is to capture the complex meanings and interpretations formed after attending a PK conference that influence fathers’ involvement with their children (Morse, 1994; Taylor & Bogdan, 1984).

The historical and cultural views of father involvement have changed over time (Griswold, 1997; LaRossa, 1997; Pleck, 1997). Some views have lingered, while other views disappeared. Instead of having one dominant view of father involvement,
fathers are faced with an array of diverse and contending patterns (Gerson, 1997a, 1997b). The next prevailing view of father involvement may not be a predictable step in an evolutionary sequence or a return to a previous step, but an ambiguous unfolding of many definitions of father involvement (Stacey, 1992).

Daly (1992a) discusses five components that articulate the challenges and opportunities for qualitative methodologies and the study of families. These include access to private spheres, studying family parts and wholes, the researcher's role, personal experiences, and ethics. These components will be discussed, followed by a description of the methods used in this study.

Qualitative Methodologies and the Study of Families

Gaining Access to Private Spheres

Families are sometimes thought of as one of the most private and closed of all social groups. By keeping certain behaviors from the scrutiny of outsiders, families construct and maintain a unique self-definition (Daly, 1992a). Qualitative research involves methods that encourage the establishing of relationships that have the potential to build trust between the researcher and participants. Developing rapport by entering the participants' setting encourages the participants to share experiences in their own language at their own pace. By being open to the participants' unique contexts, the qualitative researcher can access the private meanings in families (Daly, 1992a). Interviews and observations in the participant's setting allow for opportunities to understand how private meanings are constructed that are unique to each family. In this sense, qualitative research with families is taking the obvious and, through comparative analysis, contrasting and comparing it with other research.
(Daly, 1992a). A goal of this research was to develop relationships with participants that involved trust and rapport to ensure those private meanings were met with respect. The respect acknowledged the privacy and boundaries present and unique to each family.

**Family Parts and Wholes**

Qualitative research can accommodate multiple perspectives and provide in-depth accounts of family experiences (Daly, 1992a). The family is the unit of analysis and, therefore, requires attention to the composite of family members' meanings and experiences. Daly (1992a) suggests that "key informants" may act as gatekeepers to certain meanings and images in the family, but multiple perspectives from within the family are valuable and must be attained by including many family members.

There has been considerable concern regarding the validity of fathers' self-report assessment of their involvement (Pleck, 1997). In his review of the research on father involvement using father-mother pairs, Pleck (1997) cites several studies that have found high agreement between fathers' reports of involvement and wives' assessment of their involvement (Levant, Slattery, & Loiseville, 1987; Smith & Morgan, 1994, as cited in Pleck, 1997). A particular challenge, Daly (1994) states, is obtaining men's perspectives of family experiences because of the difficulty in recruiting men for qualitative research. Methodological studies have centered around time diaries from large representative samples from which fathers' time could be coded. Daly (1992b, 1993, 1996) suggests that recruiting fathers for qualitative interviews is particularly difficult. Daly suggests "face to face contact between the researcher and eligible participants as part of the recruitment process" (1996, p. 468).
This study involved gaining multiple perspectives of father involvement. Couple interviews, in addition to individual interviews with the fathers and mothers, were conducted to address a methodological issue of the validity of assessments of father involvement (Pleck, 1997). This practice also follows the idea of cross-checking for consistency between different accounts of the same experience (Taylor & Bogdan, 19884). The focus of this study was to capture the meanings and interpretations fathers made from attending a PK conference, and the influence those meanings had on involvement with their children. Children were not interviewed in this study because the focus is not on the father-child relationship, but on the fathers' assessment of their involvement, based on their participation in PK.

**Researcher's Role**

Daly (1992a) suggests the researcher must be aware of personal motives. The researcher must determine how much to participate, how structured the interviews will be, and how involved the researcher will become in the families' lives. The researcher may encounter various expectations from participants, such as questions about the research process, help with parenting issues, or advice about marital issues. Individual and family expectations can be engaged genuinely and positively, when the relationship is based on a fair exchange of information, is more conversational (Marshall & Rossman, 1989), and strives to establish a mutual working relationship with participants (Daly, 1992a). Disclosure from the participant, sought by the researcher, may elicit a personal request for more information or assistance with a particular issue. To the degree that the researcher is trained and is able, giving information to the participant about the subject matter of the study is appropriate (Daly, 1992a). Daly (1992a) suggests that careful monitoring of the researcher's
involvement in the family system is important to maintain a focus on the research agenda.

A goal of this study was to conduct research in a way that is respectful and helpful to the families interviewed. A primary focus during the interviews was to explore the research question and the participants' experiences. A clarifying and descriptive approach to participant responses served the goals of the research. The possibility of moving toward a therapeutic approach was present and was monitored carefully, although interviews did not move in a therapeutic direction. If a couple or individual wanted to seek therapeutic assistance, the researcher was prepared with a written description of resources available for participants.

Personal Experiences

When using qualitative methods, the researcher is the primary instrument of data collection and analysis (Rafuls & Moon, 1996). Personal experiences influence the collection and analysis of data, stimulating personal responses that can shape the direction of interview questions and the exploration process. My family experiences, professional experiences, and personal interests have contributed to this study. I am a 38-year-old white male who has been married for 11 years. My experiences as a father of two children, ages 6 and 4, and as a family life educator in a church setting have had a strong impact on my motivation to study the influence of PK on father involvement. Before starting this research project I attended a PK conference May 23–24, 1997; read the Promise Keepers organization's primary book, Seven Promises of a Promise Keeper; and resigned my full-time position as a director of family life and youth ministries to remain consistently involved with our children while completing a doctoral degree. These actions have sensitized me to the program and
messages of PK and enabled me to maintain a congruency between my beliefs regarding father involvement and my personal behavior.

My initial reaction to PK, like that of others (Abraham, 1997; Pharr, 1996), was skeptical, judgmental, and dismissive of PK as a group of extreme fundamentalists intent on returning to the “good old days” of the traditional family that never really were (Coontz, 1995). My early encounters with PK and participants of the conferences occurred during my professional tenure in a local church of a major denomination. Interactions through professional networks, reading promotional materials from the PK organization, and meeting eager conference attendees seemed to confirm my assessment of PK as a rigid, ultraconservative approach. Dismissing this organization was easy as I grouped them together with other “right wing radicals.”

I attended the day-and-a-half conference held at Soldier Field in Chicago, May 23–24, 1997. My attitudes about attending a PK conference included reluctance, skepticism, and cynicism at being with what I thought were self-righteous men. My demeanor was cool and analytical. I was a researcher who was expecting messages of male dominance and female degradation. I was among 35,000 men who had traveled mostly from a five-state area (i.e., Wisconsin, Illinois, Iowa, Michigan, and Indiana).

While I attended the day-and-a-half conference, I listened intently and watched carefully for messages that would satisfy my assumptions. As the conference ensued, I found myself participating in the singing and praying and observing and talking with other participants. By late afternoon of the second day, I was still waiting for what would confirm my original assumptions. I had heard sermons and presentations, yet I found no overt message propping up male authority at women’s expense. I did hear messages that honoring and respecting women meant “becoming
their servants." The spoken messages of male leadership conformed to PK printed material. "The essence of the Promise Keeper's leadership is not dictatorial, but rather is earned through serving his wife and children" (Abraham, 1997, p. 59). I began to suspect that my judgment of these participants may have been swift and narrow.

I left the stadium that day inspired to be more involved with my own family, not because of some message to take leadership and control in my family, but because I was reminded of how much my family means to me. I, like many PK critics, do not support a patriarchal control of women and children. On the other hand, I am drawn by the ethical, moral, and spiritual emphasis of men's genuine involvement in promoting their families' welfare.

My experience made me realize that many men intend to be better husbands and fathers, without considering the implications of the spoken messages of male leadership. The most typical response I observed from men attending the PK conference was outright support and enthusiasm for being involved in their families. A second kind of response I observed, to a lesser degree, was a kind of casual interest that suggested a "take it or leave it" kind of attitude toward PK. The participants might have returned home more inspired and challenged to be more involved. Yet, after all the enthusiasm and admonitions, I continued to wonder what meanings do these men infer from the PK conferences? And what influences did these meanings have on their involvement with their children?

Acknowledging personal experiences and interest in the research topic were helpful in an ongoing process of developing theoretical sensitivity, "the ability to see with analytical depth what is there" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 76). By journaling, participating in ongoing discussions with a research group, and engaging a process of
reflexivity, I identified personal biases and reactions to participants’ responses. My approach to data collection was respectfully curious. I found myself enjoying tremendously the process of talking with couples together and with partners individually and attempting to understand how each of the men was uniquely influenced by attending PK. Data analysis was more complex than I had originally expected it would be. As I began to know the participants, I realized that their stories were not simple and that the influence of PK was not one dimensional. There were many currents present in the data, requiring multiple facets to describe the influence of PK on fathers’ participation in the family and their involvement with their children.

Now, 11 months since attending the day-and-a-half PK conference, I have listened to stories from participants that have shown PK’s remarkable influence on them as individuals and on their families. I have become aware of and empathetic to the dissatisfaction the men described in their lives and the distance they felt from their families. I have also become more empathetic and understanding to the gendered areas of responsibility in the traditional family form and to the zealousness of the women in the study, whose husbands’ lack of participation in the family and involvement with their children motivated them to seek changes. I was moved by the excitement and changes they described as occurring in their involvement with their children and families, yet saddened at the prospect that these changes might be only temporary. Perhaps my unrest still lies with the direction of an assumed family form that PK implies for all participants.

Ethics

Informed consent is necessary once participants understand the purpose of the study and includes participants’ understanding the nature of confidentiality and their
right to withdraw at any time during the study. Due to the emergent nature of interviewing, participants were encouraged to draw their own boundaries of privacy (Daly, 1992a). Emphasizing the purpose of this project, I explained to participants that all questions would pertain to the topic of this study. I further explained:

If at any time during the interview, should you be uncomfortable with a question or find it inappropriate, please do not answer. If you would like to answer a question, but would prefer not to have it recorded, please indicate that to me, so I can turn the tape recorder off. If at any time you would like to withdraw from the study or would like a segment of the interview withdrawn from the study, please indicate this to me.

I explained to the participants the confidentiality of their comments and their anonymity and reminded them prior to each interview of their right to privacy and to withdraw at any time they wished. A goal of this research was to maintain a respectful stance toward participants' privacy, while also obtaining data to illuminate the influence of PK on father involvement.

Recruitment Process

The goal of this study was to capture the meanings and interpretations men and women made from men's attendance at PK conferences, and the influence of those meanings and interpretations on their involvement with their children. However, recruiting men for qualitative research has proved difficult for at least one researcher (Daly 1992a, 1993, 1996). One suggestion for successful recruiting is for the researcher to have face-to-face contact with eligible participants as part of the recruiting process (Daly, 1996). This procedure can lessen anxiety, raise curiosity, provide reasons to participate, and establish a relationship with fathers before a commitment is made (Daly, 1996).
Recruitment

The process of finding informants followed Taylor and Bogdan’s (1984) procedures for gaining access to private settings because the nature of the research question involved access into private settings and situations, the homes of the participants, and their family lives. One basic procedure in obtaining entry to private settings is the snowballing technique; “Start with a small number of people, win their trust, and ask them to introduce you to others” (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984, p. 24). Taylor and Bogdan (1984) suggest being involved in the experiences of the community of people; identifying friends, relatives, and personal contacts that may be have the “potential for developing insight and deepening understanding” (p. 18); contacting agencies and organizations that serve the people likely to be potential volunteers; advertising in local newspapers; appearing at local sites, and offering handouts to potential volunteers, describing the study. I used all the above strategies to locate potential participants.

The first step in the recruitment process was attending a Promise Keepers conference in May 1997 in Chicago. I attended the conference with 16 men, some of whom were aware that my attendance was part of researching PK and father involvement. This experience allowed me to meet and interact with participants and experience and discuss the conference with them. Attending the conference with a group of men gave me the opportunity to build trust and establish contacts and a network system. The second step in the recruitment process was to identify individuals who met the criteria for participation. I contacted six individuals who were asked to introduce this researcher to others who also met the criteria and to identify churches known to encourage men to attend PK conferences. None of the
individuals asked to identify potential participants were study participants. During this process, one church was contacted with initial information but had no further contact with this researcher. This approach was effective in generating contacts through participants referring someone they knew that met the criteria for participation. Twenty-seven couples were referred to the researcher by participants throughout the data collection period. Eighteen couples participated. Of the nine who did not participate, five could not be reached and did not return messages; three were unable due to time availability and scheduling conflicts; and after hearing about the study, one couple was not comfortable participating in it. This procedure was successful, considering the difficulty in obtaining men for qualitative research and the success of face-to-face contact that Daly (1996) reports.

The sample of participants represented the same experience, attending a Promise Keepers conference, rather than representing a particular demographic variable (Morse, 1994). In theoretical sampling, the actual number of cases studied is relatively unimportant. What is important is the potential of each case to aid the researcher in developing theoretical insight into the phenomenon under study (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984), in this case, the influence of PK on father involvement. Researchers have noted the repetition of findings after interviewing 15 of the same type of people (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984); therefore, a goal of 15 couples, with a range of 10–20 couples was considered sufficient.

A criteria-based selective sampling was used (Rafuls & Moon, 1996). Selective sampling is based on a predetermined set of criteria based on the research question. One benefit of selective sampling is it provides a guide for the researcher in selecting the sample (Rafuls & Moon, 1996). Participation criteria included attendance of the father at one or more day-and-a-half conferences; couples in a
heterosexual marriage; parents of at least one child, 10 years old or younger; and agreement to participate in one individual interview and one couple interview. The criteria provided some homogeneity in the sample (Daly, 1996). All potential participants were contacted and invited to participate in the study, provided the above criteria had been met. An attempt was made to involve dual-earner couples in the study because this family form represents a majority in the U.S. population (Stacey, 1992; U.S. Census Bureau, 1997). A request was made to those referring people for the study that dual-earner families were preferred, but not necessary, for participation in this study. Of the 18 couples, eight were dual-earner couples.

The first contact with participants was to provide information about the study, answer questions, screen inquirers for participation, and gather demographic information (see Appendix A for telephone script). I contacted all 4 of the initial names provided by the key informants and 11 men suggested by a friend or acquaintance as possible candidates for this study. Additionally, I contacted 3 men whom I had met while at the PK conference. The initial phone contact involved a brief description of the purpose of the study, a review of the criteria for participation, and scheduling an interview. In some cases, I waited while the men consulted with their wives about participating in this study. Often, a return telephone call was necessary so men could discuss the project with their wives and set an appropriate time for the interviews. One to two days before the interview, depending on the amount of time between the first contact and the scheduled interview, I called to confirm the interview time and directions to their home. A demographic survey (see Appendices B and C for husband and wife demographic form) and two informed consent forms (see Appendix D) approved through Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (see Appendix E) were mailed to each household prior to the
interview. When time did not permit mailing the forms, I explained to the participants that I ordinarily mailed them and asked if bringing them with me was acceptable. In each instance, this arrangement was acceptable to the participants. Great care was taken to attend to and to respect the schedules and time commitments of each family agreeing to participate in the interviews. Following introductions, I provided the couple with an oral description of the study and a brief personal introduction. I reviewed the content on the consent form with them, highlighting confidentiality, anonymity, and their right to withdraw from the study at any time, now or in the future. I explained the use of the tape recordings and the procedure for coding the tapes. I invited questions and answered them, then asked them to sign the consent form.

Data Collection Process and Procedures

Data collection occurred through a series of interviews that followed a structured format using open-end questions, observation, audiotapes, field notes, theoretical and analytical memos, and a research journal (Rafuls & Moon, 1996; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The goal was to build trust and get to know each of the participants and for them to get to know me (Daly, 1996). The session began with a review of demographic information that they provided for me on the provided forms, which allowed me to engage them in conversation about themselves and their families. An interview guide (see Appendices F, G, and H for the couple, individual father, and individual mother interview guides) was used to ensure that key topics were explored with participants. This guide was used to address primary areas of the interview and served as a guide to facilitate discussion with the participants (Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Taylor & Bogdan, 1984). Interviews were audiotaped and
transcribed verbatim. QSR NUD*IST, a computer software program for qualitative data analysis, was used in the analysis of the gathered data (Qualitative Solutions and Research, 1997).

The very nature of qualitative methodology allows for ongoing evaluation and adjustment in the collection and analysis of data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). To refine the interview schedule and procedures, individual and joint interviews for the first two couples occurred on campus at the Center for Psychological Services (CCPS). This location permitted the committee chair to observe the interviews and provide feedback regarding the interview process. In addition, the alternative sequencing of individual and joint interviews was tried. The first couple participated in individual interviews prior to a joint interview. The second couple participated in the joint interview prior to individual interviews. At the end of each interview, the first two couples were asked for feedback regarding the sequence of their interviews. Following the interviews with the first two couples, a meeting was held with the committee chair for a review of and adjustment to the data collection and analysis process. The first two couples discussed the importance of establishing the relationship with me together as a couple prior to their individual interviews. Both couples felt that it might be too uncomfortable doing the individual interviews first. It was determined, if possible according to participants' availability and schedules, that the joint interview would occur prior to the individual interviews as a way of breaking the ice and establishing rapport with the couples. Interviews employed open-end questions with the purpose of learning about individual and shared meanings (Daly, 1992a) and events and activities that cannot be observed directly (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984).
The joint interview was conducted first to develop rapport with the couple and allow a chance for us to become comfortable with one another. The overall goal of the couple interviews was to obtain a description of and explore the details of men's experience with PK and their perception of its impact on their family. The overall goal of the individual interview with the fathers was to gather and clarify information from the joint interview and to discuss further their observations of PK and its impact on their involvement with their children. The overall goal of the individual interviews with the mothers was to gather and clarify information from the joint interview and to discuss their observations of the influence of PK on their husband’s involvement with their children.

Description of Sample

The 36 participants interviewed for this study were Caucasian and ranged from working to upper middle class (Hughes & Perry-Jenkins, 1994). Ages of the participants ranged from 33 to 43 years of age. Participants' education included 2 high school degrees; 11 high school degrees, plus some college or technical school; 19 bachelor of arts degrees; three master of arts degrees; and one medical degree. The average length of marriage was 11.7 years, with a range from 3 to 21 years. The median and mode was 13. The number of children per couple ranged from one to five: one couple had one child, eight couples had two children, six couples had three children, one couple had four children, and two couples had five children. Eighteen men and eight women were employed outside the home. Of those who worked, one man and three women maintained their paid work offices in the home. The number of PK conferences that the men had attended ranged from one to four: seven men had been to one conference, two men had attended two conferences, six men had...
attended three conferences, and three men had attended four conferences. Table 3 provides demographic information as well as notes the general career area of each participant. Please note that the plus sign (+) in the education column refers to some college attendance, but no degree received. Pseudonyms are used throughout the study to protect the privacy of the participants and anyone to whom they referred. Quotes from participants’ interviews are cited verbatim. The reference to a “few participants” indicates a number ranging from 3 to 5; “some participants” indicates a number ranging from 6 to 9; “many participants” indicates a number ranging from 10 to 13; and “most participants” indicates a number 14 to 17.

Sensitizing Ideas and Interview Topics

This section will review the sensitizing concepts and the interview topics included in the initial interview guide. The involvement perspective concerned inquiry into the contextual factors and sources that influence father involvement based on the needs of children. This perspective proposes a moral imperative that fathers possess the desire and ability to care for the next generation and provides for a broad description of involvement. Interview topics included reasons for participation, influences for participation, and assessment of PK.

A postmodern feminist analysis involves inquiry into the family form and the differential experiences of family members, such as division and organization of household labor and child rearing. Interview topics included asking about family form and the decision-making process regarding domestic and child care responsibilities.
Table 3

Participant Demographics

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<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Wage</th>
<th>Work</th>
<th>Conferences Attended</th>
<th>Number of Children</th>
<th>Years Married</th>
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</table>
Analysis of the Data

Analysis followed a modified version of Taylor and Bogdan's (1984) process involving multiple readings of data; recording hunches, interpretations, and ideas; searching for emerging themes; developing categories, concepts and theoretical propositions; reading the literature; and developing a narrative that connects the themes found in the data. A modified version of Strauss and Corbin's (1990) coding procedure, a "systematic way of developing and refining interpretations of the data" (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984, p. 136), was used in the data analysis process. Open coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) was intended for conceptualizing, comparing, and categorizing the data and involved labeling phenomenon, discovering categories, naming categories, and developing properties and dimensions of categories. Axial coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) was used to explore the relationship between categories, based on the characteristics of each category. The computer software program QSR NUD*IST v.4 was used to manage, sort, categorize, identify themes, and explore the relationships between categories within the data. This tool assisted in the mechanics of data analysis and in making comparisons. As data were collected during and following each interview, notes and memos were made describing emerging themes and categories (Miles & Huberman, 1994). This process facilitated subsequent interviews by identifying possible themes and content to pursue. For example, the significance of accountability groups emerged as participants identified the importance of accountability groups as a direct influence of PK. Full analysis of each interview did not happen prior to the next interview. The analysis was guided by the conceptual framework, participants' experiences with PK, their own involvement as fathers, and my own understanding and life experiences.
Transcripts were read once while listening to the audiotaped recordings of the interviews to check for typists' accuracy. All interviews were read a second time for immersion into the data and to gain a conceptual image of their content. During the third reading, a list consisted of categories and themes covered in the interview was developed. In addition, field notes were read to facilitate identifying themes and constructing categories. An initial list of codes was developed from reading transcripts and field notes (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Beginning with the start list of codes, the data were coded, using the software program QSR NUD*IST v.4. Codes were collected and stored in categories called nodes. The start list expanded during the fourth reading, as the transcripts were coded, resulting in 61 codes (see Appendix I for original list of codes). The analysis continued as categories of data were connected to one another, revealing patterns and connections between nodes (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Coded data within specified nodes were read and analyzed to determine the relationship between categories of codes. Codes were expanded and consolidated through nodes, resulting in four nodes and 23 sibling nodes (see Appendix J for final list of codes). A sibling node is a subcategory of a primary category or node. Throughout the analysis, summaries of node reports, field notes, and theoretical memos were consulted to aid in the analysis.

Criteria to Establish Validity

The quality of this study can be determined by the criteria of credibility and trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Rafuls & Moon, 1996). Credibility refers to issues of the design of the research, and trustworthiness refers to accuracy related to findings. The guidelines noted below were followed to establish valid interpretations of the data.
Credibility

The provision that other researchers would find a similar phenomenon in a similar setting is addressed by providing a theoretical perspective and explicit description of the research methodology. Providing information about criteria for participation, interview questions, description of the researcher's role, method of coding procedures, and development of the analysis will allow the reader to understand the results in context (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984). In addition, verbatim accounts will illustrate conceptualizations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Rafuls & Moon, 1996).

Trustworthiness

The process of reporting on human action nested in private spheres is immediately relegated to "constructs of the second degree, which represent the differences between every day and scientific conceptions of reality" (Shultz, 1971, as cited in Daly, 1992b, p. 113). The difference of actual participant experience from scientific reports is inherent in research and includes some level of subjectivity (Daly, 1992b). Present to some degree in all interpretive research, trustworthiness is not "a question of presence or absence, but of degree" (Daly, 1992b, p. 113).

The congruency between what the researcher observed and what was actually present was addressed through triangulation (i.e., the use of multiple data sources). In addition to multiple interviews (i.e., couple, father, and mothers individually), observations, audiotapes and transcriptions, field notes, continued reading in father involvement, and discussion of analysis with the committee chair occurred. The
multiple forms of data also provided cross checks, as each form of data informed the others (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984).

Researchers can achieve a higher level of trustworthiness by carefully planning the steps in the procedure of the study (Daly, 1992b; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Strauss & Corbin, 1992). Daly suggested that taking stock of both the literature and personal experiences, discussed previously, enhances theoretical sensitivity (1992a). The multiple interviews that involve individuals and couples allowed "undirected emergence of key themes and a more effective exploration of those themes" (Daly, 1992b, p. 123). Becoming an insider, through participation in a PK conference, was advantageous in establishing a working relationship with participants that resulted in enthusiastic conversations with participants' describing their families, experiences with PK, and the impact they believe it had made on their families and on the fathers' involvement with the children.
CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Overview

The process of interviewing fathers, mothers, and couples has generated a snapshot of how PK has influenced father’s involvement with their children. Eighteen couples were interviewed during the winter of 1998 in the Great Lakes region of the United States. Twelve couples lived in a large city region with population under 150,000, four couples lived in a rural setting, and two couples lived in a metropolitan region population under 200,000. The information used in this study comes from those individual and couple interviews. The couples were interviewed several months following the PK march on Washington D.C., “Stand In the Gap,” which drew from 700,000 (King, 1997) to 1.25 million (Canfield, 1998) men, and during the PK organizational transition to an all-volunteer organization.

At the end of the 20th century, women and men are feeling the tension of an ideological shift from a traditional to a pluralistic family (Doherty, 1992). Men are confronted with assuming their share of the second shift (Hochschild, 1989), balancing work and family (Levine & Pittinsky, 1997), and becoming responsible, involved fathers (Doherty et al., 1996). This is not the first time in the history of fathering that changes in the culture and the family have influenced the involvement of fathers in their families and with their children. Variations of family forms will emerge as ideals and images of mothers and fathers unfold. During this ideological
shift, PK is directing men through the perceived confusion and giving them guidance on how to be fathers and husbands. As one woman from the study stated when referring to PK’s purpose, “It [a difficult world] is going to be organized . . . and handed to them.”

During this time of tension and confusion, 18 couples shared their experiences with PK and their perception of its influence on their family and fathers’ involvement with their children. The participants were enthusiastic and excited about the outcome from the men’s participation in PK and the difference it made in their families. The couples expressed unguarded eagerness to talk about PK and hoped others could learn more about it as a result of this study. Each of the participants was reluctant to report any criticism about PK or its influence on their family.

These couples were similar to one another in that they described their family form as following a traditional division of male and female responsibilities, with final authority given to the husband. However, as will be demonstrated in this chapter, these participants also described discomfort with a traditional form of family life while adhering to it.

Research on fathers is shifting from a deficit model to an involvement perspective, that is, “from the study of father absence to the study of father presence” (Levine & Pitt, 1995, p. 26). These couples described PK as influencing fathers to increase their involvement with their children and to increase their participation in performing household labor. Although the men in this study increased their presence in the home, their ideological family form and division of responsibilities within and outside the home did not alter as a result of PK participation. Paradoxically, PK offered men a chance to change and to remain the same. From a systems perspective, a first-order change is change that occurs in a system without changing the
fundamental rules of the system (Piercy & Wetchler, 1996). A second-order change is change that has occurred because the fundamental rules of the system have changed (Piercy & Wetchler, 1996). These families in this study experienced first-order change, in that father involvement increased, but not second-order change, in that the families' rules regarding gendered division of responsibilities did not change. However, the participants expressed satisfaction with this level of change, and all cases expressed joy and thankfulness for the changes.

Participants described PK as one of several means that contributed to men's involvement with their children. Nine men described PK as a "turning point" that changed their focus from self to their families and children. These men and their wives spoke of PK as an "turning point" that changed the men's thinking and living and prompted them to participate in other experiences to continue those changes. The remaining nine men described PK as a "spark" that ignited greater involvement in their families and with their children. These men and their wives spoke of PK as part of an ongoing process to address the men's spirituality and responsibility as fathers and husbands.

All the participants reported the fathers' greater participation in the family and involvement with the children. Expanded involvement did not occur overnight, however. Participants were satisfied with small steps of change and were happy to be going in the "right direction." Men and women described better communication between fathers and children and an observable change in displaying affection to the children. These men described intentionally developing a relationship with each of their children and attempting to know and understand them as individuals.

Not only does this study address how PK has influenced fathers' involvement with their children, it also addresses PK as a form of family life education. It will be
shown that PK conferences and accountability groups function as a form of family life education through integration of spirituality, religion, and parenting directives.

This chapter is divided into two sections: participants' accounts of PK's influence on father involvement with their children, and how PK functions as family life education. In the first section, men's dissatisfaction with their lives is portrayed as motivating them to attend a PK conference, which is uniquely structured to address this dissatisfaction. Men's decision to attend PK resulted from being introduced to PK by other men or as a result of the men's wives voicing dissatisfaction with their husbands' participation in the family and involvement with the children. PK was not seen as the only answer to men's dissatisfaction, but as a possible answer. Subtle variations in men's expectations of PK are seen as forming the basis of what the men in the study were seeking. The men's sudden awareness of fathering led to an examination of their priorities and a realization of their children's value and motivated them to become more involved with their children. In the second section, participants' views of PK as family life education and what constitutes attractive family life education experiences are addressed.

Promise Keepers' Influence on Fathers' Involvement With Their Children

Introduction

In this section, the decision to attend PK as a result of men's dissatisfaction with their lives and as a result their wives' dissatisfaction with their husbands' participation in the family and involvement with their children is described. A Christian direction, information, and support to be a father, and connection with other men at the conference and in accountability groups provide answers to men's
dissatisfaction. A sudden awareness of the nature of fathering is described as a result of the men realizing what is important to them. Developing better communication, intentionally developing relationships with their children, and taking greater leadership in the family are the results of men's participation in PK that participants described.

Disappointment and Distance: A Decision to Attend

The men in the study described a dissatisfaction with their lives that prompted their attendance at PK. These men specifically identified their own spirituality, their knowledge and capability as a father and family member, and their relationships with other men as areas of dissatisfaction. The section below describes those areas of dissatisfaction and is followed by a review of the men's decision to attend PK and the influence of their wives and other men on their decision.

Dissatisfaction With Their Lives

All the men in the study described a certain sense of dissatisfaction in at least one of three areas: their life's direction and spirituality, being a father and family member, and relationships with other men. These areas overlapped as men described what prompted their participation in PK. For example, when men described a desire for friendship with other men, they also stated their desire to learn from and explore the challenges and struggles of fathering from other men. The men in the study described this sense of dissatisfaction in both subtle and bold ways, as they discussed what prompted their PK participation.
Men’s Life Direction and Spirituality. Six men in the study described dissatisfaction with their life’s direction and their spirituality. All of the men spoke of their spirituality as the quality of their relationship with God. The concern of these six men in the study was that their relationship with God felt distant or nonexistent and that their spiritual lives needed attention. The men related this spiritual need to confusion about their life’s direction and sense of purpose and meaning. Several men described a feeling that “life was not quite complete,” and a history of trying, un成功地, several avenues to find something that “makes sense.” Men described a desire to address their personal needs spiritually. Some men in this study described struggling with the loss of parents and continuing to look for answers to better understand the loss. Others described a dissatisfaction with themselves. One man eloquently said, “I wanted to go beyond where I was and who I was... getting beyond basic existence and survival.” For some men this “getting beyond” included addressing life’s disappointments, frustrations, and questions that had remained unresolved. Leo described an emptiness and helplessness that prompted him to attend PK.

Leo: I think the thing that kind of prompted me was I finally came to the realization that all these other things in my life were... I was coming up empty. I have a lot of things, but I really hadn’t found happiness. I’m sure that you know about my sister, Sally, and the problems she went through. I felt so helpless then. I realize that there were so many things in my life that I had no control over. I realized that I needed God. It was just a real humbling time, I guess. It was also a wonderful time because I realized I can’t... I was real prideful and I was real full of myself and really feeling like I could do just about anything on my own. Then I realized that wasn’t true. That was kind of prior to all this other stuff happening. That was kind of what was going on in my life.

In other cases, there was a disappointment with their own attitude and behavior. In the case of Calvin, a father of three, he had become cynical and disappointed with his life. He reports a problem with anger that had begun to affect
his family life; he was lost in understanding his anger and pinpointing its source. Calvin related, “I did not want to be controlled by that kind of attitude. I wanted to find a balance in myself.”

A great deal of men’s dissatisfaction with their lives is related to their involvement in their families and with their children. One participant suggested that the key to being a better father and getting “in tune” was to make changes from the inside out, “making sure I was as close to God as I need to be in order to be a good influence on my family . . . you can’t do one without the other.” As will be discussed later, there was enthusiasm at discovering that being a better father and husband was part of the men’s spirituality and life’s direction. Dissatisfaction with spirituality and involvement in the family and with their children, while separated here, blend together in the lives of the men in the study. The next section reviews the dissatisfaction the men have in being the kind of fathers and family members they have been and their search for direction as a father and family member.

**Being a Father and Family Member.** Seven men described dissatisfaction with their involvement in the family and with their children. Men discussed needing to put into perspective their lives as fathers and family members. The desire to be a better father and husband was accompanied by a frustration of not knowing how. As one women related, “Men are realizing that they’re not the father or husband they should be and are hearing that [PK] is the place to go that might help them . . . and encourage them to be a better person.” Many fathers were searching to identify whether the issues and concerns they had about their family were similar to those of other men. They were interested in knowing if they were like other men. This
normalizing function of PK is described below by Levon, who also voiced a desire to be challenged to think more about how he fathers and is involved with his family.

Levon: I think it was the chance to kind of see if all the things that are in my life that maybe aren't as nice as I would like them to be are similar to everyone else's. Basic problems or basic concerns. . . . I knew I was going to be faced with the fact that some of the things I know I don't do or should be doing.

Other men described dissatisfaction with their knowledge about being a father. Some expressed this general feeling as "something was missing . . . feeling a need for self-improvement." Men did not feel prepared as fathers and realized preparation was needed if their expectations of themselves as fathers were going to be met. Kris, the father of four children under 10 years of age, described his desire to learn more about fathering and his realization that learning about fathering was not part of his formal or informal education.

Kris: I said, "Well, gosh, I want to learn more." The more I watched the tape [describing PK], the more I realized that they teach you a lot of things, but they don't ever teach you how to be a husband. They don't ever teach you how to be a father, you know. I mean, there's no class in school or college, you know. And that here in these tapes, they were giving you very applicable things that you should do, that you should follow, that should be examples for you. And I said, "You know, I really want to be a good husband and I really want to be a good father and I really want to learn." Maybe this was just what I needed. So that's when I decided that I wanted to get involved [in PK].

As one woman described, "Most guys want to be better fathers and husbands, but they don't know how . . . [PK] gives them the knowledge that they just don't know where to find or they don't know where to get."

Some fathers also described a growing distance between their wives and children and were dissatisfied with their relationships. For example, Jack described the time prior to PK as one of personal searching and a growing distance from the family.
Jack: I guess I was hoping to get things put into perspective a little bit better. What I could do to be a better father and a better husband and lead the household better? I didn’t necessarily think, “I want to go there and learn how to take over control.” I guess I didn’t know what I was going to find, but I was hoping that I would find some people who could show me how things could be better. I think those were my expectations.

Jack described the problem of his distance from the family and the need to be a better father and husband during the couple interview. He goes on to describe feeling shut out of the family, not meeting his responsibilities, and doing what he could to avoid them.

Jack: I’m thinking back at about that time. I think that I was, like you mentioned before, I was getting shut out of the family. I wasn’t involved in a lot of the stuff when I was working and I wasn’t really holding up my part of the bargain. I was spending more time away golfing or hanging out with guys and not really . . . So I felt like I was drifting away from the family. I think that’s kind of what set up the situation [of attending PK].

During her individual interview, Darla, Jack’s wife, echoed Jack’s description.

Darla: When he said yesterday how he felt like he was being kind of shut out and just doing his own stuff. It was getting bad. That was getting bad. The more he could do outside the home and have fun, no matter what it was. I don’t even remember that until I talk about it. I don’t consciously think about that all the time. It was getting like that.

The combination of feeling inadequate as a father and dissatisfaction with being distant from the family had an isolating effect on the men in the study. However, it was not only distance from their families, but isolation from other fathers that prompted their attendance. This next section reviews the dissatisfaction of being disconnected from other men.

Relationships With Other Men. Five men described dissatisfaction with relationships with other men or, more precisely, the lack of relationships with other men. Several men described loneliness from being disconnected from other men. The men in the study described a growing discontentment from being isolated from
friendship with men, yet they were unsure of where and how to satisfy these connections. Some men in the study looked forward to joining other men to share and compare their concerns, struggles, and friendship. One man described this disconnection from men as a “sense of lacking [in myself] in relationships with other men.” Some men had become isolated because of the conditions of their work schedules or family commitments. For example, Sam, who is the fulltime caretaker of his disabled wife when not at work, described the opportunity to connect with men as, “going with the guys and being able to share that time and hear about maybe their experiences with [PK] and how it’s affected their lives or just to talk with other guys.” Some men had become isolated because of their own preferences and desires not to connect with other men. For example, Janet described her husband’s personality as that of one who “withholds a lot of deep feelings” and that if it were not for his [PK] support group and her, “he would stay very isolated.” The men in the study described being pleasantly surprised at the opportunity to meet a variety of men, engage them in casual and intense interaction, and find that many of the concerns and struggles were shared by thousands of other men. A common experience at PK conferences is to have participants stand or come down to the main stage during a presentation or speech as a way for men to identify a problem, confess it openly, and receive counseling from other men about the problem. The men in the study felt validated by just observing the number of men who would identify themselves as struggling with an issue similar to their own.

The Decision to Attend Promise Keepers

The section below reviews the introduction of the men in this study to PK through a variety of information, presentations, and invitations. In this section, I also
discuss the men’s wives’ influence on their decision to attend PK, both when the men initiated a desire to participate and when their wives initiated a desire for their husbands to participate in PK.

**Men’s Introduction to Promise Keepers.** Other men influenced those in this study to attend a PK conference through the presentation of PK information, describing their experiences and life changes, and extending a personal invitation to attend. Participants received information about PK through enthusiastic presentations about PK conferences by men who had attended. Participants were introduced to PK through videotaped segments of actual PK conferences that were shared with participants individually or as part of a Bible study class. For example, Matt described the influence of other men providing information.

Matt: The first one was someone at our church, Gordie. He was very excited about it and I had heard a little bit about it. I really didn’t have a lot of knowledge about it. Gordie ran a 4- or 6-week Bible study on Sunday mornings and videotapes. That is really when I kind of got involved in Promise Keepers and found out what they were all about. Then after that I’d see a lot of excitement there and a lot of good things. He had actually scheduled a trip to our first Promise Keepers. We signed up and he had taken care of those, the room, and tickets and all that.

The presentations and videotapes portrayed an opportunity for spiritual renewal, to enhance family life and build relationships with men from their church. Several men in the study described an informal process of “checking PK out,” comparing information with what other men thought about PK. Often the men who introduced PK to the men in this study were coworkers, acquaintances and friends, extended family members, and Bible study leaders.

While acquiring information prompted some of the men’s participation in PK, hearing about other men’s experiences at the conference and seeing the changes in men’s lives, some dramatic, greatly influenced involvement. One man described
hearing about other men’s experiences with PK and making a comparison to issues he experienced in his own family.

Jack: So a couple of friends had been before and told me about the impact that it had on their lives. That it was wonderful. One went with his brother and dad. Another went also with the male part of his family at different locations and that it was a real good. They talked about the issues that were discussed. That was kind of dovetailing with issues that we were having of our own, especially family issues and the value of the family. As it turned out ... I approached one person and asked them if there was availability to get tickets to the nearest one, which was Detroit. I asked my father-in-law to go and he agreed. So we got two tickets and went to the one at the Silverdome.

A direct invitation from a friend or family member to participate proved critical in the process of deciding to attend a PK conference. Men in the study described the influence of a “trusted friend” as someone they had known and had become friends with prior to attending the conference. One man described continuously putting off the conference because of time and interest until he heard men from his church formally present and describe their experiences. The nature of the relationship with the person inviting and direct observation of that person’s relationship with his family prompted participation in PK. For example, Levon and Kim discuss the influence of a personal invitation.

Levon: Well, that’s when Gordie had mentioned, “Do we want to go?” I kind of brought it home to Kim and said, “Here is a chance for me to go.” It is a holiday weekend. I’ll have an extra day off on that Monday. I won’t be working. So she was very supportive of it. “Go, I want you to go.” ... It is a lot more important for me to see how someone is outside church because everyone is prim and proper in church. I’m from a small church from a small town. I’m from a church where everyone was there and wide awake ... the Bible banging type. In public they were different.

The Influence of Men’s Wives. The women in the study strongly supported their husbands’ attendance at a PK conference, either by endorsing the idea to attend or by suggesting it. In the latter cases, women had expressed certain dissatisfaction with their husbands’ participation in the family and involvement with the children.
The influence of the women in the study can be thought of in three primary ways: A husband introduced his desire to participate in PK, and she supported it; she introduced her desire for him to participate; and they both concurrently raised the idea of his participation in PK.

Ten couples described wives' supporting their husbands' desire to participate in PK. Women orally demonstrated their support and were willing to assume their husbands' weekend responsibilities while their husbands attended a conference. Women explained that supporting their husbands' desire to attend and participate in something of interest to their husbands was important to them. Moreover, women described thinking, "This will be good for him," and good for the family because of possible benefit for everyone in the family, as Pat related.

I: So your role was that of supportive?

Pat: Oh, absolutely. Anything that would allow my husband to mature in his faith, I am 100% for. I think that we will all benefit from that. Himself and all of us, the children, me, it will just make all of our lives richer. So, absolutely. He could do this every year for the rest of his life if he wishes to do so.

Among the 10 couples noted above, the women did not express dissatisfaction with their husbands' participation in the family and involvement with the children. Among the couples described below, the wives did voice dissatisfaction with their husbands' participation in the family and involvement with the children.

The response from all women in the study following their husbands' return from PK, however, was enthusiastic. This enthusiastic response raises the possibility that the women in the former group, in which husbands' initiated participation in PK, were also dissatisfied with their husbands' participation in the family and involvement with the children, but had not mentioned it.
Five couples described wives as suggesting that their husbands participate in PK, and three couples described a mutual desire for him to participate in PK. In all eight cases, there was a perception that the husband needed something he was lacking.

The eight women in this study expressed dissatisfaction with their husbands’ participation in the family and involvement with the children prior to PK participation. For example, in some cases, the women’s interest in their husbands’ participation in PK was motivated by a desire for his spiritual growth and becoming a better husband. Some women described their encouragement as “pushing him to attend.” Jessica described her role in prompting her husband, John, to attend.

Jessica: I think I had a really strong role in it. When Dave asked him to go, he was kind of on the wall about it. I was determined not to say too much because I really wanted it to be his decision. Then he kept putting it off. A couple times I said, “You better get in contact with Dave about this.” He said, “Don’t push me.” I said, “OK.” I thought this is not my job. So then I saw Dave at school. I said, “Dave, I think you should call John.” I think I did have a huge role in getting Dave to ask John even more. It was better coming from Dave than from me.

I: How come?

Jessica: I don’t know. I don’t know why. I think he was just holding back. I don’t know why it was. He thought I was pushing him for some reason and I wasn’t. I only said something twice. I think down deep he really, really knew I wanted him to go. I think part of him really didn’t want to face some of the things that he was going to have to face. But coming from Dave, he respects Dave a lot. Dave is just a nice guy. He just needed that push from someone else.

This quotation outlines a three-step process common to these eight couples: first, a wife’s encouragement of her husband to attend PK; second, the influential role of a male friend; and third, the husband taking his friend’s encouragement.

In another example, Betty wanted Jim to embrace a different lifestyle, one that moved away from “partying” to “becoming more involved in church, leading the
family spiritually, and being a better husband and father." Some women encouraged participation because areas in their relationship and family needed work and "could be better addressed by a large group of men, rather than by sitting down and discussing how [she] thought things should change." In addition, some women felt a "desperation" for changes in the family, and after hearing what PK had done for other men, encouraged their husbands to attend PK.

This section has examined men's dissatisfaction with their lives, discovery of PK, and the influence of others in prompting participation in PK. It also highlighted the wives' influence of their husbands' participation in PK and women's dissatisfaction. The next section describes PK as an answer to men's dissatisfaction.

**Promise Keepers as an Answer**

A drama commonly portrayed at PK conferences captures the attention and emotions of the men present. First, the speaker scatters half a dozen "claw type" bear traps on the stage. Then he positions his son on one end of the stage, blindfolds him, stands directly on the other side of the stage with the bear traps separating them, and tells his son to come to him. He explains to the audience of men that in today's world the tendency is to call a boy to "manhood" by expecting him to negotiate the bear traps alone. The speaker explains to the audience that to be good fathers, they need to go over to their sons and lead them through the bear traps. In other words, children need role models and companions.

While describing a father-son relationship, this drama can also serve as a metaphor of PK responsiveness to men's dissatisfaction. Instead of a blindfolded boy, it is the men who need guidance. Instead of a father leading his son through the traps, it is PK leading men through the challenges in their lives. It provides the men with a
role model and helps establish a network of companions. What remains the same is
the blindfold and the dependence on the person leading them through the traps.
Following the conferences, the men in the study described a certain relief that they
now know where to walk.

The men in the study came to PK feeling dissatisfied about their lives. The
men articulated an inability to talk with their wives and children, an emptiness in their
life, and a feeling of disconnection from themselves and other men. The men in this
study came to PK searching for trusted ways to give meaning to their lives. Men
participated in the conference because they considered PK to be a trusted and
credible source. PK was attractive to the men in the study because it demonstrated a
Christian emphasis and message, challenged and taught them as fathers and family
members, and provided men with an opportunity to connect with each other and
build relationships. Each of the men in the study believed that PK had addressed his
feelings of dissatisfaction. PK was not seen as the only answer to their dissatisfaction,
but an answer. Both women and men thought PK held great potential for providing
direction, answers, and ideas.

A Christian Direction

What may seem to be an obvious characteristic of PK and what proved to be an
essential ingredient for all participants were the Christian emphasis and messages
delivered to men. The Christian emphasis was a characteristic that invited the trust of
the participants. Each of the participants commented frequently on the Christian
nature of PK and the primary role it played in drawing their attention to the
organization. For example, Don, a father of three, explained “that people are looking
for an image they can look up to and follow.” He continued to relate his belief that a
lot of men have had role models that did not meet their expectations and that PK provided access and support “to see what is a role model.” He described role models as “the speakers or the Biblical truths coming from the speakers.” Don did find some value in the number of other men present as role models; however, “[he] did not think that’s primary.” The Christian emphasis captured the attention of participants, specifically the belief that PK is “blessed and empowered by God.” Kyle, a father of five, described PK as understandable, “blessed by God,” and not “rocket science.” Kyle observed that men have tried many avenues to be happy and have failed, and the success of PK is grounded in its Christianity.

Kyle: They’re just preaching a pretty basic fundamental message that makes sense in combination with the fact that I think it is blessed by God. Their main message is scriptural. It is the word of God. It fits. It works.

Another Christian characteristic of PK is the inclusion of religious segments: worship and hearing and reflecting on spiritual messages. The men in the study described the singing and worship interwoven with speakers and interacting with men, as a positive and effective program balance. Matt, a father of three, described his attraction to PK:

Matt: I think the biggest thing for me is that it is based on the Christian faith, No.1. You are focused on learning more about being a parent, husband, as well as hearing good speakers. . . . It’s also learning how to be . . . the good friend and it is also a really nice opportunity to praise God. The praise in there, worship opportunity. It’s kind of a lot of little things interacting and playing at the same time.

The participants believed that engaging spiritual growth first would lead to success in other areas of life, specifically the family and children. Some spoke of this belief as addressing core spiritual issues first, that is, the men’s “relationship with Christ,” as one man related. Jessica, a mother of three, described her observation of her husband’s spiritual experience and the opportunity for changes at a later time.
Jessica: I think his spiritual growth was met the most, which is a very important beginning. Second, I think that our relationship has grown from that. I think that the fatherhood thing has helped. I think the more he goes, the more he’ll get that. Right now he needed to work on these two things first. He’s always been a good dad, too. I watch for his spiritual growth, like in his spiritual reading with the kids. I’m hoping for that. Otherwise . . . I think as he goes more, he’ll get different things from it when he’s ready.

Echoing similar statements made by all the men in the study, Don said that he thought PK “is one of the answers or, if not the answer, at least another tool to find the answers. There is a whole side of spiritual life that tends to get neglected.”

The opportunity to search for answers and address personal needs spiritually is another primary characteristic of the Christian emphasis of PK. Jack, the father of two girls, described a common theme among most men in the study. Participants identified an expectation of developing a spiritual understanding of what God wanted from them as men, fathers, and husbands.

Jack: Actually a better way to probably put it, now that I think about it, is that I was looking for . . . I was trying to become the man that God had intended me to become. Instead of focusing on the things that Jack wanted to be, I was trying to set a different course and tried to determine what was God’s purpose for me. What’s God’s purpose for man? Again, in addition to some other things, I think that was one of the expectations that I had. Find that and work on that.

The Christian emphasis and messages served to earn trust from participants, engage men in worship and Biblical messages, provide an opportunity to search for answers to spiritual questions, and encourage men to base their fathering and family life on Biblical ideas. The next section describes the help PK provided the men as fathers and husbands.

**Information and Support to Be a Father**

The opportunity to gather information and support as a father was an important ingredient to the men and women in the study. The opportunity to learn
more about being a father was a significant attraction for many men. Many men realized they could "benefit and grow" and that "being a better father" was possible. For example, Verle, a father of a two-year-old, described a discovery and his excitement at learning more about fathering.

Verle: They talked about how it affected them. It really was a refreshing viewpoint to say this can help me. I don't know how to be a husband; I don't know how to be a father; I don't know anything about it. How am I going to do it? Here's an organization dedicated to saying that's why we're here. We have the model for being a Biblical father, Biblical husband, this is how. We're here to help you do that. It's kind of like when you realize you need some self-improvement, and here's someone who's willing to say here's how to do it.

Related to learning more about fathering, another common attraction to PK was the challenge posed to them as fathers and family members. The men in the study were looking for input that would stimulate them to rethink their assumptions about being a father. Men also described a desire to better understand and assess their strengths and weaknesses and find practical ideas to help them change. For example, Levon, a father of two girls, anticipated being challenged with some of those things that he does not do and should be doing. He talks about finding suggestions for improvement as a father. He spoke emphatically.

Levon: If I would not have gotten [input for improvement], it would have been a feel good, you know you are doing a good job kind of a thing. I would have felt a little bit empty at the whole thing. . . . Challenge me to think is what I ask. Don't just give me information that I already know. I think PK does that. It challenges you to think.

This expectation included providing the men in the study with, as one man said, "the questions to ask." In addition to questions, the men in the study looked to find something that applied to their specific situation. Exemplifying a common theme among the men in the study, Carl described his first time at PK as exciting and overwhelming. Subsequent times, his expectation was to "take one thing from [PK].

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If I could just pick up one thing that would really hit me, then it would be successful.” As fathers discussed their desire to learn more about being a good father, they also described a need to do better for the family. Moreover, part of learning more about fathering and being challenged to be a better father was implicit in their desire to increase the quality of family life. One man, John, the father of three boys, related his attraction to PK: “I think as a person, you always want to make sure you’re doing the best for your family. I wanted to investigate [PK], and it was obviously a worthwhile experience.”

A common expectation among the men in the study was getting support from talking specifically to men about their fathering. While this idea blends with the next section on men connecting with other men, this idea is not so much about building friendship with men as about talking about fathering. Gathering information from other men and hearing their experiences as a father was thought to be valuable. Lori, the mother of three, expressed an expectation of how PK could help fathers share information that involves speakers and participants.

Lori: Probably just be more of a support for him, maybe learn about more things that he could be doing, more things he could be involved with. Like at work we would be talking about our kids are doing this, this and that, and I’m not sure how much that actually gets discussed between men in what their kids are doing and what kinds of problems they’re having. If that opened up an area to be looked at, through Promise Keepers, whether it’s something that the individual groups of people who went there or something that a speaker was saying on stage, you know, would open that up.

Men and women identified their expectations of how PK could help fathers. These expectations included a desire to have more patience, a greater commitment to the children’s spiritual growth, more physical and emotional involvement in the daily routine with children, more careful listening to the children, and being a better role model for the children. For example, Calvin and Robin, the parents of three children,
described how PK helped put into perspective what it means to be a father and the priority of Calvin’s relationship with his children. Calvin described the opportunity to listen to speakers and have other men “point out things from practical life that, hey, these things are the things that your kid needs from you... not physical things but things from you emotionally and psychologically as a dad, relationally as a father.” Calvin went on to describe PK as a wake-up call that started him thinking about his priorities and prompted him to create a plan of involvement with his children. He related that “PK gave [him] the information [he] needed to kind of put that plan together.” Robin described Calvin’s father as a poor role model for involvement in the family and with the children. She shared her expectation that Calvin would gain knowledge of being a father that extended beyond “a bread winner,” would grow more comfortable in relating with the children, and would work closer with her in raising the children.

There were several participants who did not expect PK to address fathering. Some men said they did not think PK had a direct application for fathering, or that they did not expect PK to address fathering directly. Two couples did not have children the time these men first attended a conference. For a few, fatherhood was not a concern of the participant, or was not a reason for attending.

The opportunity to learn more about fathering and be challenged to be a better father was implicit in men’s desire to increase the quality of family life. Talking with other men about fathering and hearing about their experiences was thought to be valuable to the men in the study. The next section describes the opportunity PK provided the men to connect with other men and extend deeper connections with men beyond the actual conference.
Connecting With Other Men: Accountability Groups

Men in the study identified the huge gathering of men as one attractive component to attending PK. However, upon closer examination of the data, discovery of common concerns and struggles and the opportunity of sharing them with other men were the attractions. Furthermore, PK strongly encourages men to pursue meaningful relationships, following the conference, with “a few other men” to whom to be accountable and supported in keeping their promises.

Initially, participants identified the positive aspect of bringing men together with similar beliefs for a common goal. The women in the study also identified the unifying effect of bringing men together and the opportunity for men to relate to other men as attractive characteristics of PK. Pat, a mother of three, described those characteristics of PK she thinks are attractive.

Pat: I think it’s to be able to relate to another man. I’m going to use a poor choice of words here, but a manly man. These men who spoke, at least from what I understand, the speakers, they were very confident, some athletic. Men’s men. They were able to stand up and humble themselves and show weaknesses, talk about strengths, talk about responsibilities that helped Don relate to. I think he had maybe perceived that showing emotions, showing humility might have had a feminine connotation. He didn’t want to show that weakness. He saw it was allowed, it was OK. It can create a better, happier life.

Many men identified as attractive the experience of finding a kinship to other men in regard to beliefs, challenges, and issues in their families and with their children. It was important to them to be with other men and to struggle with similar issues. Kyle, a father of five, described the attraction of PK in this way: “I think the honesty and willingness [of PK] to address issues that everybody knows they need help in is attractive to men.” Kyle goes on to say that men welcome that honesty, but “maybe not right then . . . but deep down they know inside what they really want.”
PK exhorts men to make a careful assessment of their fathering and provides a direction to follow. Kyle finished his description with the thought that men want to be good fathers, but “do not do the things that [they] need to do, and PK addresses those things . . . [PK] gives you something to look at and say, ‘that’s where I need to be,’ and it gives you a means to take the steps to get in that direction.” According to the men in the study, PK is attractive because it lets men know they are not alone and don’t have to “[keep] things to ourselves.” Another participant, Calvin, described the attractiveness of PK as the number of men who struggle with the same difficulties and priorities, yet believe they are alone in their struggle.

Calvin: Well, I think what for me really is encouraging is it shows that there are so many other men out there, first of all, that struggle with the same difficulties and the same priorities. Again, I think men, especially, go through life because of our personalities, we tend to keep things to ourselves. We tend to feel like we fight our battles alone. We’re very independent. We tend not to share those things with others. Again, we internalize a lot of things. What I’ve found is that attending those events and what the organization seems to do is basically encourage us in the fact that, hey, we all struggle with a lot of the same things in our lives; you’re not alone; this is an organization that can encourage you to fight the battles that you’re fighting and help you fight those battles. We’re all in this together type of thing. I really come away feeling encouraged that there are other men just like me who have the same values I have, who have the same desires I have, as far as being better husbands and fathers.

A few men in the study specified a deeper attraction that PK holds for some men, that is, an encouragement in being honest about one’s life with oneself, one’s family, and one’s God. The opportunity to honestly address and discuss issues men need help in and to confide in other men the nature of those struggles was highly attractive to some men. Leo, a father of three children, described the attractiveness of discussing some issues just with other men. He related that “as much as you love your wife, [I do not] think [wives] can always understand what it is that men struggle with.” Leo spoke of the importance of having someone with whom to share some of
the struggles. However, he does go on to state that "I’m not professing that it’s healthy to have a guy friend that you’re telling all these things to and you’re not telling your wife. . . . Once they are brought out, I think they’re easier to talk about at another time [with your wife]."

Women in the study also described the importance of their husbands being with a group of other men with similar concerns and problems and being able to find help and support. The attractiveness of getting together with men who share common struggles and sharing with other men their problems was also apparent to the women in the study. For example, Kelly, the mother of five described a common perception among the women in the study.

Kelly: Well, [PK] talks about all different issues that everybody, all the men, deal with. So then in going, the men hear the different issues that hit them and they’re not the only one that has that problem. They see, oh, I’m not the only one that is in this situation and they can have support or just to help them out. Because sometimes you’re in a situation and it’s like, I don’t know what else to do, and this way Promise Keepers, the speakers and all getting the men together to be supportive to one another, being like brothers instead of just individual acquaintances that you see, that you can at times, you can open up to the other guys because you find out everybody is weak in different areas, and no one is perfect, and you find out, oh well, I’m good at this part, maybe you can lean on me for this, and I can lean on them on that.

PK encouraged the men in the study to evaluate their relationships with other men in the hope of finding a person or group they could trust and with whom they can develop close relationships. As mentioned earlier, the primary message of PK is structured around seven promises. The second promise is intended to encourage men to "pursue vital relationships with a few other men, understanding that he needs brothers to help him keep his promises" (Promise Keepers, 1997, p. 26). Often these relationships are referred to as accountability partners or groups.

An accountability partner or group establishes an agreement between two men or a group of men for the purpose of being better men, fathers, and husbands,
and forming deeper relationships with men. Accountability groups or partners hold each other accountable for promises each makes about intended changes in relationships with God, family members, and involvement in the family. Men in this study reported that their participation in accountability groups or with partners was encouraged and influenced by PK.

Sixteen men in the study were involved with accountability partners or groups. Two men were not involved with an accountability partner or group at the interview time. One man, however, was in the process of looking for a group to join, and the other man had no desire or intention to join a group: “It was not something [I] needed.”

The men in the study described sharing ideas, identifying areas for improvement, communicating problems, and building relationships with men who have similar experiences as part of participating in an accountability group. Men and women reported that accountability partners may also act as role models for each other. Betty described the role of her husband’s accountability partner.

**Betty:** Definitely. He’s influenced by that, by Kent’s role modeling. He’s had some negative role modeling with some of his brothers. A little bit has come into that, not much. He doesn’t want that to happen much. Mostly Kent has been the biggest influence because he spends a lot of time with him. He’s over there a lot. Kent is just a wonderful father. We’ve taken on some of their parenting skills as far as how they discipline. We consult with them on things. What should we do with Kim here? How do we discipline an 11-year-old? This is what works with Rene, her older kids. Sure enough, we tried it with Kim, and it worked.

The women in the study also reported the importance of accountability groups for extending the changes desired and prompted by attendance at a PK conference, as Janet related.

**Janet:** Since the very first Promise Keepers event, Kyle and our pastor have been accountability partners and that, as the wife looking on, has been maybe as equally as important as attending the event and hearing what they have to
say because you’re taking it home and you’re being accountable for it, instead of just going from one conference to one conference and having all these down slides in between.

Janet related the importance to her of her husband making changes that last.

Participants reported that more changes come as a result of participating in an accountability group than attending PK. Men in the study described PK as addressing the major changes and the weekly accountability partner as helping maintain direction and changes. Sam, the father of two, described PK and the process of change as spanning a lifetime. “Every year it gets better because men keep coming back to learn more about what they need to change about their lives. I think even in areas of my life that I need to change on, it’s not going to happen over night,” he said. His ability to make ongoing change is dependent upon his staying connected to an accountability group in his opinion. Sam explained.

Sam: It’s the same thing with Promise Keepers. I think you have to be involved or associated with people who are somehow... like in a Promise Keepers group that I’ve joined, or somehow to keep motivated in whatever area you need to be helped or challenged in. I think that’s what they do at Promise Keepers.

Accountability groups may interfere with communication between husband and wife. One couple described the PK accountability group as competing with the wife in terms of the influence of other men superseding her own influence with her husband. Julie described the frustration of not being listened to by Keanu regarding an issue with a television show called “Rugrat,” and his attention to the other men in his accountability group.

Julie: Which is why I encourage it because like what I said, I can talk until I’m blue in the face, but I don’t know what it is, if it’s just a personal struggle thing, that it doesn’t have any validity unless millions of men are there listening. I mean, I don’t understand it. Like with the accountability group, the Rugrat thing, it’s like, great, you heard it for the third or fourth time with your group of friends, that’s good. It’s frustrating because I can say the same thing and it’s not, but I think he is maybe recognizing a little bit more that I
may have. I'm in tune to some things that maybe he's not. That doesn't mean he's lacking, but I have God-given gifts.

A closer look at the above quotation suggests that Julie's encouragement of Keanu's participation in the accountability group is supportive of ideas she has already tried to discuss with him. However, it is frustrating that he is not listening to her, although she suggests that he is becoming more aware of her ability and how "tuned in" she really is. All the women whose husbands are in an accountability group, including Julie, support and encourage their husbands to participate with the men in their accountability group or with their accountability partner. Julie was the only participant who voiced frustration with competing to be heard above her husband's accountability group. Because it was not specifically asked of participants, wives' competition with accountability groups or partners may have been a silent, unspoken frustration.

This section has examined the responsiveness of PK as an answer to the dissatisfaction men have experienced in their lives. Through the attraction of PK and the expectations of the men in the study, PK was responsive to the men because it articulated a Christian emphasis and message, challenged and taught them as fathers and family members, and provided men with an opportunity to establish deeper relationships with other men. In light of PK as an answer to men's dissatisfaction, the next section describes the results of participating in PK.

From Inertia to Involvement: Epiphanies and Effort

The participants in this study described PK as having a clear, definite influence on fathers' involvement with their children. Fathers clearly became more involved in their children's lives, although this involvement did not extend to altering
the gendered division of labor, which maintains a traditional family form. The changes that occurred were welcomed by all the participants in the study. As will be discussed later, although participants described various degrees of change, participants were alike in wanting those changes to increase and continue. The results of PK influence on fathers' involvement in their families and with their children fall into two primary categories. The first influence on the men in the study can best be described as a realization of the priority of their children in their lives. Second, PK has influenced and changed the ways fathers are involved in their families and with their children.

A Wake Up Call for Fathers

The men in this study went to PK with the question, what does it mean to be a father? PK extended to the men an image of what it means to be a father. Men experienced a sudden perception of the essential nature of being a father and attributed this realization to participating in PK. The influence of PK on creating a realization of fathering involved challenging fathers to identify the place of their children among their priorities, affirming the choices that fathers have already made to be involved with their children, emphasizing the impact of their decisions on the nature and amount of involvement, and promoting the self-reflection needed to assess the nature of their fathering.

A story frequently told at PK conferences involves a man who spent considerable time away from his family at work and pursuing his own interests. One day his daughter brings him a picture she drew of the family. Upon looking at the picture, the man discovers that he is not in the picture. Asking his daughter to explain what happened to daddy, she informs him that he is working in his office. The story ends with another picture the child has drawn, following the father's increased
presence at home, the father is now in the picture. The story is told with drama and two-colored drawings that are displayed on a giant screen to the gathering of men. The speaker asks the men present, “Are you in the picture?” The use of this story is intended as a wake-up call urging men to assess their priorities, realize the impact of their decisions on involvement with their children, and be sensitive to the needs of their families. Although this message encourages men to become more involved in their families, it does not suggest that men need to alter their family form.

As a result of attending PK, the men in the study who described a sudden perception of the essential meaning of being a father and the priority of their children in their lives, who experienced a “turning point,” were primarily attracted to PK because of the focus on family and fathering and the spiritual emphasis. The remaining men who described PK as a “spark,” a reaffirmation of the priority of their relationship and involvement with their children, were primarily attracted to PK because of the spiritual emphasis or the opportunity to connect with other men. This section reviews the influence of PK on establishing children as a priority and reaffirming the ongoing involvement of fathers with their children and the need for self-reflection on being a father.

Children as a Priority. PK encouraged men in the study to evaluate their priorities and take an inventory of what is important to them. The primary message of PK is structured around seven promises. The first three promises have to do with an individual’s ethics and conduct and include men’s relationship to God, men’s relationship to a few close males, and men’s sexuality. The last four promises focus on a man’s relationship to others. Specifically, the fourth promise is the commitment “to building strong marriages and families through love, protection, and Biblical
values” (Promise Keepers, 1997). This promise reflects an emphasis on helping men become better fathers to their children.

The men in the study described a realization of their priorities. Men attributed this realization to the challenges PK made, asking men to examine what is of value to them in their lives. Fathers described rearranging their priorities, based on the messages they heard. For example, Carl described what many men discussed. “I think priorities were a big learning point for me: God, family, work,” he said. Carl went on to describe how God is first in his life and that if you “don’t have him, the other things don’t work.” Carl, like other men in the study, described losing their priorities as “things aren’t going right.” By rearranging their priorities, “I put God back in there, God back in control. Things click, and many of the problems disappear.” As a result of clarifying their priorities, fathers reported finding their children to be an important part of their lives. Fathers expressed their realization of the value of their children and that they had taken for granted their relationship with them. The realization of “missing out on your child’s life,” as one man stated, gripped the men in the study. Kris, a father of four, described this clarifying experience as a “matter of understanding what [he] wanted, what [he] needed.”

Kris: Well, you go through and you say, “OK, great I’ve got a wife. OK, I’ve got kids. OK, I’ve got a job.” OK. But, somewhere down the line you lose track of the importance of what kids are, the importance of what a wife is; and the next thing you know, you’re working late; you’re doing all of the things in a rush; and you forget that none of that is important, not where you live, not any of that. The important thing is the relationship that you have with your family. . . . I would say that I know that I only have a certain amount of time to affect my children’s lives and that if I do not act in that time frame, that time will be lost. . . . Like I said, you go through and you have your faith, and then you get married and you have your children and you have your career, and it’s almost like you’re floating along and the things that are important are taking a back seat because there’s so much other things that have to get done that aren’t important.
Several men in the study reported that a realization of the choice made regarding their priorities has a direct effect on the amount of time and nature of their involvement with their children. Dan, a father of three, described feeling startled when shown the benefits of being involved with his children. “PK is to show . . . hey, you have an influence, there are so many things that happen if you’re not in sync.” PK asks the participants, “Is this important?,” and if it is, “take care of it.” Several men speak of PK putting the issues “in your face” and asking men to make a choice after presenting the benefits of involvement and the cost of fathers’ absence.

According to the study, the men realized their mistakes, the importance of being aware of them and of monitoring how priorities reflected the amount of time spent with their children. Keanu related:

Keanu: More of an awareness, so when you make a decision you kind of put it back up . . . So, yea, it’s more of an awareness, so periodically you fall and stumble on things and say, “Geez, you know, I shouldn’t have done that, you know, but at least it’s more of an awareness” . . . . Yea, it’s trying to prioritize, knowing that your goal, at the end of your life, you can look back, you know, and sit there and say, “Geez, how was I as a father, as a Christian, how did I do the things I’m supposed to, I should do, and I want to do. But how did I actually just spend my time?” And so . . . so I spend more time being around the kids, and I try to get home more often.

Reinforcing Involvement That Is Already Present. Several men described a confirmation of the kind of relationship they already are developing with their children and reaffirmed “just how important my family is to me.” Matt and Lori described the affirmation of decisions they made regarding his work, and the greater involvement with the children that resulted.

Lori: But we always bring back to the point, well, if Matt did work outside the house or work for a company again, he’d be gone a lot more. He’d be gone more probably, and I guess it was just a reinforcement of that fact that we think he needs to be home or be more involved with the kids. I think if he hadn’t gone to Promise Keepers, that might not have been his focus. He might have stayed at his other job for a longer period of time.
I: Are you saying that one of the influences of PK was a realization that it is important that Matt’s at home?

Lori: It’s important, yea, that he’s involved with the family, and for us, that works that he is working outside our home, and we notice that that is being a hindrance. We think of [him working in the home] as a great positive now... He’s more focused on really what is the important thing here... I think it kept him more focused or reaffirming that this is what he should be doing.

I: So it confirmed again something that you and he had already been thinking about.

Lori: Exactly.

The six men in the study whose involvement with their children was reinforced by PK described enthusiastic reactions to PK. The men had been reminded of the fundamentals of “what’s important.” Moreover, fathers felt they had confirmed that they were doing right and supported in their choices.

Ned’s response to PK was the exception among the men in the study. Ned is the father of two; he works nights and is the primary caretaker of the children during the day while his wife is at work. He described a slightly different response to the message he heard at PK. He was not impressed, changed, or reinforced as a father. Ned thought that bringing the information out into the open for men was good, but for him, he said, “I do that anyway.”

**Need for Self-reflection as a Father.** A few participants identified a need for deeper self-reflection regarding their role as fathers. These participants reported developing a clearer perspective of “what it means to be a father.” Men reported having had the opportunity to reflect on what speakers and other men at the conference discussed about fathering and to consider their own situations at home. Taking the time to think about the kind of father they were involved identifying...
shortcomings as a father and considering the kind of father they wanted to be, as Verle and Victoria each related in their individual interviews.

Verle: Look where you could be [as a father] and whether you’re one step away or a 1,000 yards away. Look where you could be. And then it’s more into a this is how we can help you get there.

Paula: I think it makes the men when they go, all of them, I think it makes them really look into their lives, where they can change things.

I: So it provokes some self-reflection?

Paula: Yea. They think about their lives, where they’re at, where they’d like to be. It helps them make some decisions if they need to change things.

One woman in the study described the role of PK as establishing an atmosphere for awareness, with the rest up to the husband. She said, “PK makes you aware of your behavior; it does not change your behavior.” The next section reviews the influence of PK on fathers’ participation in the family and the ways fathers are involved with their children.

Participating in the Family: Ways of Involvement

What does more involvement with children look like? Many men asked themselves and each other this question. PK, however, did not provide specific training or skill development in fathering. Rather, PK taught about father involvement through examples. One man in the study described their approach as “PK does not get specific . . . but they show you examples of good fathers, good husbands.” PK extended to men examples of how to be an involved father. However, upon closer examination, this increased involvement was intended to be within their current traditional family form (Schwartz, 1994), that is, men increased their ways of involvement but did not assume a sharing of responsibilities.
The phrase "ways of involvement" (Palkovitz, 1997) is used here to express a wide latitude of fathers' involvement. It should be stressed that there are many ways to describe individual examples of fathers' involvement with their children (Palkovitz, 1997). A wider latitude permits the inclusion of a diversity of fathers' involvement with their children. These sections below review the influence of PK on taking steps toward greater involvement, improved communication, intentionally developing relationships with their children, focusing on time spent, and spiritual leadership in the family and with the children.

**Steps Toward Greater Involvement.** Many men did not report dramatic overnight changes in their involvement with their children, although participants did express a sense of energy and motivation to make changes in their families. Some described a work in progress, beginning with smaller steps. PK had provided a direction, and participants were taking steps toward a greater involvement. Participants also described the process of setting one goal at a time, "rather than attempting to change everything immediately." For example, one couple, Keanu and Julie, the parents of two children, described the process of working on changes they both wanted in their family. He described her patience with him, knowing they were both working on their parenting and marriage. He stated his expectation for results, having attended PK: "It's not like you go to one of those deals and the next day you're a whole different person." He described the need for a lot of change and identified the need for time, but took some confidence in knowing that he was going "in the right direction." Julie expressed her belief of not needing to be perfect, but also hoped that "you don't stay stagnant."
A new awareness of priorities led to steps to increase the ways fathers are involved with their children. For example, Kim, the mother of two, described her husband’s return from PK as a time in which they talked about everything, but more than talking, she reports, “[PK] made him do things.”

Kim: I think he made more of a point to prioritize the children. Even though he was a good father before, I think now he says, “Is it really that important that I do this right now when she needs this or she needs that or whatever?” Then he goes, “No, it is not important for me to do that. I can wait until they go to bed to do this.” . . . A lot of things like that. Maybe it seems like little things, but, it is not really, little things.

In another example, one man in the study reported needing to remain aware of his priorities and of acting on them. Leo, a father of three, described monitoring himself because he gets busy with “some very good things,” but needs to return to the question, “Is this the most important?” Participants report that men’s commitments outside of work are taking a back seat to being involved with their children. For example, Kim said, “[Levon] is saying no to things he knows is going to take away from what is really important to him [the children] . . . . He was never home. Now it seems like it is just a lot smoother.” One man in the study identified more involvement based on an awareness of the value of his relationship with his children. Keanu explained that he valued them before, but he is now making a change in how he reacts to them. He reports, “I’m trying to take advantage of the opportunities when they come up and trying to create some new opportunities.”

Most of the participants also reported that men became more involved in the home and more sensitive to household demands. However, a closer look at the changes described below, for example, in the man’s involvement with the children and the family, reveals his wife saw him as more of a helper with her responsibilities, rather than as someone who shares their responsibilities. Representative of the
participants, Jessica, a mother of three children explained the changes she had experienced.

Jessica: It’s a huge burden lifted off of me to have a helper. Sometimes I’ll go upstairs to get the boys in the tub, I’ll come down and the kitchen will be clean. It might not exactly be clean the way I would, but that’s OK because he’s trying. He’s doing little things more. Like if I have a bunch of things to do in one day, he’ll say, “What can I do? What’s one thing I can do to help, that I’ll do instead.” If I have to run to the grocery store after dinner or something, he’ll go do it. Just little things add up so big for me. That’s a half hour that I didn’t have to spend in the grocery store. He just sees that better now. Before he was oblivious to the little things that add up to like hours of time. He’s much more sensitive to that.

Some participants described a less observable shift from self-centeredness to family centeredness. For example, Jean, a mother of three, described her husband’s shift from pursuing his own interests without the family, to spending more time and doing more things together. She related, “I think, too, I feel like he’s not just out there checking in once in a while; he really is in the family.”

Communication. The influence of PK on the ways of fathers’ involvement concerned changes in communication and interactions with their children. Men in the study described being more patient and sensitive to their children as people with feelings and needs, which involved greater attention to children, more affection and love shared, and a more compassionate temperament. Mary, a mother of five, described how Kris had become more patient in involving the children in the ongoing activities of the day, for example, by making beef jerky. Mary reported that while Kris was patient in the past, he is more inclined to go “with the flow” and “patient with the little things.” She described his posture as being more of “it’s not so important to be perfect” with the children.

A change in communication also involved attending to more emotion and taking a caring interest in family members. Fathers and mothers both described the
fathers as being more interactive with their children and more accessible to them, both physically and emotionally. This change in communication with their children included more open dialogue, patience in listening, and the expression of more love and affection. For example, Kyle, a father of five, described a time when his boys used to kiss him all the time, then stopped. He interpreted that as "a need to show them more affection just throughout the day." As a result of increased affection and greater sensitivity to his boys, "it did change." Changes in communication and understanding have influenced the nature of fathers' involvement with their children. 

Jim, a father of two children, often forgets that his children are children and must remind himself to attend to them as children. He says, "I always struggle with that. Understanding that she [10-year-old] is still a kid." Betty, his wife, reports that the children are "not so afraid of Jim anymore."

Jim: I was, well, "This is how it is." Now I try to talk it out with her and now I'm understanding. I'm getting to certain levels in our conversations or my tone of voice where I know I went over the edge.

Yet another influence that some participants identified is change in temperament. Six fathers explained that they have become a softer, kinder, more compassionate person, more able to "hold my temper," as Calvin explained.

Calvin: Well, I guess maybe an attitude that shows more love and affection to them, a little bit more of an interest in them, in what they're doing and how they are, in my temper, my attitude. Just the fact that I'm not too busy in life or not too busy in other areas that I can't take time out for them.

Intentionally Developing a Relationship.

The participants described intentionally developing relationships to know each child as individuals, to take a teaching role with their children, and to monitor themselves during interactions with the children. Fathers identified the desire to be
more present in their children's daily lives. They intentionally developed relationships including, for example, planning to be present at their children's activities and incorporating the children into their daily activities such as chores, errands, and entertainment. For some, building a relationship meant intentionally exerting the effort and becoming involved in the children's lives. Kelvin, a father of two children, described trying to be more involved on a day-to-day basis.

Kelvin: I think for me, I've been a little more involved . . . even the day-to-day things. The homework, the being down at the bus stop. Just pretty much trying to spend more time with the kids, even if it's doing something that I wasn't really that excited about. . . . I've been to the kids' school conferences now. Being more up front, more up-to-date on their lives. . . . Because it's easy to get lazy, even let her tuck them in and so forth. Kind of those important times when they're going to look back and say, "Well, I remember" . . . I want them to remember dad doing some stuff with them. The fact that they grown up so fast and also the fact that I need to keep the relationship that Thersa and I have growing and also that we have something, when the kids are gone also.

Women in the study noticed that their husbands were getting to know each of their children as individuals. Reflective of some women in the study, Janet, a mother of five children, described Kyle's understanding of their children:

. . . in a loving way is meeting everybody's needs. . . . I think he knows each one of our kids and he knows what the differences are in each one of our kids and he can pick up on their personalities. I think you're [said to husband] sensitive to who each one is.

Men were beginning to take initiative in the relationships with their children, rather than sitting back and waiting for the relationship to happen. Jean, for example, described how Dan is more intentional about his relationships with each of the children.

Jean: It's like he's always checking in with them on, Jamie had exams this week, and he's just like when we come together, when we do eat supper, when he is together, we eat together, and when he's home, and he always tries to get a little bit of everybody's how their day went. That's so good. And it's kind of like, though some people are impatient, usually everybody gets a turn of what went on. It could be a bad thing that happened in the day
or a good thing that happened, but it's that generally of what happened in your day, was it a good thing, and then also praying for each of us.

Eight fathers described taking a teaching role in their relationship with their children. For example, one father, Carl, described wanting his relationship with his sons to be more than being their "big friend." He would like to help them, provide guidance, and "be there" for them. Kris described his need for intentional involvement with his children, as a teacher and to send the message that he is approachable as a parent.

Kris: One of the things I learned at that Memphis is that if you don't teach your children, somebody else will. They are sponges; they want information; they have questions. If you blow them off, you don't answer any of their questions. Sooner or later they will stop coming to you with the questions. They will be getting those answers from somebody else, OK. And you have to make sure that when your child comes to you to ask you questions that you give them the time to give them an answer or help them find an answer, explain to them why you don't have an answer, so they can continue to come to you.

Intentionally developing a relationship involves another influence that participants described: monitoring behavior as a parent during interactions with children. Leo described monitoring his interactions with his children to better understand "how [Leo] might be received by [his] kids and thinking of how [he] might receive that same message." He continues to explain, "I don't want to crush their spirits. I want them to learn the right way to do things." Robin, a mother of three, described how her husband Calvin, has managed to monitor his own behavior, particularly his anger. However, he relies on her to point it out when he "does not realize it." She reveals her satisfaction at being able to address his behavior when she feels it is inappropriate.

Robin: I think, I don't want to sound redundant, but I think his patience, he's got more patience, because I think he's dealing with the anger thing that we talked about before. I think, and not always, but when he realizes that he's not having patience or if one of us reminds him, it's in check, and just dealing
with when he has to talk to them about a discipline situation. I think more of a
gentleness in his spirit maybe. Not always. There's times when it's not, but
once again, if it gets pointed out to him, usually I point it out to him, he will
say, "Oh, I didn't realize," and try to correct it.

Work, Personal, and Family Time. Participants described noticeable changes
in men’s priorities “before” and “after” PK. Women described great dissatisfaction
with the level of husbands’ involvement with their children prior to attending PK.
Participants described the men in this study as putting work, and often personal time,
ahead of family time. They directly credited PK for the changes in men’s attitudes and
behaviors regarding time with their children.

Attending PK did not change the majority of men’s work schedules; that is,
the men continued to work the same amount of hours, and work continued to be
defined as the men’s primary responsibility. Change occurred in the men’s attitudes
toward spending time with their children. Participants described men’s willingness to
become involved with their children when not at work. Rather than engaging in
personal recreation and entertainment, these fathers increased their emotional
availability and interaction with their children.

For example, men replaced hobbies, sporting events, and recreational
activities with being with their children. As one father says:

I don’t want any of the things I love, hated by my children because I spent
time doing them instead of playing with them and being involved with them.
So if I can get them involved with me, then it becomes an enriching thing.

Kris, a father of five, began taking his children to football games and fishing trips
rather than “going with the guys” to do these activities. Other fathers described
having lunch with their children at school, volunteering at their schools, coaching
their sports teams, going to school conferences, giving baths, talking with them about
their day, attending school parties, and playing with them and their neighborhood friends.

Kelvin, a father of two, explained how his is now more accessible to his children, especially during “down times.”

Kelvin: Yea, more accessible, and not letting like my job for instance, be always first priority. So they can, like taking a day off work for this or that, for their birthday for example, take a half a day and take them out to lunch or someplace. More of the things that the mothers do because they’re there more. I’m trying to be here and to be with them more, to be at home. . . . And to be with them time-wise. To be where they are. To be near them, even if we’re all just sitting here and reading, to know that I like to spend time with them and with Thersa too, and that I would do things just simply because that was something they enjoy. And I still have a ways to go in that category.

Four fathers rearranged their work schedules by going in to work earlier so that they could leave for short periods of time during the day or leave work earlier to home in the afternoon with their children. They altered their work schedules to “get more involved on a day-to-day basis,” “get more time with the children,” “be home more,” and “connect more with the children’s activities.”

Jack: Well I’m doing a lot of things now that I never would have thought I would have done. They seem little until you add them all up. . . . Megan’s got a Valentine’s dance next Friday. I was leaving on a business trip and I thought that I would push the business trip back a few hours and still go to the Valentine’s dance. Things that I would have probably never done before because I’m use to being so rigid. It’s like my flight leaves here I can’t make it. Now it’s like, it doesn’t matter if I get in on the last flight is at midnight. I’m going to get a good night’s sleep anyway and why don’t I just go to the dance for an hour with her. It would mean a lot more to her if I was there.

Women were clearly satisfied with the changes in their husbands’ involvement with their children. Men also expressed their delight and rewards with their increased involvement in what had been, and continued to be, their wives’ areas of responsibility. So while men increased their involvement with their children, they did so within an ideology of “helping out” and “just being there for them” rather than assuming equal responsibility for children’s well-being.
Leadership in the Family

Head of the House: Decision Making. Participants described their form of leadership style in the home as a traditional couple, dividing male and female roles into separate areas of responsibility and giving final authority to the husband. PK directed men to become more involved in “lightening her load” of household labor and raising children, areas of women’s responsibility. Two versions of a traditional couple style emerged in this study. Both give final authority in decision making to husbands as “head of the household” and separate family tasks into gendered areas of responsibility.

Twelve couples explained that “he makes the final decision” and also reported that “we never get there” or “it never comes down to his final decision.” These couples used words such as, “collaborative,” “a partnership,” “coleading,” and working together as a “team” to describe decision making. These participants expressed satisfaction with identifying the male as the head of the household and reserving the final decisions for him should the two of them fail to reach a decision together, although they could not identify examples of husbands making the “final decision.”

Only one woman reported any doubt or concern regarding this process. Darla, a mother of two children, described her apprehension with a type of decision-making process that ultimately left her husband making the final decision, should both of them be unable to collaborate on one. She expressed her fear that the process of collaboration could end prematurely with “him making the final decision.”

The remaining six couples also described decision making as a husband’s primary responsibility, although he “puts his needs second in family decisions.”
Couples described the decision-making process as "he makes the final decisions that look out for the family's needs and welfare." The men and women in this group were satisfied identifying the male as the head of the household who decided what would be best for the family. Four of the six couples in this group clearly identified how the men changed from making decisions based on their needs alone to making decisions based on what they thought was good for the family. Participants cast this change as moving away from selfish behavior to selfless behavior and as a result of participating in PK.

Belief in the man as the spiritual leader in the home was present in all couples. Spiritual leadership involved the responsibility and the initiative in developing and maintaining a spiritual emphasis and spiritual activities in the family. Men's increased involvement with spiritual activities in the family was a direct result of attending a PK conference. Men's involvement in the spiritual dimension of home life established a shared and common ground for wives and husbands. The women in the study enthusiastically described the result of their husbands' spiritual renewal as no longer being alone spiritually. The women in the study expressed a sense of relief that their husbands' were not only more spiritually involved in the family, but also had become proactive in the day-to-day spiritual activities of the children. For example, men were helping the children get ready for church in the morning, teaching them prayers at dinner, planning devotions and prayers at bed time, and taking the children to weekday evening Bible studies. Kim, a mother of two, described her husband Levon, as the one who "now gets the girls ready for church on Sunday morning, while [I] have a cup of coffee." The next section describes three ways fathers provided spiritual leadership with their children.
Spiritual Leadership With the Children. Participants saw establishing leadership, developing a spiritual emphasis, and increasing spiritual activities with the children as results of PK participation. Spiritual leadership referred to the idea that primary responsibility for the practice of religious faith in the home belonged to the father. This position was shared and encouraged by all participants. This leadership involved integrating spiritual principles and faith activities into the family and into the father’s relationship with the children. Participants described the increased incorporation of Christian beliefs into dialogue with their children that emphasized concepts in everyday examples and modeled their beliefs to their children. For example, Lori described the shift in the nature of Matt’s involvement with the children. His message had moved from something he wanted the children to do, to “here’s the Christian thing to do.”

Lori: Skills in how you handle a situation may not have changed that much since he’s been to Promise Keepers. However, the focus of parenting, I really thing that has, not because we want you to do this, it’s the Christian thing to do to help a person out that doesn’t have any friends at school.

Participants also described a focus on spiritual activities and routines initiated by the father: worship, prayer, Bible study, devotions, and discussions. Of all the activities and ways of involvement mentioned from participants, responsibility for a spiritual emphasis and activities in the family and with the children were a top priority. Matt described the essence of this idea.

Matt: I guess maybe the other thing is that it helps solidify, for me, the role of the father as the primary one for the spiritual responsibility of the family as a unit and of the children. . . . I guess their perspective, and I’ve come to, not only through Promise Keepers but through other personal study, have come to realize that it is the father, the religious faith and practice in the home is the father’s primarily the father’s responsibility. Not the mother’s and not the children’s. Even though the mother may be very influential, but dad is the one who is really ultimately responsible for that. I think in our society, particularly dads, play a back seat role in that. It is the moms that bring the kids to Sunday School, not the dads. I think that Promise Keepers helped me solidify
that concept that, hey, it is my role to see that that is done. Not that I have to do it all. Lori can read or help the kids memorize the verse from Sunday School or read to them from the Bible or whatever. But it is my responsibility to see that it does get done.

Promise Keepers as a Form of Family Life Education

PK functioned as an alternative form of family life education by tailoring a conference that uniquely addressed fathers’ involvement in the family. According to the men in the study, a consistent message from PK was to build strong families and be a committed father to their children. According to the characteristics of family life education and participants’ descriptions, PK simultaneously maintained an alternative and a narrow approach to family life education. The term alternative reflects the unusual setting and number of participants, which has differed from previous family life education. The term narrow reflects the degree to which PK parallels current family life education, ethics, and procedures. This section reviews PK as a form of family life education and, in the aftermath of their participation in PK, what the men in this study would be attracted to for future family life education.

Promise Keepers as Family Life Education

Six characteristics define family life education and provide a context for family life education to support and educate fathers. These six characteristics include: a multidisciplinary approach to family life education; a concern with meeting the needs of individuals and families; a focus on individuals and families across the lifespan; a respect for different individuals, family systems, and cultural values; an educational, rather than a therapeutic approach; and a focus on individual parent and family strengths (Arcus et al., 1993; Arcus & Thomas, 1993).
A multidisciplinary representation among speakers was not as important to participants as was their Christian emphasis and message applied to fathering. Hearing about families and fathering from a Christian perspective was the criterion mentioned most often and valued by all participants. When asked what future family life education programs would be attractive, participants reported those that have a Christian emphasis or orientation would be a “top priority.” A few participants identified research-based information as valuable. Family life education's diverse disciplines serve to focus on families in particular ways. While the speakers at PK may have had training in several disciplines, the participants identified a Christian emphasis as a primary characteristic of the speakers. To the participants in the study, this characteristic was not a casual component, but a critical factor.

Meeting the needs of individuals and families was addressed by encouraging fathers to become involved for the well-being of the whole family. Men and women described satisfying results because of the fathers' attending the conferences. Men and women described closer relationships between fathers and children and more involvement in the family and with household tasks. Participants in the study described improved relationships; however, the nature of these relationships was subsumed under a traditional style of marriage (Schwartz, 1992). The men in the study reported broad concepts of fathering were presented to them in the form of “good models,” the goal of which was to spur involvement with their children, rather than address specific needs or issues. Family life education struggles with espousing or defining “good parenting” (Arendell, 1997) because of the variability of parents and children. As mentioned above, PK takes a broad approach to fathering concepts. The men in the study reported a primary emphasis was to “get involved.” What PK was specific about was that fathers must become the spiritual leaders in their homes.
and with their children, providing themselves as an example to follow and engaging their children in spiritual activities.

Addressing individuals and families across the life span was indirectly addressed by encouraging fathers and children of all ages to build meaningful relationships. Eleven of the 18 men attended PK with their fathers or fathers-in-law. While PK emphasized reuniting fathers and children through increased involvement, the conferences did not address common transitions and stresses that families face.

The respect for differences in individuals, families, and cultures is indirectly supported by PK, as long as those differences fall within a prescribed form for families and individuals. PK defines some differences, such as unmarried couples and gay and lesbian families, as "unacceptable to God." Participants described the rationale for their belief as Biblically mandated (Promise Keepers, 1997). In contrast, family life education expresses a broader definition of respecting differences among people (NCFR, 1998), as, for example, in regard to differences in religious and sexual orientation. Participants described their affinity for the PK approach to families and differences, which was encouraging a traditional family form. Moreover, the traditional family form is not espoused overtly as one family form among many, but assumed to be the only family form.

Family life education takes an educational approach to fathers and families. This approach is intended to educate and equip, rather than repair, that is, to emphasize teaching over therapy. An educational approach is intended to empower the learner to use the knowledge to their benefit. Participants in the study report that the information and support the men received from the conference had changed their lives. The men in the study reported plans to continue learning about fathering and described their involvement in accountability groups as a primary support for
continued change and learning. As mentioned earlier, the accountability groups or partners are viewed by those in the study as having as much value as the conferences.

PK focuses on individual and family strengths addresses fathers as capable members of their families. Men and women in the study identified the fathers' involvement as important and necessary to the “success of the family.” PK promotes self-reflection and the identification of men's strengths and weaknesses as a father. Participants reported a clear message from PK was that fathers are important and must be involved in the family.

Men’s Attraction to Future Family Life Education

Each of the men in the study showed enthusiasm and excitement about their experiences at the conferences and what they had learned. There was also an unmistakable desire to know more about fathering, to gather additional information, and to cultivate additional spiritual experiences.

The men in the study identified three characteristics that would most interest them in a parent education program. These included programs that were led from a Christian perspective and taught parenting from a “Biblical” context, that provided child development information, and that provided practical tools and techniques that were “hands-on.” The men in the study who identified a Christian perspective as a characteristic, described a program that was “Christian based.” The expectation for a Christian emphasis ranged from a preference but not a necessity, to a requirement for a “Biblically based” program that used the Bible. For many men, a Christian emphasis meant a spiritual as well as a parent education experience, in which both the material and the speakers needed to present a Christian emphasis. Information about child development was also identified by the men in the study. The men wanted to better
understand child development, "particularly at the age that our kids are or the next step," as Matt stated. Many men described wanting to better understand their children's age groups, how their children see the world, and the changes and transitions their children go through. Practical tools and techniques were seen as attractive to the men in the study. Many men believed that information they could bring home and use in their families were techniques they did not have before, or had not "refined very well." Men described these tools as hands-on, "practical, everyday things that you can see and use." For example, some men described time management, handling conflict, and talking with their child as important tools.

The women in the study identified two characteristics they believed would most interest their husbands in a parent education program. These included programs that provided information about discipline, and practical tools and techniques. Two women mentioned discipline as important because "[the children] are getting older," and "we're having a hard time getting them to listen . . . they're getting older now." The women also described practical tools and techniques in a similar way as the men. In addition, women reported that practical information for specific situations would be attractive and helpful to their husbands. Hands-on materials that generated ideas applied to specific problems were also cited by the women in the study. Practical ideas, such as time management, handling sibling conflict, and problem solving, were described as being attractive to their husbands.

Summary

Men's dissatisfaction with their lives, albeit from mild to overwhelming, has been discussed as motivating them to join thousands of other men and participate in PK. PK has been portrayed as uniquely structured to address this dissatisfaction. Men
were introduced to PK by other men, but were prompted to attend PK as a result of identifying their own dissatisfaction or as a result of their wives' dissatisfaction with their husbands' participation in the family and involvement with the children.

PK was not seen as the only answer to men's dissatisfaction, but as an answer. Both women and men thought PK held great potential for providing direction, answers, and ideas. A Christian direction, information, and support in being a father, and connecting with other men formed the foundation of what the men in the study were seeking.

Movement from inertia to involvement occurred as a result of attending PK. Becoming more involved was a satisfying pleasure for all the participants. This movement was greater involvement of men in their wives' area of primary responsibility. Fathers experienced a sudden realization of the importance of their fathering. A reorganization of priorities led to greater communication, more focus on developing relationships, and focus on time spent with their children. As a result of PK, men clarified and increased their leadership within the family.

PK has developed a conference that uniquely addressed men's dissatisfaction with their lives and fathers' involvement with their children. The clear message of building strong families and fathers committed to their children was appealing to these participants. PK simultaneously maintained an alternative and a narrow form of family life education through its integration of spirituality, religion, and parenting directives. Men returning from PK have identified a Christian emphasis, child development information, and practical ideas for parenting as their next step in family life education.
CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

Overview

The theoretical framework applied in this study, a combination of father involvement and postmodern feminist perspectives, focused attention on how a recent men's movement, Promise Keepers, encouraged fathers to become more present in their children's lives and on how this increased presence supported and challenged the traditional family form of the participants in this study. An involvement perspective stresses the presence and variety of ways fathers are involved in the lives of their children. A postmodern feminist perspective emphasizes the multiple and divergent experiences of women and the implications of structural patriarchy for family life (Baber & Allen, 1992).

When describing what led to attending a PK conference, the men in this study identified experiencing a general dissatisfaction with their lives and an emotional distance from their families. They hoped that PK would address their dissatisfaction and loneliness by guiding them as fathers and offering opportunities to form friendships with other men. PK appeared trustworthy to the participants in this study because of its Christian foundation. As a result of participating in PK conferences and accountability groups, the men in this study increased their communication, time spent with their children, and sought to intentionally develop relationships with their children. All of the participants expressed satisfaction with this change in fathers'
involvement with their children; however, changes in a traditional ideology of family life did not accompany the fathers’ increased involvement in the lives of their children.

Men’s Dissatisfaction With Life/Themselves and Deciding to Attend a Promise Keepers Conference

Through conference messages, PK tapped into and brought to the fore men’s dissatisfaction in this study. Prior to participating in PK, men described a deep dissatisfaction with their lives and an emotional distance from their families. This dissatisfaction prompted the men to attend PK. The following section describes how men’s reflection and evaluation of their lives, confusion regarding changing cultural demands of fathers, and the dissatisfaction of men’s wives with their participation in the family and involvement with the children that combined to prompt the men in this study to attend PK.

Men’s Deeper Questions About Their Lives and Relationships

The men in the study had attended PK at a time in their lives when they were asking deeper questions about themselves and their relationships (Meth, 1990), and desiring more connection with others (Bergman, 1995; Kimmel & Messner, 1989). For the men in this study, it was important to make connections with other men, and for some it was as important to them as their work (Bergman, 1995). These questions and desires are indicative of midlife concerns (Bergman, 1995; Meth, 1990). In midlife, men may sense a loss of meaning, an emptiness, loneliness, failure, or sadness that may lead to further isolation and greater dissatisfaction and despair (Bergman, 1995; Meth, 1990). Meth (1990) suggests that during the middle years, men will
reflect on and evaluate their accomplishments, life dreams, success in their jobs, and their family life.

Because of a tendency to avoid feelings of vulnerability, men may not directly address the emotional turmoil the middle years generate, but may turn to, for example, new relationships, more work, or alcohol (Meth, 1990). Bergman (1995) suggests that if men cannot connect, they may continue or increase harmful coping mechanisms, such as drinking or drugs, affairs, workaholism, suicide, or neglect and violation of loved ones. The men in this study, however, chose to try what they perceived as a credible source, PK, from which to seek answers to their deeper questions.

Men and Changing Cultural Demands

The men in this study were dissatisfied with the distant relationships that had developed between them and their wives and children. This dissatisfaction involved an unhappiness with their assessment of their own fathering, little or no preparation for being a father, and limited or no access to information men thought they needed to be a better fathers. This dissatisfaction can be thought of as a response to gender role strain (Meth, 1990; Pleck, 1995) and the breakdown of friendship and intimacy resulting from a traditional couple style (Schwartz, 1994).

Men are confronted with assuming their share of the second shift (Hochschild, 1989), balancing work and family (Levine & Pittinsky, 1997), and becoming responsible fathers (Doherty et al., 1996; Levine & Pitt, 1995). The conflict men experience over gender role expectations has not brought large groups of men into therapy (Meth, 1990); however, the changing landscape of expectations for men and fathers may help to explain the large numbers of men drawn to PK. Gender roles are
social constructions that carry significant expectations intended to describe and shape appropriate behavior (Baber & Allen, 1992; Kimmel & Messner, 1989; Meth, 1990; Pleck, 1995; Stacey, 1992). Part of men's socialization is "the fear of femininity and feminine values" (Meth, 1990, p. 6) and an avoidance of relationships (Bergman, 1995). Avoiding all behavior associated with being feminine can create gender role strain and conflict, yet the changing expectations for men and fathers involve "supposedly feminine" behaviors and values (Meth, 1990). Gender role strain can result when fathers attempt to adhere to prescribed behaviors and limit other behaviors that may be appropriate or useful at certain times (Meth, 1990; Palkovitz, 1997). Furthermore, staying within the confines of male gender roles can be restrictive, but behaving in ways not sanctioned within the confines of male gender roles can damage men's lives (Meth, 1990; Pleck, 1995). For example, the male provider role has contributed to men's dissatisfaction and lack of involvement with their children (Schwartz, 1994). In contrast, PK offers, via the large gatherings of men, an alternative gender code and normalizes common struggles and behaviors regarding fathers and their participation in family life. PK eases gender role strain by including care for children and participating in family life in the definition of masculinity.

Schwartz (1994) suggests men's distance from their wives and children may stem from the family form they are currently using. The men and the women in this study described dividing roles into male and female areas of responsibility, with the final authority in the family given to the husband. Men were considered primarily providers, and the women were primarily caretakers. Schwartz (1994) argues that a traditional couple style perpetuates disconnection and undermines the development of intimacy, friendship, and mutual respect. Distance is created when couples have his
and hers spheres of influence. As Schwartz states, "traditional gender guidelines undermine marital intimacy" (Schwartz, 1994, p. 19). As a traditional couple "takes and governs separate spheres of interest," the prescription for parallel lives is established (Schwartz, 1994, p. 9). Parallel lives separate men and women in marriage and dilute the possibility for empathy, a deeper sense of knowing the other and being known. Emotional distance is created when men and women cannot share interests, experience each other’s lives, or transcend each other’s spheres of influence. PK blurred the distinction, but did not ameliorate the separation, between the spheres by encouraging men to become more involved with their children and in family life.

If remaining in separate spheres creates emotional distance, the failure of respect between men and women “exacerbates it” (Schwartz, 1994, p. 24). A lack of respect is often a result of unequal status between men and women in marriage, disallowing genuine interaction. Two separate worlds of experience dismantle authenticity and promote an idealism that obstructs understanding and support. Failure to establish identity separate from the man in the marriage strips the woman of becoming her own person and results in dehumanizing and taking for granted a person in her own right (Schwartz, 1994). For women, a traditional couple style denies individuality at the expense of the “corporate entity” of the traditional marriage (Schwartz, 1994, p. 7). The distance experienced between family members is the breakdown of friendship between husband and wife and remote connection between fathers and children (Markman, Stanley, & Blumberg, 1994; Levine & Pittinsky, 1997; Schwartz, 1994). Although PK encourages closeness between husbands and wives and fathers and children, it maintains a family structure that is
gender driven for the husband and the wife, subsequently robbing both of personal identity, thereby diluting the power of friendship and intimacy.

Women’s Dissatisfaction and Their Influence on His Attendance at Promise Keepers

Eight women in this study voiced dissatisfaction with their husbands’ participation in the family and involvement with the children, and initiated and suggested their husbands’ participation in PK. Speaking from within their sphere of influence and responsibility, the women were dissatisfied with raising children in the absence of their husbands and children’s fathers. The women spoke of wanting a better father-child relationship than presently existed. The women in the study described wanting “caring and loving fathers” for their children rather than what Schwartz termed “unknown, fearsome, or irrelevant [fathers]” (1994, p. 149).

The degrees of dissatisfaction varied among the women in the study. While it appeared that the women in the study had control in the family arena, it is also true that their husbands were less interested in the women’s area of influence, that of caretaking for the family, and more interested in their own area of influence, namely, the provider role (Baber & Allen, 1992). Schwartz identified this preference as “the beginning of divergent lives” (1994, p. 148). Furthermore, it was said by the women in the group “that their husbands had the final authority in the family.”

Although the women were dissatisfied, they also described a sense of meaning and fulfillment in their families. The dialectical tension is a common experience for women in that “the very aspects of family life that oppress them also offer them confirmation and fulfillment” (Baber & Allen, 1992, p. 7). The women in the study were not asking that their husbands take their “fair share” of household and child rearing duties (Thompson, 1991). Rather, they spoke clearly of wanting more help
and understanding from their husbands. As Schwartz (1994) states, women in traditional couples are not seeking equality; they want help, empathy, and companionship for themselves and their children.

Some of the women in the study were dissatisfied with absent husbands and fathers, and feeling isolated in their sphere of influence. This dissatisfaction led them to initiate their husbands’ attendance at PK. Positive support from mothers can move men in the direction of greater father involvement, “even in the face of modest personal investment” (Doherty et al., 1996, p. 16). If the men’s desire for connection is nurtured, men can begin to address the relational conflicts and differences instead of stopping them; reconnect with their children, wives, fathers, and mothers; and deal with substance abuse. The next section discusses what about PK posed as an answer to men and women attempting to remedy their dissatisfaction.

A Response to Dissatisfaction

PK provided a safe structure for men to explore relationships with themselves, other men, and family members. The men came to PK searching for trusted ways to give meaning to their lives. In one sense, there was no place for men to turn; they seemed caught in the narrow corridor of men’s prescribed social roles and behavior (Meth, 1990), needing some kind of structure to assist them. PK was considered a trusted and credible source because of its Christian emphasis and message. PK was also an organizing presence that gave men something greater than individual friendship to rely on, to show them how to build relationships with others. The men in this study believed and trusted PK to show them how to be men. As one man said, “I don’t know how to be a husband. I don’t know how to be a father. I
don't know anything about it. Here's an organization [PK] dedicated to saying that's why we're here.”

PK acknowledged and validated men’s feelings that portions of their lives were “not OK.” For example, one man shared, “I was getting shut out of the family. I wasn’t involved . . . I wasn’t holding up my part of the bargain.” PK gave men permission to recognize places in their lives they had neglected and to validate needs that lead toward fulfillment within relationships. The effort to pursue relationships is not reinforced or developed in the traditional messages of success and achievement to men; therefore, relationships and the need for them are neglected (Meth, 1990). The confines of the male gender role offer a narrow range of behaviors that allow a man access to external rewards, but do not lead to control over his own life (Meth, 1990). PK provided an opportunity for men to acknowledge needs and develop meaningful relationships with family members and friendship with other men. PK affirmed a broader range of behaviors, extending beyond traditional masculine characteristics that would be ordinarily denied or dismissed. PK provided a clearer understanding of their needs and directed the men to act on their needs for connection in relationships with other men and their families. PK confirmed to men the value of their families and the desire “to be more psychologically connected . . . more family activities and . . . [have] more fulfilling relationships” (Meth, 1990, p. 7).

Promise Keepers as Information and Support for Fathers

The men in this study had identified a desire to learn more about parenting and being a father. The men did not receive specific skills regarding their parenting from PK. However, Pleck (1997) reports that skill development tends to increase father involvement. The average age of men in this study was 37.2 years. Lamb et al.
(1987) suggest that the motivation for father involvement increases as men get older. The men expressed a desire to be challenged as fathers, to have an opportunity to assess their strengths and weaknesses. PK stimulated the men to rethink their assumptions about fathering and challenged them to act on the assessment of their fathering, based on the models PK presented as examples of good fathering. The belief that their role as a father was important was significant motivation to become involved with their children (Lamb et al., 1987). PK provided men with examples of good fathering and the opportunity to apply ideas or concepts to their specific situations back home in their families.

**Promise Keepers as Social Support**

PK offered significant social support for men through the huge stadium conferences and through accountability groups. Doherty et al. (1996) identifies social support as an important contextual factor leading to father involvement. However, highly involved fathers report negative attitudes from acquaintances, relatives, and coworkers (Doherty et al., 1996; Pleck, 1997). PK offers men an opportunity to demonstrate positive attitudes about involved fathering, while also building a supportive network of friends and acquaintances. Lamb et al. (1987) stated the benefit of positive communication with others regarding fathering as an important determinant to father involvement. This support and encouragement from other men during the conferences confirm the significance of social support. Men discovered other men who had struggled with similar concerns and issues regarding their fathering. Moreover, hearing of other men’s experiences with their children, the men went beyond identifying with other men to actually addressing issues and concerns.
Men also expressed finding support through the role modeling provided by PK speakers and, more importantly, consistent encouragement by men in accountability groups. Because of an absence of role models, fathers tend to take a "piecemeal approach to fathering behavior" instead of looking to one individual as the source of information, either vicariously or directly (Daly, 1993, p. 522). Daly suggested that men create "fragmented" models to imitate fathering behavior (1993, p. 523). Amid the confusion and the wide latitude for defining a father’s parental role (Doherty et al., 1996), PK appears to provide a part of a fragmented model of father involvement.

Accountability groups or partnerships may serve an important function in supporting and encouraging fathers’ involvement with their children. However, some wives find it subversive to the marital relationship when the accountability group replaces couple communication, interaction, and mutual influence. As one woman noted in the study, men may allow their accountability groups to influence them beyond the influence of their wives. As is characteristic of many traditional couples, individuals may find empathic relationships outside the marital relationship, diluting intimacy and friendship between partners (Schwartz, 1994). Husbands who do not accept the influence of their wives may be reflecting the unhappiness and parallel lives of a traditional couple (Schwartz, 1994) and perpetuating unhappiness and even potential instability of their marriage (Gottman et al., 1998).
A “Turning Point” and “Spark”

The sudden realization of the essential nature of being a father was a “turning point” or “spark” in these men’s experience at PK. The “turning point” for many men came as a result of concentrated messages from PK speakers and intense interaction with other men in accountability groups concerning the importance of involvement in family life. The “spark” for some men was a reinforcement of how important their families were to them, reaffirming decisions to be involved with their children made prior to attendance at PK conferences.

The messages from PK to the men in this study were direct moral imperatives and can be thought of as an ethical appeal to men for the care of their children and the welfare of the next generation. The men were urged to examine their lives and to assess “what is really important.” PK speakers explained that the moral and spiritual obligation of fathers to their children is not an optional responsibility. Moreover, PK makes the overt assumption that fathers can and want to be the kinds of fathers their children need them to be (Dollahite et al., 1997).

PK emphasizes the ethical obligation of fathering as a moral imperative. There are two components of the messages from PK speakers that tell fathers to care for the needs of their children as “moral, productive, mature, and loving fathers” (Dollahite et al. 1997, p. 30). These two components are delivered to men through the discourses of morality as care and morality as justice (Gilgun, 1995). The morality of care discourse is grounded in relationships and characterized by “concern, loyalty, and love for self and others.” (Gilgun, 1995, p. 266). This discourse encourages each to work for the good of the other, based on the other’s needs.
Generative fathering offers a discourse of care by highlighting fathers as caring for the next generation in terms of the children’s needs (Dollahite et al., 1997). The discourse of justice is grounded in duty and obligation and is characterized by “fairness, equal treatment, respect, rights, and impartiality” (Gilgun, 1995, p. 266). This discourse encourages others to modify procedures or protocol for the protection of those who are particularly vulnerable in society. Generative fathering provides a discourse of justice by highlighting fathers’ obligation to protect children (Dollahite et al., 1997). Combined, these two discourses have the potential to “contribute to the personal, intellectual, and moral growth of its citizens” (Bloom, 1986, as cited in Gilgun, 1995, p. 226). Furthermore, providing men with both the short- and long-range consequences of their involvement choices leads to moral decision making (Dewey, 1908, as cited in Gilgun, 1995). The overwhelmingly positive response of the PK participants in this study and their greater father involvement suggest that fathers will respond to an approach shaped by moral imperatives and directed toward the needs of the children of this and the next generation (Dollahite et al., 1997). Men described PK involvement as an opportunity to reflect on the nature of the father they wanted to be and the need for ongoing self-examination and reflection (Dollahite et al., 1997). Snarey (1997) suggests that one question, “Am I a good father?” represents one of the most “important acts of self-reflection among men” (p. xi).

Involvement and Family Form

Participants in this study enthusiastically reported more father involvement as a result of PK attendance. Increases in fathers' involvement with their children varied from family to family (Palkovitz, 1997). PK influenced fathers to be more patient, sensitive to their children’s feelings and needs, affectionate and loving, and interactive.
and accessible. Moreover, fathers were influenced by PK to be more intentional in their relationships with their children, a process that included getting to know the children as individuals, taking a teaching role with the children, monitoring their behavior during interactions with the children, and participating in the children’s daily activities.

The extent of men's involvement with their children was determined by their work schedules, that is, by the men's assumption of a provider role. A provider role that dominates the family organization, however, makes it difficult to have an investment of involvement with the children (Schwartz, 1994). Responsibility for the children is less about actual time spent with the children. Responsibility is defined here as taking ownership of the direct care and well-being of the children beyond the role of provider. Responsibility is the result of the type of partnership the husband and wife take together jointly toward raising the children (Schwartz, 1994). Involvement suggests the idea of engaging as a participant, taking part in the lives of their children. Responsibility goes beyond involvement and suggests liability as one of the primary people accountable for the children. However, the shift in responsibility for the children from primarily the mother to shared by mother and father requires attentiveness to the manner in which women and men take responsibility for their roles as mothers and fathers (Daly, 1993). "Certainly a man who has had less day-to-day contact with his children is likely to be less intensely committed to them than would a man who has shared raising them" (Schwartz, 1994, p. 150).

The idea of father involvement also suggests the possibility, and reality, of fathers' not being involved with their children (Dollahite & Hawkins, 1997; Palkovitz, 1997). Taking responsibility or sharing responsibility for children may include varying amounts of involvement with children. Traditional couples’
responsibilities are clearly differentiated, according to male earning capacity and female caretaking. Fathers' involvement is thwarted when responsibility is connected to the provider role, rather than to child-raising and caretaking (Schwartz, 1994). PK supports and encourages increased father involvement, but it is unclear if it supports a change in responsibility. PK's influence on father's involvement has increased men's participation with the children. Although PK exhorted men to consider their children and the amount of time devoted to work, for example, the provider role remains primarily men's responsibility in PK messages. The ideology of the provider reifies "women to do women's work and men to help," even though a joint responsibility has the potential to bring a greater sense of bonding and friendship (Schwartz, 1994, p. 123).

All participants, men and women, were satisfied with the changes PK attendance had brought about. However, this involvement did not alter the family form. For men there was greater involvement without greater responsibility; that is, men helped women in the woman's sphere of influence and responsibility. For the women in the study, there was more help, but the same amount of responsibility for the children. Primary responsibility for children remained with the women in each case. Men were more involved in other areas of women's responsibility, rather than assuming a share of responsibility for the children. One disadvantage of a traditional couple style is a distancing element that is built into the form and nature of the fathers' involvement with the children. Greater responsibility for the children would change the nature of involvement.

Leadership and family form converge to suggest that the traditional couple may be subtly changing form. All participants, men and women, spoke of the father as the head of the household and the man as the leader and the woman under him
(Schwartz, 1994). When there are separate spheres of influence and responsibility in a marriage, the "gender imbalance . . . renders the promise of intimacy in marriage difficult to fulfill" (Baber & Allen, 1992, p. 35). Men and women stated the man has the final authority in making decisions. However, in a majority of the couples, men and women described their style as collaborative, stating they "discuss everything; it never reaches the point" when husbands make the final decisions. The remaining participants were also satisfied with husbands' making final decisions because they had shifted from a focus on their own needs to the needs of the whole family. The statements that couples made regarding the husband as the leader with the final authority and a wife under him, conflict with statements describing the collaborative nature of the couple's decision-making process. This conflict may suggest an inability to accurately describe an experienced reality that has meaning to the women and men but is influenced by gender and other systems (Baber & Allen, 1992). "Married partners must negotiate between the institution of marriage, which is resistant to change, and the idiosyncratic ways in which their own lives and relationships develop" (Baber & Allen, 1992, p. 35). The conflict could also represent an automatic self-regulation by women in the decision-making process. Given the differential power in the decision-making process, women could be screening what they say. Thompson (1991) noted that women are satisfied with a decision-making process that favors the husband making the final decision, provided their husbands consult them (p. 194).

It is uncertain what increased father involvement within the same family form means for the families involved in this study. Have the men found an answer that will generate greater dissatisfaction and distance from their families in the long run? There can be no doubt, however, that those families that experienced increased father
involvement within their current family form, in a traditional couple style, were happy and pleased with the changes that occurred at least in the short term. However, changes in the family form, such as movement away from reliance on the provider role and toward the marital relationship and the male’s desire to nurture, may enhance intimacy and friendship between husband and the wife (Schwartz, 1994). However, as Schwartz (1994) states, there are pitfalls when considering movement away from reliance on the male in the provider role. A likely path may suggest that subtle changes in this form will alter those dynamics that are most likely to prompt distance and disconnection between fathers and their wives and children. One of these changes may involve decision making. The traditional couple style as a family form is sure to evolve into several variations, based on the demands made, internally and externally, on the family (Stacey, 1992).

Promise Keepers as a Form of Family Life Education

As an alternative form of family life education, PK demonstrated a critical emancipatory approach to family life education (Morgaine, 1992). The messages from PK to the men in this study were consistently aimed toward identifying and dismantling beliefs that a good father was simply a good provider. PK exhorted a belief that a good father is involved with his children beyond the role of a provider. PK also portrayed discrepancies between involved fathers and uninvolved fathers and asked men to reflect on their involvement with their children and assess the kind of father they were and want to be (Morgaine, 1992). The men in this study confirmed the perception that PK boldly demonstrates the need for fathers to be involved with their children and the consequences of not being involved with them. The men in this study also discussed the realization of no longer taking for granted the provider role
as the definition of involvement with their children (Morgaine, 1992). PK gives men the opportunity to appraise and choose to become the kind of father they want to be (Dollahite et al., 1997). Examples are presented to the men of the results of absent fathers and fathers who have relinquished responsibility. The men are advised to examine their own behavior to determine if they have “bought into” the cultural value of, for example, fathers as breadwinners only, remaining at a distance from their families and children (Morgaine, 1992).

PK can promote an involvement perspective by working with fathers to develop a close relationship with their children, by promoting family life education at an individual level, by creating a setting that feels safe for fathers, and by acknowledging strengths fathers bring to parenting (Palm, 1997). Through messages at conferences and follow-up support with accountability groups, PK motivates fathers to become more involved by building on the premise that men want to be close to their children, even if they do not know how (Palm, 1997).

While the discrepancies between involved and uninvolved fathers were articulated, the strengths and potential benefits of fathers’ involvement with their children were portrayed. Palm (1997) suggests that acknowledging some of the strengths that men bring to parenting is an important step in validating fathers’ involvement with his children (1997). The nature of the Christian emphasis, combined with the encouragement and directive to be more involved with their families, were significant attributes of PK as an alternative form of family life education. The men in this study described a confidence resulting from participating in a PK conference that they were important to their children and that they could and should be involved in the lives of their children (Palm, 1997). Results of the study also suggest that the best outreach for effective family life education for fathers is through personal invitation.
(Palm, 1997). The men in this study described the success of an individual approach of other men in explaining and inviting them to PK.

PK also may promote a traditional couple style and inadvertently perpetuate distance between family members, thereby maintaining men and women’s dissatisfaction with family life (Schwartz, 1994). The traditional couple style is initially comfortable for many couples because it is familiar, but as Schwartz suggests, when children arrive it is the beginning of two separate worlds (1994). Perhaps, if men and women became more comfortable with a broader range of ways of relating, more family relationships would be strengthened, thereby modifying the family form (Bergman, 1995; Schwartz, 1994).

PK assumes a traditional couple style (Schwartz, 1994) as the family form to which all participants strive, or should strive. Given the descriptions of dissatisfaction and the reported distance and disconnection characteristic of a traditional family form (Baber & Allen, 1992; Gottman et al., 1998; Schwartz, 1994), the enthusiasm and excitement the men and women in this study expressed following PK may be short-lived. The couples in this study seem committed to the same family form following PK as they did prior to attending. The men, prior to attending PK, described various levels of dissatisfaction. The dissatisfaction and distance from family members may have been connected to traditional parenting (Schwartz, 1994). As mentioned above, the influence of PK on fathers’ involvement with their children expanded their involvement in their wives’ sphere of influence and responsibility. Although men and women reported satisfaction with the changes in involvement, the family form that assisted in creating dissatisfaction and distance, experienced by both men and women, was still in place.
Implications of Research

The results of this study suggest some areas in which family life educators could assist fathers in becoming more involved with their families and broaden their responsibility for their children. It is essential that family life educators remain attentive to evolving expectations of fathers and the constructing and reconstructing of masculinity. Messages that include a combination of care and justice seem effective with fathers. Monitoring implied messages regarding family form in family life education seems central to encouraging father involvement, without doing so at the oppression of women in families (Baber & Allen, 1992), while also enabling men and women to cultivate friendship and intimacy in their marriages (Markman et al., 1994; Schwartz, 1994).

The fathers in this study described dissatisfaction with their lives, and it should be no surprise that men do indeed seek connection with others (Bergmen, 1995; Pleck, 1995) and want to be close to their families (Doherty et al., 1996; Dollahite & Hawkins, 1997; Levine & Pittinsky, 1997). Changes in the definition of what it means to be a good father and the discrepancy between a father’s conduct and the culture of fatherhood (LaRossa, 1998) have provided a recipe for confusion and apprehension. The shift from a deficit, father absent perspective to an involvement, father present perspective will contribute to addressing the confusion and close the gap between the ideal and actual behavior of fathers’ involvement with their children (Doherty, 1991; Dollahite & Hawkins, 1997; Levine & Pittinsky, 1997; Snarey, 1993). Expanding this shift requires support for the changes fathers have made (Dollahite & Hawkins, 1997) and the expectation of fathers’ assuming responsibility for their children (Doherty et al., 1996; Levine & Pittinsky, 1997; Stacey, 1992).
The men in the study were dramatically influenced by the strong messages directing them to care for their children and to live up to the obligation they have to them. Adopting an ethical message (Dollahite et al., 1997) to men regarding their involvement and responsibility for their children may have lasting results that provide greater benefit to fathers, mothers, and children. Combining a discourse of morality of care and justice may make it possible to bring about father involvement that is characterized by shared responsibility for the care and protection of their children. PK also directed men toward the traditional family form (Schwartz, 1994), implying father involvement and marital intimacy and friendship would be two by-products. However, by attending to the rules implied by a family form, family life educators can be aware of how forms thwart father involvement, marital intimacy, and friendship (Schwartz, 1994), as well as how these forms may evolve in unpredictable ways (Stacey, 1992) as they are constructed by husbands and wives (Baber & Allen, 1992).

The responsible fathering model (Doherty et al., 1996; Levine & Pitt, 1995; Levine & Pittinsky, 1997) and generative fathering perspective (Dollahite et al., 1997) provide a valuable basis for the study of father presence. Both of these models are value based and prescription oriented, expressing the expectation that fathers should be involved with their children. These models represent a shift from an implicit expectation for father involvement to an explicit definition for father involvement. The responsible fathering model expresses a value that involves behavior men ought to have as responsible fathers. The responsible fathering model provides a foundation that is systemic, identifying factors that interact and contribute to father involvement. Responsible fathering, rather than a set of static characteristics, involves factors that shape fathering as a dynamic process influenced by all the stakeholders in children's lives. The generative fathering model establishes an ethical foundation that expresses
fathers' moral obligation to their children. The generative fathering model establishes fathers' choices, in a landscape of shifting contexts, to extend themselves to their children. The belief that fathers are capable of carrying out their responsibility to their children is an important basis for the study of father presence.

Limitations of the Study

The limitations of interviewing as the methodology include the uncertainties of participants' cooperation in the interview process and responses to the interviewer's questions. Participants may not understand the interviewer's questions or be unable to articulate their experiences (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). Misunderstandings can be best addressed through careful development of an in-depth conversation that has a purpose and goal and by being patient and determined to listen carefully to participants as their responses unfold and they describe their stories (Marshall & Rossman, 1995; Taylor & Bogdan, 1984). The focus on participants' descriptions of their lives, particularly fathers' involvement, had the potential for exaggerated reports of the degree of accuracy of father involvement (Pleck, 1997). Individual interviews, combined with couple interviews, provided the opportunity to investigate discrepancies in the report of fathers' involvement. For example, conversations revolving around the women's dissatisfaction occurred during the couple interviews, rather than during the individual interviews. This dissatisfaction was an open topic of conversation, and the husbands were well aware of the dissatisfaction that their wives had regarding their participation in the family and involvement with the children. Furthermore, the focus of the interviews was to gain understanding of the influence of PK on fathers' involvement, as opposed to quantifying the amount of change in father involvement as a result of attending PK.
The possibility for insight and understanding regarding PK and its influence on the family is broad, and, at times, limited the opportunity to qualify that influence.

One of the limitations of this study is that it examines a relatively homogenous group. White middle to upper middle class fathers with small children hardly represent the diversity of fathers. In reality, fathers are a very heterogeneous group, with diverse definitions of father involvement and responsibility (LaRossa, 1997). Another limitation of the study is quite obvious: the lack of extensive research experience on my part. The depth of data analysis was fundamental but appropriate for an inexperienced researcher on the path to more sophisticated research methods (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984).

Future Research

Future research on the influence of PK on the family can follow many routes. Most notably, investigating PK influence on fathers' involvement with various racial and ethnic groups would assist in understanding the multiple constructions of father involvement in the United States. PK influence on nonresidential father involvement would contribute further understanding to both the PK influence and the nature of nonresidential fathers' involvement with their children (Doherty et al., 1996).

Several issues are left unanswered by this study. Does PK attract non-Christians? What are the experiences of non-Christians who attend PK? Do they remain non-Christian? Are there variations on the influence of PK on father involvement? How do children perceive and understand their fathers' involvement following the PK experience? What are the effects on fathers' involvement in terms of long-term changes? What is the effect of accountability groups on sustaining the changes fathers make in their families? What is the influence and effect of
accountability groups or partnerships on the marital relationship and intimacy? The PK influence on marriages and the evolution (Stacey, 1992) of the traditional couple form (Schwartz, 1994) may provide understanding of family forms that are meeting the demands placed on fathers and mothers.

Summary

Masses of men may continue to gather in 1998, despite the organizational transition of PK to an all volunteer organization. The men in this study undoubtedly benefited from their participation in PK. They had the opportunity to address, some for the first time, their dissatisfaction with their lives and the distance they felt from their families. The men and women found PK to be one answer among many to address their dissatisfaction. Fathers and mothers were excited and enthusiastic about PK influence on father involvement. It would seem that men are moving toward greater involvement and are embracing a generative posture with their children. Although the rate of change may be slow, evidence of effort and enthusiasm for involvement with their children and in their families has set the direction for more integrated participation in the family.
Appendix A

Telephone Script
Phone Script When Speaking With a Potential Volunteer for the Study

Thank you for calling. The project title is:

The influence of Promise Keepers on fathers' involvement with their children

This research is intended to study how father involvement is influenced after attending a Promise Keepers conference.

May I ask you a couple of questions about criteria for participating in the project?

____ Have you attended at least one Promise Keeper day and one half conferences?

____ Are you married?

____ Do you and your spouse have at least one child ten year old or younger?

____ Would you and your wife be able to agree to one individual interview each and one couple interview each lasting about one hour? Scheduled at a time and place for your convenience.

____ (optional) Do both of you work outside the home?

A) It appears that you meet the requirements for the project, and it would be a pleasure to include you and your spouse. Would you like to schedule times for the interviews?

Name___________________________________ Phone____________________

Interview(s) scheduled: Couple interview ____________________________
                    Male interview _____________________________
                    Female interview ___________________________

Location of interview(s) __________________________________________

If you should have a schedule conflict, please call me at 329–4142.

B) It appears that you do not meet the requirements for the project. Thank you for taking the time to consider this project and call. Thank you, good bye.
Appendix B

Demographic Information Form
(Husband)
Demographic Information Form to Be Completed by Each Participant (Husband)

Demographic Information

Name _____________________________________
Address ___________________________________
Phone _____________________________________
Promise Keepers Conference(s) Attended ________________________________
    Date(s): ______________________________________
Promise Keeper programs or activities (formal or informal) I have participated in since attending the conference.

____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
Date of birth ______________ Occupation ________________________________
Level of education__________ Date of Marriage ____________________________
Number of children __________ Ages and sex of children ____________________
Previous parent education experiences ____________________________________
Appendix C

Demographic Information Form
(Wife)
Demographic Information Form to Be Completed by Each Participant
(Wife)

Demographic Information

Name _____________________________________
Address ___________________________________
Phone _____________________________________

If you have participated as a volunteer in Promise Keeper conferences, programs, or activities (formal or informal), please describe below.

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

Date of birth ___________ Occupation _______________________________________
Level of education ________ Date of Marriage ________________________________
Number of children ________ Ages and sex of children _________________________
Previous parent education experiences__________________________________________
Appendix D

Participant Consent Form
I have been invited to participate in a research project entitled: "The influence of Promise Keepers on fathers' involvement with their children". I understand that this research is intended to study how father involvement is influenced after attending a Promise Keepers conference. I further understand that this project is Michael Walcheski's dissertation project.

My consent to participate in this project indicates that I will be asked to participate in one-hour interviews with Michael Walcheski. The first interview is a joint interview with my spouse. The second interview is an individual one. The setting and time of the interviews have been arranged for my convenience. The first interview will involve completing a brief survey describing my experiences with Promise Keepers and general information about myself such as age, level of education, and employment status and a discussion regarding the influence of Promise Keepers on my involvement with our children, or my husband's involvement with our children. The second interview will involve a discussion regarding the specific influences of Promise Keepers on my involvement with our children (for husbands) or regarding my observations of my spouse's involvement with our children after attending a Promise Keepers conference (for wives).

As in all research, there may be unforeseen risks to the participant. If accidental injury occurs, appropriate emergency measures will be taken; however, no compensation or treatment will be made available to me except as otherwise specified in this consent form. I understand, however, that Michael Walcheski is prepared to provide ample resources regarding a referral if I would like counseling regarding the topics discussed. I will be responsible for the cost of therapy if I choose to pursue it.

One way in which I may benefit from this activity is having the chance to talk about how Promise Keepers has influenced my involvement with our children or talk about how Promise Keepers has influenced my spouse's involvement with our children. I understand that others who experience Promise Keepers, or men seeking family life education may benefit from the knowledge that is gained from this research.

I understand that all information collected from me is confidential. That means that my name will not appear on any papers on which this information is recorded. The forms will all be coded, and Michael Walcheski will keep a separate master list with the names of participants and the corresponding code numbers. Once the data are collected and analyzed, the master list will be destroyed. All other forms will be retained for three years in a locked file in the principal investigator's office.

I understand that I may refuse to participate or quit at any time during the study without prejudice or penalty. If I have questions or concerns about this study, I may contact either Michael Walcheski at (616)329-4142 or Dr. Karen Blaisure at (616)387-5108. I may also contact the Chair of Human Subjects Institutional Review Board at (616)387-8293 or the Vice President for Research at (616)387-8298 with any concerns that I have. My signature below indicates that I understand the purpose and requirements of the study and that I agree to participate.

Signature

Date
Appendix E

Human Subjects Institutional Review Board Approval
Date: 24 December 1997

To: Karen Blaisure, Principal Investigator
   Michael Walcheski Student Investigator

From: Richard Wright, Chair

Re: HSIRB Project Number 97-11-24

This letter will serve as confirmation that your research project entitled “The Influence of Promise Keepers on Fathers’ Involvement with Their Children” has been approved under the expedited category of review by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board. The conditions and duration of this approval are specified in the Policies of Western Michigan University. You may now begin to implement the research as described in the application.

Please note that you may only conduct this research exactly in the form it was approved. You must seek specific board approval for any changes in this project. You must also seek reapproval if the project extends beyond the termination date noted below. In addition if there are any unanticipated adverse reactions or unanticipated events associated with the conduct of this research, you should immediately suspend the project and contact the Chair of the HSIRB for consultation.

The Board wishes you success in the pursuit of your research goals.

Approval Termination: 24 December 1998
Couple Interview Guide

Introduction

Explanation of Study and Consent Form
1. Do you have any questions about the study?
2. Do you have any questions about confidentiality?
3. Do you have any questions about withdrawing from the study?

Check Demographics
1. You have (number of) children? Their names are?
2. (Father) attended a Promise Keepers conference in ____?

Attraction to Promise Keepers
1. What was attractive to you about Promise Keepers?
2. What influenced _____’s attendance at the Promise Keepers Conference in (month) of (year)?
3. Who influenced _____’s participation?
4. What prompted _____’s participation?

Expectations of Promise Keepers Conference
1. What did you expect would happen by _____ attending the Promise Keepers Conference?
2. In what ways were these expectations met?
3. In what ways were these expectations not met?
4. What didn’t you expect to happen that did happen by attending the Promise Keepers Conference?

Influence of Attending a Promise Keepers Conference
1. What did you learn from attending a Promise Keepers Conference?
2. To what extent, if any, was Promise Keepers an influence on your family life?
3. To what extent, if any, was Promise Keepers an influence on your involvement with your children?
4. Please describe any changes you have noted in your family since _____ attended the conference.
5. Please describe what has remained the same in your family.
6. Please describe how your family manages household work, raising children, and jobs outside the home.
   Who does what?
   How did you come to have this way of managing household work?
   How did you come to have this way of managing raising children?
   How did you come to have this way of managing and jobs outside the home?
   How have you come to have these arrangements?
7. Please describe any ways in which the Promise Keepers conference has influenced how you manage raising children, household work, and jobs outside the home.
8. Please describe any ways in which the Promise Keepers conference has influenced how you are involved with your children.

Assessment of Promise Keepers
1. What do you like about Promise Keepers?
2. What do you not like about Promise Keepers?
3. How can Promise Keepers help men become better fathers?
4. What are the limitations of Promise Keepers in helping men become better fathers?
5. What other points would you like to tell me about Promise Keepers?
6. What other points would you like to tell me about fathering?
Appendix G

Individual Interview Guide
(Father)
Individual Interview (Father)

Introduction
1. Do you have any questions about the study?
2. Do you have any questions about confidentiality?
3. Do you have any questions about withdrawing from the study?

Attraction
1. How did you come to attend a Promise Keepers conference when you did?
2. How is Promise Keepers attractive to men?
3. What and who influenced your participation?
4. What was your wife’s role in your participation?
5. What characteristics of Promise Keepers make it successful in attracting some men?
6. What characteristics of Promise Keepers make are not attractive to some men?

Expectations
1. What did you expect would happen by attending the Promise Keepers conference?
2. In what ways were these expectations met?
3. In what ways were these expectations not met?
4. What didn’t you expect to happen that did happen by attending the Promise Keepers conference?
5. In what ways, if any, did you expect Promise Keepers to help you as a father?
6. How were these expectations met?
7. How were these expectations not met?

Influence
1. Describe the ways you currently are involved with your children? Possible follow-up statements and questions:
   Tell me more about that.
   How does ___(whatever the father described)____ happen?
   Can you give me an example?
2. Did you notice any changes due to attending a Promise Keepers conference?
3. What influences your involvement with your children? (What encourages or discourages your involvement? What promotes or inhibits your involvement?)
4. Did you notice any changes in the influences on your involvement due to attending a Promise Keepers conference?
5. Do you think you are a better parent due to attending a Promise Keepers conference? Is so, then in what ways? How? What has changed?
6. Please describe how you manage household work, raising children, and jobs outside the home.
   Who does what?
   How did you come to have this way of managing household work?
   How did you come to have this way of managing raising children?
   How did you come to have this way of managing jobs outside the home?
   How have you come to have these arrangements?
7. Please describe any ways in which the Promise Keepers conference has influenced how you manage raising children, household work, and jobs outside the home.

Assessment
1. Have you attended any parent education classes or programs?
2. If so, how does Promise Keepers compare with these classes or programs?
3. If not, are there reasons why you haven’t attended?
4. What would you look for in a parent education class or program?
5. What could Promise Keepers do to help fathers?
Appendix H

Individual Interview Guide
(Mother)
Individual Interview (Mother)

Introduction
1. Do you have any questions about the study?
2. Do you have any questions about confidentiality?
3. Do you have any questions about withdrawing from the study?

Attraction
1. Who influenced _____’s participation in the Promise Keepers conference?
2. What was your role in _____’s participation in attending the Promise Keepers conference?
3. What was attractive to your husband about Promise Keepers?
4. How is Promise Keepers attractive to men?
5. What characteristics of Promise Keepers make it successful in attracting some men?
6. What characteristics of Promise Keepers make it successful in not attracting some men?

Expectations
1. What did you expect would happen by _____ attending the Promise Keepers conference?
2. In what ways were these expectations met?
3. In what ways were these expectations not met?
4. What didn’t you expect to happen that did happen by _____’s attending the Promise Keepers conference?
5. In what ways, if any, did you expect Promise Keepers to help _____ as a father?
6. How were these expectations met?
7. How were these expectations not met?

Influence
1. Describe the ways _____ is currently involved with your children? Possible follow-up statements and questions:
   - Tell me more about that.
   - How does (whatever the father described) happen?
   - Can you give me an example?
2. Did you notice any changes due to _____’s attending a Promise Keepers conference?
3. What influences _____’s involvement with your children? (What encourages or discourages his involvement?)
   - What promotes or inhibits his involvement?)
4. Did you notice any changes in the influences on _____’s involvement due to attending a Promise Keepers conference?
5. Do you think _____ is a better parent due to attending a Promise Keepers conference? If so, in what ways? How?
   - What has changed?
6. Please describe how you manage household work, raising children, and jobs outside the home.
   - Who does what?
   - How did you come to have this way of managing household work?
   - How did you come to have this way of managing raising children?
   - How did you come to have this way of managing jobs outside the home?
   - How have you come to have these arrangements?
7. Please describe any ways in which the Promise Keepers conference has influenced how _____ manages raising children, household work, and jobs outside the home.

Assessment
1. Has _____ attended any parent education classes or programs?
2. If so, how does Promise Keepers compare with those classes or programs?
3. If not, are there reasons why _____ hasn’t attended?
4. What would _____ look for in a parent education class or program?
5. What could Promise Keepers do to help fathers?
Appendix I

Original List of Codes
Original List of Codes (61)

Female
Male
Joint (couple)
High school
Some college
Technical
Bachelors
Masters
MD
One employed outside the home
Both employed outside of the home
One conference attended
Two conferences attended
Three conferences attended
Four conferences attended
One child
Two children
Three children
Four children
Five children
Traditional couple Style
Near-Peer couple Style
Peer couple Style
Yes—previous parent education
No—previous parent education
Both—previous parent education
1–7 years married
8–14 years married
15–21 years married
Influence by PK
Awareness
Accountability
Intentional connection
Intentional connection/with children
Intentional connection/with other men
Intentional connection/with wife
Leadership
One of Several
Learn
Involvement
Assessment
Dislikes
PK could do
Looking for in PE
Limitations
Compares
Attraction
Influenced-Self
Influenced-Self/Personal growth
Influenced-Self/Enhance family
Influenced-Self/Life circumstances
Influenced-others
Influenced-others/Male friends
Influenced-others/Wife
Influenced-others/Other family
Expectations
Clear
Clear/As a father
No expectations
Surprises

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Appendix J

Final List of Codes
Final list of codes (27)

Attraction
Influenced-Self
Influenced-Self/Personal growth
Influenced-Self/Enhance family
Influenced-Self/Life circumstances
Influenced-others
Influenced-others/Male friends
Influenced-others/Wife
Influenced-others/Other family

Expectations
Clear
As a father
No expectations

Influence by PK
Awareness
Accountability
Intentional connection
Intentional connection/with children
Intentional connection/with other men
Intentional connection/with wife
Leadership
One of Several
Learn
Involvement

Assessment
PK could do
Looking for in PE
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