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# Paternal Involvement with Special Needs Children

Emily Lauren Furst

*University of Tennessee, Knoxville*

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To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Emily Lauren Furst entitled "Paternal Involvement with Special Needs Children." I have examined the final electronic copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science, with a major in Child and Family Studies.

Greer Litton Fox, Major Professor

We have read this thesis and recommend its acceptance:

John G. Orme, Hillary N. Fouts

Accepted for the Council:

Dixie L. Thompson

Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

(Original signatures are on file with official student records.)

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Hillary N. Fouts, Committee Member

Accepted for the Council:

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Carolyn R. Hodges, Vice Provost and  
Dean of the Graduate School

(Original signatures are on file with official student records.)

PATERNAL INVOLVEMENT WITH SPECIAL NEEDS CHILDREN

A Thesis Presented for the  
Master of Science Degree  
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Emily Lauren Furst  
August 2008

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## Abstract

The focus of this study is paternal involvement of fathers with special needs children. Role salience, parental satisfaction, reflected appraisals, and contextual variables were hypothesized to mediate the relationship between empowerment and paternal involvement. It was also hypothesized that financial strain would moderate the relationship between empowerment and paternal involvement, as mediated by the identity theory variables and contextual variables. The researcher additionally hypothesized that empowerment would be more important to men facing higher levels of financial strain. These hypotheses were investigated using data from the Pathways Research Project, which evaluated Tennessee's Early Intervention System (TEIS). TEIS provides services to families with special needs children under the age of three. The children in the sample had previously been diagnosed with cerebral palsy, autism, spina bifida, Down syndrome, developmental delays, and speech and/or hearing delays. Findings revealed that the relationship between empowerment and paternal involvement was mediated by role salience and parental satisfaction. In addition, the results showed that the mediated model was moderated by financial strain, such that empowerment was found to be extremely important for men facing high levels of financial strain.

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## CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

This project is framed by two separate areas of research pertinent to families in the contemporary United States. First is a concern with father roles and men's engagement as a foundation of family life. The second focus concerns families with special needs children and the use of family centered practices as a source of empowerment for these families. This project brings these two areas together and examines how paternal roles and empowerment together help us understand the involvement of fathers of special needs children.

Researchers have long shown interest in understanding the dynamics of the family, but researchers did not begin to examine the role of the father until the dynamics of the family began to show dramatic changes in the mid-twentieth century (Bronte-Tinkew, Carrano, & Guzman, 2006; Black, Dubowitz, & Starr, 1999). The 1960s saw a decline in the idea of a traditional nuclear family. Divorce rates began to escalate and gender roles within the family began to change. Many mothers, married or divorced, gained employment outside of the home (McLoyd, 1989). These changes in the American family contributed to the role of the father being called into question. Men were forced to redefine their paternal role, some while living separately from their children, while others simply had to learn to adapt to a more egalitarian style of partnership with their wives (Black et al.; Coley, 2001; Bronte-Tinkew et al.). Several decades later, a unified definition of a family is still not present in social science research due to the many different structural compositions of modern day families (Boss, 2002). Due to these differences within the basic structure of the family, coming to an understanding of the

role a father plays within the family and a man's level of involvement within the family has become a challenging task for researchers.

Families with special needs children underwent additional changes during this same time period due to revolutionary ideas regarding rights and services to individuals with disabilities. The American government began enacting laws in the 1970s to protect the rights of children with disabilities. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA; PL 101-476) was enacted in 1975 in order to ensure that children with disabilities had access to public education. The law has been revised many times since 1975 and continues to ensure that children with disabilities are provided education and services around the United States. According to the United States Department of Education (2008), under Part C of IDEA, states are required to provide services to children under the age of three who are at risk for developmental disorders, while also aiding the children's families in receiving information regarding how to care effectively for their special needs child. Under Part C of IDEA, Tennessee's Early Intervention System (TEIS) was created. TEIS began providing a bridge between families with special needs children and the services available within the community through the provision of family-centered therapy (Tennessee's Department of Education, 2007). Family-centered therapy was implemented under TEIS because it is believed to be one of the most effective therapies for families of special needs children. Family-centered therapy empowers parents to succeed in meeting the needs of their children by encouraging parents to work with professionals within the context of the family and the family's daily routines (Higgins, 2005; Wang et al., 2006).

Ideas about the paternal role, on the one hand, and the opportunities afforded to families with special needs children, on the other, have evolved independently in recent decades. It may be useful for researchers now to bring these two separate developments together and to examine how the role of the father and feelings of empowerment provided to fathers through family-sensitive services relate to levels of paternal involvement. Symbolic Interactionism Theory (SI) provides one way to examine this relationship. More specifically, Identity Theory, a component of the Symbolic Interactionism Theory, provides leverage for understanding how one's actions are shaped by one's ideas about appropriate behavior, and further, how those ideas are shaped by one's social interactional environment.

In its simplest formation, SI suggests that people are influenced by their culture and the interactions they have with others. Based on these values and cultural norms, individuals assign meaning to concepts in their environments (Ingoldsby, Smith, & Miller, 2004). This theory also suggests that people have multiple identities or roles they play depending on the specific context they are in at any given time. Because of the number of roles, individuals construct a hierarchy of their identities based on the salience of each role and subsequently react to their surrounding environments according to the meaning and salience that they have assigned (Ingoldsby et al.). Identity theory specifically examines the formation of the self through expectations of others and cultural norms and explores the relationship between identity of the self and behaviors that the individual engages in related to their identity (Fox & Bruce, 2001). Research using SI and Identity theory suggest that a man who attaches a high degree of salience to his fathering role, has a high level of satisfaction in his paternal role, and perceives that others in his

social environment are supportive of him in that role, will show active involvement in his child's life. However, it is unclear from the available literature how role salience, satisfaction, and reflected appraisals are related to paternal involvement when a special needs child is involved.

Father role salience and paternal involvement may be more difficult to examine with fathers of special needs children due to social conditions that affect their ability to care for their children effectively and their level of paternal satisfaction (Ray, 2003). Because beauty and perfection are highly valued in the American culture, parents of children with disabilities frequently face stigmatization from people around them. Research indicates that parents of disabled children may feel isolated from others in their community and face more emotional distress than their counterparts with typical children (Green, 2003). Green found that emotional distress related to feeling stigmatized by their children's disabilities was particularly salient in parents of young children. In addition, researchers found that fathers felt more uncomfortable than mothers with bringing their special needs children into public places where they could be seen and could potentially bother people with their atypical appearances and behaviors (Pelchat, Lefebvre, & Perreault, 2003). This level of discomfort carried over into asking for help. Fathers expressed a lack of desire to involve professionals with their children because they did not want their children's disorders to bother people, even if these people were service providers willing to provide help and information (Pelchat et al.). Because fathers may struggle a great deal with the effects of their child's disability, research suggests that service providers may need to work even harder to encourage men to participate in the

services related to their children's condition, as well as to participate in everyday activities with their children.

Researchers have suggested that dealing with service providers and medical professionals provides an additional level of stress to parents of special needs children, even when parents are open to using service providers to gain an understanding of their children's needs (Ray, 2003). However, it is important to encourage parents, especially fathers, to take advantage of the services programs, like TEIS, provided to families of special needs children (Ray). Without feeling that they have sufficient information to aid their children, fathers may be less likely to be involved with their children because they are unaware of how to properly care for their children's special needs. Therefore, helping fathers feel empowered to deal with their children's needs may be particularly important in providing a link between men's father role salience and the amount of interaction they have with their special needs children.

Despite the amount of literature examining men's involvement with their children, on the one hand, and the cultural changes occurring to help ensure children with disabilities are being serviced within their communities, on the other, there are several gaps in the current body of research relating to the role of fathers with special needs children within the context of the family. First, it is unclear from the existing literature on fathering and on special needs families how men with special needs children view the importance of their roles as fathers, how satisfied these men are with the role they have identified, and whether their view of their role affects how involved they are with their special needs children. The idea of empowerment has also become an important construct in understanding services provided to families of special needs children, and much more

research is needed to understand more fully men's responses to empowerment. Finally, because parenting does not occur apart from social context, more information is needed to understand how demographic characteristics, such as income and level of education may affect fathers' role salience, role satisfaction, empowerment, and subsequently, the men's amount of involvement with their special needs children. Therefore, the current study was conducted in order to determine the relationship between paternal role salience, paternal role satisfaction, reflected appraisals, empowerment, demographic variables, and paternal involvement.



## CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

The following chapter is a literature review discussing the existing research on special needs children and paternal involvement. The chapter is divided into sections representing the independent and dependent variables. The sections include program variables, identity theory variables, contextual variables, and fathering involvement variables. The literature review attempts to bridge the gap between special needs children and paternal involvement, while thoroughly explaining the current body of literature supporting each of the variables used in the current study.

### Program Variables

#### *Family-Centered Practices and Empowerment*

Throughout the last decade, family centered practices have been put into place throughout the United States to provide services to families with special needs children (Curtis & Singh, 1996). Family centered practices are often recommended by professionals because they include all members of the family and allow therapy and other services to occur within the context of the family and often, the child's home (Wang et al., 2006). These services are considered to be especially effective for two reasons. First, they provide the family with knowledge which allows them to effectively care for their child's special needs. Family-centered practices focus on enabling the entire family to develop and strengthen a sense of competence in regards to learning how to best help the child in need, while also attempting to provide the family with a sense of control over their lives (Curtis & Singh; Wang et al.). The second reason family-centered practices are considered to be effective is the sense of empowerment these services provide for families of special needs children (Dunst & Dempsey, 2007). Often, these programs refer

families to other services in the community, such as support groups, as an attempt to connect them to other families struggling with similar issues within the community. This can be a crucial part of gaining a sense of empowerment because research has shown that families who have participated in support groups reported feeling a greater sense of empowerment than families who did not attend support group meetings (Curtis & Singh). Fathers who participated in support groups have also been found to have increased levels of self esteem and self efficacy (Fagan & Stevenson, 2002). Gaining access to other sources of support around the community is also important for families of children with disabilities because gaining empowerment and competence is never a complete process; there is always more to learn about what families can do to help their children and help themselves (Curtis & Singh; Resendez, Quist, & Matshazi, 2000).

Empowerment is a crucial component provided through family centered practices because research also suggests that a sense of empowerment is significant when examining levels of paternal involvement. Empowerment is gained through the provision of services and resources which help the family improve their quality of life, as well as their special needs children's quality of life (Resendez et al., 2000). Singh (1995) defined empowerment as a process in which families gain knowledge and information from the resources provided to them, resulting in an increased sense of control over their lives and a greater quality of life. Empowerment has also been defined in terms of system advocacy. Curtis and Singh (1996) explained that empowerment is defined by the family's ability to navigate the system of services available to them. In this case, parents who feel disempowered will be less likely to know how to secure necessary services for their children (Scheel & Rieckmann, 1998). Self efficacy is also frequently mentioned in

the definition of empowerment, suggesting that parents are empowered when they have high levels of self efficacy and feelings of power in dealing with situations that may arise (Guitierrez & Ortega, 1991). Resendez and colleagues argued that empowerment is extremely important because children and families are always changing, causing their needs to change as well; they cautioned that parents must actively pursue feelings of empowerment and constantly seek out knowledge and resources in order to help provide themselves and their children with a higher quality of life.

Scheel and Rieckmann (1998) discussed the importance of the relationship between empowerment and parent satisfaction. Although service providers hope to leave the parents with a sense of self efficacy and empowerment as the services continue, research suggests that fathers who are depressed or have lower levels of parent satisfaction may be less likely to understand and grasp the concepts of the services provided to them, therefore hindering the process of empowerment (Scheel & Rieckmann). Dunst and Trivette (1987) explained that empowerment and parental satisfaction are extremely important constructs for service providers. When service providers intervene, parents may face feelings of insecurity, feeling that they are unable to competently parent their children with special needs. Therefore, service providers should ensure that they are encouraging the parents, providing mothers and fathers with a sense of empowerment and self efficacy (Dunst & Trivette).

Fagan and Stevenson (2002) found that services that focused on empowering fathers were effective in promoting higher levels of self esteem and parent satisfaction; however, this was found to be true only when discussing residential fathers. They suggested this finding may relate to the idea that nonresidential fathers are more likely to

have complicated relationships with the mother of the child, including potential conflict regarding custody and visitation. These findings suggest that empowerment may play a very important role in contributing to parent satisfaction. Scheel and Rieckmann also found that parents of preschoolers who had recently been diagnosed with psychological disorders faced negative perceptions of themselves. While learning about services for their children, parents' levels of satisfaction may increase due to realization that there was nothing they could have done to prevent their child's disability.

When examining levels of empowerment, Curtis and Singh (1996) found that perceptions of empowerment differed greatly depending on gender and level of education. They found that women tended to feel more empowered than men after being involved with local service providers. They were unsure of why this gender difference occurred, but suggested that services may inadvertently be designed for female participants because there is a cultural belief that women will be more involved with their children's services.

When examining levels of education, Curtis and Singh found that the higher the level of education, the lower the level of empowerment felt by the participant. They suggested that this was because participants with higher levels of education may expect more from services than people with lower levels of education and therefore feel less empowered after meeting with service providers (Curtis & Singh). Fagan and Stevenson (2002) suggested that programs that provide a sense of empowerment to fathers may be particularly important for low income men because these men are more likely to have lost confidence and have lower levels of self efficacy regarding their parenting abilities.

Therefore, they may have more to gain from services than men who begin programs and services with higher levels of knowledge and higher levels of self esteem.

When examining the relationship between involvement and empowerment, Curtis and Singh (1996) found a correlation showing that parents who feel more knowledgeable with their children's disability and are more aware of the services available to their children will be more involved in the services provided to them. Although there is very little information regarding how empowerment relates to fathers' involvement in activities with their children, Fagan, Berndt, and Whiteman (2007) suggested that when fathers feel lower levels of stress and are able to cope with stressors in their lives, they are more involved with their children through caregiving activities. By combining this finding with the information known about services that provide a sense of empowerment, I hope to find that when fathers feel empowered to deal with their children's needs, they are more involved in their children's lives through caregiving activities and active participation in events in their children's lives.

### Identity Theory Variables

#### *Role Salience*

The role of the father has been socially constructed throughout the course of history, placing expectations on men, guiding how they should act as fathers and what responsibilities are attached to fatherhood (Minton & Pasley, 1996). However, how men choose to embrace their role depends on the importance they place on fatherhood, as well as how they think and feel about being a father and their perceptions of the expectations of people around them (Saracho, 2007). According to identity theory, a man's identity can be conceptualized in many ways because of the number of roles he plays at any given

time in his life, such as the role of a father, a husband, or an employee (Stryker & Serpe, 1994). Because a man's identity is composed of many different facets, a hierarchy of roles is constructed based on which roles are more central to the man's identity (Fox & Bruce, 2001). Assuming a hierarchy of roles, men may be more motivated to engage in activities and behaviors that coincide with their beliefs and expectations about their roles (Minton & Pasley; McBride & Rane, 1997). For example, a man may place a greater degree of importance on his occupation than on his role as a father; therefore, his actions may reflect this hierarchy through working overtime instead of leaving work to attend a child's sports activity (Aldous, Mulligan, & Bjarnason, 1998). However, it is important to acknowledge that men's circumstances, such as inflexible work schedules, may also prevent men from enacting their father role preferences because of obligations they have in other areas of their lives (Fox & Bruce; Roy, 2004).

Bronte-Tinkew et al. (2006) found that men who believed being a father was an important aspect in their lives were more active participants in caregiving activities and nurturing activities than those who placed less importance on the role of the father. They also found these men to be more active in physically caring for the child, displaying paternal warmth, and stimulating the child cognitively through activities. These results were more consistent when dealing with men with male children. McBride and Rane (1997) also discovered that men who placed more importance on the role of the father were more involved than those men who did not; however, they were still significantly less involved than their wives in child care routines and acts of nurturance. They also found few correlations between men's beliefs about their roles as fathers and their participation in actual parenting behaviors. McBride and Rane suggested that the

discrepancy between beliefs and actions could be attributed to a lack of self awareness when reporting on men's own behaviors or gatekeeping mothers who influence both the men's identities and behaviors as fathers to their children. The discrepancy may also be accounted for by situational constraints. Fox and Bruce (2001) suggest that men may place a high degree of salience on father roles, but if their occupations fail to allow autonomy and negotiable work hours, they may not have an opportunity to engage in fathering behaviors that reflect their beliefs about the importance of the father role.

Minton and Pasley (1996) found that aspects of role identity, such as feelings of competence and satisfaction with the role of the father were correlated with paternal involvement, but role salience was not correlated with higher levels of paternal involvement. However, they cautioned that the lack of correlation between role saliency and paternal involvement may actually have been due to a poor measure of saliency instead of a lack of relationship between the two constructs. Henley and Pasley (2005) reported very similar results when they found role identity and parental satisfaction to be correlated with paternal involvement, with no direct correlation between role salience and paternal involvement. They suggested that simply because a man talks about being a father to other men around him does not necessarily mean that he will be more involved with his children than a man who does not outwardly express feelings related to fatherhood.

Although the concept of role salience has been studied with many populations, there is an obvious gap in the literature regarding role salience of fathers with special needs children. It is unknown how fathers' identities reflect their behavior when they are also coping with the stress and hardships that come along with having a child with a

disability. However, the current body of literature suggests that the relationship between role salience and paternal involvement may be affected by other variables. One such variable is reflected appraisals, meaning the opinions of others regarding men's ability to father their special needs children. Henley and Pasley's research (2005) suggested that the relationship between role salience and paternal involvement may be affected when fathers have support and encouragement to engage in specific parenting behaviors. Beitel and Parke (1998) came to similar conclusions when they found that maternal attitudes predict paternal involvement, suggesting that men may be encouraged by their wives to participate in certain activities and their encouragement actually predicts paternal involvement more than paternal attitudes. According to identity theory, there is reason to believe that reflected appraisals will aid role saliency in predicting paternal involvement (Fox & Bruce, 2001).

### *Reflected Appraisals*

Identity theory suggests that expectations of others are extremely important in forming an individual's role identity and subsequently their behaviors associated with that role (Fox & Bruce, 2001). Therefore, the construct of reflected appraisals is frequently linked with identity theory because it provides a sum of the fathers' beliefs regarding how others view their abilities as fathers, while taking into account the degree of importance the men place on each person's opinion (Fox & Bruce). The available body of literature supports identity theory in finding that men's paternal identity is heavily influenced by other people's perceptions of their fathering abilities and their own beliefs regarding how other people view their abilities as fathers (McBride et al., 2005; Fox & Bruce). The current body of research also suggests that wives' opinions of their



husbands' abilities may be the most important predictor of fathers' level of involvement. For instance, McBride and Rane (1997) found mothers' perceptions regarding their husbands' father role salience significantly predicted the level of involvement a man had with his child.

Maurer, Pleck and Rane (2001) suggested that perceived reflected appraisals may help shape individuals' own identities and predict their behavior even when they lack a clear identity of their own. This line of research may be particularly important when exploring role salience and paternal involvement of fathers with special needs children. Because the relationship between role salience and paternal involvement is unclear when examining fathers of children with disabilities, it may be critical to examine how fathers perceive other people's opinions of their behaviors. For example, perceiving a sense of approval from service providers may enable men to gain more knowledge regarding their role as fathers of special needs child and therefore encourage men to become more involved in not only their children's daily activities, but also in their children's treatment plans. In addition, if fathers of special needs children feel empowered in their role as fathers and feel capable in providing for their children, they may be more satisfied with their own abilities and behaviors.

### *Parent Satisfaction*

Rogers and White (1998) suggested that parent satisfaction may not be a construct that is researched consistently because a lack of parent satisfaction does not signify termination of the role of a parent. When paternal satisfaction has been researched in the past, the samples primarily consisted of divorced parents because satisfaction and its relationship to involvement may be particularly important when the father is not living in

the same home as his children (Minton & Pasley, 1996). Despite the limited amount of research, experiments have shown that parent satisfaction may be an important predictor of paternal involvement. This was especially pertinent when examining human capital of the parent. For example, fathers with higher levels of income and education may have more to bring to the role of a father and therefore may be more satisfied with how they portray their role (Rogers & White). Minton and Pasley examined paternal satisfaction using a primarily Caucasian sample and found that the higher degree of satisfaction married men felt in their role as fathers, the more active they were with their children. Their findings also showed that when married men had a greater degree of competence in their parenting abilities, they were more satisfied and subsequently became more involved with their children. Another study found that fathers of all ethnicities, both in and outside of the home, are generally satisfied with their role as fathers (Andrews, Luckey, Bolden, Whiting-Fickling, 2004). However, fathers reported that they wished they would have more time to spend with their children in playful interactions and through attending school events.

Although the field lacks research regarding paternal satisfaction of special needs children, identity theory suggests that paternal satisfaction is an important construct to include when examining paternal involvement. Fox and Bruce (2001) explained that identity theory suggests that a father's dedication to his children is a combination of the importance a man places on his role as a father (role saliency), his perception of other people's beliefs regarding his abilities as a father (reflected appraisals), and the satisfaction that being a father provides to a man. Therefore, role saliency, reflected appraisals, and parental satisfaction may be combined to examine paternal involvement

with special needs children. In addition, there is some evidence that reports fathers who feel supported and empowered may be more satisfied with their role as a father and therefore more involved with their children (Rogers & White, 1998). This may suggest that granting a sense of empowerment to men, including men with special needs children, may increase their level of satisfaction as fathers, which may subsequently increase their level of interaction with their children.

### Contextual Variables

#### *Income, Financial Strain, & Education*

Throughout the past few decades, researchers have tried to extend the current body of research regarding paternal role and paternal involvement in the family by examining different variables that may affect how men view themselves as fathers and how men interact with their children. Researchers have examined whether fathers were present or absent in their children's lives, while also focusing on identifying factors that would predict a man's level of involvement with his children (Jain, Belsky, & Crnic, 1996). Researchers have also focused on exploring different types of American families, particularly minority and impoverished families, in order to identify and create interventions for families and children in need of services (Landale & Oropesa, 2001). Sociodemographic variables relating to paternal human capital, such as income bracket, financial strain, and education level have been particularly prevalent throughout the examination of paternal role and paternal involvement (Ahmeduzzamen & Roopnarine, 1992; Coley & Hernandez, 2006).

The economic resources available to fathers may be critically important in predicting men's role identity and the type of involvement men have with their children

and families (Landale & Oropesa, 2001). Specifically in lower income level populations, the economic resources men have at their disposal may be central to their identity as fathers and therefore related to their level of involvement with their children (Landale & Oropesa). Coley (2001) suggested that if men lack the ability to financially provide for their families, they may remain absent from their children's lives because they know they cannot provide necessary resources and subsequently do not feel as though they can provide a strong role model for their children. This concept has been supported through past research, which has primarily examined men's involvement with their families in the context of the breadwinning role. Some researchers still believe that acting as a breadwinner is the most important role a man can play in his children's lives (Walker & McGraw, 2000). Other researchers have found that men in lower income brackets are not solely tied to the role of the breadwinner. Men in lower income brackets may try to compensate for their lack of monetary involvement by being involved in other aspects of their children's lives. These men believed their role as fathers included acting as providers for their children emotionally and financially, acting as teachers by guiding children and helping them learn about the world, acting as playmates by physically interacting with their children, and showing support to their children by expressing love, concern, and encouragement (Summers, Boller, Schiffman, & Raikes, 2006).

For fathers who were consistently involved with their children and families, the level of income of the family was found to be a predictor of the amount of caregiving men provided to the infants (Volling & Belsky, 1991). Men from families with higher levels of income engaged in more caregiving tasks with their children and participated in more stimulating and responsive interactions with their infants. Volling and Belsky also

found a significant relationship between personality characteristics of fathers and the type of involvement men had with their infants. In accordance with popular belief, they found support for the theory that men with more traditional family views interacted less with their children, particularly when looking at basic caregiving tasks. However, this may be less of a function of their belief system and more of a function of their work schedules. For example, men who reported more traditional family roles also tended to be the single-earner in the household; therefore they may not have had as much time to engage their children as men from dual-earner families (Volling & Belsky). In addition, men from dual-earner families may have had to take care of their children more often because of their wives work schedules. Men from single-earner families may have relied more on their wives for child-care related tasks because of the stress they felt when dealing with work and family conflicts (Volling & Belsky). Deutsch, Lussier, and Servis's (1993) results supported a similar idea by finding that men's participation in housework and childcare tasks could be predicted by men's traditional views of the family and by their wives' work hours. Therefore, both income and perceptions of the family affect paternal involvement.

Landale and Oropesa (2001) examined the importance of paternal financial contributions and its relationship with paternal involvement and discovered that paternal employment was much more important than actual financial contributions. They found that fathers tended to participate in more childcare tasks when they were employed. In addition, the employment of the mother also contributed to the likelihood of their engaging in childcare tasks, which is similar to the results found by Deutsch et al. (1993) and Volling and Belsky (1991). The importance of employment and financial security

when examining paternal involvement has been supported in previous research. For example, studies have shown that the more secure a man feels economically, the more he will participate in childcare oriented tasks (Ahmeduzzaman & Roopnarine, 1992). However, similar to previous discussion, it is important to examine the type of employment a man has when examining the role he plays within the family and his amount of involvement. Some types of employment may remove men from the home due to inflexible hours, therefore inhibiting them from being able to engage in specific caregiving activities or types of involvement (Coley & Hernandez, 2006; Fox & Bruce, 2001).

The concept of financial strain has not been reviewed as frequently in the current body of literature, but it may actually produce a more concise picture regarding the economic stability of the family than a simple measure of income. Elder, Conger, Foster, and Ardel (1992) explained that there is a growing discrepancy between a family's income and their needs. They suggested that this discrepancy causes families to make difficult decisions regarding what is truly important. In addition, Elder and colleagues explained that a measure of economic strain is more efficient than a simple measure of income because a family's income may change and a one-time measure of income does not provide any information regarding the family's ability to cover expenses and provide for all material needs. Gutman and Eccles (1999) also explained their belief that financial strain is a better measure than income because a family's income does not adequately reflect a family's distress level. By understanding the stress a family is under, researchers may be able to better understand parents' ability or inability to be involved with their children and show support for their children.

A measure of financial strain may also be important when examining fathers in particular. Some researchers have found a link between changes in men's behavior with a high degree of financial strain. For example, men facing a high degree of economic pressure were found to be more abrasive and irritable, which made them act in more hostile and punitive ways towards their children (Elder et al., 1992). Mayhew and Lempers (1998) found that fathers who faced financial strain reported lower levels of self esteem and engaged in less supportive parenting behaviors than fathers who were not dealing with economic hardship. Other studies showed similar results in that parents who felt greater levels of economic strain showed higher levels of depression and demoralization, which resulted in interferences with the typical parenting behaviors of both mothers and fathers and the parents' level of involvement with their children (Conger et al., 1992).

Mixed results have been found regarding the importance of paternal education. On one hand, Landale and Oropesa (2001) found that education was not as salient of a predictor of paternal involvement as the father's employment status. On the other hand, Ahmeduzzaman and Roopnarine (1992) suggested that constructs relating to human capital are all generally related to improving the well-being of a family. They suggested that any variable that improves the human capital of a father will potentially grant him and his family greater economic stability and a greater sense of overall satisfaction. In addition, they found a significant relationship between education, family income, and both the quantity and quality of paternal involvement. Men with higher levels of education and higher levels of family income were found to be more likely to involve themselves with both caregiving and socializing their children (Ahmeduzzaman &

Roopnarine). Coley and Hernandez (2006) described the same concept in their research, explaining that fathers' human capital can only help the family because it provides men with more skills and more resources to provide to their children. Similarly, they also found that men with greater levels of human capital also showed increased levels of involvement with their children. However, they also cautioned that a greater level of human capital potentially comes with more responsibilities outside of the home, which may inhibit men from actively engaging with their children (Coley & Hernandez).

#### Fathering Involvement Variable

##### *Paternal Involvement*

As the socially constructed role of the father within the family has changed over time, so too has the body of research on the concept of paternal involvement (Doherty, Kouneski, & Erickson, 1998). Paternal involvement has been conceptualized in many different ways; some researchers have defined paternal involvement by financial contributions a man makes to the family and the child (Christian & Palkovitz, 2001), while others have measured the amount of time the father is physically present in the child's life (Hall, 2005). Still other researchers have defined the construct of paternal involvement in terms of types of parent-child interactions, using characteristics such as warmth and responsiveness to determine a man's degree of involvement with his children (Grossman, Pollack, and Golding, 1988). For the purpose of the current study, the concept of paternal involvement will be measured by examining type of activities the father is involved in with the child and how often he engages in these behaviors.

Results of recent studies have shown that American fathers are becoming more involved in their children's lives in a variety of ways (Saracho, 2007). They are more



involved in caregiving activities, instructional activities, and playful and loving interactions, therefore paternal involvement is being examined by looking at the types of activities fathers complete with their children (Wanless, Rosenkoetter, & McClelland, 2008). For example, Ahmeduzzaman and Roopnarine (1992) operationalized paternal involvement through the examination of men's participation in caring for their children. This included the time in which men were primary caregivers of the children, the amount of time fathers were available to help socialize the children through disciplining and setting limits, the amount of time the father was physically available in his home, and the amount of influence the father had in making decisions for the children (Ahmeduzzaman & Roopnarine). Similarly, Coley and Hernandez (2006) assessed how fathers stimulated their children cognitively, how well fathers supported their children emotionally, and how frequently they completed caregiving tasks with their infants. Similarly, Grolnick and Slowiaczek (1994) chose to examine parental involvement through a multidimensional approach. Their definition of involvement included behavioral, cognitive-intellectual, and personal aspects of parenting. Behavioral involvement was defined as a parent's engagement in activities relating to the child, such as attending club activities or helping the child with projects for extracurricular activities. Intellectual involvement included participation in an event that intellectually challenged the child, such as reading together or playing stimulating and challenging games together. Lastly, personal involvement meant that the parent was knowledgeable about the child's life, including events that were occurring in the child's home life and school life (Grolnick & Slowiaczek).

Although research has shown that men define their role of a father as a multidimensional identity, some researchers question whether men actually engage in all of these roles or if they just believe that a father should be involved in many different aspects of a child's life (Hall, 2005). For example, research has shown that men tend to be more involved with children who are younger, especially when they are still romantically involved with the mother of the child (Coley & Chase-Lansdale, 1999). Researchers have also found that a man's type of involvement may also change depending on the mother's work hours, meaning that a man may be more involved in certain activities because the child's mother is not present to complete specific caregiving tasks (Deutsch, Lussier, & Servis, 1993). Therefore, men's beliefs of fathering may not necessarily translate to the degree of involvement they have with their children.

Despite the possible discrepancy between beliefs about involvement and actual involvement between fathers and their children, research has shown that fathers play a very important role in a child's development. For example, children who have a positive attachment with both their mother and their father show more socioemotional competence than children who have a positive attachment with only one of their parents or a positive attachment with neither of their parents (Belsky, 1996). In addition, fathers who engaged in dyadic play with their children produced children with more competence in social skillfulness. However, this was only true when speaking of father and son interactions (Pettit, Brown, Mize, & Lindsey, 1998). Research has also shown that children learned patterns of communication from their mothers and fathers, then subsequently mimic those interactions with their peers (Black & Logan, 1995); and

children were more likely to be accepted by their peers when their fathers engaged in play with the child and the child's peer (Pettit et al.).

Although the base of literature regarding paternal involvement has greatly increased over the years, researchers are just beginning to explore how fathers of special needs children interact with their children. Much of the information known about paternal involvement with special needs children is extrapolated from studies conducted with mothers of special needs children (Quinn, 1999). Although research on maternal involvement may be a good starting place, it does not provide definitive information regarding paternal involvement, nor does it provide practitioners with information necessary to appropriately encourage and support fathers. It is particularly important to learn more about how fathers interact with special needs children because research has shown that paternal involvement may decrease if fathers do not feel supported and informed about the future after learning the demands of their child's disability (Quinn). Fathers may face a crisis when they learn of their child's diagnosis, specifically because men may feel a need to protect their children. Men may subconsciously feel that they have failed their child, despite the fact that they could not have done anything to prevent the disability (May, 1996). Because there is so little evidence about the involvement of fathers with special needs children, many practitioners are unaware of how to cater to their needs and inadvertently alienate them from support programs and other types of therapy (May).

### Summary

The Pathways Research Project dataset provides me with the opportunity to examine how paternal role salience, paternal satisfaction, reflected appraisals,

empowerment, and demographic factors affect paternal involvement when examining fathers of special needs children. Although several of these factors have been examined independently, the current body of literature provides little guidance as to the relationships among these variables when examining a sample of fathers with special needs children. However, based on the literature that has been reviewed for the current study, it is believed that positive correlations will exist between paternal role salience and paternal involvement, paternal satisfaction and paternal involvement, reflected appraisals and paternal involvement, and empowerment and paternal involvement. Past research also suggests that there will be a positive correlation between the fathers' level of education and paternal involvement, as well as a positive correlation between the fathers' income level and paternal involvement. In addition, the research suggests the presence of a negative correlation between financial strain and paternal involvement.

Because of the literature associated with identity theory and symbolic interactionism, I believe that role salience, paternal satisfaction, and reflected appraisals will work together to predict paternal involvement because all three variables provide information regarding the level of importance a man places on his paternal role (Fox & Bruce, 2001). The current body of literature also suggests that men's feelings of empowerment will predict paternal involvement. I also believe that the three demographic variables, education, income, and financial strain will also work together to predict paternal involvement. The current body of literature also suggests both mediating and moderating hypotheses. Identity theory suggests that empowered fathers may feel more competent regarding the needs of their children and therefore may feel supported and encouraged through the implementation of services provided to them. Subsequently,

services that provide men with a sense of empowerment may also encourage men to become more competent and excited about their role as fathers. As a result, I believe the relationship between empowerment and paternal involvement will be mediated by the identity theory variables, which include role salience, paternal satisfaction, and reflected appraisals. Finally, I believe that financial strain will moderate the relationship between empowerment and paternal involvement, as mediated by the identity theory variables. Specifically, I believe that empowerment will be more important to fathers who are facing high levels of financial strain.

## CHAPTER III: METHODS

### Data Collection

The data used for the current study was taken from the Pathways to Family Empowerment Project, which evaluated the effectiveness of services provided to families of special needs children through Tennessee's Early Intervention System (TEIS). The primary goal of TEIS is to provide parents of special needs children with the tools needed to aid in their child's development, while encouraging the child to participate in activities with the family and the community (Tennessee's Department of Education, 2007). Families were eligible for participation in the Pathways to Empowerment Project if they were actively involved in TEIS, if the special needs child was under the age of three, if the parents fluently spoke English, and if the child was not involved in foster care (Higgins, 2005).

Approximately 1,000 families were selected to participate in the study through stratified random sampling based on the geographic areas served by TEIS. Four hundred twenty-four fathers were asked to participate in the study. Two hundred sixty-six men agreed to participate, however only 151 fathers actually returned the questionnaires (Higgins, 2005). The response rate among fathers who agreed to participate was 57 percent and the overall response rate was 36 percent. Data were collected when the TEIS staff member visited the home of potential participants. The project was described to the family, and both the mother and the father were asked to participate by filling out a packet of 21 questionnaires. A five dollar gift card to Wal-Mart was given to families who met with the TEIS service provider to learn about the study (Higgins). Although both mothers and fathers participated in the Pathways to Family Empowerment Project,

the current study only used data collected from the fathers. In addition, the current study only uses six of the 21 questionnaires, including the Family Empowerment Scale, the Parental Role Salience Scale, the Parent Satisfaction Scale, the Assessment of Parenting Scale, the Subjective Assessment of Financial Well-Being Scale, and the Parent Involvement Scale.

### Participants

One hundred fifty-one men participated in the study; however only 138 fathers were included in the current study. Ten men were excluded because of failure to complete the measure of the dependent variable, the Parent Involvement Scale. Three other participants were excluded because they failed to complete one or more of the independent measures used in the present study. The majority of the sample identified themselves as Caucasian (93%), with a small number of African-American men (2%), and Asian men (1%). Fathers in the study were 37 years old on average and 83% of the men interviewed were biological fathers of the special needs children. Approximately 11% of the men had a high school diploma or less, 43% of the fathers had some college or technical training, and 46% had a college degree or more. Refer to Table 1 for further demographic information pertaining to the fathers. The children's ages at the time of data collection ranged from birth to age three, with a mean age of 28.5 months. Approximately 62% of the children were male. All children included in the study had a diagnosed disability. Approximately 35% of the children in the sample were diagnosed as developmentally delayed, while approximately 28% of the children had diagnoses of speech and/or hearing delays. Refer to Table 2 for more information regarding the children's diagnoses.

Table 1

*Fathers' Demographic Information (N=138)*

Characteristics	#	%
<b>Relationship to the Child with Special Needs</b>		
Biological Father	115	83.3
Adopted Father	12	8.7
Step Father	1	0.7
Other	5	3.6
No Data	5	3.6
<b>Race</b>		
Caucasian (Non-Hispanic)	128	92.8
African-American	3	2.2
Asian	2	1.4
Other	3	2.2
No Data	2	1.4
<b>Marital Status</b>		
Single/Never Married	3	2.2
Married/Never Divorced	100	72.5
Divorced/Single	3	2.2
Divorced/Remarried	31	22.5
No Data	1	0.6
<b>Education</b>		
High School	15	10.9
Some College	30	21.7
Associates/Technical Degree	29	21.0
Bachelor's Degree	18	13.0
Some Graduate School	27	19.6
Master's Degree	6	4.3
Doctoral Degree	13	9.4
<b>Income</b>		
Less than \$15,000	17	12.3
\$15,000 to \$29,999	19	13.8
\$30,000 to \$44,999	26	18.8
\$45,000 to \$59,999	21	15.2
\$60,000 to \$74,999	16	11.6
\$75,000 and above	30	21.7
No Data	9	6.5



Table 2

*Children's Diagnostic Information (N=138)*

Diagnosis	#	%
Autism	9	6.5
Cerebral Palsy	14	10.1
Developmental Delays	49	35.5
Down Syndrome	12	8.7
Speech and/or Hearing Delays	39	28.3
Spina Bifida	3	2.2
Other	41	29.7

\*Parents were told to select all that applied

## Measures

### *Program Measures: Predictor Variable*

*The Family Empowerment Scale.* The Family Empowerment Scale (FES) was created by Koren et al. (1992) in order to examine feelings of empowerment felt by parents of special needs children. Singh et al. (1995) used factor analyses to examine the scale when exploring families of emotionally disturbed children. Three factors were discovered within FES including knowledge, competence, and self-efficacy. The Pathways Research Project examined four different components within the 34-item scale. These components included self efficacy, competence, system advocacy, and knowledge. For the purpose of the current study, the scale was utilized as a single indicator of paternal empowerment. The reliability of the complete FES was .937 as assessed by Cronbach's alpha. After the final scale was decided upon, missing values for each item within the scale were replaced with the mean of the corresponding item. The mean of the composite score changed from 3.78 to 3.77. The scale items are listed in Appendix A.

### *Identity Theory Measures: Predictor Variables*

*Parental Role Salience Scale.* The Parental Role Salience Scale is an 18 item, self-reported measure used to evaluate the importance a man places on his role as a father (Fox & Bruce, 2001). Fathers were given a statement and asked to state their degree of agreement or disagreement to the item based on a five point scale. The scale was based on a nine item measure reported in Fox and Bruce with several items added specifically for the Pathways Project. A missing value analysis was conducted and one item was deleted because 14 percent of the sample failed to provide an answer to the statement. After examinations of an initial exploratory factor analysis, two items were deleted

because of low or ambiguous factor loadings. A second exploratory factor analysis with varimax rotation with the remaining 15 items showed a KMO of .838 and four factors, which together accounted for 61% of the total variance. Because the reliability of the individual components were .748, .723, .745, and .410 respectively, I chose to use the scale as a single indicator of parental role salience instead of dividing the scale into four different components. The reliability of the 15 item scale was .850 as assessed by Cronbach's alpha. Six of the fifteen items within the scale were reverse coded in order for all of the items to reflect a scale with greater values indicating agreement with the statement and lower values indicating disagreement with the statement. Missing values were replaced with the mean for each item within the scale. The mean of the composite score remained the same when the missing values were replaced. The scale items are shown in Appendix B.

*Assessment of Parenting Scale.* The Assessment of Parenting Scale used in the Pathways Research Project is a twelve-item measure used to determine perceived reflected appraisals of important people in men's lives. Only three of the 12 original items will be used in the current study. These items include the participant's spouse or partner, relatives, and best friends. Fathers are first asked to indicate how important the person's opinion is to them. Fathers are then asked to indicate their own belief regarding how these individuals would rate their ability to parent. Both answers are given on a five point scale. This scale is a weighted summed scale. Ratings of the participant's fathering abilities are weighted by the importance the father attaches to the opinion of the source. The reliability of this scale was not analyzed because there is no reason to believe these items would not be independent of one another.

*Parent Satisfaction Scale.* The Parent Satisfaction Scale is a seven-item scale used to determine how satisfied a man is with being a father (Fox & Bruce, 2001). Fathers were given a statement and asked to state their degree of agreement or disagreement to the item based on a five point scale with higher scores reflecting a greater degree of satisfaction. One item was excluded because it failed to correlate with other items in the measure. An exploratory analysis with varimax rotation with the six items in the scale showed a KMO of .785 and showed two factors with eigenvalues over the accepted value of one. The six items together accounted for 62% of the total variance. The results failed to replicate the two factors reported in Fox and Bruce. The reliability of the six item scale was .702 as assessed by Cronbach's alpha. Two of the six items within the scale were reverse coded in order for all of the items to reflect a scale with greater values indicating agreement with the statement and lower values indicating disagreement with the statement. Missing values were replaced with the mean for each item within the scale. The mean of the composite score remained the same when the missing values were replaced. The scale items are shown in Appendix C.

#### *Contextual Measures: Predictor Variables*

*Income Measure.* A single item indicator was used to determine the income level of the families involved in the study. The men were given six ranges of incomes and asked to indicate which bracket their income fit into. Missing values were replaced with mean substitution; however the mean of the single-item indicator did not change.

*Subjective Assessment of Financial Well-Being Scale.* The Financial Well-Being Scale is used to examine the degree of financial strain felt by the father. This scale is a nine item, self-reported measure. One item was added to the measure specifically for the

Pathways Project. The nine items were correlated and two items were deleted from the scale because they did not correlate well with the other items. With the remaining seven items, an exploratory factor analysis showed a KMO of .800. The scale was found to have two factors with eigenvalues exceeding the criteria of one. These two components accounted for 73% of the measure's total variance. However, the factors were not developed because two of the seven items loaded equally on both of the components. The reliability of the seven item scale was .859 as assessed by Cronbach's alpha. Two of the seven items within the scale were reverse coded in order for all of the items to reflect a scale with greater values indicating agreement with the statement and lower values indicating disagreement with the statement, such that higher scale scores reflect a greater degree of financial strain. Missing values were replaced with the mean for each item within the scale. The mean of the total scale changed from 2.73 to 2.61 when the missing values were replaced with mean substitution. The full scale is shown in Appendix D.

*Education Measure.* Educational attainment was measured by asking the fathers to select the category that best represented their completed level of education. Missing values were replaced using mean substitution; however the mean of the variable did not change with the replacement of missing values.

*Fathering Involvement Measure: Dependent Variable*

*Parent Involvement Scale.* The Parent Involvement Scale is used to determine the types of activities fathers engage in with their children. These activities include caretaking activities, as well as playful activities. Refer to Appendix E for the complete scale used in the current study. Five items were added to the scale as part of the Pathways to Empowerment Project. The 12-item scale was analyzed and one item was deleted

because it failed to correlate with other items in the scale. In addition, the ninth item, which was added to the scale particularly for the Pathways Research Project was also deleted. The decision was made to remove the ninth item, “I put into practice at home the recommendations of my child’s therapists,” because of the statement’s ambiguity for different participants. After removing two items, an exploratory factor analysis with varimax rotation showed a KMO of .852 and revealed two factors with eigenvalues exceeding the criteria of one. The eigenvalues were 4.755 and 1.174 respectively. These two components accounted for 59% of the total variance for the 10 remaining items in the Parent Involvement Scale. The decision was made not to divide the scale into different factors because the components were not clear conceptually. In addition, three of the ten items loaded equally on both of the components. The reliability of the ten-item scale was .860 as assessed by Cronbach’s alpha.

## CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

Descriptive statistics of each item in the parental involvement scale were examined. The means and standard deviations are presented in Table 3. Men reported the lowest levels of involvement in the categories of attending the child's therapy sessions and engaging in household chores with the children, while they showed the highest levels of involvement in the areas of playing with the child, joining the child in activities he or she enjoys at home, and spending one-on-one time with the child.

The ten items in the parental involvement scale were also examined to determine how different levels of empowerment related to the different categories of paternal involvement. The variable of empowerment was divided into three groups reflecting low, medium, and high levels of empowerment. Each item of the parental involvement scale and the three levels of empowerment were then examined through the use of line graphs. Refer to Figures 1 through 10 for more information. For most of the items in the scale, higher levels of empowerment were related to higher levels of paternal involvement. However, for items five, six, and seven, the means of the parental involvement scale reflected the highest levels of paternal involvement at medium levels of empowerment.

Pearson correlations were analyzed in order to determine the presence of relationships among empowerment, the identity theory variables, the contextual variables, and paternal involvement. Role salience, paternal satisfaction, reflected appraisals, empowerment and paternal involvement were all found to be positively correlated with each other. In addition, role salience, paternal satisfaction, reflected appraisals, empowerment and paternal involvement were all found to be negatively correlated with financial strain. The single-item indicator of education was correlated only with the other

Table 3

*Parental Involvement Scale: Descriptive Statistics (N = 138)*

Item	Mean	SD
1. I spend one-on-one time with my child.	3.45	.759
2. My child(ren) and I play together.	3.64	.653
3. I join in activities my child(ren) like(s) at home.	3.47	.748
4. I teach my child(ren) new skills.	3.11	.802
5. I take my child(ren) to places (e.g. the mall, restaurants, and parks) and activities (e.g.) soccer, swimming, camping).	3.02	.776
6. I help my child(ren) prepare for the day's activities (e.g. getting dressed and feeding).	3.28	.918
7. I help my child(ren) prepare for bedtime.	3.36	.887
8. I attend my child's therapy sessions.	2.27	.996
9. I watch TV with my child(ren).	3.25	.895
10. I do household chores with my child(ren).	2.47	.979



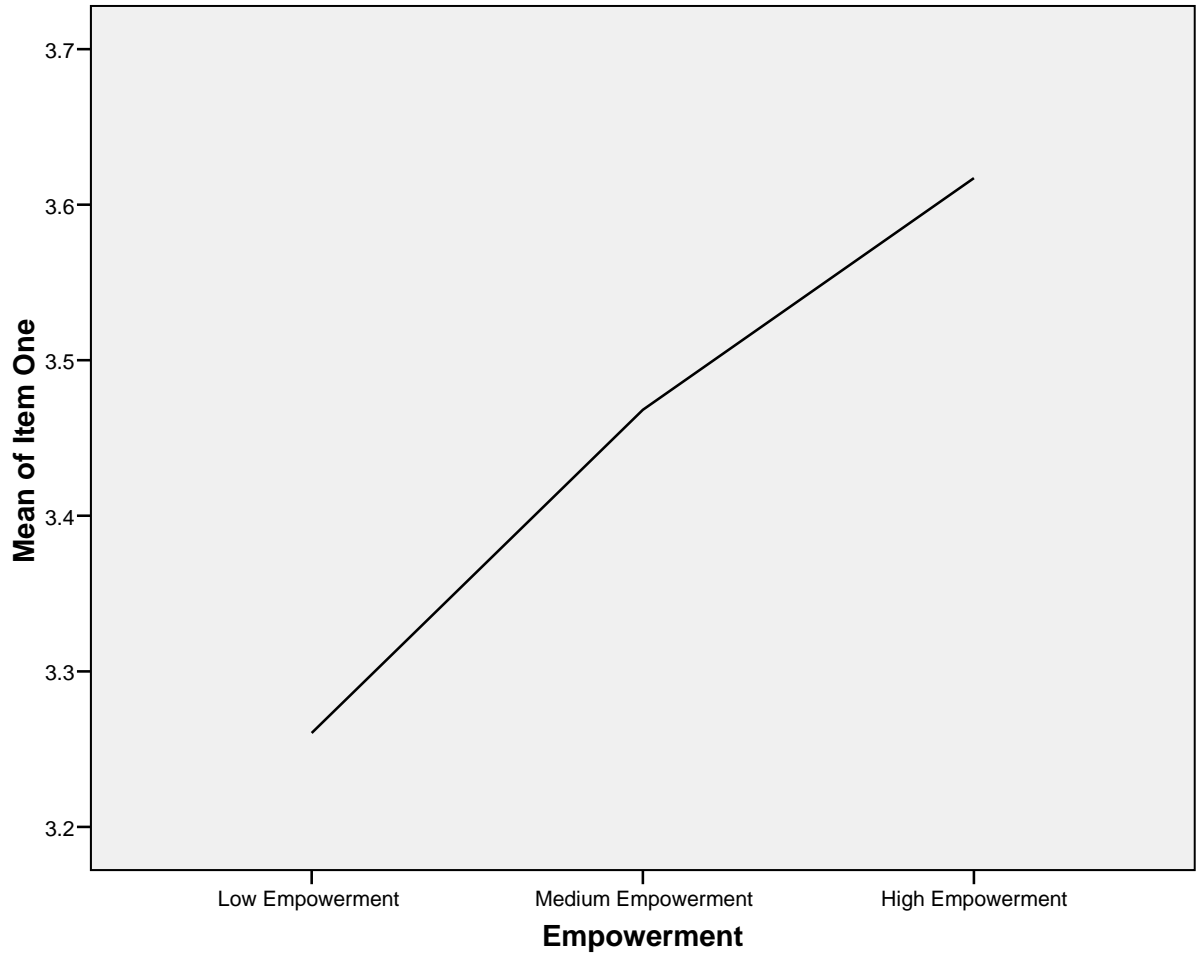


Figure 1. Line Graph of the Mean of Item 1 in the Parental Involvement Scale and Empowerment.

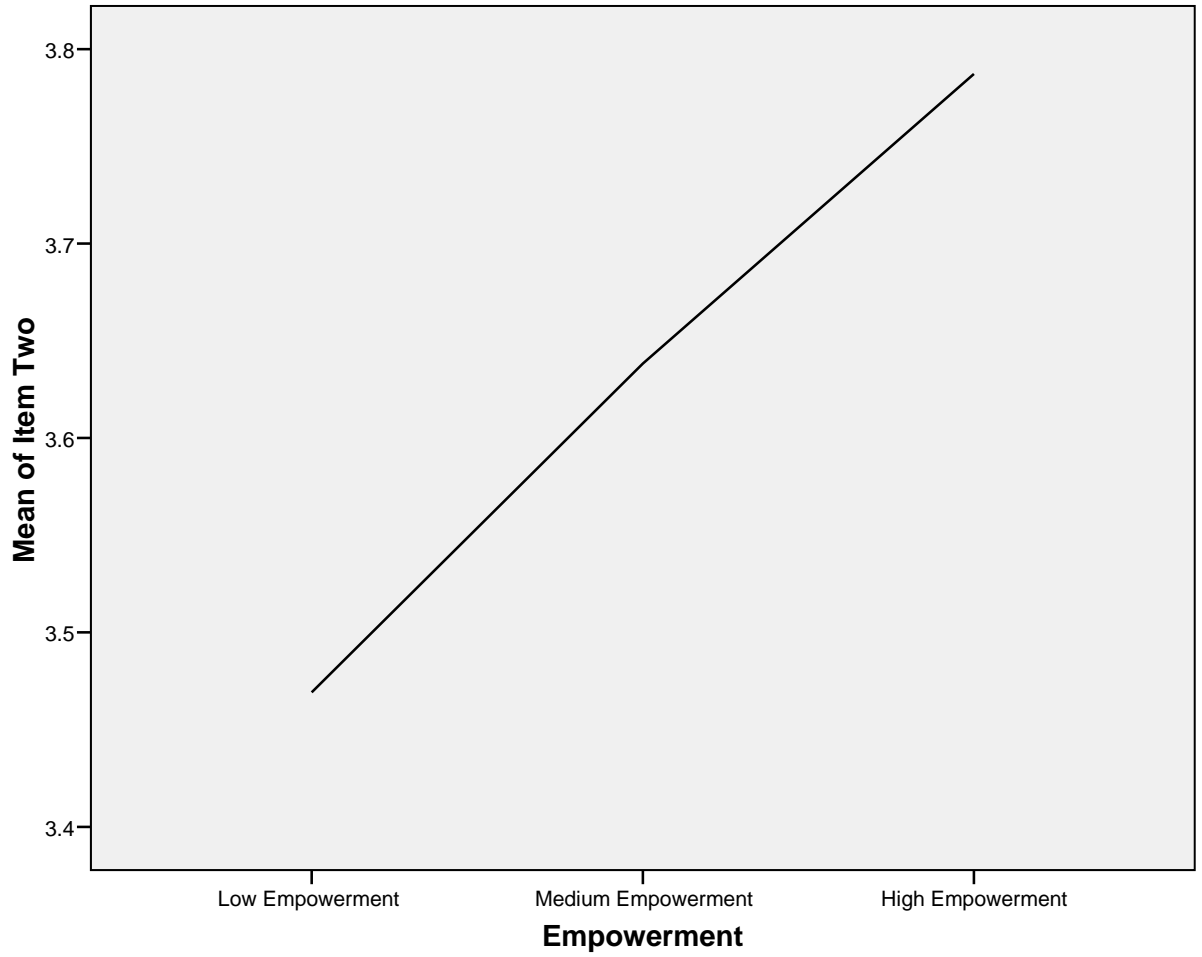


Figure 2. Line Graph of the Mean of Item 2 in the Parental Involvement Scale and Empowerment.

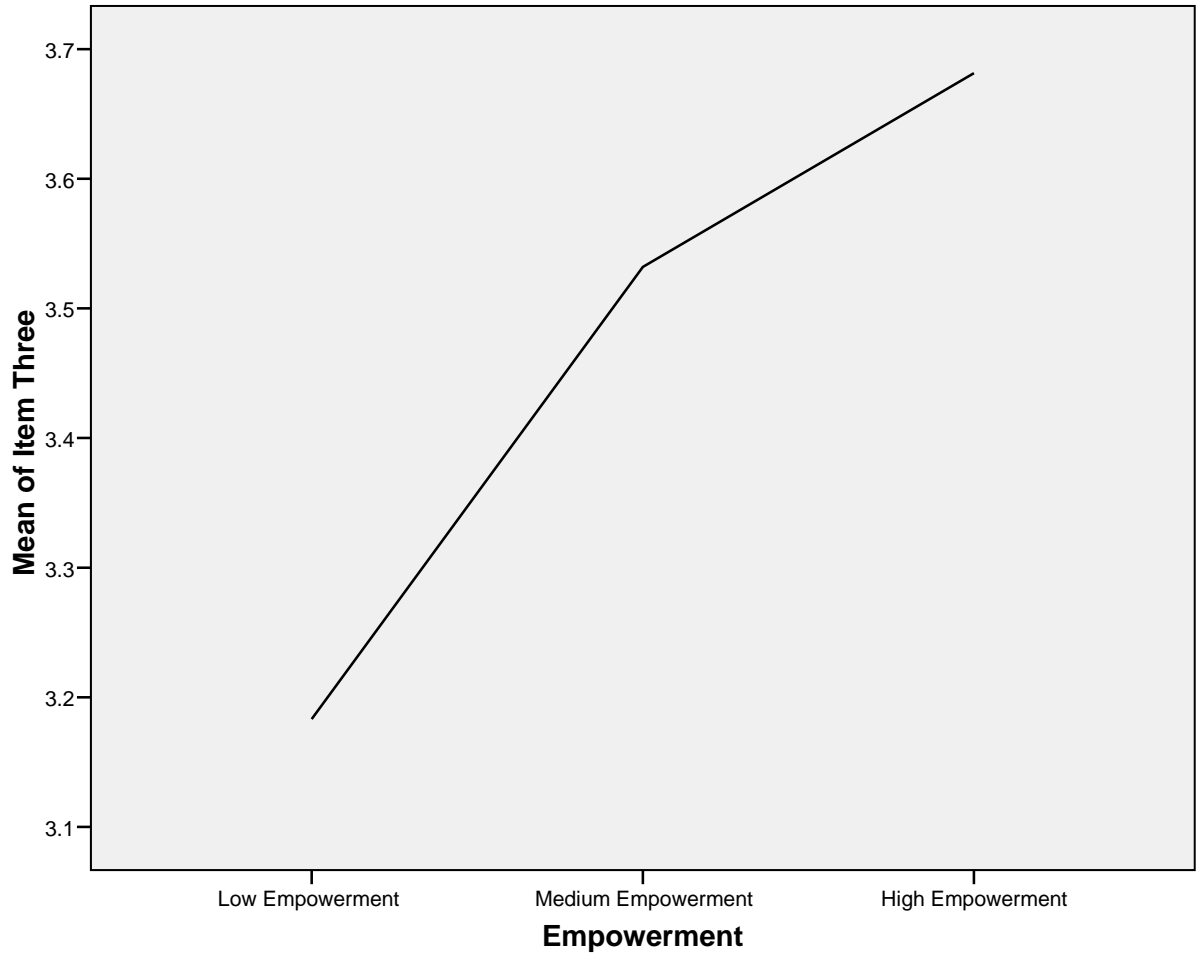


Figure 3. Line Graph of the Mean of Item 3 in the Parental Involvement Scale and Empowerment.

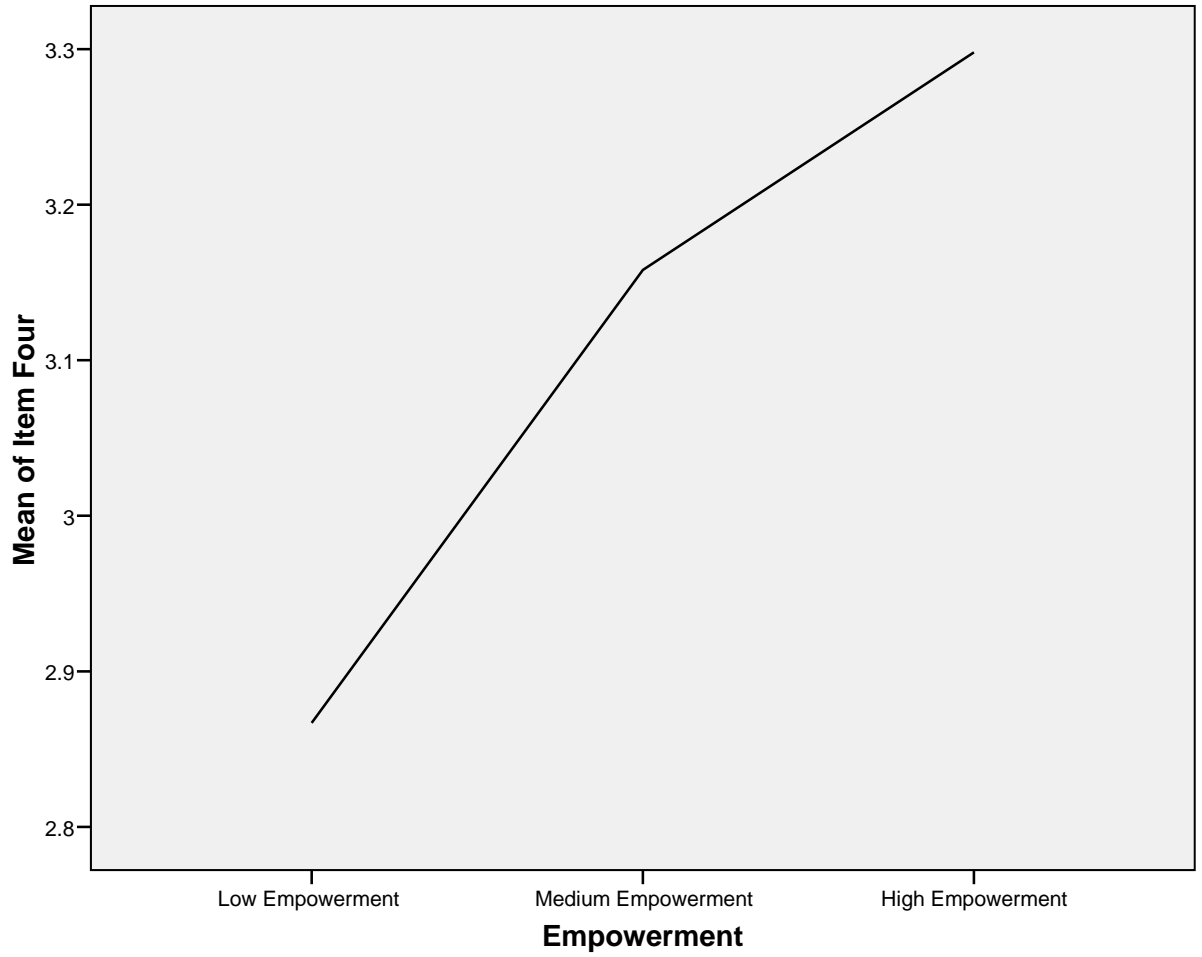


Figure 4. Line Graph of the Mean of Item 4 in the Parental Involvement Scale and Empowerment.

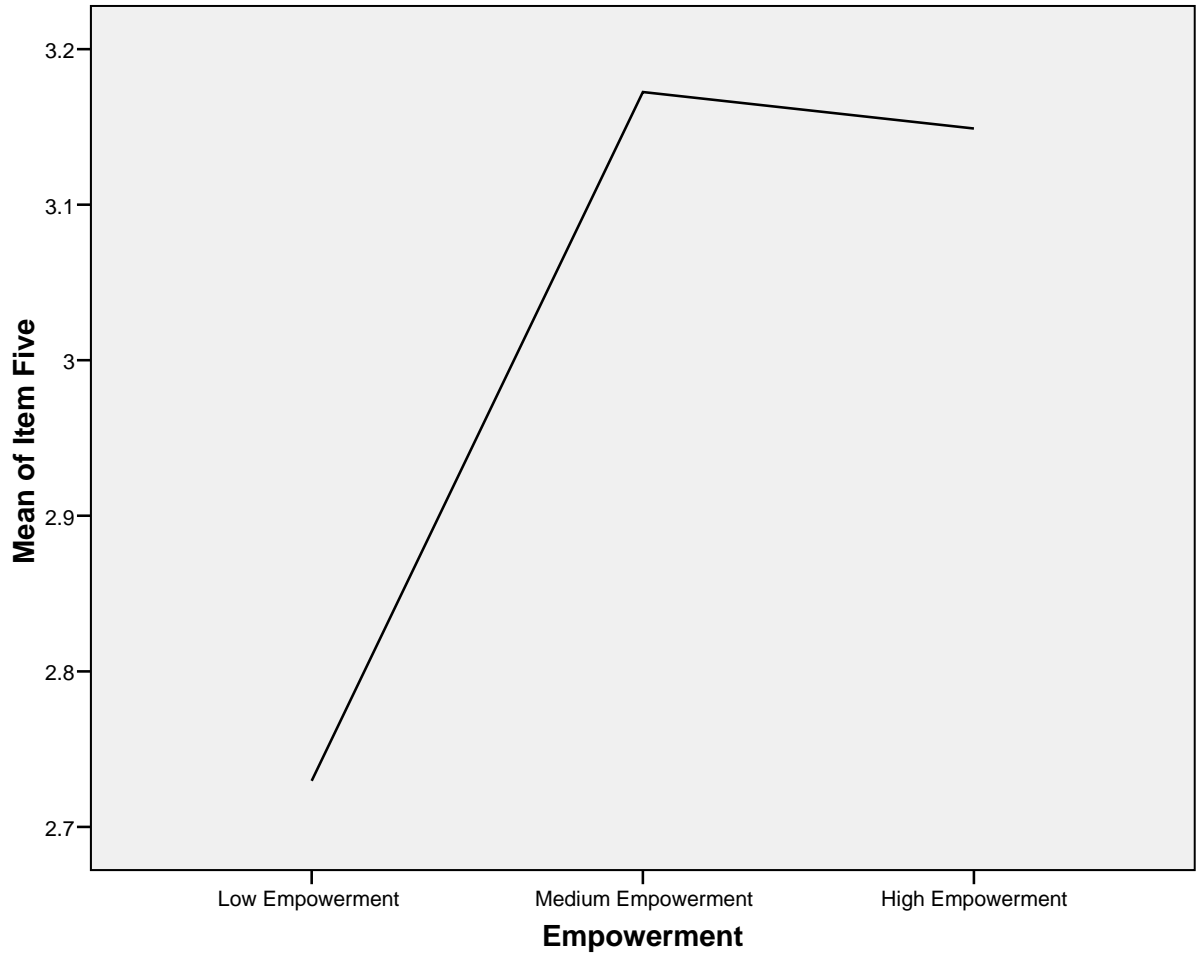


Figure 5. Line Graph of the Mean of Item 5 in the Parental Involvement Scale and Empowerment.

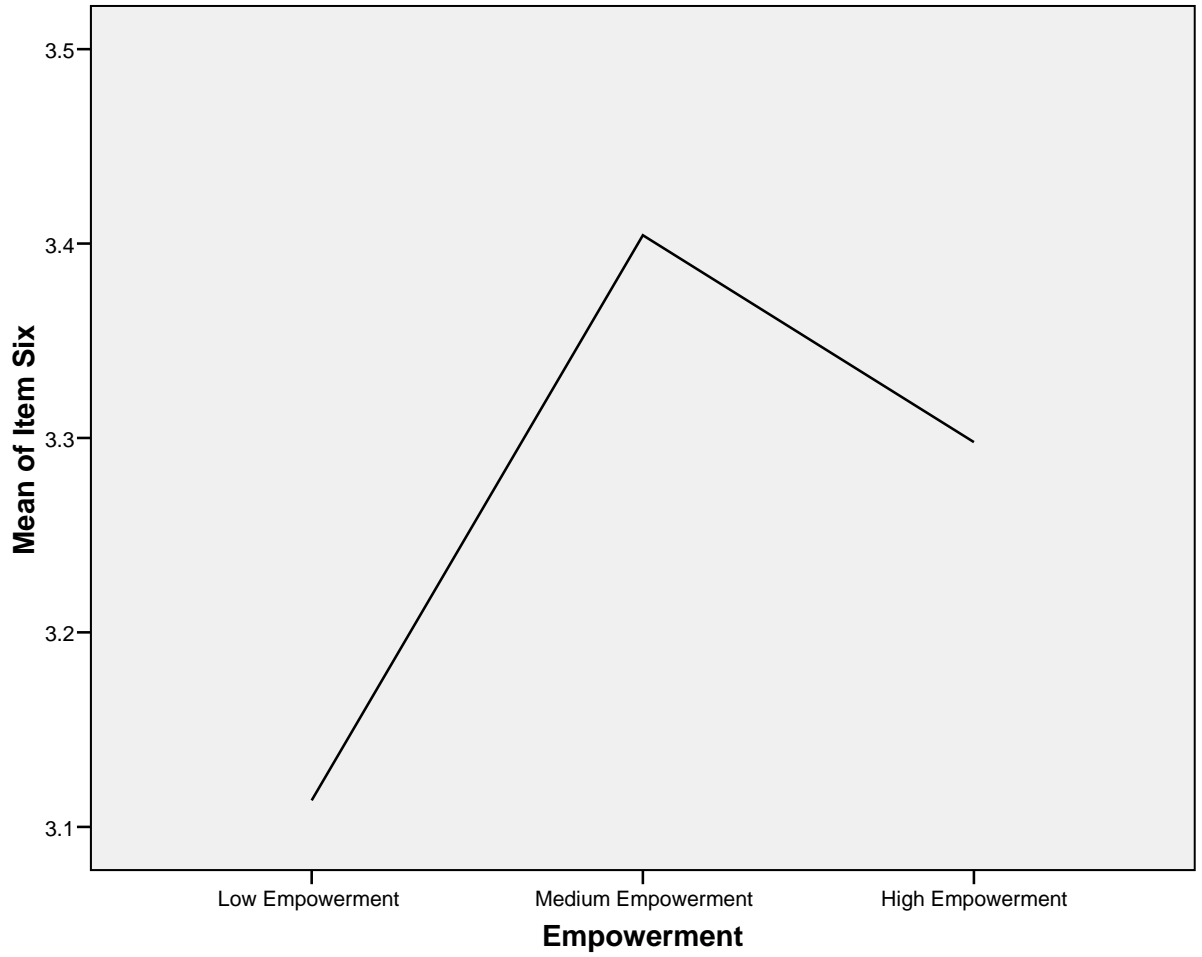


Figure 6. Line Graph of the Mean of Item 6 in the Parental Involvement Scale and Empowerment.

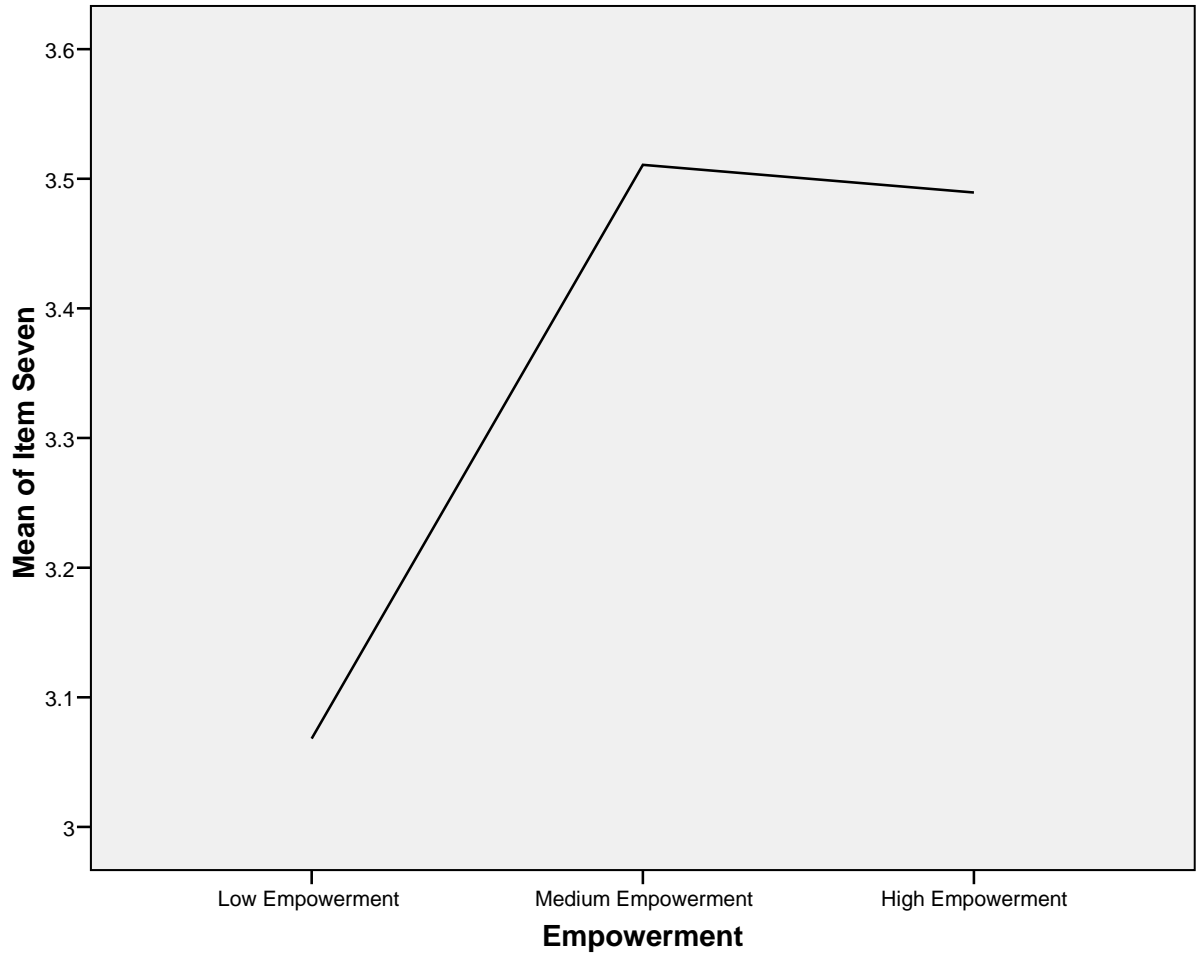


Figure 7. Line Graph of the Mean of Item 7 in the Parental Involvement Scale and Empowerment.

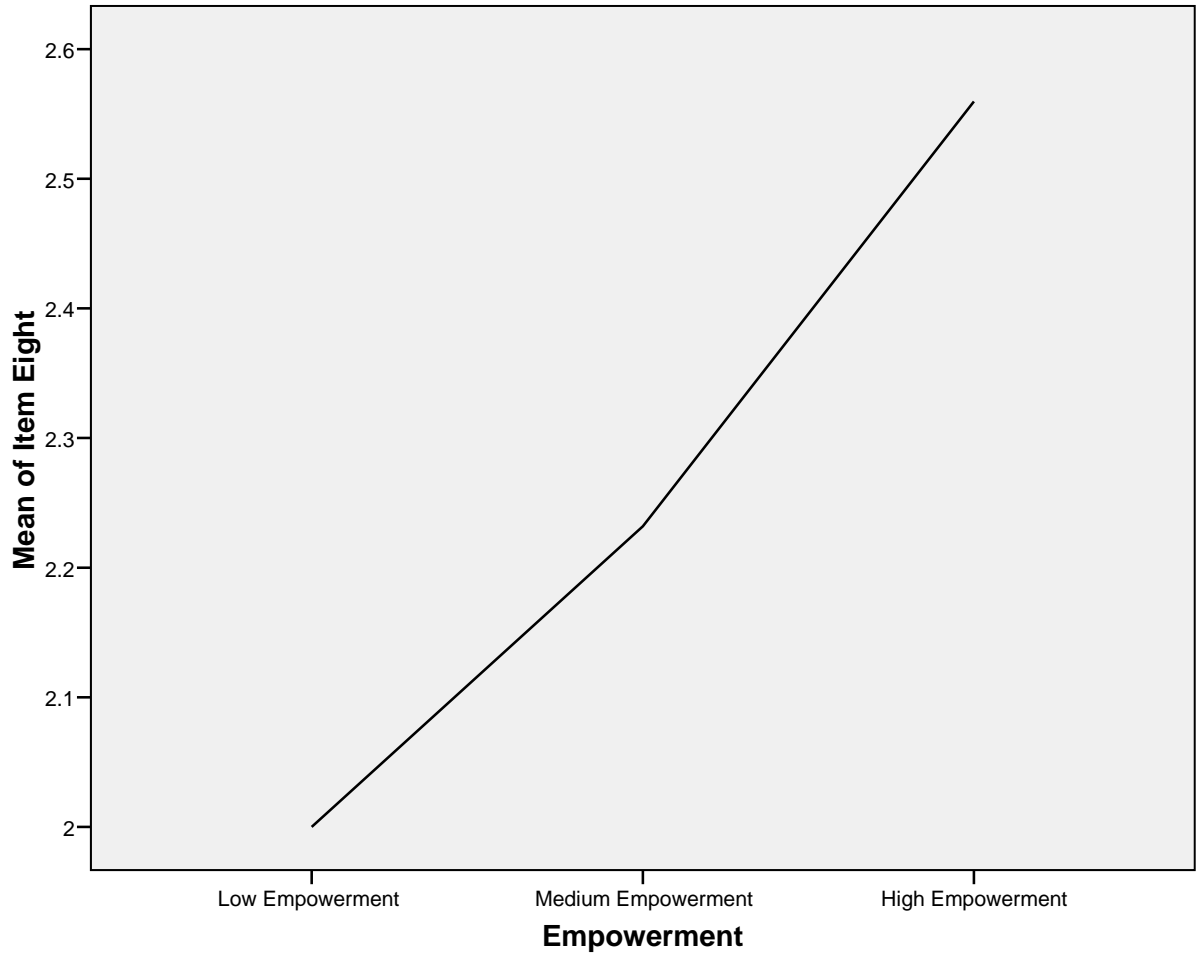


Figure 8. Line Graph of the Mean of Item 8 in the Parental Involvement Scale and Empowerment.



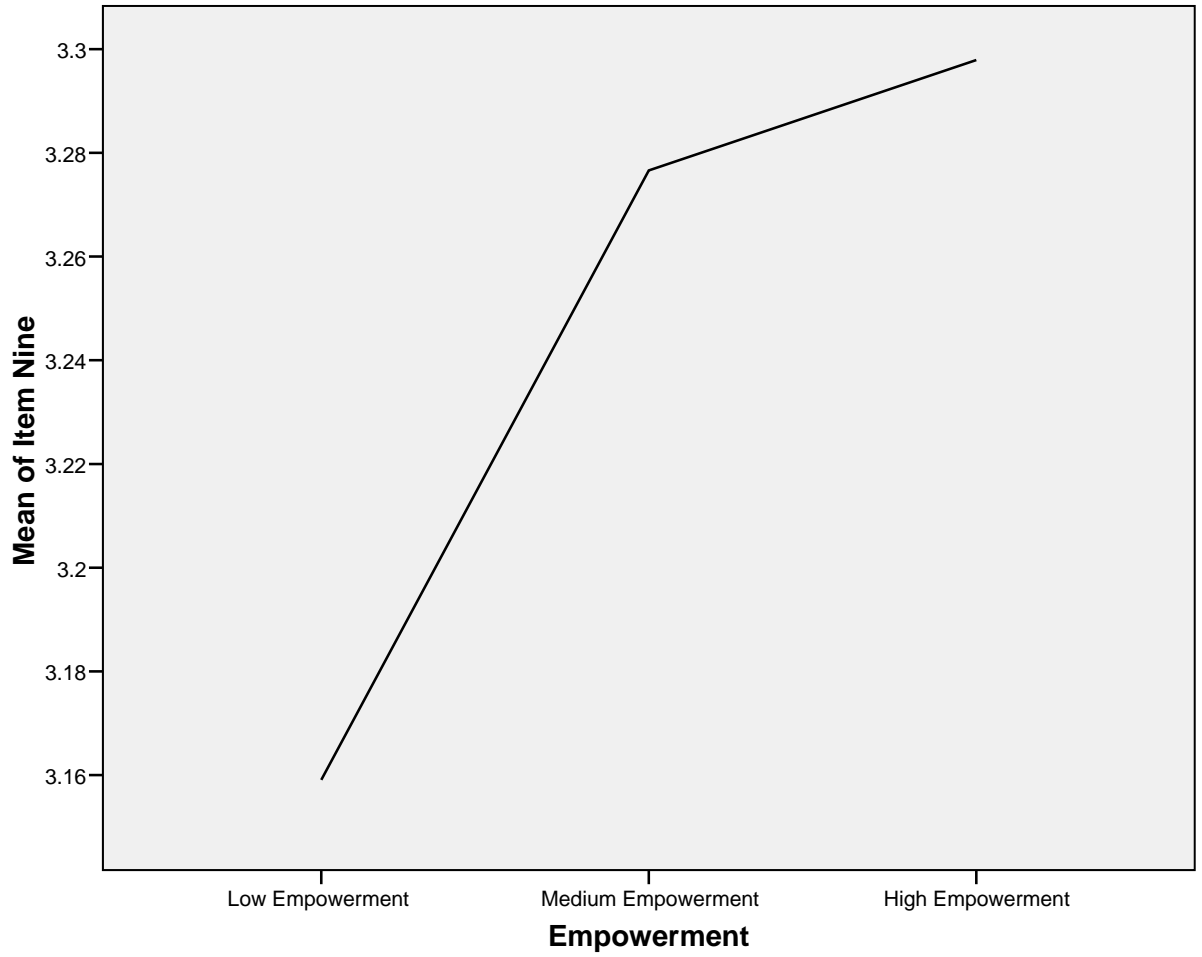


Figure 9. Line Graph of the Mean of Item 9 in the Parental Involvement Scale and Empowerment.

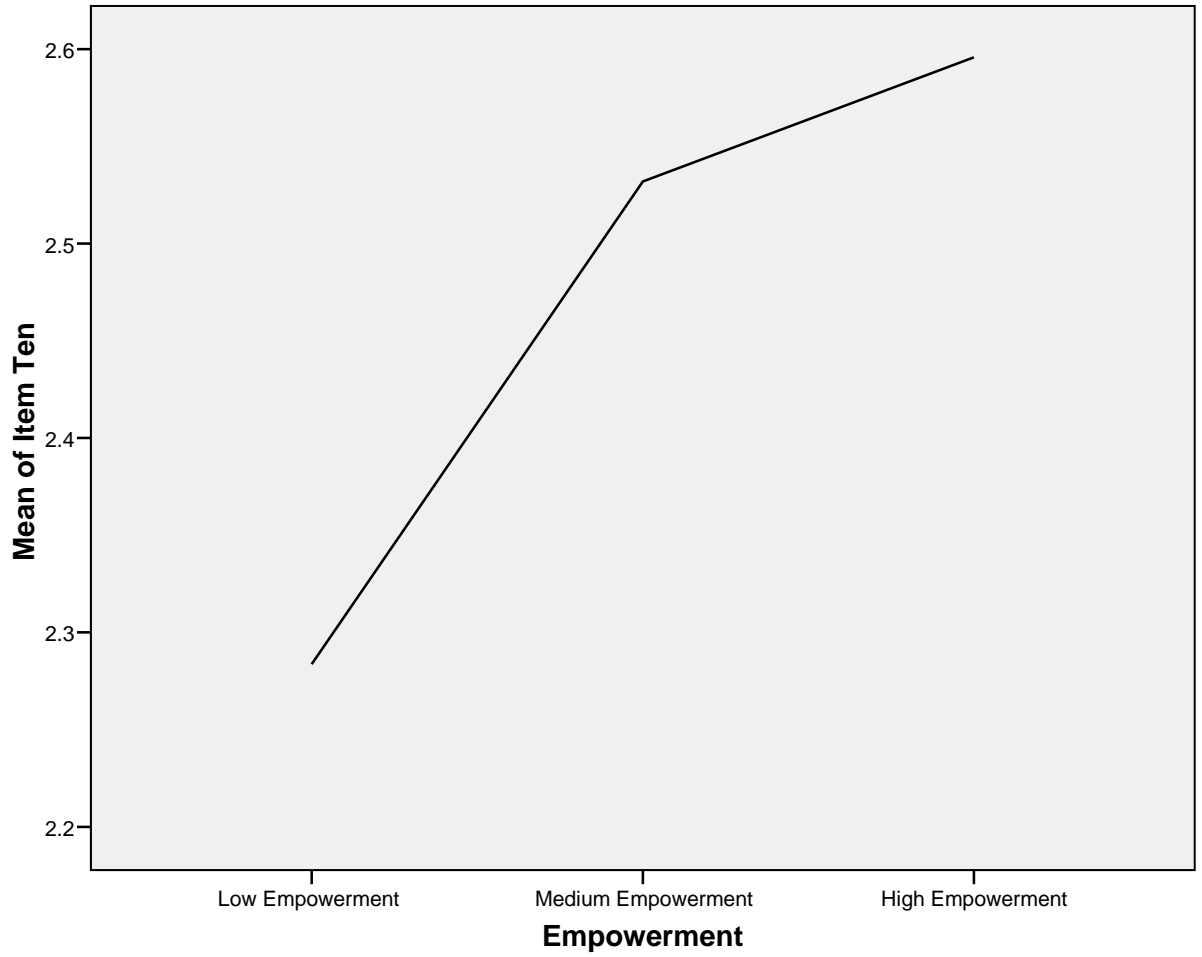


Figure 10. Line Graph of the Mean of Item 10 in the Parental Involvement Scale and Empowerment.

contextual variables, while the measure of income was found to be correlated with the contextual variables, as well as with paternal satisfaction and reflected appraisals.

Descriptive statistics and the results of the correlation matrix are presented in Table 4.

Linear regression was used with individual models in order to determine the amount of variance in paternal involvement accounted for by each predictor variable. The contextual variables were examined first. The model was not found to be significant when paternal involvement was regressed upon education level, income level, and financial strain. Refer to Table 5 for more information. Therefore, the model was trimmed by excluding education level and income level. When paternal involvement was regressed upon financial strain, the model was found to be significant. Financial strain was found to account for 4.7% of the variance. Refer to Table 6 for more information on the individual regression model. The identity theory variables were also examined as a group, which can be seen in Table 7. The model was found to be significant with 29.7% of the variance being accounted for when paternal involvement was regressed upon role salience, parent satisfaction, and reflected appraisals. However, the model was trimmed because the reflected appraisals construct was not found to be significant when examined independently of the other two identity theory constructs. When the construct of reflected appraisals was trimmed from the model, role salience and parental satisfaction still accounted for 28.4% of the variance. Refer to Table 8 for the trimmed identity theory model. The last construct to be independently examined using linear regression was empowerment. Empowerment was found to account for 15.9% of the variance of paternal involvement. See Table 9 for further information.

Hierarchical regression was used to examine the mediational hypothesis; that is,

Table 4

*Program Variables, Identity Theory Variables, Contextual Variables and Fathering*

*Involvement Variables: Bivariate Correlations & Descriptive Statistics (N = 138)*

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Empowerment	—							
2. Role Salience	.48**	—						
3. P. Satisfaction	.38**	.69**	—					
4. R. Appraisals	.35**	.37**	.26**	—				
5. Fin. Strain	-.26**	-.37**	-.47**	-.21*	—			
6. Education	-.03	-.02	.16	.07	-.23**	—		
7. Income	.00	.10	.27**	.18*	-.41**	.63**	—	
8. Involvement	.40**	.49**	.49**	.29**	-.22*	.02	.03	—
Mean	3.77	4.17	4.23	31.59	2.61	4.59	3.70	2.27
SD	.52	.51	.51	9.36	.92	1.77	1.66	.67

\*  $p < .05$ .      \*\*  $p < .01$ .

Table 5

*Summary of Simultaneous Regression Analyses for Contextual Variables**Predicting Paternal Involvement (N = 138)*

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$
Education	.003	.041	.008
Income	-.030	.047	-.075
Financial Strain	-.179	.068	-.245**
$R^2$		.051	
$F$		2.385	

\*  $p < .05$ .    \*\* $p < .01$ .    \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

Table 6

*Summary of Simultaneous Regression Analyses for Contextual Variables*

*(Trimmed Model) Predicting Paternal Involvement (N = 138)*

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$
Financial Strain	-.158	.061	-.216*
$R^2$		.047*	
$F$		6.647	

\*  $p < .05$ .    \*\* $p < .01$ .    \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

Table 7

*Summary of Simultaneous Regression Analyses for Identity Theory Variables*

*Predicting Paternal Involvement (N = 138)*

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$
Role Salience	.323	.136	.246*
Parental Satisfaction	.383	.132	.289**
Reflected Appraisals	.009	.006	.121
$R^2$		.297***	
$F$		18.865	

\*  $p < .05$ .    \*\* $p < .01$ .    \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

Table 8

*Summary of Simultaneous Regression Analyses for Identity Theory Variables*

*(Trimmed Model) Predicting Paternal Involvement (N = 138)*

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$
Role Salience	.381	.132	.290**
Parental Satisfaction	.386	.133	.291**
$R^2$		.284***	
$F$		26.803	

\*  $p < .05$ .      \*\* $p < .01$ .      \*\*\* $p < .001$ .



Table 9

*Summary of Simultaneous Regression Analyses for Program Variables Predicting Paternal Involvement (N = 138)*

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$
Empowerment	.522	.103	.399***
$R^2$		.159***	
$F$		25.780	

\*  $p < .05$ .    \*\*  $p < .01$ .    \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

the effect of empowerment on father involvement was expected to be mediated through role salience and satisfaction. The model was first run without any contextual factors. Empowerment was entered in the first block, followed by role salience and paternal satisfaction in the second block. The model was significant with empowerment, role salience, and parental satisfaction accounting for 31.3% of the total variance. In addition, the relationship between empowerment and paternal involvement was partially mediated by role salience and parental satisfaction. The Standardized Beta for empowerment decreased from .399 to .194 when role salience and parental satisfaction were included in the model. Empowerment, however, remains a significant predictor even though role salience and parental satisfaction translate some of empowerment's impact on paternal involvement. See Table 10 for further information. The model was then analyzed again with financial strain entered in the first block to act as a control variable, empowerment was entered in the second block, and role salience and parental satisfaction were entered in the third block. Although the model was significant, the original negative impact of financial strain was mediated by empowerment, role salience, and parental satisfaction when looking at paternal involvement. Refer to Table 11 for further information.

The moderating hypothesis was examined by creating two financial strain groups, split at the median of the distribution of financial strain. The variable was split at the median of 2.44 in order to create a high financial strain group and a low financial strain group. After the sample was divided with the use of a median split, the model was analyzed through a hierarchical regression within each financial strain group separately. Empowerment was entered into the first block and role salience and parental satisfaction were entered simultaneously in the second block. In the low financial strain group,

Table 10

*Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Program Variables and Identity Theory Variables Predicting Paternal Involvement (N = 138)*

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$	$R^2$	<i>F</i>
Step 1					
Empowerment	.522	.103	.399***	.159***	25.780
Step 2					
Empowerment	.253	.107	.194*	.313***	20.324
Role Salience	.275	.137	.209*		
P. Satisfaction	.361	.131	.272**		
* $p < .05$ .    ** $p < .01$ .    *** $p < .001$ .					

Table 11

*Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Contextual Variables, Program*

*Variables and Identity Theory Variables Predicting Paternal Involvement*

*(N = 138)*

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	<i>F</i>
Step 1					
Financial Strain	-.158	.061	-.216*	.047*	6.647
Step 2					
Financial Strain	-.088	.059	-.121	.173***	14.110
Empowerment	.482	.106	.368***		
Step 3					
Financial Strain	.036	.060	.049	.315***	15.261
Empowerment	.258	.108	.197*		
Role Salience	.278	.137	.212*		
P. Satisfaction	.387	.139	.291**		

\*  $p < .05$ .    \*\* $p < .01$ .    \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

empowerment was not a significant predictor of paternal involvement. However, empowerment, role salience, and paternal satisfaction accounted for a combined 24.8% of the total variance. In the high financial strain group, by contrast, empowerment accounted for 21.9% of the variance, while empowerment, role salience, and parent satisfaction accounted for 33.7% of the combined variance. Empowerment was mediated by the two identity theory variables. The standardized beta for empowerment decreased from .468 to .302 when role salience and parent satisfaction were added into the regression model. However, empowerment remained significant even though the standardized beta was decreased somewhat ( $p < .01$ ). When the two groups were compared, the moderating effect of financial strain could be seen. Refer to Table 12 for more information.

Table 12

*Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Program and Identity Theory**Variables Predicting Paternal Involvement in High and Low Financial Strain**Groups*

Variable	High Financial Strain (N = 70)			Low Financial Strain (N = 68)		
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	<i>B</i>
Step 1						
Empowerment	.584	.134	.468***	.328	.177	.223
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>		.219			.050	
<i>F</i>		19.025			3.439	
Step 2						
Empowerment	.378	.142	.302**	.065	.176	.044
Role Salience	.221	.176	.167	.364	.228	.268
P. Satisfaction	.373	.182	.258*	.345	.219	.248
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>		.337			.248***	
<i>F</i>		11.194			7.024	

\*  $p < .05$ .    \*\* $p < .01$ .    \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

## CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION

Through the use of the Pathways Research Project, I was given the opportunity to examine men's involvement with special needs children. Although income, education level, and reflected appraisals were trimmed from the final models, the hypotheses were supported by the data. While providing support for both the mediating and moderating hypotheses, this study also provided information regarding how men are involved with their special needs children. However, it is important to keep in mind that these measures were self reported; therefore the men's levels of involvement cannot be confirmed because they were not directly observed through data collection.

The means of each item of the parental involvement scale showed that men reported lower levels of involvement in the areas of attending therapy sessions with the child and completing household chores with the child. The low levels of participation in household chores may relate to the idea that mothers may not leave room for fathers' participation in this area. Pelchat and colleagues (2003) found that mothers recognized that they did not actively encourage or allow men to participate in household chores. They also found that men did not accept help and services provided to them as readily as their spouses, which may relate to lower levels of involvement in the children's therapy. The highest levels of involvement were reported in playing with the child, spending one-on-one time with the child, and joining in activities the child likes at home. Simmerman, Blacher, and Baker (2001) found similar results, showing that fathers were most involved with their special needs children in the areas of playing, nurturing, and disciplining. They also found that one of the areas fathers reported lowest levels of involvement in related to the children's therapy, which was supported in the current study.

When each item of the parental involvement scale was examined in the context of low, medium, and high levels of empowerment, three of the ten items displayed interesting results. Refer to Figures 5 through 7 for further information. The literature suggested that higher levels of empowerment are related to higher levels of paternal involvement (Curtis & Singh, 1996); however, items five, six, and seven of the parent involvement scale reported higher levels of paternal involvement at medium levels of empowerment. As Fox and Bruce (2001) suggested, men may not be able to participate in certain activities, despite a desire to fulfill their roles as fathers, because of other obligations, such as long and inflexible work schedules. Two of the items reflected specific time periods in the child's day, relating to the child's morning and evening routines. It is possible that men may not be at home for some of these activities due to work obligations. Similarly, men may not be able to take their children to places and activities because of responsibilities that remove them from the home. Just because the fathers report feeling more empowered does not mean that they are able to engage in every aspect of their child's life. Therefore, the results reported in the figures may relate more to the inability of men to actively participate in these types of activities than to the men's levels of empowerment.

Despite the results of several studies suggesting that a man's level of education and income are correlated with the amount of involvement he has with his children (Coley & Hernandez, 2006; Landale & Oropesa, 2001; Volling & Belsky, 1991), the current study failed to find a relationship between either education and involvement or income level and involvement. The lack of relationship between these contextual factors may support the idea that financial strain is a stronger measure of a man's economic



situation than an objective measure of income or a simple measure of education. Conger and colleagues (1992) suggested that a measure of economic stability needs to reveal chronic and acute economic distress. The measure of income used in the current study only asked participants for an estimate of their total earnings over the course of a year. It is impossible to know if the family is facing stress by only obtaining an objective measure of their income. A measure examining financial strain may be more effective in providing information about the participants due to its subjective nature. Financial strain represents participants' beliefs regarding whether their current income level is adequate or inadequate in providing for the family's needs. Similarly, knowing participants' education level does not provide an understanding of the amount of money they make each year and if that salary enables the family to meet all of their material needs. Therefore, education and income may not have been able to predict paternal involvement because of their inability to adequately report the participants' perception of their economic situation.

Additionally, the measure of financial strain may be correlated with paternal involvement, unlike education and income, because economic hardship has been correlated with feelings of parental depression, which in turn may make parents less likely to engage in activities with their children (Conger et al., 1992; Gutman & Eccles, 1999). McLoyd (1998) found that parents living in poverty reported lower levels of involvement with their children, while also showing fewer supportive and positive interactions with their children. Elder and colleagues (1985) reported that fathers who were facing financial strain were harsh and rejecting with their children when compared to men who were not facing economic distress. Therefore, a perceptive measure of

income, such as financial strain, may be more likely to predict paternal involvement because it suggests difficulty in the men's economic situations, which subsequently affects other areas of the fathers' lives. The literature suggested financial strain would be negatively correlated with paternal involvement, explaining that the less financial strain a man feels, the more involved he is with his child, which is what the findings of the current study reflected. Education and income may not be positively correlated with paternal involvement because they do not reflect feelings such as stress or competence; they simply state a man's level of education or income.

The construct of reflected appraisals also failed to significantly predict men's level of involvement with their special needs children. The current body of research suggested that reflected appraisals would be significant because it works together with role salience and parent satisfaction to aid in the formation of a person's identity (Fox & Bruce, 2001). In addition, the construct of reflected appraisals has been linked to paternal involvement in the past. McBride and Rane (1997) found that spouses' beliefs of men's fathering abilities were correlated with men's levels of paternal involvement. Similar findings have been reported when maternal gatekeeping has been examined (Grossman et al., 1988; Maurer et al., 2001). Therefore, it was predicted that the three variables would work together to predict paternal involvement. It is possible that the construct of reflected appraisals was not significant because of the categories of significant others that were used to form the composite score. Unlike past experiments that have used the Assessment of Parenting Scale, the current study only used the categories of "your spouse or partner," "your relatives," and "your best friends" (Fox & Bruce). Although several other categories were available from the Pathways Research Project, they could not be used

due to a significant amount of missing data. Perhaps the reflected appraisals construct might have contributed to the explanation of paternal involvement with special needs children had the requisite data on other categories of significant others been reported. Additionally, it is possible that the constructs of role salience and parent satisfaction detracted from the predictive ability of reflected appraisals due to a high level of multicollinearity. It is possible that if the three identity theory variables were entered into the model in a different order, alternate results would have been found.

Unlike Curtis and Singh (1996), the current study also failed to find a correlation between empowerment and education. Curtis and Singh reported their belief that participants with lower levels of education may have had fewer expectations regarding the services available to them and therefore felt more empowered by the services offered to them because they had less knowledge and fewer expectations upon beginning services than their counterparts with higher levels of education. I am not sure why the current study was unable to replicate a correlation between lower levels of education and higher levels of empowerment; however, the Curtis and Singh sample was overwhelmingly female, with fathers comprising only 18% of their sample. In addition, Curtis and Singh also found that mothers tended to report higher levels of empowerment in general when compared to fathers involved in the experiment. Perhaps Curtis and Singh's findings were more of a result of gender than education level, which is why their findings could not be replicated in the current study. Singh and colleagues (1997) also found a correlation between education and empowerment, reporting that higher levels of empowerment were reported by participants with lower levels of education. However, they only found this correlation when examining the knowledge subscale of

empowerment. Perhaps correlations between empowerment and education would have been discovered had the current study examined the subscales of empowerment instead of examining the Family Empowerment Scale as a single indicator.

Minton and Pasley (1996) and Henley and Pasley (2005) were unable to find a relationship between role salience and reported levels of paternal involvement; however, the current study was able to find a positive correlation between the two constructs. In addition, role salience was found to account for 24% of the total variance of paternal involvement when entered into a linear regression individually. This supports a direct relationship between role salience and paternal involvement and fails to support their idea that a man's beliefs do not necessarily match up with his behaviors. However, both Minton and Pasley and Henley and Pasley interviewed only fathers of normally developing children. Perhaps the involvement of special needs children motivated men to follow through on their beliefs and report greater levels of involvement with their children. In addition, all of the fathers included in the present study were residential fathers. The sample used by Henley and Pasley included both residential and non-residential fathers. The current study may have found different results due to the lack of inclusion of non-residential fathers within the sample. Perhaps it is easier for men to follow through on their beliefs regarding their paternal role when they live in the same household as their children.

The current study was also able to replicate a study relating to parental satisfaction, while also adding to the current body of research. Examining parental satisfaction with men of special needs children is a relatively new idea. On one hand, research has frequently examined satisfaction levels with the services provided to

families with special needs children, but few researchers have examined how satisfied mothers and fathers of special needs children are with their own parenting. On the other, research has frequently examined levels of parent satisfaction with both mothers and fathers of typical children. For example, Fagan and Stevenson examined a sample of fathers whose children attended Head Start and used an empowerment-based program to try to increase involvement. They found that the empowerment-based program enabled provided men with a greater level of parent satisfaction. Similar results were found in the current study with the significant finding of a positive correlation between empowerment and satisfaction. The current study found that satisfaction was also a significant predictor, along with empowerment, of involvement among fathers who felt higher degrees of financial strain. Fathers who feel less pressed financially may have more options due to their greater levels of economic stability, and perhaps they have more choices when parenting their special needs children. Overall, the results of the current study show that paternal involvement is increased when men report greater levels of parental satisfaction.

The model examining the relationship between empowerment and paternal involvement as mediated by role salience and parent satisfaction was first examined without any contextual variables in order to determine the predictive ability of the model and also in order to have a comparison model when financial strain was added as a control variable. As previously mentioned, the results showed the relationship between empowerment and paternal involvement was mediated by role salience and parent satisfaction. This finding suggests that the greater sense of empowerment a man feels, the more salient he finds his role as a father, the more satisfied he is with his role as a father, and the more involved he reports to be with his special needs child. This finding seems to

be consistent with the current body of literature because empowerment is thought to provide fathers with a greater level of self esteem and a greater sense of competence regarding the ability to care for their children (Fagan & Stevenson; Curtis & Singh, 1996). As a man becomes more confident of his parenting skills, he may enjoy his role more and believe the role of a father to be more important overall. Fagan and Stevenson's findings suggested that empowerment was important in promoting paternal satisfaction and paternal involvement. Their results were supported by the current study.

Fagan and Stevenson (2002) suggested that low income men may be particularly affected by empowering programs because of their lack of confidence and self esteem as both men and fathers. They explained that low income men may have began the program with more to learn and more to gain from services than higher income men. Fagan and Stevenson's results were replicated in the current study, as seen in the support found for the moderating hypothesis; empowerment was found to be more important to men facing high levels of financial strain than their counterparts facing low levels of financial strain. The results of the moderating hypothesis may also relate to Fagan, Berndt, and Whiteman's (2007) findings, suggesting that when men feel lower levels of stress, they are able to become more involved in their children's lives.

Perhaps family-centered practices that encourage providing a sense of empowerment to families should be utilized specifically with families who are feeling a great deal of economic stress because they provide families with a sense of competence in regards to knowing how to care for the special needs child, as well as providing the family with an increased sense of control over their lives. If families are dealing with financial strain, as are most working and middle-class families today, they may be greatly

affected by a program that attempts to make them more stable and efficient in handling the day to day stressors of a special needs child (Curtis & Singh, 1996; Wang et al., 2006). For fathers who are facing so many stressors in life, perhaps feeling more empowered and competent in dealing with their children allows them to become more involved and show more interest in their children. It is possible that empowerment may be the key to enabling men to want to be fathers and to want to be active participants in the lives of their children. In addition, perhaps the fathers with less financial stress are less sensitive to empowerment effects because they are not struggling with feelings of inadequacy or incompetence in dealing with their special needs children. They may be less vulnerable and already feel competent and knowledgeable, which may make them less likely to be affected by services such as family-centered practices.

It is important for service providers to recognize the importance of targeting men under stress. Because empowerment is such a strong predictor of paternal involvement, empowerment may encourage men to be involved with their special needs children regardless of their initial dedication to their role as fathers. In addition, providing a sense of empowerment to these men may encourage pride in their role as fathers, increase paternal satisfaction, and finally lead to a greater sense of involvement with their children. If service providers are able to empower men in feeling competent and confident in their fathering abilities, perhaps more fathers would be engaged in a range of activities with their special needs children.

#### Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

The topics of special needs children and paternal involvement should be further explored in order to provide additional information regarding how men interact with their

special needs children. Because there is very little research regarding information on empowerment, identity theory variables, and paternal involvement, future research should continue to explore paternal involvement with special needs children by replicating the current study and expanding on the findings of this study. One limitation of the current study relates to the sample. The sample used in the current study is relatively small and may not be generalizable to all populations. Additionally, the participants in the current study were primarily Caucasian and had relatively high levels of educational attainment. Therefore, the current study should be replicated with a more diverse sample in order to ensure that empowerment, role salience, and parent satisfaction are salient predictors of paternal involvement across different populations.

Regarding fathers' involvement with special needs children, it would be useful to have more specific information regarding characteristics of the men involved in the study. For future studies, an index such as the Hollingshead might be useful in order to provide a more complete picture regarding the participants' economic state. For the current study, such an index was not possible because of the lack of information available regarding the participants' occupation and work hours. It would be helpful if more information was known regarding the fathers' occupations and work hours. Perhaps it would have been possible to determine if men's role identities were inhibited by their work schedules had more information been available. Information regarding mothers' work hours would also be useful because men may be involved with their children out of necessity instead of desire. If mothers are working outside of the home, men may be forced to take on greater levels of involvement with their special needs children (Deutsch et al., 1993). Additionally, because research suggests that despite increases in paternal



involvement, men are still not nearly as involved as mothers in caring for the children, it would be interesting to determine if levels of paternal involvement were influenced by the men's gender ideology. Traditional or modern ideas of gender roles may affect men's views of the paternal role and subsequently, their involvement with their children (Deutsch et al.).

The current study did not ask the participants or the TEIS service providers how long the family had been participating in TEIS. This limited the current study because it was not possible to determine if families who have been receiving services for a greater period of time felt higher levels of empowerment than families who had just started the program. Future researchers should account for the amount of time families have been enrolled in the program in order to look for possible interaction effects.

Information regarding levels of paternal involvement before the implementation of services would also be especially useful in order to determine the effectiveness of family-centered therapy programs, such as TEIS. In order to determine the effectiveness of family-centered therapy, researchers should use pretests in order to determine the fathers' stress levels, involvement levels, and feelings of empowerment before the services are put into effect. Using a pretest/post-test method, researchers would be able to view the effectiveness of the services provided to the fathers. Curtis and Singh (1996) suggest that following families from the time of diagnosis throughout the course of services would be useful because it would allow researchers to determine at which point empowerment is most significant to parents dealing with special needs children. Because so little information is available regarding fathers of special needs children, I believe a longitudinal study following fathers of special needs children would help to provide

valuable information regarding empowerment and paternal involvement, especially if levels of involvement could be tracked throughout the implementation of services.

Research has also suggested that fathers are more involved with their children when they are younger (Coley & Chase-Lansdale, 1999). It would be useful to determine if feelings of empowerment continue to affect paternal involvement as the child ages.

Future research may also want to examine the relationships between the identity theory variables, the contextual variables, and paternal involvement by using different subscales of empowerment. Several studies have found that one subscale of empowerment, such as system advocacy or self efficacy, may reflect a relationship with a variable, while the complete empowerment scale does not reflect a similar relationship (Curtis & Singh, 1996; Higgins, 2005; Resendez et al., 2000). The results of the current study may vary if subscales of the Family Empowerment Scale were used instead of a single indicator of empowerment. Future researchers should also examine the possibility of reciprocal relationships between the variables. The current study did not analyze the data to determine if the relationship between the identity theory variables and paternal involvement was mediated by empowerment. Therefore, it is important to determine if other models using the same variables are also significant.

The current study should also be replicated in order to collect more detailed information regarding the diagnoses of the children in the sample. The current study provided me with very little information regarding the children's diagnoses; although most of the children in this sample were considered to be relatively highly functioning, there was a large group of fathers that identified their child as having an alternate, and not listed, disorder or disability. Having more detailed information about the children's

diagnoses would allow researchers to further examine how the severity of the child's diagnosis affects father involvement. Researchers have suggested that men may be less involved with children with more severe disabilities; therefore, it would be interesting to determine if the children's diagnoses was related to varying levels of paternal involvement (Wanless et al., 2008). The findings of the current study may have varied if the children's diagnoses were more severe and less manageable to the families. As a result, future research should examine the types of diagnoses the children in the sample have in order to see if there are any interaction effects caused by the severity of the children's diagnoses.

Another suggestion for future research relates to the examination of the gender of the child. Research has suggested that men may be more involved with male children than female children. Perhaps further examination into the relationship between the gender of the child and paternal involvement with special needs children would be useful. Similarly, research has suggested that fathers are more involved with younger children (Coley & Chase-Lansdale, 1999). Therefore, examining the age of the child at the beginning of service implementation may also be of interest to future researchers.

Regarding data analysis, it is also important to acknowledge that mean substitutions were used to replace missing values. Although the means of the composite scores did not change significantly, it is important to recognize that the power of the relationships may have been lowered due to the mean substitutions. Additionally, because the measures were all self reported measures, it is important to remember that all answers provided by the fathers through the questionnaires were not verified through behavioral

observations in data collection. Therefore, it is not possible to determine if the men's reports accurately depict their feelings and behaviors.

## CHAPTER VI: CONCLUSIONS

The findings of this study add to the current body of literature by bridging a gap between two separate areas of research; but perhaps more importantly, the current study provides valuable information regarding predictors of paternal involvement with special needs children. Although there have been studies examining fathering involvement with special needs children, very few studies have found such strong predictors of paternal involvement. This study shows the importance of empowerment in predicting paternal involvement of men with special needs children and the moderating effect of financial strain. In addition, this study provides important information regarding men's role salience as fathers and feelings of parental satisfaction. Therefore, the current study not only bridges the gap between two areas of research, it also provides fascinating results regarding how men with special needs children fulfill their role as fathers.

Several studies have attempted to predict paternal involvement, yet very few studies have been able to account for a significant percentage of the variance of paternal involvement. For example, McBride and Rane (1997) found that the amount of hours worked by the children's mothers accounted for 3% of the total variance of paternal involvement. Similarly, McBride et al. (2001) examined the relationship between men's perceptions of their own parenting and mother's perceptions of their husbands' parenting and men's accessibility to their children. The two constructs accounted for only 4% of the total variance in men's accessibility to their children. After examining the relationship between demographic variables, infant characteristics, father characteristics, marital characteristics of the parents, and attitudes regarding work and family, Volling and Belsky (1991) could account for only 15% of the total variance of father-child

interactions. The current study found that empowerment alone accounted for 16% of the total variance in paternal involvement, while role salience and parental satisfaction combined accounted for 28.4% of the total variance in paternal involvement.

Other researchers were able to account for a greater amount of variance of paternal involvement; however, their models were not as concise and parsimonious as the model used in the current study. Fox and Bruce (2001) accounted for 25.6% of the total variance of a composite fatherhood measure when the composite fathering measure was regressed onto socioeconomic control variables, paternal investment theory variables, and identity theory variables. Minton and Pasley (1996) were able to account for 29% of the total variance of father involvement when examining income level, competence in the paternal role, and marital status. They also determined income level, satisfaction in the paternal role, and marital status accounted for 27% of the total variance of paternal involvement. Additionally, income level, investment in the paternal role, and marital status accounted for 26% of the total variance of paternal involvement. The current study was able to show that empowerment, role salience, and parent satisfaction accounted for 31.3% of the total variance in paternal involvement. This model simply shows empowerment affects men's involvement with their children by increasing fathers' role salience and parent satisfaction.

This study also may improve the negative image of lower income fathers. Typically, low income men are thought of as uninvolved and uninterested in fulfilling their role as fathers (Coley, 2001). Summers et al. (2006) reported that there is still a vague and imprecise definition of lower income fathers, usually resulting in stereotypes such as "the deadbeat dad." Similarly, Andrews et al. (2004) explained their belief that

the social climate of the United States, including political and economic changes, has caused men to be confused about their role as fathers. The current study went beyond simple correlations between income and paternal involvement and financial strain and paternal involvement and found empowerment to be an especially strong predictor of paternal involvement, specifically among men with high levels of financial strain. One interpretation of the findings of this study is that when financially strained men are empowered and feel more secure and competent in their role as fathers, they are able to become more involved with their children. The current study reflects the idea that men facing financial instability are not necessarily uninterested in being fathers; instead they may simply need information regarding how to effectively be involved with their special needs children.

In sum, the findings from the current study are important because they add to the current body of research and provide useful information to the service delivery systems. The study determined how important empowerment is when predicting levels of paternal involvement for financially strained men, while also showing that the relationship between empowerment and paternal involvement is mediated by role salience and paternal satisfaction. It is important that research continue in this area, specifically examining fathers of special needs children. Service providers may be able to use this study and others to find a way to encourage men to become more active participants in their children's lives and gain a greater sense of competence regarding their fathering abilities. However, it is important to determine whether empowerment is an important tool in encouraging paternal involvement only for men who face financial stressors or whether men from less difficult circumstances might also benefit from empowerment.

Service providers can only be effective if they are aware of which populations will benefit most from their intervention programs.



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## Appendices

## Appendix A

### *Family Empowerment Scale*

---

I feel that I have the right to approve all services my child receives.

When problems arise with my child, I handle them pretty well.

I feel I can have a part in improving services for children in my community.

I feel confident in my ability to help my child grow and develop.

I know the steps to take when I am concerned my child is receiving poor services.

I make sure that professionals understand my opinions about what services my child needs.

I know what to do when problems arise with my child.

I get in touch with my legislators when important bills or issues concerning my child are pending.

I feel my family life is under control.

I understand how the service system for children is organized.

I am able to make good decisions about what services my child needs.

I am able to work with agencies and professionals to decide what services my child needs.

I make sure I stay in regular contact with professionals who are providing services to my child.

I have ideas about the ideal service system for children.

I help other families get the services they need.

I am able to get information to help me better understand my child.

I believe that other parents and I can have an influence on services for children.

My opinion is just as important as professionals' opinions in deciding what services my child needs.

I tell professionals what I think about services being provided to my child.

I tell people in agencies and government how services for children can be improved.

I believe I can solve problems with my child when they happen.

I know how to get agency administrators or legislators to listen to me.

I know what services my child needs.

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## Appendix A

### *Family Empowerment Scale (continued)*

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I know the rights of parents and children under the special education laws.

I feel that my knowledge and experience as a parent can be used to improve services for children and families.

When I need help with problems in my family, I am able to ask for help from others.

I make efforts to learn new ways to help my child grow and develop.

When necessary, I take the initiative in looking for services for my child and family.

When dealing with my child, I focus on the good things as well as the problems.

I have a good understanding of the service system that my child is involved in.

When faced with a problem involving my child, I decide what to do and then do it.

Professionals should ask me what services I want for my child.

I have a good understanding of my child's special needs.

I feel I am a good parent.

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## Appendix B

### *Parental Role Salience Scale*

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I like being known as a parent.

Being a parent has changed me a lot.

I want people to know I have child(ren).

My attitude, feelings, and enthusiasm about being a parent increased after having my child(ren).

I often talk about being a father with other men.

I prefer the company of adults to spending time with my child(ren).

I would rather work overtime than watch my child(ren) for an evening.

I do not feel comfortable with a lot of children running around.

I miss the running around I did before I had a child(ren).

Before I spend money on myself, I ask myself if my child(ren) need something more.

Being a parent makes me feel special somehow.

I like the recognition I get from being someone's parent.

The word father completely captures who I am.

Having a child(ren) has made me feel less certain about my role as a parent.

I feel uncomfortable sometimes because I am the parent of a child with special needs.

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## Appendix C

### *Parent Satisfaction Scale*

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Being a parent has given me a lot of pleasure.

All in all, I am very satisfied with my relationship with all my children.

I want people to know I have child(ren).

If I could, I would do a lot of things differently as a parent of my child(ren).

Raising my children has been very hard.

I feel very close to my children.

I am very proud of being my child(ren)'s parent.

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## Appendix D

### *Subjective Assessment of Financial Well-Being*

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We have enough money to meet all our expenses each month.

I worry about having enough money for the children's education.

I feel very secure about our family's financial situation.

I worry about saving enough money for retirement.

Money problems frequently cause trouble in our family.

It is hard for us to live on our present income.

I worry that I may not be able to provide for my child(ren) as they get older.

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## Appendix E

### *Parent Involvement Scale*

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I spend one-on-one time with my child.

My child(ren) and I play together.

I join in activities my child(ren) like(s) at home.

I teach my child(ren) new skills.

I take my child(ren) to places (e.g. the mall, restaurants, and parks) and activities (e.g. soccer, swimming, and camping).

I help my child(ren) prepare for the day's activities (e.g. getting dressed and feeding).

I help my child(ren) prepare for bedtime.

I attend my child's therapy sessions.

I watch TV with my child(ren).

I do household chores with my child(ren).

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## Vita

Emily Lauren Furst was born in Fort Pierce, Florida on October 10, 1983. She graduated in 2001 from Riverview High School in Sarasota, Florida. She then attained her Bachelor of Science in Psychology, with minors in English and Sociology, from Presbyterian College in Clinton, South Carolina in May, 2005. While enrolled at Presbyterian College, she interned at Thornwell Home and School for Children and the University of South Carolina's Developmental Pediatric Clinic. She also worked as a behavioral tutor for the Lauren County School System.

Upon graduation from college, Ms. Furst worked as a Family Care Coordinator at Safe Children's Coalition in Bradenton, Florida. She provided case management services to families with children in the foster care system. Her other duties included working individually with teenagers aging out of the foster care system, in order to ensure they were able to live independently, and appearing regularly in Manatee County's Family Court to testify and provide recommendations for placement of the child, reunification, and/or termination of parental rights. Before leaving Safe Children's Coalition, Ms. Furst was certified as a Child Protection Professional through Florida's Department of Children and Families' Safety Program Office.

In August of 2006, she returned to school at the University of Tennessee in order to earn her Master of Science degree in Human Ecology, with a concentration in the area of Child and Family Studies and a focus on paternal involvement.