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WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY IN ST. LOUIS

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The Cost of Child Support: Policy Design and Father Identity

by

Lara E. Markovitz, LMSW

A dissertation presented to
the Washington University-Brown School in
partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree
of Doctor of Philosophy

August 2022

St Louis, Missouri

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Acknowledgments

Thank you to my chair, Trish Kohl, who has always nurtured and supported my interest in father involvement and child support. I am very grateful to my committee members, Amy Eyler, Sean Joe, and Vetta Sanders-Thompson, who have supported me in my academic and personal goals and shared their rich knowledge and insight. Todd Swanstrom has been an exceptionally generous mentor and given me the great gift of the academic and intellectual tools to pursue my academic interests. Rich Tolman has been a great supporter over the years and has helped me achieve my goals in numerous ways. I would like to extend special appreciation to Renee, Enola, and Melissa for their unwavering support. Marissa, thank you for lifting me up with your warmth, wisdom, and humor. Finally, I would also like to extend a special thank you to Charley Willison. I could not ask for a more generous and inspiring intellectual guide.

This research was supported by a NIMH T32 Predoctoral Fellowship (MH19960). Research reported in this publication was supported by the NICHD of the NIH (R01HD036916, R01HD039135, R01HD040421) and private foundations.

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents, Ruth and David Markovitz. I am deeply grateful for their encouragement, love, and support (formal, in-kind, and emotional!). With love and gratitude to the Mishpochah (Adam, Allison, & Mischa) for your support. We are so fortunate to be your neighbors. Thanks to Becca (Jonathan, Grant) for always believing in me. Leo J., thank you for introducing me to the exquisite tzar gidul banim.

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August 2022

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

The Cost of Child Support: Policy Design and Father Identity

by

Lara E. Markovitz, LMSW

Doctor of Philosophy in Social Work

Washington University in St. Louis-Brown School, 2022

Professor Patricia Kohl, Chair

Child support policy is one of the key forces in the lives of families in the U.S., where 1 in 4 children and half of African American children live apart from their fathers (Carlson et al., 2017; Grall, 2020; U.S. Census Bureau, 2014). Most unmarried fathers of newborns express a strong desire and commitment to their children (Carlson & McLanahan, 2002; England & Edin, 2007). However, by the time their children turn five, fathers' involvement (caregiving and time, provision of child support) diminishes greatly (Turner & Waller, 2017). This decrease in father involvement among low-income NRFs is thought to be related to unintended consequences of child support policy; however, little is known about the effect of child support policy design on father identity. Yet less is understood about *how* child support policy exerts this effect, or which specific aspects of policy design play a meaningful role. The overarching purpose of this research is to investigate the effect of child support policy design on father identity among low-income fathers living apart from their children using in-depth interviews with fathers, state-level policy design data, and transcripts of governors' state of the state addresses. The findings of this study suggest that child support policy design influences fathers parenting self-esteem by increasing role strain.

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background

Child support policy is one of the key forces in the lives of families in the U.S., where 1 in 4 children and half of African American children live apart from their fathers (Carlson et al., 2017; Grall, 2020; U.S. Census Bureau, 2014). Children with non-resident fathers (NRFs) experience higher rates of social-emotional, developmental, and academic problems than children with resident fathers—issues closely linked with high rates (30.1%) of poverty (Grall, 2017). Yet regardless of whether fathers live with their children, children whose fathers remain consistently and positively involved over the course of their childhood have better outcomes in each of these domains (Nepomnyaschy et al., 2012; Pleck, 2007). One of the central components of father involvement, child support, has been found to promote child wellbeing across various indicators (McLanahan et al., 2013; Nepomnyaschy & Garfinkel, 2010; Randles, 2018).

To reduce high levels of poverty among children with NRFs and promote father involvement, the Child Support Program (CSP) was introduced in 1975 (Garasky et al., 2010). The CSP now serves 1 in 5 children and half of low-income children in the United States and is one of the largest public welfare programs and sources of income support for children (Administration for Children and Families, 2017; Edin et al., 2019; Office of Child Support Enforcement, 2017; Sorensen, 2016; Wolkomir & Dean, 2019). As key safety net programs (e.g., Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)) have imposed more stringent eligibility guidelines and reduced funding, child support now provides the greatest proportion of low-income families' finances of any major social welfare program in the United States (Gunter, 2013; Sorensen, 2010).

The CSP intersects the four “major forces” influencing the lives of young fathers and families: public policy, the labor market, incarceration, and multiple-partner fertility (Smeeding et al., 2011, p.13). While middle- and high-income parents can generally afford and access legal representation, allowing them to avoid interacting with the state and its rules, low-income parents, particularly those who receive public assistance, are funneled into the public child support program, automatically connecting them to the broader public welfare system and its rule and regulations (or what Curran & Abrams, 2000 refer to as the “adversarial state” (p. 667). The CSP lies at the nexus of various major social systems (e.g., labor, criminal justice) and welfare programs (TANF, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Medicaid, Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF). NRF families receiving public welfare are required to cooperate with the CSP (Hatcher, 2012; Selekman & Holcomb, 2018; Sorensen, 2016; Wolkomir & Dean, 2019). Families that do not cooperate risk having their public welfare benefits reduced or even terminated (Selekman & Holcomb, 2018; Wolkomir & Dean, 2019). Thus, child support policy wields significant influence over the lives of low-income NRFs.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Most unmarried fathers of newborns express a strong desire and commitment to their children (Carlson & McLanahan, 2002; England & Edin, 2007). However, by the time their children turn five, fathers’ involvement (caregiving and time, provision of child support) diminishes greatly (Turner & Waller, 2017). This decrease in father involvement among low-income NRFs is thought to be related to issues of injustice, inequity, and restriction of parental autonomy embedded in child support policies. These policy problems influence family structure and function and minimize the CSP’s potential benefits (Greene & Moore, 2000). For example, in 2013, only 40% of NRFs in the U.S. had a formal child support order (Grall, 2013; Mincy et

al., 2015). According to 2017 U.S. Census data, most (69.8%) custodial mothers reported receiving some formal child support; however, less than half (45.9%) received the full amount (Grall, 2020). Mincy and colleagues (2015) found that among NRFs with low incomes (\$40,000 per year or less), the rate of full payments was far lower (only 33%). Furthermore, despite the imposition of increasingly harsh collection mechanisms, the rate of custodial parents receiving no child support increased from 24.2% in 1993 to 30.2% in 2017. This unpaid child support represents the loss of vital financial resources sorely needed by low-income children and their custodial parents, half of whom live at 150% of the poverty level (Lippold & Sorensen, 2013; Sorensen, 2016).

However, collection attempts have been compared to squeezing blood from a turnip or a stone (Brinig & Garrison, 2018; Mincy & Sorensen, 1998). Available data on NRFs income are limited, as the most recent comprehensive study of NRFs' income in the United States was conducted by Sorensen in 1997; however, that study found that approximately one quarter of NRFs in the U.S. lived below the poverty level. In addition, Sorensen et al. (2007) found that NRFs who have annual incomes below \$20,000 owe 75% of unpaid child support in the U.S. Consequently, child support debt in the United States today is considered uncollectible (Heinrich et al., 2011; Sorensen et al., 2007; Turner & Waller, 2017). Fathers who are African American or Hispanic, young, have incomes below the poverty line, receive public assistance, have low educational levels, or lack stable employment are the least likely to pay formal child support (Grall, 2020; Huang et al., 2005; Kane et al., 2015; Stykes et al., 2013; Waller et al., 2018). Many low-income fathers face barriers (e.g., employment, educational, criminal justice involvement) to paying child support (Heinrich et al., 2011; Pate, 2002). Low-income and African American NRFs also have less access to educational, employment, and other financial

opportunities that could reduce these challenges (Coles, 2009; Julion et al., 2012; Lemay et al., 2010; Lerman, 2010; Summers et al., 2006).

Failure to pay child support can result in sanctions (e.g., driver's license suspension, court proceedings and jail) (Bronte-Tinkew et al., 2007; Cancian et al., 2009; Maldonado, 2006), fines, fees, and interest from which new barriers (e.g., lower credit score) can result (Pate, 2002). While sanctions are intended to compel NRFs to pay, there is little evidence to support their effectiveness, and research suggests that these sanctions may impede NRFs short- and long-term earning ability (Bronte-Tinkew et al., 2007; Cancian et al., 2013; Nooteboom, 2007; Wolkomir & Dean, 2019). For example, the federal government allows the states to use these harsh enforcement mechanisms even in cases of sudden loss of employment or incarceration (Clary et al., 2017).

Various scholars and advocacy organizations have come to refer to the CSP as the new *debtors' prison* (Patterson, 2008, p.98). Turner & Waller (2017) argue that these enforcement mechanisms have a damaging effect on NRFs who already owe an unevenly high amount of debt when compared to higher-income NRFs. The authors further contend that certain sanctions—criminal justice involvement, withholding of tax-based incentives and returns, and license suspension—have a particularly deleterious impact on low-income NRFs.

Furthermore, child support payments made by NRFs are instead transferred directly to the government. These funds are then used to support various government programs. Consequently, child support payments drain low-income fathers' limited resources while leading to no supplemental support for children, presenting serious issues of inequity (Danziger & Haveman, 2001; Weimer & Vining, 2009). Indeed, presently, 60% of the national child support debt is owed to the state in exchange for TANF assistance (Danziger & Haveman, 2001;

Heinrich et al., 2011; Solomon-Fears et al., 2012).

Therefore, child support policies contain various *perverse incentives*, undesirable and unintended outcomes that lie in direct contrast to the outcomes originally intended by policy makers, to participate in the CSP (Miller & Mincy, 2012; Sorensen et al., 2007; Stirling & Aldrich, 2008; Waller & Plotnick, 2001). Specifically, by discounting the non-financial (e.g., caregiving, modeling values, in-kind support) provided by low-income NRFs and overlooking NRFs own socio-economic stressors, current policies can cause NRFs to feel “alienated” (Hatcher, 2012). Ultimately, these policies may cause fathers to lose a stake in their children. Yet, only recently have researchers begun to turn their attention to inequitable burdens placed on low-income NRFs (Stirling & Aldrich, 2008).

Thus, even as child support policy has reached a critical juncture, policy change has lagged in the face of major socio-demographic changes in the United States. Within this context a *policy gap* has emerged (Strach, 2007). This suggests that a *policy window*, or period during which the political milieu is ripe for new policy priorities (*agenda setting*), may be opening (Kingdon, 1984; Strach, 2007). As state governments grapple with uncollectible child support debt, many states have introduced new legislation and innovative programs that either increase or reduce welfare generosity and/or restrictiveness. Such policy decisions have the potential to result in marked changes in society’s structure and social course; yet little is understood about how current child support policy is perceived by families or how it impacts their behaviors.

Families’ perceptions and experiences with the institutions that govern them are molded by their interactions with governmental programs. For families with low incomes, the social service agencies responsible for distributing and withholding critical aid (e.g., food stamps, health insurance) bear a particular influence (Kumlin & Rothstein, 2005; Lerman & Weaver,

2014; Mettler & Soss, 2004; Strach & Sullivan, 2011). The extent to which citizens perceive these institutions as just (and therefore trustworthy and effective) affects their interpretations of their experiences with the institution (Kumlin & Rothstein, 2005; Rothstein & Stolle, 2002). In fact, the *social justice perspective*, asserts Kumlin (2002), is predicated on the belief that citizens “want to experience fairness and justice”, not just maximizing the benefits they receive from the welfare state (p. 211). Citizens’ interpretations and experiences with government are thought to have a subsequent effect on their identities and behaviors (Kumlin & Rothstein, 2005; Rothstein & Stolle, 2002). Lerman & Weaver (2014) explain this effect by arguing that as part of the process of “glean[ing] lessons about the nature of government”, citizens also learn about their own “political standing, membership, and efficacy” (p. 12). What do these lessons impart to fathers about the value of their role or their ability to fulfill it and how do these lessons influence their behaviors?

Contemporary scholars Hawkins & Dollahite (1997) contend that fathers’ identity and attachment are shaped by the institutions that govern them. Yet the dearth of literature on welfare policy’s effect on father identity reflect the historical belief that fathers’ emotional lives were disconnected from broader societal structures and institutions. As a result, little is known about the effect of child support policies on NRFs involvement with their children (e.g., provision of in-kind support). Yet less is understood about *how* child support policy exerts this effect, or which specific characteristics of these policies play a meaningful role. As the “center of attention between the micro-level individual and macro-level analyses” (Myrdal, 1941; Strach, 2007, p. 151), this interplay between policy and families begs further investigation. Specifically, what are the consequences when “the state declares fathering as a law” (Curran & Abrams, 2000, p. 666)? Do fathers’ fathering-related values or capabilities differ from the expectations delineated by

child support laws? If so, how do these discrepancies impact fathers' behaviors—particularly their involvement with their children?

1.3 Purpose of the Dissertation

The overarching purpose of this research is to investigate the effect of child support policy design on father identity among low-income fathers living apart from their children. Improving our understanding of the effect of specific policy design characteristics on key components of father identity and role strain enhances our ability to design policies that promote, rather than inhibit, father involvement. To achieve this aim, I examined the effect of policy design on father identity using longitudinal data from both in-depth interviews with fathers as well as governor's state of the state addresses and state-level policy data.

First, I conducted a policy content analysis. Using annual Governor's State of the State Addresses from 1996-2005 for three states (Illinois, New York, and Wisconsin), I explored how social constructions and target populations were used in governors' descriptions and justifications of changes in child support policy design across states and over time. To investigate the political and social milieu of the study states, I investigated and compiled detailed data on state-level demographics, policy design, and policy implementation tools using extant databases including the Urban Institute Welfare Rules database. Next, I explored the effect of child support policy design on several key components of father identity: (1) role strain and (2) parenting self-esteem (composed of perceived role-value, self-efficacy, and parenting satisfaction) (Johnston & Mash, 1989; Ohan et al., 2000) using in-depth interview data from the Time, Love, and Cash Among Couples with Children study (TLC3), which is a sub-study of the of the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study. These datasets are linked by respondent identification numbers, which are the same for FFCWS and TLC3 (England & Edin, 2016).

Using longitudinal interview and policy data gleaned from various extant databases allowed me to explore little studied and complex research questions in depth.

Chapter 2: Empirical and Theoretical Foundations

2.1 Child Support and Father Involvement in the U.S.

Welfare and family policy in the U.S. are inextricably linked. The introduction of Aid to Dependent Families with Children (AFDC) in 1935 marked the advent of fatherhood policy in the United States (Moffitt et al., 1998). AFDC was a hallmark of the expansive anti-poverty legislation of the New Deal and became the first means-tested program to provide public financial assistance to low-income families (Moffitt et al., 1998). The introduction of public benefits to families marked a *critical juncture in state-market-family relations* (Orloff & Monson, 2002). From 1935 to 1967, AFDC enforced new restrictions on families including the so-called man in the house rule, which excluded families with a father or father figure present in the home from receiving public aid (Orloff & Monson, 2002). As a result, couples were forced to choose between keeping their families together and public aid (Moffitt et al., 1998). Fathers began to “disappear or make themselves invisible” (Harris & Metler, 2014). In addition, mothers relinquished their right to child support payments while receiving AFDC. Child support payments made by NRFs were instead transferred directly to the government, which would use the funds to support various welfare programs. With the introduction of direct transfer of NRFs child support payments to the government, the CSP became the only public welfare program in the U.S. to use private funds (i.e., child support payments) from individuals (i.e., NRFs) to help fund public welfare programs.

Fifteen years after the passage of AFDC, amendments to the Social Security Act of 1950 introduced government intervention in child support. These amendments required state welfare

agencies to inform law enforcement if a father *abandoned* his children, thus facilitating the identification of fathers who were paying child support. This allowed the government to count child support as part of families' income and thus reduce the income eligibility threshold. As a result, both the number of families eligible for public assistance and the amount of assistance for which they were eligible decreased (Lerman & Sorensen, 2003).

Yet the conception of responsible fatherhood did not come to the fore until the late 1960s, when a sharp rise in children living apart from their fathers contributed to increased participation in Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), and consequently, rising AFDC costs and unpaid child support (Danziger & Haveman, 2001; Lerman & Sorensen, 2003). These profound shifts in family structure and resulting welfare costs gave rise to a new public debate about *responsible* fatherhood (Jordan-Zachery, 2009; Lerman & Sorensen, 2003; Orloff & Monson, 2002). This debate introduced new narratives about a national crisis of fatherhood (Orloff & Monson, 2002, p.87) spurred by deadbeat dads and absent fathers who were unwilling to support their children (Edin et al., 2019; Thornton et al., 2012 as cited in Edin et al., 2019).

In response to the fatherhood crisis and rising AFDC costs, the *Child Support Enforcement Act (CSEA)* was passed in 1975, marking a critical juncture in welfare and family policy in the United States (Lerman & Sorensen, 2003). The CSEA established punitive new enforcement "weapons" to the CSP's "arsenal" including automatic income withholding, intercepting tax refunds, and liens (Brinig & Garrison, 2018, p.522; Lerman & Sorensen, 2003). The CSEA was the first of a series of legislation aimed at transferring responsibility for child support collection enforcement from federal to state government, an emphasis in keeping with the national period of decreased social spending from 1975-1995 (Katz, 1986). Table 1, below, summarizes central child support-related legislation in the United States from 1935-1998.

Table 1

Key Child Support Policies in the United States

Year	Public Law	Title	Policy Change(s)
1935	P.L. 74-271	<i>Aid to Dependent Children and Families</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● “Man in the House” Rule (families ineligible for AFDC if father present)
1950	P.L. 81-734	<i>Social Security Amendments of 1950</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Advent of government intervention in child support enforcement
1965	P.L. 89-97	<i>Social Security Amendments of 1965</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Authorized welfare agencies access to employer information of NRFs with unpaid child support
1967	P.L. 90-248	<i>Social Security Amendments of 1967</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Enhanced child support collection enforcement
1974-75	P.L. 93-647	<i>Social Services Amendments of 1974</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Established a national Child Support Program
1980	P.L. 93-647	<i>Amendments to Title IV-D of the SSA</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Established federal incentives for state child support collection enforcement
1984	P.L. 98-378	<i>Child Support Amendments to Title IV-D of the SSA</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Introduced federally mandated state participation in child support enforcement ● Introduced “pass-through” to promote child support cooperation among mothers
1988	P.L. 100-485	<i>The Family Support Act</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Required states to establish uniform child support guidelines ● Required regular reviews of cases opened by the CSP
1992	P.L. 102-521	<i>The Child Support Recovery Act</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Introduced sanctions for child support non-payment
1996	P.L. 104-193	<i>The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Introduced stricter child support enforcement policies ● Created responsible fatherhood programs
1998	P.L. 105-187	<i>Deadbeat Parents Punishment Act</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Established new criminal penalties for child support non-payment for children residing in other states

References: Administration for Children and Families, 2014; Katz, 1986; Lerman & Sorensen, 2003; Moffitt, 2013; Moffitt, 2015

In 1984, a series of child support amendments established mandated state government cooperation with federal child support enforcement (Glass, 1990). Whereas states were previously encouraged to comply with federal enforcement efforts, state governments were now charged with (1) designing and implementing an expedited child support establishment and enforcement system; (2) mandatory methods to enforce child support orders (e.g., automatic income withholding and withholding of state and federal tax returns) and (3) including mothers who both do and do not receive AFDC in state child support collection unit services (Glass, 1990).

Four years later, the Family Support Act (1988) increased the state's power to compel NRFs to pay child support (Seltzer & Meyer, 1994). By 1990, automatic income withholding was established for fathers whose child support cases had been opened by the CSP (Seltzer & Meyer, 1994). Increased measures to ensure automatic transfers were implemented in 1994, when automatic income withholding was introduced for NRFs with newly established child support orders (Seltzer & Meyer, 1994). The restrictive and punitive measures introduced beginning in 1981 culminated in the *Child Support Recovery Act* of 1992. This act introduced sanctions for non-payment up to and including criminal proceedings (Maldonado, 2006).

Policy reforms aimed at decreasing social spending and increasing employment and child support among low-income NRFs culminated in the passage of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) (i.e., welfare reform) of 1996. To enhance child support collection, the government increased efforts to locate NRFs more quickly, required states to establish innovative programs aimed at increasing paternity establishment, and provided additional financial resources to help fathers gain visitation with their children and support them

in finding employment (Brinig & Garrison, 2018).

2.2 State-level Policy Variation

As a result of the policy reforms discussed in the previous section, NRFs interactions with the CSP are heavily influenced by state-level welfare policy design. While the federal government determines the enforcement tools available to states and which welfare programs must employ them, state government has the freedom to decide whether, when, and how to use these tools. This has led to broad variation in state-level welfare and child support policy design, particularly in *welfare rules*. *Welfare rules* refer to government rules related to what a family is required or not allowed to do to become or remain eligible for government assistance (Hahn et al., 2017). Variation in welfare rules and child support policy structure and scope among states is important because it contributes to differing levels and types of barriers and facilitators to cooperation with the CSP. Taken together, these barriers and facilitators influence father involvement and family function.

2.2.1 Child support cooperation requirements. While the federal government requires states to enforce child support cooperation among TANF and Medicaid applicants/recipients, states have the option of waiving cooperation requirements for SNAP and CCDF childcare subsidies (Selekman & Holcomb, 2018). Presently, there is wide variation both among states and programs. For example, while 23 states currently require cooperation with the CSP to receive CCDF childcare subsidies, only 7 states require cooperation with SNAP (Selekman & Holcomb, 2018). Five of these states have introduced these rules recently, between 2015 and 2018. The federal government also provides states with the option of rendering fathers who have child support debt ineligible to apply for or continue receiving SNAP. The special EITC available to low-income NRFs in several states also requires child support cooperation

(Cancian et al., 2009).

2.2.2 Enforcement tools. Failure to cooperate with the CSP in establishing child support orders or falling behind on child support payments can result in various *sanctions* (punitive actions) including refusal or loss of benefits (Brustin & Vollendorf Martin, 2015; Hatcher, 2012). Punitive measures such as sanctions for non-payment and sanctions for arrears (debt) are the key mechanisms in child support enforcement. Sanctions include driver's license suspension, car booting, wage garnishment, interception of federal and state tax returns, ineligibility for a special EITC for low-income NRFs available in some states, withholding of unemployment benefits, and even court proceedings and jail (Bronte-Tinkew et al., 2007; Cancian et al., 2009; Maldonado, 2006). Characteristics of welfare punitiveness include the following: reason for imposing sanction (non-cooperation and/or non-payment of child support); harshest type of sanction, duration of sanction, whether welfare benefit reduction is used as a type of sanction, and whether conciliation processes are available to avoid and/or ameliorate sanctions. A second type of enforcement tool is *comparable disqualification*, which refers to the disqualification of a SNAP recipient if that household member has been disqualified from a different means-tested public welfare program (Roberts, 2005; Wolkomir & Dean, 2019). Comparable disqualification is not used in other public welfare programs.

2.2.3. Who gets what: pass-through and disregard policies. Determining which resources the government provides to families and how many resources they are allowed to have or retain and still be allowed to receive government assistance (or, as Laswell described this role, "who gets what") is central to the policy process (Hahn et al., 2017). To ensure that fathers' income is collected towards child support, the federal government requires fathers' employers to cooperate with *automatic income withholding*. This involves the employer

automatically withholding the amount of the child support order from NRFs earned income (Maldonado, 2006; Pirog & Ziol-Guest, 2006; Weimer & Vining, 2009). Once income has been withheld, it is then transferred directly to the government, rather than the custodial parent (Pirog & Ziol-Guest, 2006). All or most of child support payments made by NRFs whose children receive public assistance (TANF, SNAP, Medicaid, CCDF childcare subsidies) are then retained by the government as a form of repayment for this assistance.

In 1984, *pass-through policies* were introduced as part of the Child Support Enforcement Amendments to encourage mothers' cooperation with the CPS (Curran & Abrams, 2000). State governments have the choice to use pass-through and disregard policies to increase child support and public welfare benefits to custodial mothers and children. *Pass-through policies* increase the amount of funds paid through child support that goes directly towards children and custodial parents (Gunter, 2013; Lippold et al., 2010; Sorensen, 1997; Sorensen & Zibman, 2000; Stirling & Aldrich, 2008; Waller & Plotnick, 2001). In fact, Wheaton & Sorensen (2007) estimate that if every state implemented the maximum pass-through of \$100/month/child/\$200/month/2+ children, custodial parents' annual household income would increase by 50%.

Disregard policies refer to policies that do not include child support as income when evaluating families' eligibility for TANF. In other words, the state disregards child support to allow the custodial parent to receive more state support. These policies vary in their implementation. For example, some pass-through and disregard policies promote employment services (e.g., training, support) to bolster fathers' ability to pay future child support through wages from employment (Sorensen, 1997; Sorensen & Zibman, 2000; Stirling & Aldrich, 2008; Waller & Plotnick, 2001). However, these policies share three goals. First, to reduce poverty among custodial families with low incomes; second, to enhance fathers' involvement with their

children; and third, to promote formal employment among NRFs with low incomes (Sorensen, 1997; Sorensen & Zibman, 2000; Stirling & Aldrich, 2008; Waller & Plotnick, 2001).

States have always been given the option of “passing-through” child support collected by TANF; however, until 2007, most states did not have policies in place to pass-through these payments (Wheaton & Sorensen, 2007). Instead, very little of these funds were distributed to families receiving TANF, with only 27% being distributed in 2004. The rest of these funds were retained by federal and state TANF to provide financial support to the federal and state governments (Wheaton & Sorensen, 2007). New incentives to increase pass-through policies were introduced with the reauthorization of TANF as part of the Deficit Reduction Act of 2005 (Wheaton & Sorensen, 2007).

Additional policy variation lies in the types of services and other benefits provided by some pass-through and disregard policies. For example, some pass-through and disregard policies promote employment services (e.g., training, support) to bolster fathers’ ability to pay future child support through wages from employment (Sorensen, 1997; Sorensen & Zibman, 2000; Stirling & Aldrich, 2008; Waller & Plotnick, 2001). States were also allowed in 2008 to pass through up to \$100 per month for one child, and up to \$200 per month for two or more children without having to re-pay this amount to the federal government (Wheaton & Sorensen, 2007). Yet as of 2020, only half of the states in the U.S. had implemented some form of pass-through policy and disregard policy (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2020). The amount passed-through ranges from \$50 to between \$100 and \$200 in states that take the number of children into account.

What determines these differences in policy? To investigate this question, I will first examine several theories related to social constructions and policy design as well as father identity. Next, I will present and describe the conceptual framework for the current study.

2.3 Social Constructions and Policy Design

This study explored The child support program's policy design has been well documented, yet little scholarship has examined the underpinnings of child support policy design and its consequences. Previous theoretical work rooted in Berger & Luckmann's (1967) *social constructionism paradigm* seeks to understand how and why policies are designed. Scholarship on social constructionism focuses on understanding how social constructions become embedded in institutions and how, once institutionalized, these constructions persist over time (Berger & Luckmann, 1967; Chard et al., 2019; Pierce et al., 2014). Berger & Luckmann (1967) point to the importance of the history and context in which institutions were designed, stating "institutions always have a history, of which they are the products" (p. 54). This continual interaction between past and current policy design is known as the *feed-forward effect* (Pierce et al., 2014; Pierson, 1993).

Building on social constructionism, Schneider & Ingram (1993; 1997) expanded the definition of policy design to include not only legislative texts, but the methods used to impart policies to the public and the consequences associated with these methods (Pierce et al., 2014). This theory identifies the specific elements of policy design (e.g., rules, benefits and burdens, tools) that have "underlying patterns of logic that cause tangible consequences along instrumental or interpretive dimensions that may lead to the distribution of benefits to some and burdens others" (Pierce et al., 2014, p. 6; Schneider & Ingram, 1997; Schneider & Sidney, 2009). Ultimately, this results in "differential allocation of benefits and burdens...produce inequalities

that last through many generations” (Lipsitz, 1995; Schneider & Ingram, 2007, p. 27). Schneider & Ingram applied the social construction of target populations, one of the nine key elements in their theory of policy design (see table 2) to the study of public policy, to explain the socially constructed mechanisms underlying the policy process (Pierce et al., 2014; Schneider & Ingram, 1993; 1997).

Table 2

Schneider & Ingram’s Theory of Policy Design

Name	Definition
Target populations	The “players” in the policy arena who receive, or may receive, benefits or burden
Policy problem and goals	Problem definition and goals to be pursued
Rules	Policy directives stating who is to do what, when, with what resources, who is eligible, etc.
Rationales	The explicit or implicit justifications and legitimations for the policy including those used in debates about the policy
Assumptions	Explicit or implicit assumptions about causal logics or about the capacity of people or of organizations
Benefits and burdens	To be distributed
Tools	Incentives or disincentives for agencies and target groups to act in accord with policy directives
Implementation structure	Entire implementation plan, including the incentives for agency compliance and resource

References: Schneider & Ingram, 1997; Schneider & Sidney, 2009; Pierce et al., 2014

Schneider & Ingram (1993) highlight the importance of *target populations*, which refers to “cultural characterizations or popular images of the persons or groups whose behavior and well-being are affected by public policy” (p. 334). The social construction of target populations, the authors argue, influences policy “agenda setting, legislative behavior, and policy formulation and design, as well as to studies of citizen orientation, conception of citizenship, and style of participation” (p. 334).

Target populations include two domains, construction (positive or negative) and power (high vs. low, strong vs. weak) (Chard et al., 2019, p.1; Schneider & Ingram, 1993). According to Willison (2019), “a moral weight is associated with certain perceived individual or group characteristics” (p.31). For example, populations with low levels of power, i.e., *dependent*, (e.g., mothers, children) are generally constructed more favorably than those considered *deviant* (e.g., single parents with low incomes, citizens who are criminal justice system-involved) (Crowley et al., 2008). Among populations with high levels of power, business owners and older adults (constructed as an *advantaged* population) are viewed more positively than *contenders* (e.g., unions). These constructions result in “variable opportunity structures as well as targeted messaging from government that all interact to continually shape the social construction of the target population” (Ingram et al., 2007; Pierce et al., 2014, p. 6).

Policy images, which refers to policy makers and citizens perceptions of policies and the way in which they engage in debates about policy problems are shaped by how *visible* and *proximate* (how many citizens lives are affected) a particular policy is to the public (Soss & Schram, 2007). For example, the CSP has low visibility and touches the lives only of families with low incomes who often remain invisible to society and “if they are noticed at all, through the distorting lenses of stereotyping, scapegoating, and, at best, condescension” (Johnson et al., 1999, p.10). Consequently, NRFs political power is more restricted than recipients of non-means tested programs (e.g., Medicare, which is both highly visible and proximate). Furthermore, policies that are highly visible and proximate are more likely to touch the lives of populations that have been constructed more positively and have higher levels of political power (e.g., politically organized) (Crowley et al., 2008; Soss & Schram, 2007).

Once constructed, “symbolic language, metaphors, and stories” (i.e., *narratives*), often based on racist stereotypes, transmit these characterizations to the public (e.g., citizens and policy makers) where they become “the principal means for defining and contesting policy problems” (Stone, 2012, p.158). Ingram et al. (2007) assert that these social constructions have the ultimate effect of “shaping institutions and the broader culture through both the instrumental (resource) effects of policy and the rhetorical/symbolic (interpretive) effects” (p. 97). In other words, narratives influence which policy problems are prioritized, how they are represented and responded to (e.g., urgently, punitively), and their design (e.g., generous, restrictive) (Stone, 2012). Specifically, narratives become tools used to convince policy makers and citizens of the need for policy change (e.g., reducing or increasing benefits to certain target populations) (Blum & Kulmann, 2019). Narratives are central to this decision-making process, as they are used by policymakers and the public to determine a target population’s *deservingness* (*advantaged, contender, dependent, and deviant*) (Baumgartner & Jones, 2009; Schneider & Ingram, 1993). Thus, social constructions of target populations and the narratives that drive them become ingrained in the policy process (Schneider & Ingram, 1993).

Furthermore, social constructions are rarely questioned or altered (Schneider & Ingram, 1993). While prior research has demonstrated that target populations are not stagnant (they can move between categories or be part of two different categories at the same time), these changes occur gradually and slowly (Pierce et al., 2014). While little is known about how target populations shift from one category to another (deLeon, 2005), Pierce et al. (2014) assert that target populations categorization is altered only when there are external changes in broader society (e.g., institutional, public narratives, media) as well as shifts within the population (e.g., mobilization of advocacy groups, changes in group resources).

Previous research demonstrates that policymakers justify their choice and use of policy tools using social constructions as a rationale (Ingram et al., 2007; Schneider & Ingram, 1990). While all institutions rely on their ability to successfully impose a system of social control to function, public support for punitive systems of control is shaped by the social construction of the population being targeted (Alesina et al., 2001; Berger & Luckmann, 1967; Blum & Kulmann, 2019; Fusaro, 2017; Ingram et al., 2007; Stone, 2012). For example, in the case of *deviant* target populations, the “moral weight” referenced by Willison (2019) is used to “rationalize punitive responses to such characteristics” (p.31). As a result, social constructions gave impetus to the notion of a fatherhood crisis and influenced the policy tools used by policymakers to carry out and enforce child support policies and shape their justification for these policy decisions. For example, the responsible fatherhood debate was framed as a crisis of *deadbeat dads* and *absent fathers* unwilling to support their children (Edin et al., 2019; Orloff & Monson, 2002; Thornton et al., 2012 as cited in Edin et al., 2019). By centering this discourse on values of family self-sufficiency and the traditional nuclear family structure, policy makers failed to account for socio-historical factors such as the sudden dearth of employment opportunities for men in under-resourced areas, the increasing number of women working outside the home, and the dramatically diminishing public welfare system. Instead, they constructed NRFs as *deviants* by emphasizing their departure from “the classical family of Western nostalgia” (Goode, 1963, p.6).

As these narratives become embedded in the policy process, they begin to evolve into *policy images*, the way in which policy makers and citizens perceive policies and engage in debates about the policy. For example, as mothers across the socio-economic spectrum were beginning to bear greater responsibility for financially supporting their families, fathers’ roles

were becoming increasingly relational (e.g., focused on nurturing) (Carlson & Magnuson, 2011; Edin & Nelson, 2013). Yet, even as these new role conceptions were afforded to fathers with middle- or high-incomes, they were denied to NRFs with low incomes. While aspects of these role ranges were framed positively (e.g., increased focus on nurturing among fathers, greater gender equity among parents) regarding middle income fathers, these same outcomes were framed negatively or ignored in discourse about fathers with few financial resources (Carlson & Magnuson, 2011).

Therefore, in addition to issues related to social constructions that are built on stereotypes or faulty data, social constructions can also become incongruous with society (Strach, 2007). For example, the continued reliance on the construction of NRFs with low incomes as deadbeat or absent fathers evolved into an *institutional logic* which facilitated restrictive and punitive child support policies (Thornton et al., 2012 as cited in Edin et al., 2019, p.80). Edin and colleagues (2019) contend that the institutional logic supporting restrictive and punitive child support is increasingly “at odds with economic, demographic, and cultural realities of American families, and with the “familial logic” that fathers employ in relation to their children’s support” (p. 80). This incongruity between institutional logic and families’ contemporary reality indicates a *policy gap* (Strach, 2007).

To better understand how such a gap could be addressed, scholars of *policy feedback* have examined the role of policy in effecting political change. In contrast to traditional notions of policy as a process that begins with politics and ends with policy design, the *policy feedback* framework argues that policies are “political forces in their own right” with the capacity to stem political change by influencing the public’s preferences (Soss & Schram, 2007, p. 3). This capacity for change is important because, according to Schneider & Ingram (1993), social

constructions affect citizens' attitudes about government programs and their behaviors (e.g., willingness and ability to cooperate with the CSP) in several ways. First, social constructions inform the public's perception of a constructed population's value and the type of treatment they should receive from policymakers and government. Second, social constructions influence citizens *orientations* (i.e., attitudes) toward the government, particularly when weighing decisions that involve competing interests between the individual and government institutions. Finally, social constructions affect citizens participation in various aspects of society.

Yet the effects of policy design on citizens attitudes and behaviors vary across target populations (Schneider & Ingram, 1993). In the case of *deviant* populations, policy design may create a negative feedback loop. According to the authors, deviants are more likely to experience punitive policies and are therefore more likely to avoid interactions with the government (Schneider & Ingram, 1993). For example, punitive policies may push fathers off the grid, increasing the likelihood that fathers substitute formal child support with informal (cash) arrangements. In response, the CSP imposes harsher sanctions, which ultimately makes it more difficult for fathers to provide for their children. In addition to the problems this creates for fathers and families, this makes it more likely that families will be unsuccessful in fulfilling their role in *governance* (i.e., carrying out the policy goals of the government) (Novkov, 2008; Strach & Sullivan, 2011). This is important because the government relies on families' cooperation to implement its policies.

According to Strach (2007), while families are generally portrayed as passive actors in the policy process, they are instead mechanisms in the policy process. Strach contends that "the business of congress is conducted in the language of the family" (p. 25). In other words, the government uses the family as a way of determining what Laswell referred to in 1936 as "who

gets what, when, and how”. Therefore, it is important to understand how families perceive welfare and child support policies and how their perceptions influence their decision making and behaviors in relation to child support, employment, marriage, etc.

The negative feedback loop present in current child support suggests institutional issues and calls into question the effectiveness of punitive approaches to child support enforcement. According to Berger & Luckmann (1967), while control mechanisms are a central part of institutional design, the reliance on additional implementation mechanisms suggests a failure in the institutionalization process. To better understand *which* implementation tools are effective, we need to improve our understanding of how implementation tools are perceived by fathers and families and the influence that these tools have on their decision-making processes.

Schneider & Ingram (1990) point out that not all incentives come in the form of external enforcement tools, as often presupposed by classical implementation theory. Citizens, they argue, use their existing values and beliefs to help them decide whether to take a particular policy action. In fact, citizens are more likely to cooperate with a policy if it is perceived to align with their own values (e.g., justice, obligations, equality). Thus, these *symbolic and hortatory tools*, i.e., incentives rooted in individuals’ values, can play an overlooked role in the policy process.

In fact, De Geest & Dari-Mattiacci (2013) contend that *carrots* can be more effective than *sticks* in two specific situations. The first situation is one that presents a *specification problem*, which refers to a situation in which policymakers do not know which citizens are more likely to comply with a *norm*. The authors argue that in this case, punitive measures, or *sticks*, are unlikely to be effective, because the citizens they target are unlikely to be able to comply with the norm. In the case of child support, policies tend to target NRFs who are least likely to be

able to conform to norms of providing sufficient financial support to their children. In addition to the low likelihood that *sticks* will be effective in this case, *specification problems* cause governments to spend money on *administrative costs* (e.g., paternity establishment) that may not pay off in a cost-benefit analysis.

The second is when the policy maker designs a policy that requires some citizens to produce, provide, or act more than other citizens. The authors refer to this as *singling-out danger* (De Geest & Dari-Mattiacci, 2013). In the case of child support, NRFs affected by poverty are singled-out by the government due to their children or co-parents receipt of public assistance, and then required to provide a greater proportion of their income than middle- and high-income NRFs (Huang et al., 2005). De Geest & Dari-Mattiacci (2013) argue that in cases in which certain citizens are singled out, the danger of greater *distributional distortions*, or “artificially impoverishing those from whom much is required” is increased (p. 341). Accordingly, *carrots* would be more effective than *sticks* under these conditions.

2.3.1 Previous applications. While there is a great body of literature on the effects of policies on citizens behaviors, most of this literature focuses on citizens participation in political and civic life (e.g., voting) (Mettler & Soss, 2004; Michener, 2018). Previous studies that have focused on TANF (e.g., Fusaro; 2017; Lipsky, 1980; Mettler & Soss, 2004; Schneider & Ingram, 1993; Watkins-Hayes, 2009) have largely examined TANF’s effects on citizens behaviors, and the findings of these studies may be relevant to child support and NRF involvement due to the overlap between welfare and child support policy. However, the focus of these studies has been on the interactions between *street-level bureaucrats* (e.g., case managers) who may rely on their perceptions of populations (e.g., ethnicity) as a *shortcut* in the process of distributing resources to the public (Fusaro; 2017; Lipsky, 1980; Mettler & Soss, 2004;

Schneider & Ingram, 1993; Watkins-Hayes, 2009). Only one previous study (Crowley et al., 2005) has applied this paradigm to the study of NRFs with low incomes and child support policy. The authors found that social constructions of fathers whose children receive public welfare (*deviants*) differed from fathers whose children do not receive public welfare (*contenders*). The authors further argue that these differing constructions lead to different policy design for each target population though the aim (to collect child support) is the same. Ingram et al. (2007) argue that these findings illuminate the effect of negative social constructions on policy design, specifically punitive policy design aimed at “disciplining fathers into breadwinning” (Orloff & Monson, 2002, p. 85).

2.3.2 Gaps. There is a paucity of systematic methods available to study the mechanisms and effects of social constructions within a policy framework. Willison (2019) points to the lack of “an overarching or synthesized explanation of how social constructions work in conjunction with other political structures, incentives, and tools, to explain policy decision-making more completely” (p. 30). To address this gap, Willison combines Schneider & Ingram’s work with literature focused on the use of social constructions as a policy tool. This approach can be applied to the study of NRFs with low incomes, as social constructions have been used as a tool to promote and justify punitive child support-related policies that provide financial benefits to federal and state governments (Willison, 2021). Pierce et al. (2014) assert that the feed-forward effect of social constructions in policy design creates a “powerful influence on the behavior and understanding of self by target populations” (p. 6). Brotherson, Dollahite, & Hawkins (2005) further posit that fathers internalize messages about their role and value as fathers from the broader society; yet the process through and the extent to which this occurs is little understood.

2.4 Father Identity

This study explored Identity theory has long been believed to play an important role in promoting or discouraging father involvement. However, there is little research exploring the influence of identity on fathers' involvement with their children among NRFs. Goldberg (2015) argues that while great emphasis has been placed on fathers' demographics and relationship status and quality with their co-parents, there is a gap in studies examining the role of father identity—particularly the value fathers attribute to this role—in father involvement. Goldberg's study, which used FFCWS data, demonstrated that fathers' identity was important in predicting their involvement over time. Several previous studies have used identity theory to explore the extent and types of fathers' involvement (Henley & Pasley, 2005; Nepomnyaschy & Garfinkel, 2007).

Fathers' social roles and welfare policy in the U.S. are closely tied. Contemporary views on fathers' roles are rooted in four historical roles (Lamb, 2000). First is the role of moral teacher or guide. This role, which refers to the fathers' role as providing children with moral education, stems from the period of Puritanism to the era of early Republicanism. Second is the role of the breadwinner, which emphasizes the provision of financial support. This role became particularly salient during the period of industrialization and remained the central role of fathers until the Great Depression. The social and economic changes rendered by the Great Depression also resulted in the transformation of the fatherhood role, from the provider of financial support to a strong sex role-model, particularly for sons. Finally, and most recently, the new nurturant father role arose during the mid-1970s. This model highlighted the importance of fathers as nurturers and caregivers who were involved in every aspect of caring for their children.

How are fathers' identities and roles constructed? How do these constructions differ between high- and low-income and married versus unmarried fathers? What is the

political/policy role in constructing fathers' roles? To explore this question, Orloff (1993) developed *gendered policy regime analysis*, which examines the "political construction of men's gendered positions, including as breadwinners, fathers and husbands" (Orloff & Monson, 2002, p.62). Fathers are now perceived by broader U.S. society as having various roles including social status (co-parent, parent) and role (e.g., breadwinner, caregiver) (Henley & Pasley, 2005). However, the limited scope of fatherhood studies demonstrates a "narrow or restrictive conception of fatherhood" (Lamb, 2000, p. 25). According to Freeman et al. (2008), "family structure is usually studied as father absence, fatherlessness, non-resident fathers, or more recently fragile family contexts" (p. 804). Lamb (2000) points to three areas of focus in fatherhood research: "fatherlessness and *deadbeat dads*", father engagement (i.e., the amount and quality of time spent with children), and the co-parent relationship (p. 25). These conceptions leave little room for the myriad social interactions that shape father's identity. *Identity theory* posits that social interactions shape the ways in which we interpret our social roles and responsibilities and assign meaning to them (Henley & Pasley, 2005). Yet little is known about men's experiences of fatherhood, leaving gaps in our knowledge about the transition to fatherhood, fathers' identity, and wellbeing (Garfield et al., 2010). These gaps are particularly glaring in scholarship on NRFs in the U.S., where the emphasis on financial contributions has led to gaps in understanding how they view their own roles as fathers. A particular gap lies in knowledge about how African American NRFs perceive masculinity, particularly within the context of the fathering role. These perceptions are thought to be closely tied to the parenting beliefs that influence parents' sense of competency (Cooper et al., 2019; Roy & Dyson, 2010).

This presents a pressing need to explore fathers' perceptions of various aspects of their roles (e.g., breadwinners, nurturers) and differences between how they perceive their role from how society/policies portray them. For example, restrictive role construction of NRFs does not reflect the breadth of fathers self-perceived roles. For example, some previous studies have found that while fathers with little income value their role as financial providers, they view providing nurturance, guidance, and teaching as equally important (Connor & White, 2006). Several qualitative studies report that adult African American NRFs emphasize the importance of providing emotional support and time to their children (i.e., "being there") regardless of their ability to provide financial support (Edin & Nelson, 2013; Fleck et al., 2013; Roy, 1999; Summers et al., 2006; Threlfall et al., 2013). In contrast, Hamer (2001) found that adolescent African American fathers believed that their chief responsibility was to provide financial support; yet they believed that they did not have the resources to successfully do so.

2.4.1 Parenting self-esteem. Parenting self-esteem, which stems from the social identity concept of self-esteem, has been defined in various ways (Stets, 2000). However, most definitions include parenting self-efficacy or competence, contentment or satisfaction, and perceived social value of the parenting role (Johnston & Mash, 1989; Ohan et al., 2000). In the current project, I self-esteem is constructed as the combination of *perceived role value*, *parenting self-efficacy*, and *parenting satisfaction*. Perceived role value refers to one's perceptions of the value of one's role within society (Johnston & Mash, 1989; Ohan et al., 2000).

Parenting self-efficacy refers to parents' sense that they have the ability (e.g., mastery of parenting skills) and resources necessary to successfully care for their children (Ohan et al., 2000). Johnston & Mash (1989) define parenting self-efficacy as the extent to which parents feel "confident and competent, capable of problem solving, and familiar with parenting" (p. 173).

This concept stems from identity theory and is rooted in Bandura's (1982) theory of *self-efficacy*, which refers to one's self-perceived ability to successfully cope with challenges as they arise (Stets, 2000). According to Bandura (2006), self-efficacy is the most important predictor of human agency, because motivation rests on the belief that actions can result in success (i.e., an outcome of choice). Without this belief, people "have little incentive to act, or to persevere in the face of difficulties" (Bandura, 2006, p. 170).

Parenting self-efficacy can be applied to NRFs identity in various ways. For example, fathers who perceive themselves as being able to support their children financially and therefore successfully fulfill the *breadwinner role* may also be more likely to engage with their children in other ways (Peters, 2004). Peters (2004) contends that by successfully fulfilling the provider role, fathers parenting confidence may increase. According to Freeman et al. (2008), parenting self-efficacy mediates the relationship between barriers to father involvement (e.g., lack of time, energy, and work constraints) and father involvement. Parenting satisfaction refers to *role contentment* (Johnston & Mash, 1989). According to Johnston & Mash (1989), role contentment within the context of parenting stems from three factors: "frustration, anxiety, and motivation" (p. 167).

2.4.2 Role strain. Role strain refers to stress/distress evoked by an inability to successfully fulfill a role. Role strain has been included in previous definitions of parenting self-esteem; however, in this dissertation, I conceptualize role strain as a separate construct. While various factors can contribute to role strain, I focus on *role conflict* as a key driver. Role conflict occurs when the demands of one role clash with another. Biddle (1986) identifies four components of role conflict. First, *role ambiguity*, which refers to a state in which the expectations of an individual have not been laid forth clearly enough to help shape their behavior

(Biddle, 1986). Second, *role malintegration*, which refers to a situation in which one is expected to hold various roles which are conflicting, or in some other ways are difficult to maintain simultaneously. Third, *role discontinuity*, which occurs when an individual is expected to inhabit multiple *malintegrated roles* over time. Finally, *role overload* can occur when an individual is expected to do more than he or she is able.

NRFs with little income are at particularly high risk of *role conflict*, which contributes to a deficit perspective, emphasizing their struggle to provide financial contributions and minimizing fathers engagement/co-parenting relationships. While father's internal role conflict may contribute to deficit perspectives, policymaker's adoption of a *deficit approach* (i.e., emphasizing aspects of NRFs role that they are not fulfilling) to fatherhood/welfare policy plays a central role in NRFs experience (Bronte-Tinkew et al., 2007; Hawkins & Dollahite, 1997; Panter-Brick et al., 2014; Randles, 2013; Randles, 2018). A consequence of this approach is that it can lead to *role strain*, which refers to discrepancies between expectations of fathers and their ability to fulfill these expectations. According to identity theory, role strain, is associated with lack of preparation, low role clarity, and lack of control over decisions made on behalf of the child (Harper & Fine, 2006). Role strain is prevalent among NRFs (Harper & Fine, 2006).

In a qualitative study of African American fathers and their sons, Hammond et al. (2011) sought to explore factors that either bolstered or undermined the relationships between fathers and sons using identity theory. The authors found that fathers expressed the importance of serving as a moral guide and teacher throughout the course of their children's lives. Fathers also expressed feelings off loss related to gaps in their relationships with their own fathers, which they attributed largely to differences between generations. This study illuminated high levels of distress among NRFs related to their ability to provide financially for their children and the strain

that this led to with their co-parents. An important aspect of this distress stemmed from fathers' perception that fathering was precarious, as they felt that this role could be withheld from them, often due to conflict with co-parents. Fathers cited emotional withdrawal from their children as a resulting barrier to involvement. These findings align with Fagan & Kaufman (2015)'s findings that stress can lead to diminished involvement among NRFs.

Previous research suggests that a *generative fathering* approach, which views fatherhood as an ongoing process that involves and demands learning and change on a continual basis, may promote more salient and positive fathering identity, particularly among fathers with low-incomes and other psycho-social stressors (Doherty et al., 1998; Dollahite & Hawkins, 1998; Hawkins & Dollahite, 1997). Yet the role of policy in driving role conflict and strain has not been examined in depth. Hawkins & Dollahite (1997) conducted seminal research on how discrepancies between societal expectations (e.g., breadwinner role) and fathers' external realities (e.g., employment status) could contribute to *role strain* among low-income fathers. For example, NRFs with little income and African American NRFs experience a higher burden of stress related to unemployment and under-employment, racism, poverty, criminal justice involvement, and homelessness than fathers in the general population (Hunt et al., 2015). Such stressors can serve as barriers to positive father involvement (Castillo & Sarver, 2012; Coley & Chase-Lansdale, 1999; Edin & Nelson, 2013, Hunt et al., 2015; Lerman & Sorensen, 2000; Randles, 2018; Smeeding et al., 2011).

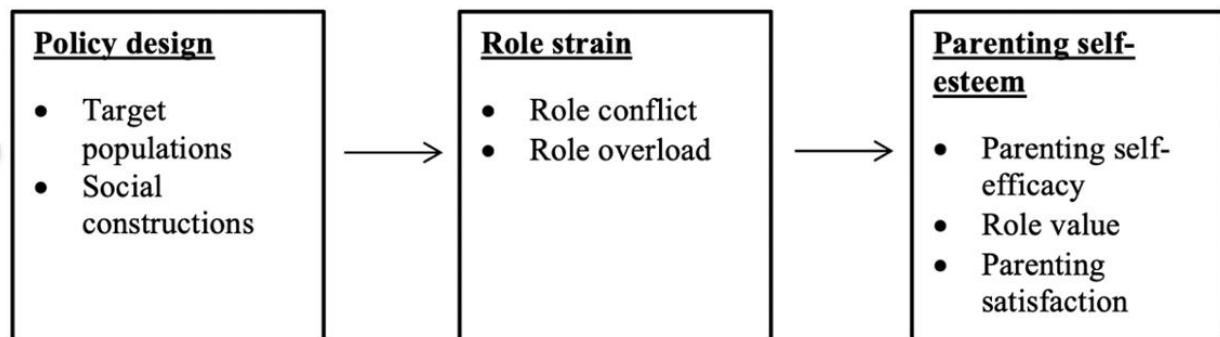
2.5 Conceptual Framework

This study explored This dissertation research is informed by Ingram & Schneider's theories of policy design and the Social Construction of Target Populations. As discussed earlier, Ingram & Schneider's theories asserts that policy design is composed of content, implementation

tools, and the combined consequences of the policy's content and implementation approach. This dissertation examined the social construction of low-income non-resident fathers as a target population and the effects of these constructions on fathers' role strain and parenting self-esteem. These processes are illustrated in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1

Conceptual Model



Chapter 3: Methods

3.1 Research Design

This dissertation research investigated the effect of welfare and child support policy design on father identity among low-income fathers. To investigate these effects comprehensively, I conducted a *policy content analysis* embedded within a *longitudinal multiple case study design* to integrate state-level policy data, transcripts of political speeches, and in-depth individual interview data. This design allowed me to undertake a deep exploration of little-examined and complex questions for which few data are available.

Case study design is a natural approach to bridging micro and macro factors and systems, making it an optimal method for exploring *how* or *why* an outcome occurs given the context in which it takes place (Yin, 2003). Therefore, case studies are frequently used in policy research to explore various aspects of the policy process including antecedents to policy design or implementation and intended and unintended consequences (i.e., outcomes unforeseen or undesired by the policy designer) (Bardach & Patashnik, 2020; Padgett, 2008; Ragin & Becker, 1992; Teddlie & Tashakori, 2009). This study uses a *multiple case study design*, meaning that more than one case is studied to allow the researcher to compare cases within different contexts (e.g., cities, states) (Yin, 2003). This approach allowed me to explore differences both within- and across- case difference comprehensively (Yin, 2003).

This study was conducted in two phases. In phase I, I conducted a policy content analysis using governor's annual state of the state address transcripts (1994-2005) and state-level child support and welfare data (1994-2010). In phase II, I conducted a thematic analysis of individual in-depth interviews with low-income fathers in Chicago, Illinois, New York, NY, and

Milwaukee, Wisconsin included in the Time, Love, and Cash in Couples with Children Study (2000-2005). Each of the phases will be described in greater detail below.

3.1.1 Phase 1: Policy content analysis. To investigate variation in state-level policy design among the three TLC3 study states, I began by exploring the political and social milieu of the study states by compiling detailed data on state-level demographics, leadership (e.g., majority party affiliation), and key elements of child support policy design (e.g., policy implementation tools) from extant policy databases, policy reports, and government agency reports. To ensure that the policy content analysis encompassed the social and political landscape of the welfare reform era, I included various data sources ranging from 1994-2005 (A. Eyler, personal communication, November 5, 2021). This allowed me to investigate the context in which key welfare and child support reforms were enacted and the TLC3 study was conducted (A. Eyler, personal communication, November 5, 2021).

Next, I examined how welfare and child support policy reform was framed to the public, with special emphasis on how social constructions were used to construct target populations and justify policy design. Leveraging annual Governor's State of the State Addresses from 1994-2005 for three states (IL, NY, and WI), I conducted a thematic analysis to examine change within- and across-states and over time. State of the state addresses for used for several reasons. First, while welfare and child support policy reforms were crafted on the federal level, the responsibility for implementing the policies was left to the states. Governors played a broad and critical role in both designing and implementing state-level policy reforms as well as framing them for the public. Singer (2018) cites several particularly important reasons for this including the governor's responsibility to pass the budget and present policy issues to citizens throughout the state through broad public platforms. One of the most important sources of governors' broad

influence is the annual state of the state address. In each state, governors are required by Congress to make an annual address in a joint state legislative session (Eyler & Zwald, 2015; Weinberg, 2010). This annual address, called the State of the State Address, serves as a platform to highlight the governor and states policy problems and solutions (Eyler & Zwald, 2015).

In addition to their role in presenting policy to citizens and policy makers within their states, governors play a central role influencing policy adoption across states (Berry & Berry, 2007). Interpretive policy analysts argue that the act of framing policies for the public involves meaning making on the part of the politician as well as citizens (Aukes, Lulofs, & Bressers, 2018; Berry & Berry, 2007). Given governors platform and influence, I chose to examine child support policy framing and policy implementation through the lens of the governors' state of the state addresses delivered between 1994 and 2005.

To further explore the political and social context within the study dates, I drew on online newspaper archives to examine policy discourse among policymakers and the public and local and state-level legal cases related to child support policy and welfare.

3.1.2 Phase II: Thematic analysis of longitudinal, in-depth individual interview data. In phase II, I explored the effect of child support policy design on several key components of father identity: (1) role strain and (2) parenting self-esteem (composed of perceived role-value, self-efficacy, and parenting satisfaction) (Johnston & Mash, 1989; Ohan et al., 2000) using in-depth interview data from the Time, Love, and Cash Among Couples with Children study (TLC3), which is a sub-study of the of the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study. Figure 2, below, illustrates the study procedures.

Figure 2

Study Procedures

Phase I: Policy Content Analysis	Phase II: Interview Analysis	Phase III: Interpretation
State-level policy data <u>Procedures:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Examine government and non-government data sources Analyze state-level policy design data <u>Products:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Summary tables (1994-2005) 	State of the state addresses <u>Procedures:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collect data from multiple archives for each study state Conduct initial review of each transcript Open coding Create conceptual cluster matrix Write memos <u>Products:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Themes 	Individual interview data <u>Procedures:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Select sample inclusion/exclusion criteria Initial transcript review Open coding Thematic analysis Create conceptual cluster matrix to compare respondents by wave, theme, and state across 4 waves <u>Products:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Themes
		Convergence <u>Embed Phase II findings within findings of Phase I</u> using conceptual cluster matrix to compare respondents by wave, theme, and state across 4 waves

References: Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018; Enosh et al., 2015; Kanwati & Kane, 2019

3.2 Data Sources

3.2.1 Data sources used in the policy content analysis. The current project focused on the social construction of low-income non-resident fathers within state-level legislation. To investigate variation in state-level policy design among the three TLC3 study states, I extracted data from multiple government and non-government databases, reports, policy briefs, and datasets. I also exploited extant policy databases. Additionally, I examined how child support and welfare policies, lawsuits, and policy actors were discussed in public discourse using online newspaper archives including national, state, and city newspapers. Leveraging multiple existing data sources allowed me to explore questions that cannot be answered using a single policy database. The two key sources of policy data for the years of the TLC3 study were the United States Department of Agriculture and the Urban Institute Welfare Rules, described below. To provide me with a broader understanding of the policy landscape in the years before and after the TLC3 study, additional data were culled from sources of more recent data, all of which are described below.

United States Department of Agriculture. In 2002, the Program Design Branch, Program Development Division, United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) began publishing annual reports¹ on states options in implementing the food stamp program. For this study, I took advantage of all available annual reports (2002-2003 and 2005) for the study years to explore and compile data on state-level child support cooperation requirements and enforcement tools.

Urban Institute Welfare Rules Database. This database serves as the primary source of data for the creation of the novel dataset. The Welfare Rules Database provides extensive longitudinal data on state-level policy contexts related to Aid for Dependent Families (AFDC) and TANF between 1996 and 2018 (covering the span of years with available data through the TLC3 study). This database contains data on child support-related policies and rules for families receiving public welfare only. The data reflects policy variation across and within states over time. I took advantage of this website to compile data on pass-through and disregard policies, cooperation requirements, enforcement tools (including sanction type and the circumstances in which it is used). For additional information on this database, see <https://wrd.urban.org/wrd/Query/query.cfm>.

Urban Institute Child Care and Development Fund Policies Database. This database provides comprehensive data on state-level policy rules related to the CCDF, which serves as the central funding mechanism for childcare vouchers for working parents with little income. For families receiving TANF, these vouchers are funded by TANF and can therefore require child support cooperation.

¹ The first annual report was published in 2002; therefore, I used all available reports spanning from 2002-2005 in this study.

The National Conference of State Legislatures Child Support and Family Law

Legislation Database. The NCSL's mission is to promote cooperation and information among state legislatures and enhance their effectiveness. This database includes comprehensive data on state-level child support and family law legislation throughout the U.S. from 2012 to present.

Additional data were gleaned from policy reports and briefs from the Center for Law and Social Policy (<https://www.clasp.org/tags/child-support/>), the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (<https://www.cbpp.org/research/topics/family-income-support>) and the National Child Support Enforcement Association (<https://www.ncsea.org/>).

Annual governors' state of the state addresses. Governors' state of the state address transcripts were collected from various state legislative websites and archives. The sources used to compile the governors state of the state address transcripts are presented in Appendix A.

3.2.2 Data sources used in the individual interview analysis. *The Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study (FFCWS)*. The FFCWS is a longitudinal birth cohort study of 4,700 low-income parents (n=3,600, unmarried; n=1,000, married) with children (Reichman et al., 2001). The FFCWS is an ongoing study that has, thus far, collected data in 6 waves between 1998 and 2015 (baseline, 1998-2000; year 1, 1999-2001; year 3, 2001-2003; year 5, 2003-2006; year 9, 2007-2010; year 15, 2014-2017) (Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study, n.d.). The objective of the FFCWS is to examine issues critical to family and welfare policy: the role of fathers; births to unmarried parents; welfare reform (Reichman et al., 2001). Specifically, the FFCWS investigates unmarried parents' relationships, socio-economic conditions, and the effects of welfare and child support policy on their lives over time (Reichman et al., 2001). See Reichman et al. (2001) for a detailed description of the study design. Additional information about the study and available data can be accessed at

<https://fragilefamilies.princeton.edu/documentation>.

Sampling. Sixteen U.S. cities with populations greater than or equal to 20,000 residents were selected for inclusion (Reichman et al., 2001). Study cities were selected and evaluated according to policy and labor market factors rather than geographical location (Reichman et al., 2001). To ensure that cities were representative of the policy characteristics of interest (welfare generosity, child support enforcement stringency, and the labor market), cities sampled in the main study were sorted into four categories. These categories included *high generosity/high stringency*, *high generosity/low stringency*, (3) *low generosity/high stringency*, and (4) *low generosity/low stringency*. FFCWS cities were equally represented among four categories, which allowed the study to capture broad characteristics of the policy environment (Reichman et al., 2001). Four additional U.S. cities were included in the study; however, these cities were part of pilot studies funded by foundations with specific areas of interest. The FFCWS data can be weighted to be nationally representative (using 16 cities); however, the additional four cities can be used if a study does not require the data to be nationally representative (Reichman et al., 2011).

Births were sampled from 75 hospitals within 20 U.S. cities (Reichman et al., 2001). Hospitals (rather than other settings serving pregnant women and their partners) were selected for sampling as a pilot study found that more fathers were reached this way. Hospitals within city boundaries were randomly selected (Reichman et al., 2001). Exclusion criteria included parents who could not complete the interview due to illness (mothers or babies) or language barriers (not speaking English or Spanish proficiently), parents who were minors (fathers and/or mothers under 18 years old), families in which the baby's father was deceased, and parents whose babies were going to be placed for adoption (Reichman et al., 2001).

Protocol. Data were collected in various ways including surveys, interviews, and direct observation (Reichman et al., 2001). Survey data are available as public data; however, secondary interview data are not available. Surveys were conducted at the hospital and participants homes (Reichman et al., 2001). In addition, in-depth interviews were conducted with both parents at baseline and again when children were 12, 30, and 48 months old (Reichman et al., 2001). Interviews focused on topics including family and social support, attitudes towards parenting and the fathering role, knowledge about and access to community resources, and income and employment. See Reichman et al., 2001 for a more detailed description of these themes. Secondary interview data are not available for the FFCWS.

Time, Love, and Cash in Couples with Children (TLC3). The TLC3 is a qualitative and observational study conducted with a sub-sample of a larger study, the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study (FFCWS). Only TLC3 study data were used in the current project. Using stratified sampling, TLC3 randomly selected 75 couples (150 individuals) from 3 of the 18 FFCWS sample cities (Chicago, Milwaukee, and New York). The TLC3 study sample included 25 couples (50 individuals) from each of the study cities (England & Edin, 2007). Sampling in the TLC3 study was limited to one hospital per city (unlike the FFCWS which sampled multiple hospitals).

Interviews were conducted with each couple (biological father and mother) at baseline. Individual interviews with biological fathers and mothers were also conducted at each time point for all parents who continued to participate in the study. Couples that broke up during the study were only interviewed individually. (In some cases, social fathers were interviewed in individual and/or couple interviews with the focal child's mother.) For the purposes of the current study, only father-only individual interview data were used. Baseline couple interviews were used for

the sole purpose of gleaning demographic information that was unavailable in the individual interviews.

Sampling. To be eligible for inclusion in TLC3, couples had to be romantically involved at the time of the focal child's birth. Additionally, TLC3 capped couple's household incomes at \$60,000 (Magnuson, 2006). While many studies include lower income thresholds, TLC3 researchers wanted to include parents who were living with relatives and, as a result, had higher household incomes (Magnuson & Gibson-Davis, 2007). The researchers also wanted to include families with fluid living situations, as these families were more likely to experience shifting income levels than families with more stable housing. The researchers chose this approach as it reflects the living situation of many families affected by poverty (Magnuson, 2006).

Sample description. The mean father age at baseline was 27; 33% of the fathers were 15- <24; 33% were 24- <30, and 33% were 30 + years (Shafer, 2007). Most (38%) of the fathers had post-high school education; 36% had a high school diploma; and 29% had no high school diploma (Shafer, 2007). The TLC3 study over-sampled for unmarried and African American and Latino participants (Collett, 2015; England & Edin, 2007; Shafer, 2007). Most of the fathers in the study were Black (49%), 36% were Hispanic, 13% were White, and 1% were other (Shafer, 2007). Thirteen percent of the fathers in the study were first generation immigrants (Shafer, 2007). Most fathers in the sample were employed at baseline (75%) while 22% were unemployed (Shafer, 2007). One percent of the fathers were in school and working while one percent were in school and not employed (Shafer, 2007).

Most of the couples (65%) were unmarried (Shafer, 2007). Among the unmarried couples, 49% were cohabiting and 16% were romantically involved but not cohabiting (Shafer, 2007). By the end of the study, 33% of the couples had broken up (Magnuson, 2006). However,

27% of the unmarried couples in the TLC3 study that had broken up at some point during the study were back together at wave 4 (Reed, 2007). Among couples that were not married and living together, only 11% had legal child support agreements; however, 50% of the parents that were not married and did not live together (most or all of the time) had an informal child support agreement (Shafer, 2007). Forty-one percent of the fathers had other biological children who were not living with them at baseline (Shafer, 2007).

Hospital-level variation. Each of the hospitals sampled serve patients from diverse ethnic backgrounds; however, the ethnic composition of the patients varied by hospital (England & Edin, 2016). The patients at the hospital in Chicago, IL were mostly African American and had low incomes, while most of the patients in the hospital in New York were Hispanic (England & Edin, 2016). The patients served by the hospital in Milwaukee reflected the greatest ethnic (and economic) diversity (England & Edin, 2016).

Protocol. Using in-depth semi-structured qualitative interview methods, the study explored parents' knowledge about child support and welfare policy, experiences with welfare programs, and attitudes about the costs and benefits of participating in these programs (e.g., under what circumstances would they use these programs; previous experiences, tell a story about someone you know who used it, who deserves help). The first wave of interviews (lasting between 2 and 3 hours) included one interview conducted with each parent individually and one interview conducted with the couple together within the first few months after the focal child's birth. If a couple broke up, they had the option of being interviewed individually only or individually and in a paired interview. Audiotape recordings were made for each interview and later transcribed.

3.3 Methods in the Current Study

3.3.1 Case selection. The analytic sample includes TLC3 participants in each of the three study cities (Chicago, Milwaukee, and New York). *Marital status.* I limited my sample to couples unmarried at the time of the first father-only individual interview; however, fathers who had been unmarried at the time of the focal child's birth but married the focal child's mother between the time of the baseline couple interview and the W1 individual father interview were included.

Residential and relationship status. At the start of the study, I had planned to include only (unmarried) couples that had lived apart during at least 1 time-point during the study, regardless of whether their relationship remained romantic or not. However, during my initial review of the transcripts I discovered that this inclusion criteria could not be evenly applied. Many fathers moved out for some period due to housing insecurity, welfare rules, caregiving duties for other family members, or changes in romantic relationships. The reasons for these changes in resident status were so varied, and often, unrelated to the father's relationship with their children or provision of financial or other support. In other words, the sample included NRFs who have broken up with the child's mother as well as NRFs who remain in romantic relationships with the child's mother but do not reside together. I analyzed qualitative data for fathers only; therefore, couples with missing follow up interviews with fathers were excluded due to the focus of the current study.

Public welfare participation. Given the exploratory nature of this study, I included any fathers in the sample who met all other criteria, regardless of whether they or a family member participate in a public welfare program and/or provide child support. This approach provided the opportunity to explore several dimensions of potentially important variation: relationship,

experience with public welfare, attitudes about, and perceptions of public welfare.

Ethnicity. I included all ethnicities in the sample due to the exploratory nature of this study and its understudied research aims. In addition, NRFs, particularly with low incomes, are often excluded from survey and other important sources of data (Lippold, 2014). Finally, while I did not exclude participants based on ethnicity, ethnicity was considered during the process of reviewing transcripts and coding with the expectation that if ethnicity emerged as a major factor in NRFs experiences with policy and their identity, it would be explored more deeply and included in the analysis.

3.3.2 Scope of the sample. Only fathers who had completed at least 2 waves (wave 1 individual father interview and at least 1 follow up interview at any time point) were included in the present study.

Table 3

Table 3 summarizes the number of waves completed by participants in the analytic sample and by state. The majority

Number of Respondent Interviews Completed by Wave and City

# waves completed	Illinois (n=11)	New York (n=10)	Wisconsin (n=11)	Sample (n=32)
All waves	6 55%	8 80%	9 82%	22 69%
3 waves	3 27%	2 20%	1 9%	6 19%
2 waves	2 18%	0 0%	1 9%	3 9%

(69%) of fathers in the present sample completed all waves of individual interviews. The percentage of fathers who completed all waves was highest in Wisconsin (82%) and New York (80%). In Illinois, only 55% of fathers completed all waves of interviews. Among the 2 fathers who completed 3 waves in NYC, interviews were completed at the following time waves: 1-3; 1, 3, & 4 respectively. None of the fathers completed only 2 waves of interviews. In Chicago, the 3 fathers who completed 3 waves were interviewed at the following combination of waves: 1-3;

1, 2, & 4; 1, 3, & 4 respectively. Fathers who completed 2 waves in Chicago were interviewed at the following combination of waves: 1-2; 1 & 4, and 1 & 4 respectively.

3.3.3 Characteristics of fathers. Table 4 contains a summary of participant demographics in the full analytic sample (n=32) and by city at baseline².

² Data regarding ethnicity was not reported for all cases; most of the fathers with missing data on ethnicity resided in Chicago and Milwaukee.

Table 4

<i>Demographics of analytic sample by city at baseline</i>								
Characteristic	Sample (n=32)		Chicago (n=11)		Milwaukee (n=11)		New York (n=10)	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
<u>Father age</u>								
19-21	6	19%	2	18%	4	36%	0	0%
22-24	9	28%	2	18%	3	27%	4	40%
25-27	7	22%	5	46%	0	0%	2	20%
28-30	6	19%	1	9%	2	18%	2	20%
31+	4	12%	1	9%	2	18%	2	20%
<u>Relationship status</u>								
Romantic, unmarried	28	81%	8	73%	10	91%	10	100%
Romantic, married	2	6%	2	18%	0	0%	0	0%
Broken up	2	6%	1	9%	1	9%	0	0%
<u>Residential status</u>								
Co-residing	27	84%	8	73%	9	82%	10	100%
Not co-residing	5	16%	3	27%	2	18%	0	0%
<u>Employment status</u>								
Employed,	28	88%	10	91%	10	91%	8	80%
Unemployed	3	9%	1	9%	1	9%	1	10%
Disability	1	3%	0	0%	0	0%	1	10%
<u>Ethnicity</u>								
Black	11	34%	6	54%	3	27%	2	20%
Latino	9	28%	0	0%	3	27%	6	60%
White	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Unknown	12	38%	5	46%	6	55%	1	10%
<u>Focal child is father's 1st child</u>								
Yes	14	44%	4	36%	5	45%	5	50%
No	18	56%	7	64%	6	55%	5	50%
<u>Age father had 1st child</u>								
15-17	3	9%	2	18%	0	0%	1	10%
18-20	12	44%	3	27%	6	55%	3	30%
21-23	6	22%	1	9%	3	18%	2	20%
24-26	5	13%	4	36%	0	0%	1	10%
27-29	3	6%	1	9%	0	0%	2	20%
30+	3	0%	0	0%	2	18%	1	10%

Note. N=32

Father age. The average age of the fathers in the study overall was 25.78, with a range of fathers ages from 19-35 years old. In both Chicago and Milwaukee, the average participant age was 25. However, the age range was broader in Milwaukee (19-35 years) than it was in Chicago (21-30 years). The average participant age (27 years; range 23-33 years) in New York City was greater than in the other study cities.

Age father had first child. The average age at which participants became first time fathers was 22.00 years old, ranging from 15-33 years old. In both Chicago and Milwaukee, the average age that fathers had their first child was 21, with a range of 16-27 years old in Chicago and 21-31 years old in Milwaukee. The average age that fathers in New York had their first child was 22 (range 15-33 years old).

Other children. Half (n=16) of the fathers in the present study sample already had at least one child before the birth of the focal child; however, this varied by city. Among fathers who had other children before the focal child's birth, 31.3% (n=10) had another child with the focal child's mother, while 40.6% (n=13) had another child with a different mother.

For example, over half of fathers in New York (60%; n=6) and Wisconsin (54.5%, n=x) reported that the FC was their first child. However, only 36.4% (n=4) of fathers in Illinois became fathers for the first time with birth of focal child.

Relationship status. At wave 1, most of the fathers were still in a romantic relationship with the focal child's mother; only 6% had broken up between the baseline couple interview and wave 1 individual father interview. One father in Chicago and one father in Milwaukee had broken up with the focal child's mother between the baseline couple interview and the first individual father interview. By wave 2, 21% of the fathers in the sample were no longer in a romantic relationship with the focal child's mother. At both wave 3 and wave 4, this percentage

had increased to 29%.

Marital status. Fathers who were married at the time of the initial couple interview were excluded from the study; however, the present study sample includes several fathers who got married during the study. Over the course of the study, 6 of the fathers married the focal child's mother. Two of the fathers got married between the baseline couple interview and wave 1 individual father interview; 2 (6.3%) of the fathers got married between waves 1 and 2; and 2 of the fathers got married between waves 3 and 4. One of the fathers who got married during the study period lived in New York, 3 lived in Chicago, and 2 lived in Milwaukee.

Residential status. At wave 1, 84.4% of the fathers (n=27) resided with the focal child's mother, while only 15.6% (n=5) lived apart (regardless of whether the relationship between the parents was romantic).

Most (66%) of the fathers in the study sample lived with the focal child and focal child's mother at all of the waves that they participated in. Only 16% did not reside with the focal child and focal child's mother at any wave they were interviewed in. The percentage of fathers living with the FC and FC's mother at all waves of participation was highest in New York City, where 90% of fathers co-resided at all waves; all of the fathers in had co-resided with the FC and FC's mother during at least 1 time point.

Milwaukee had a similar percentage of fathers who co-resided at all waves (82%); however, 18% of fathers had never lived with the FC and FC's mother. The smallest percentage of co-residing fathers at all waves was in Chicago, where less than half (46%) of the fathers had co-resided at all waves and 27% had never co-resided with the FC and FC's mother.

Among fathers co-residing at all waves during which they were interviewed (all cities), 75% completed 4 waves of interviews; 14% completed 3 waves; and 10% completed 2 waves.

Ethnicity. Of the 20 participants for whom data regarding ethnicity could be gleaned, the majority (34.4%, n=11) were Black and 28.1% (n=9) were Latino. Over 1/3 (37.5%) of the fathers ethnicities are not identified. Chicago had the highest percentage (54%) of fathers who were Black, while New York City had the highest percentage (60%) of Latino fathers.

Employment status. At wave 1, the majority of the fathers (78%; n=25) were employed. Only 12.5% (n=4) of the fathers were unemployed, while 6.3% (n=2) received disability and 3.1 (n=1) received unemployment benefits.

Among the fathers who were employed at baseline, 77% (n=20) of the fathers were employed full time. Nearly ¼ (23%; n=6) of the fathers were underemployed, with 11.5% (n=3) working part-time and 11.5% (n=3) employed seasonally or temporarily.

Nearly half (47%) of the fathers in the sample were employed full-time at all waves (40% New York; 45% Milwaukee, 55% Chicago). The majority (91%) of the fathers in the present study were employed during at least 1 wave. Only 1 father in each study city was unemployed at all 4 waves. Appendix D illustrates fathers employment status by city by wave.

Income. At wave 1, the mean monthly income among fathers in the sample was \$1,481.16, with a range of \$0-\$4,200 per month.

Among the 1/3 of fathers (34.4%; n=11) who earned less than \$1,000 per month, 12.5% (n=4) earned no income.

Domestic violence. Twelve (37.5%) of the fathers reported at least 1 instance of domestic violence in their relationship. For the purposes of this study, I defined domestic violence as physical violence or serious threats of harm or any report of police involvement. I included all fathers with domestic violence who met other inclusion criteria as the interviews were individual; couple interviews were used only to glean demographic data.

Incarceration during study period. Two fathers were in jail during the study period (unrelated to child support). One father was in Chicago was in jail between waves 2 and 3 and in a residential facility at the time of the wave 3 interview. The other father, who resided in Milwaukee, was in jail during wave 3 and a residential facility during wave 4.

Public assistance receipt.

SNAP. SNAP and childcare subsidies are the two programs that states can choose to enforce cooperation requirements for. At baseline, 43% (n=14) of the fathers reported SNAP receipt (for themselves, FC, or FC's mother). Fathers in Illinois (35.7%; n=5) and New York (35.7%; n=5) were more likely than fathers in Wisconsin (28.6%; n=4) to receive SNAP.

Child care subsidies. None of the fathers reported receiving childcare subsidies at W1.

Medicaid. Only 9% (n=3) of the fathers in the sample received Medicaid at wave 1. Among fathers receiving Medicaid, 66.7% (n=2) resided in Illinois, 33.3% (n=1) resided in New York, and none lived in Wisconsin.

TANF. Among the sample, only 9% (n=3) of the fathers reported receiving TANF for themselves or their children; one father in each state reported TANF receipt at wave 1.

3.4 Thematic Analysis

3.4.1 Individual interviews. Coding generally focuses on the “four coordinates” of social life: participants (i.e., “intersection of one or more actors”), behaviors, time, and place (Lofland et al., 2006). According to Lofland et al. (2006), coding focuses on units of social organization, e.g., roles, social and personal relationships, organizations. These units of social organization, in combination with cognitive aspects/meanings (e.g., ideologies, self-concepts, identities), emotional aspects/feelings (e.g., feeling successful in fathering role), and hierarchical

aspects/inequalities (e.g., negative stereotypes about non-resident fathers), are used to create codes (Lofland et al., 2006).

There are several types of codes: descriptive codes, which summarize the topic that the quotation is being used to analyze; values coding, and in vivo codes, which use the speaker's words rather than the researcher's words (Saladana, 2013). The iterative, multi-stage process of coding generally begins with broad, descriptive codes and culminates in more focused codes aimed at interpretation (Saldana, 2013). In addition, unlike quantitative methods, which conduct data cleaning in the early stages before analysis, interpretive methods use data condensation, which refers to the iterative, continuous process by which qualitative researchers explore, summarize, identify the most salient and core aspects of the text (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2020). Miles & colleagues (2020) contend that data condensation is part of the analytical process that begins with the researcher's choice of theoretical framework and continues throughout the process of coding and memo writing.

Open coding. I began the analytic process by familiarizing myself with the data by reading each of the transcripts of the interviews completed by NRFs in the analytic sample in detail. I uploaded all transcripts into NVivo, which I used to organize the transcripts by participant ID number, pseudonym, state of residence, and key demographic information. Next, I conducted open coding, which serves to help the researcher identify various distinct categories (Roy, 2006; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). This phase was informed by the pre-determined codes used in the TLC3 study, and I used those codes to cross-check my own coding process and analysis. Appendix B illustrates the pre-determined TLC3 study themes and sub-themes that structured the individual and couple interviews (only the pre-determined themes and sub-themes relevant to the current study are included). Appendix C contains individual interview questions

for each theme and sub-theme.

Second cycle coding. In the second stage, I conducted axial coding, which Roy (2006) describes as the process of investigating and comparing “patterns of coding” within and between-cases. While reviewing the transcripts, I took *code notes* on each transcript, created annotations, and began outlining memos to document and begin analyzing these patterns (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Conceptual cluster matrix. In addition to the coding matrices created in NVivo, I created a *conceptual cluster matrix* in Excel. In a classic conceptual cluster matrix, the rows reflect the participants and the columns represent the themes (Miles & Huberman, 1994). For the purposes of this study, the conceptual cluster matrix was organized by row (father participants) and columns (study time-points). Father participants were identified by TLC3 study pseudonym, TLC3 study identification number, and city of residence. Within each cell, I included quotations that fit within each theme.

This matrix enhanced the study’s analytic rigor in several ways. In the early stages of the analytic process, I used the conceptual cluster matrix to cross-check my work, by comparing it to the coding matrix I produced in NVivo. This allowed me to ensure that each relevant quotation for each father had been captured accurately. In the later stages of coding, I used the matrix’s illustration of how often the themes emerged and among which respondents to refine the codes (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Stahlschmidt et al., 2013). Finally, for each theme, I created summaries focused on changes in fathers attitudes and perceptions across time and included these summaries in the top row for each time point for each father (as applicable) (Grossoehme & Lipstein, 2016). The matrix enhanced this study’s rigor by facilitating analysis of change within- and across-cases in different socio-political settings over time.

3.4.2 Policy content analysis. Approach. Content analysis can be *summative/conceptual* or *relational* (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). *Summative/conceptual content analysis* involves counting keywords within the text to identify which words appear most frequently (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Keywords are selected by the researchers before analyzing the data, and the researchers' selection of keywords is based on a review of relevant literature and/or their research question (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). However, as content analysis is an iterative process, the keywords can be added or changed during the process of data analysis as well (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). *Relational content analysis* focuses on analyzing the meaning of the words (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

There are two approaches to *relational* content analysis: *conventional* and *directed*. A *conventional* approach is based on researcher observation and can therefore be used to explore research questions about which very little theory and/or literature exists (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Codes come from the data and are developed during the analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Using a *directed approach*, the researcher is guided by theory and informed by prior research; the researcher develops deductive codes before conducting the content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Potter & Levine-Donnerstein, 1999). However, coding is an iterative process and continues throughout the analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Potter & Levine-Donnerstein, 1999). A directed approach allows the researcher to analyze various dimensions of the content, including the “origins of the messages”, the effects of messages of various types, and the relationships among variables within a content analysis (Neuendorf, 2017; p. 101). In this dissertation project, I combined a relational-*directed* approach with a summative approach to enhance my understanding of these under-studied questions.

Coding. Initial review. To familiarize myself with the transcripts, I began by uploading each transcript into NVivo and organizing them by attributes including governor party affiliation, state, and year. Analysis began with an initial, detailed reading of each transcript. In addition to familiarizing me with the transcripts, this initial phase allowed me to identify terms that reflected the areas of interest, particularly words or descriptions that I might not have previously thought of or been familiar with, giving me the opportunity to identify multiple terms for the same type of policy.

First stage coding. Coding began using a directed approach informed by the categories of interest (fathers, welfare, families, child support). To enhance the initial coding process, I used the query function to find new terms and phrases related to the areas of interest. For example, to emphasize employment as a key component of welfare reform, governors used a range of terms including “workfare”, “earnfare”, and “learnfare”. Child support enforcement was described as “track[ing] down” fathers using an “arsenal” of enforcement tools. To ensure that I had captured all of the relevant sections and terms, I conducted multiple queries related to fathers, child support, families, and welfare. These queries were based on previous research and theory. To further enhance the study’s rigor, I used the query function to search for terms with positive connotations. These terms included “supporting” and “strong families”. In addition, I searched for phrases related to resources such as “parenting classes” and “fatherhood initiatives”. I also used the query function to cross-check my findings.

Second stage coding. This stage involved refining my initial codes. This process focused on identifying patterns in how policies were presented to the public and the social constructions, target populations, and assumptions they used to frame policy problems and change. In this stage of the analysis, I used both the coding matrices function in Nvivo and a *conceptual cluster*

matrix (created in Excel) that represents years, states, and governors (e.g., 1994, Wisconsin, Thompson) in the rows and themes in the columns (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Quotations that supported the themes were included in cells for each year, state, and governor as applicable. I used the conceptual matrix to (1) enhance the study's rigor by ensuring that all relevant quotations were included, (2) refine the codes by comparing the supporting quotations, and (3) compare the study states by governor and year.

3.5 Credibility and Trustworthiness

3.5.1 Worldview and paradigm assumptions. Several aspects of researchers' personal experiences, attitudes, and beliefs are thought to influence their process. First, researchers' *worldviews* and *paradigm assumptions* (e.g., *interpretivist*, *critical*, *positivist*) effect how they choose to approach validity in their work (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Throughout the analytic process, I took my own worldviews and paradigm into account.

3.5.2 Marginalization/ethnicity. According to Sacks (2015), being a member of a marginalized population can have important impact on qualitative research. According to Sacks (2015), this can take various forms including "omitting the totality of one's lived experience, overemphasizing experiences of suffering or degradation, or simply presenting one-dimensional accounts of complex social experience" (p. 754). Views on the importance and impact of matching interviewers and interviewees in terms of ethnicity, gender etc. vary greatly. Padgett (2008) cites potential benefits; however, Padgett also cites the difficulty in knowing which aspects of one's identity will prove to be a meaningful match. Throughout the analytic process, I noted several key differences (ethnicity, gender, biological sex, and socio-economic status) and similarities, most notably, being a parent of a child under 5 and raising my child as a solo parent

in a multi-generational household, that I shared with the study participants.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

3.6.1 Policy content analysis. The state-level policy data used in the content analysis are publicly available without restrictions as they do not contain any data specific to an individual or any identifying characteristics.

3.6.2 TLC3 study. I maintained research ethics by describing the requirements of the FFCWS and TLC3 studies as well as the IRB and other ethical requirements I fulfilled. To obtain access to the TLC3 dataset, which is housed in the Inter-university Consortium Program on Social Research (ICPSR) at the University of Michigan, I applied for access in several steps including a data security plan and pledge of confidentiality. The data are deidentified. Each participant was assigned a pseudonym by the TLC3 research team (England & Edin, 2007). To further prevent risk of identification, I assigned each participant a different pseudonym than the one assigned by the original TLC3 research team, an approach used by Collett & colleagues (2019).

Chapter 4: Findings of the Policy Content Analysis

4.1 Introduction

The three study states share important similarities and differences in their demographics and political and social landscapes during the study period. For example, in the presidential elections during the period of welfare reform and the study period, each of the study states voted for democrats in each of the presidential elections (1992, 1996, 2000, and 2004). Yet, all of the states were led primarily by Republican governors during the study period. Illinois and Wisconsin had Republican governors for the first half of the study (2000-2002) and Democratic governors for the second half of the study (2003-2005). In addition, each of the states had the same Republican governor in office during the critical juncture of welfare report.

4.1.1 Illinois. Illinois has a long history of a strong and generous welfare state. For example, it was the first state in the United States to implement a welfare program for mothers and children (known as the mothers' pension). Yet, with Governor Edgar (Republican) of Illinois at the helm, Illinois became one of the first states to introduce initiatives aimed at reducing welfare and promoting work (Wiseman, 1996). After 2 years under Edgar's leadership, welfare cases in Illinois had decreased dramatically. According to the Chicago Jobs Council, which was responsible for carrying out welfare to work, one of the most frequent causes of welfare case closure was non-cooperation by mothers who refused to provide the name and contact information for their children's fathers (Broughton, 2010).

4.1.2 New York. During the period of welfare reform, George Pataki (Republican) served as the Governor of New York State from 1995-2007. During this period, much of his

legislation focused on promoting “personal responsibility” (Riedinger et al., 1999). In January 1996, Pataki introduced several new enforcement mechanisms including a widely distributed publication listing New York State’s “Top 10 Deadbeat Parents” (Riedinger et al., 1999). Pataki also introduced the suspension of driver’s and professional license for fathers owing at least four months of child support (Riedinger et al., 1999). Additionally, Pataki designed the New Hires Reporting Program, which required employers to inform the New York state Department of Taxation and Finance of new hires. This system facilitated the identification of fathers with the goal of establishing paternity and child support orders (Riedinger et al., 1999). In 1997, the governor introduced new legislation that would make child support nonpayment by “deadbeat parents” a felony rather than a misdemeanor (Kelly, 1997).

In 2002, a New York State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance report stated that “the strict enforcement of child support requirements is designed not only to increase the resources available to support the children of single parents, but also to discourage irresponsible fatherhood” (p. 14). The report also claimed that new mechanisms to enforce child support cooperation have led to “dramatic increases in child support collections, making it more likely that a family can support itself without welfare” (New York State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance, 2002, p. 9). After declaring that all adults/head of households receiving public assistance by 2000 would have to be employed to receive this assistance, New York Mayor Rudy Giuliani recruited Jason A. Turner, who had spearheaded welfare reform alongside Governor Thompson, to serve as the Commissioner of the New York City Human Resources Administration. Turner served in this role between 1998 and 2001.

4.1.3 Wisconsin. Wisconsin is “widely viewed as exemplar of the capability of states to reform welfare policy (Wiseman, 1995, p. 516). At the helm of these reforms was Wisconsin’s

longtime Republican, Governor Tommy Thompson (known as “Governor Get a Job”). Thompson took office in 1987 and remained until 2001, when he was appointed the Secretary of Health and Human Services under George Bush. Immediately after taking office in 1987, Thompson reduced welfare benefits by 6% and started a campaign aimed at preventing people from other states (particularly Illinois) from moving to Wisconsin (Atkins, 1995; DeParle, 1997). To support these policies, Thompson propagated the idea that “for an \$8 bus ticket, you can get \$200 more [in welfare benefits] coming to Wisconsin” by wielding data suggesting that over one quarter (28%) of recently enrolled welfare recipients in Milwaukee County had listed their most recent addresses as being in Chicago (Atkins, 1995).

On April 25, 1996, Thompson signed legislation that laid the foundation for welfare reform. Upon signing this legislation, Thompson announced that “this doesn't just end welfare as we know it...it ends welfare – period” (Johnson, 1996). Later that year, during his August 13 address at the Republican National Convention, Thompson described Wisconsin Works as a program that “provides families with the tools to escape welfare, and we insist that parents -- including deadbeat dads -- get up in the morning, go to work, and provide for their families just like all of you and the rest of America” (CNN, 1996). This foreshadowed the drastic cuts that followed. However, it is important to note that in justifying welfare reform, Thompson invoked welfare as harmful and employment as a more compassionate way of supporting families.

Wisconsin’s drastic transition from welfare to *workfare* was spearheaded by Jason A Turner, who designed Wisconsin Works while working under Governor Tommy Thompson (1993-1997). Before joining Thompson’s administration, Turner was the director of the national AFDC program as a member of George Bush’s administration. In September of 1997, Wisconsin Works replaced welfare-which was slashed entirely-with a new work-based program. The

Governor adopted the slogan, “two years and you’re out”, which reflected the new limit on welfare receipt (Atkins, 1995; DeParle, 1997). In 1999, Wisconsin passed bill 948.22(2), which made the failure to pay child support for 120 or more days a Class E Felony (McCright, 2002; Lewin, 2001; Papke, 2004).

4.2 State-Level Policy Variation Findings

Key state-level policy variation included cooperation requirements, pass-through and disregard. Table 5 presents a summary of key child support policy design by state and year.

4.2.1 Cooperation requirements. In 1997, Wisconsin became one of only 5 U.S. states to require child support cooperation among food stamp recipients. In addition, it became one of only 3 U.S. states to require cooperation of both the custodial and non-custodial parent (Gabor et al., 2003). The maximum penalty for non-cooperation with child support varied by state. While the harshest penalty in New York was a reduction in families’ benefits, the maximum penalty in Illinois and Wisconsin was termination of benefits (Roberts, 2005).

4.2.2 Pass-through and disregard policies. Prior to 1996, states were required to pass-through \$50 of fathers’ child support payments to the mother and her child(ren). However, with the advent of welfare reform, this restriction was eliminated, allowing the states to choose whether to withhold the full amount of the child support payment. In addition, the amount of the child support payment could be disregarded (i.e., not counted as part of the household income) when determining eligibility for public welfare benefits. This means that in 1994 and 1995, the three study states had the same policies; however, to examine within-state change, I included data for these years in the current analysis.

Table 5*Child support policy design by state and year*

Year	State	Governor party	Pass-through	Cooperation requirements	
				SNAP	CCDF
1994	Wisconsin	Republican	\$50	No	No
	New York	Democrat	\$50	No	No
	Illinois	Republican	\$50	No	No
1995	Wisconsin	Republican	\$0	No	No
	New York	Republican	\$50	No	No
	Illinois	Republican	\$50	No	No
1996	Wisconsin	Republican	\$0	No	No
	New York	Republican	\$50	No	No
	Illinois	Republican	\$50	No	No
1997	Wisconsin	Republican	\$0	Yes	No
	New York	Republican	\$50	No	Yes
	Illinois	Republican	\$50	No	No
1998	Wisconsin	Republican	\$0	Yes	Yes
	New York	Republican	\$50	No	Yes
	Illinois	Republican	\$50	No	No
1999	Wisconsin	Republican	\$0	Yes	Yes
	New York	Republican	\$50	No	Yes
	Illinois	Republican	\$50	No	No
2000	Wisconsin	Republican	\$0	Yes	Yes
	New York	Republican	\$50	No	Yes
	Illinois	Republican	\$50	No	No
2001	Wisconsin	Republican	All	Yes	Yes
	New York	Republican	\$50	No	Yes
	Illinois	Republican	\$50	No	No
2002	Wisconsin	Republican	All	Yes	Yes
	New York	Republican	\$50	No	Yes
	Illinois	Republican	\$50	No	No
2003	Wisconsin	Democrat	All	Yes	Yes
	New York	Republican	\$50	No	Yes
	Illinois	Democrat	\$50	No	No
2004	Wisconsin	Democrat	All	Yes	Yes
	New York	Republican	\$50	No	Yes
	Illinois	Democrat	\$50	No	No
2005	Wisconsin	Democrat	All	Yes	Yes
	New York	Republican	\$50	No	Yes
	Illinois	Democrat	\$50	No	No

4.3 Findings from State of the State Addresses

4.3.1 Introduction. The findings of this analysis suggest that child support was a central policy issue at the top of governors' agendas throughout the study years. In addition to its interconnection with welfare reform, child support policy highlighted national values and issues such as self-sufficiency, personal responsibility, family, marriage, and work. In fact, child support was mentioned in 16 of the 36 addresses (44%) given between 1994 and 2005 across the 3 states. Child support was mentioned in 9 of the 12 addresses in Illinois (75%), 4 of the 12 in New York (33%), and 3 of the 12 addresses in Wisconsin (25%). The only year in which no mention of child support was made in any state was 1997.

Across the 3 states, the majority (over 69%) of the addresses were given by Republican governors. Child support was addressed in 39% of the addresses given by Republican governors across all states. Among the addresses given by Democratic governors, 4 out of 8 (50%) referred to child support. In Illinois, child support was mentioned in 6 of the 9 (67%) of addresses by a Republican governor and each address by a Democratic governor. In New York, child support was not mentioned in the one address by a Democratic governor. Four of the 11 (36%) addresses given by a Republican governor mentioned child support. In Wisconsin, child support was mentioned in 2 of the 8 (25%) addresses given by a Republican governor, while 1 out of 4 (25%) addresses given by a Democratic governor referenced child support.

4.3.2 Deadbeats and scofflaws. Terms constructing low-income NRFs as being unwilling to support their children financially were used by governors in each state. Specifically, the term "deadbeat" was used multiple times in each state. Table 6 illustrates the themes and sub-themes related to child support.

Table 6

Findings of the Content Analysis: Deadbeats and scofflaws

To those parents who shirk their responsibility, I say this: you cruise...you lose. We will find you... and we will make you pay.	WI, 1994, Gov. Thompson (R)
Even though Wisconsin is one of the best states at collecting child support, we're getting even tougher on the scofflaws who abandon their children and expect taxpayers to pay for them.	WI, 1996, Gov. Thompson (R)
Today, as Governor, I want to look those deadbeats in the eye and tell them straight out: Your free ride is over. We are going to see to it that you pay your obligations to support your children...	IL, 1999, Gov. Edgar (R)
You are not entitled to profit from your professional or occupational license while you flaunt your obligations to your children. You are not entitled to profit from property or business investments while you deny your children that to which they are entitled.	IL, 1999, Gov. Edgar (R)
We need to expand our efforts to track down and recover child support from deadbeat parents.	NY, 1999, Gov. Pataki (R)
In Illinois, we are finally making deadbeat dads do what they're supposed to do, pay the child support they owe.	IL, 2005, Gov. Blagojevich (D)

Illinois. Illinois (1995). In 1995, Illinois Governor Edgar framed “deadbeats” as a central issue in welfare costs. These costs, he suggested, were caused by dependency among families receiving public assistance. For example, he stated that his administration would “crack down on child support *deadbeats*” as a way of preventing families from becoming “totally dependent on taxpayers”. He added:

We have collected record amounts of child support \$225 million last year, a 50 percent increase from what we were collecting just four years ago. That is money that has supported families that otherwise might have been totally dependent on taxpayers...

He then attributed unpaid child support to fathers frequently “duck[ing] their responsibility claiming to be unemployed and without the resources to meet their court-ordered support”. Thus, Edgar presents fathers of children receiving public assistance as the policy problem; the policy solution, he proposes, is a program that will “require those delinquent fathers to participate in supervised job search programs or our Earnfare program so they can meet their obligations to their children”.

Illinois (1999). In 1999, Governor Edgar asserted his commitment to “*forcing child support deadbeats* to pay their obligations”. He stated, “today, as Governor, I want to look those *deadbeats* in the eye and tell them straight out: Your free ride is over. We are going to see to it that you pay your obligations to support your children”. His speech indicated that fathers were avoiding paying child support for great personal gain:

You are not entitled to profit from your professional or occupational license while you flaunt your obligations to your children. You are not entitled to profit from property or business investments while you deny your children that to which they are entitled.

To address this policy problem and “to be sure that these *deadbeats* really get the message” Edgar introduced legislation that would “transfer the responsibility for the enforcement of child support collections from the Department of Public Aid to the Office of the Attorney General -- our State's chief law enforcement agency -- and give him the tools to do the job”. Notably, Edgar leveraged phrases related to the military or conflict in support of this policy proposal. Edgar first describes the implementation of a “system to track new hires” as a “new weapon” being added “to our child support arsenal”. Edgar was one of two governors who referred to tracking down fathers. The other governor was Governor Pataki (Republican) of New York in 1999.

Illinois (2005). Six years later, in Illinois, Governor Blagojevich (Democrat) again highlighted the importance of child support as a key welfare and family issue. After citing a steep increase in child support collections between 2003 and 2005 before asserting that, “in Illinois, we are finally making deadbeat dads do what they’re supposed to do, pay the child support they owe”.

New York. New York (1999). In 1999, New York Governor Pataki (Republican), stated that the welfare system in New York had been reformed “carefully, compassionately, and intelligently”. He argued that this had been achieved by:

...emphasizing work. By providing crucial assistance, like child and health care. By weeding out fraud and abuse. By forcing *deadbeat parents* to fulfill their financial obligations to their children. And by remembering that the only limitations in life are those we impose upon ourselves -- or, when it comes to welfare -- those that are imposed on us by government.

He concluded by stating that these actions had not been enough and calling for action to “expand our efforts to *track down* and recover child support from *deadbeat parents*”.

New York-2001. In 2001, Governor Pataki again called for action to enhance child support enforcement in New York. He stated:

At the same time, we're taking the crucial step of forcing *deadbeat* parents to be responsible parents. Roughly one-third of the people who've left New York's welfare rolls have done so in large part because an absent parent now pays child support.

He added that the significant increase in child support collections in New York State (from \$610 million in 1996 to an anticipated \$1.2 billion in 2001) had occurred due to the introduction of

enforcement tools such as driver's license suspension of fathers with child support debt.

Governor Pataki stated:

Together, we passed a law that allows us to suspend the driver's license of a *deadbeat parent*. Let's expand that law. It's unconscionable that a *deadbeat parent* can hold a professional license that enables him to earn hundreds of thousands of dollars while his children live in poverty.

The governor then introduced a proposal for additional enforcement tools, invoking savings for taxpayers and personal responsibility among low-income non-resident fathers.

In addition to suspending a *deadbeat's* driver's license, we should have the administrative authority to suspend their lawyer's license, their doctor's license, and other professional licenses. We must take every reasonable step to force *deadbeats* to pay their child support, instead of forcing taxpayers to do it for them.

Wisconsin. Wisconsin (1994). In his 1994 state of the state address to Wisconsin, Governor Tommy Thompson (Republican) included child support as a central issue in welfare reform and introduced legislation to enhance child support collections enforcement. He stated:

First, I will once again ask you to approve the tough child support enforcement proposal that I advanced in the budget bill last year. To those parents who shirk their responsibility, I say this: you cruise...you lose. We will find you... and we will make you pay.

Wisconsin (1996). In his 1996 address to Wisconsin, Governor Thompson followed an update on child abuse prevention (specifically abandonment of babies in “dumpsters”) with one on child support. Governor Thompson stated:

Even though Wisconsin is one of the best states at collecting child support, we're getting even tougher on the *scofflaws* who abandon their children and expect taxpayers to pay for them.

This address was different from all of the other addresses in the content analysis because interwoven with an emphasis on deadbeats and scofflaws was the proposal for a new fatherhood initiative. In fact, Thompson was the only governor in any state to discuss fathers' roles as nurturers. In 1996, he introduced the policy problem focusing on fathers' presence rather than their provision of formal child support:

Studies show that about 40 percent of American children will go to sleep tonight in homes without a father present. As a result, these children are more likely to be poor, drop out of school and become teen parents.

To ameliorate these issues, Thompson first introduces a new fatherhood initiative as the policy solution:

Our new Fatherhood Initiative will help dads become more involved in caring for their children. On a one-on-one basis, this program will teach fathers parenting skills....nutrition...appropriate play for appropriate ages...and how to bond with their children.

However, following this proposal, Thompson added:

We're also continuing to make sure fathers meet their financial responsibilities. It is a national disgrace that \$34 billion in child support goes unpaid to mothers and children in this country.

Governor Thompson then introduced new enforcement tools including a new Ten Most Wanted poster featuring "parents who owe the most child support" that was to be widely

distributed throughout the state. Governor Thompson's description of this tool was based on assumptions including that this was "one poster nobody wants to be on". He concluded by asserting that "Wisconsin works by making sure our children are properly cared for".

Immediately following, Thompson discussed the state of crime in the Wisconsin.

Wisconsin (1997-2003). Between 1997 and 2001, Thompson made no mention of child support in his addresses. The next no mention of fathers or child support was made in 2003, by Democratic Governor, who highlighted child support broadly among other key policy areas.

Wisconsin (2004). In 2004, after 7 years of addresses with no mention of child support or fathers, Governor Doyle (Democrat) of Wisconsin included "cracking down on deadbeat parents" in a summary of a package of reforms including "Later this spring, improving oral health for children, quality child care, setting higher educational standards, and strengthening law enforcement efforts against abuse and neglect. No mention of fathers or child support were made in the following year (2005).

While child support was a central issue throughout the speeches, it was highlighted far more in the early years of the study. For example, In Illinois, there was no mention of fathers or child support made by governors from 2001-2004. In New York, child support and low-income fathers were not mentioned in the annual addresses in 1997 or 2002-2003. In 2005, Governor Pataki made one reference to low-income fathers, urging New York to "strengthen families by expanding our Earned Income Tax Credit to include lower income, single fathers". In Wisconsin, there was no mention of fathers or child support made by governors from 1997-2003 or in 2005.

4.3.3 "Welfare families": A crisis of spirit. In each of the study states, "welfare families" were described as dependent, relying on taxpayer dollars to fund public assistance programs. This dependency, argued the governors, stemmed from programs that fostered reliance

on government and snuffed out families' motivation and capacity to support themselves. Governors in each of the states referred to welfare as a trap, citing a lack of self-esteem, pride, and hope among its recipients. Thus, "welfare families" were constructed as both the policy problem and as its victims.

The solution, the governors argued, was to replace welfare with workfare: "first work, then wages." This message was shared by governors across states, political parties, and time. However, the way in which the problem was constructed varied, as will be discussed below. In addition, while negative stereotypes about dependence among welfare recipients and positive stereotypes about working people were employed frequently and often throughout the addresses, the concept of welfare to work was highlighted most frequently in Wisconsin.

While many of the governors highlighted unintended consequences of welfare as a program, Jim Edgar (Republican) of Illinois (1994-2001) was the only governor to refer to *welfare rules* as hampering fathers' abilities to stay with their families and find and maintain employment. Governor Edgar mentioned welfare rules in each (1994-1998) of his addresses.

Illinois (1994). In this address, Governor Edgar attributed the success of welfare reform in Illinois to the following policy actions:

...removing tens of thousands of single, able-bodied people from the welfare rolls, by helping those who were willing to work find jobs and by scrapping irrational rules that discouraged welfare families from staying together and the adults them from seeking employment.

Later, in the same speech, Edgar stated that the new Fresh Start initiative had eliminated "old roadblocks that penalized welfare families if father stayed with the family and also penalized welfare recipients who took temporary jobs".

Illinois (1995). In 1995, Edgar argued that Illinois had been “a leader in helping welfare recipients move from dependence to independence”. He argued that the state had “worked to break the generation after generation cycle that has locked far too many families into lifetimes on public assistance.” Specifically, he noted welfare rules that were being changed to facilitate the achievement of the policy goals:

We are encouraging welfare recipients now to find work. And once they do we are not penalizing them for bringing home a paycheck. We have removed obstacles that penalized welfare recipients who took temporary jobs. And that discouraged fathers' from staying with their families.

Edgar discussed obstacles that penalize recipients of welfare for taking temporary jobs and discourage fathers from staying with their children again in 1995, 1996, and 1998.

Illinois (1997). In 1997, Edgar stated that welfare in Illinois had been successful “because it rewards self-sufficiency and not continued dependency”. In contrast to other governors, Edgar identified specific rules that had served as barriers to families and fathers: “We've gotten rid of the rules that made no sense. Families on welfare no longer have to break up to avoid a cut in benefits. The father can remain in the home where he belongs”.

New York. New York (1994): In his last state of the state address to New York State after having served as governor since 1984, Mario Cuomo (Democrat) described the need to “expand our successful efforts to make the welfare system a road to new work, not a road to nowhere”. Specifically, he argued, welfare reform “must concern itself with the responsibility of both parents to provide economic support for their children”. Cuomo went on to describe the state’s Child Assistance Program as “the first alternative to America's welfare system that promotes work and insists that parents pay their child support”. The development of this program, Cuomo

stated, was based on the recommendations of his Task Force on Poverty and Welfare's call for a "dignified, rational alternative to welfare"

New York (1995): The following year, Governor Pataki became the new Republican Governor of New York, where he remained in office until 2006. Previously, Governor Cuomo (Democrat), had served as Governor from 1983-1994. In his first state of the state address, Governor Pataki asserted that, in contrast to welfare, "the gift of real compassion is opportunity and hope. It protects personal freedom, fosters self-reliance and restores individual responsibility". He further claimed that "when government takes responsibility for people, people stop taking responsibility for themselves". To justify the replacement of welfare with workfare, Governor Pataki asserted that welfare reform was necessary not reduce costs, but to "save lives, to help needy New Yorkers escape the confines of welfare dependency and live full, productive lives".

New York (1997): Two years later, Governor Pataki stated that in the previous year, New York State had "changed the system" through welfare reform. During this process, Pataki stated, New York State had confronted a "crisis of spirit that was suppressing the potential of talented people by locking them in a system that discouraged ambition". This crisis of spirit, he argued, was driven by "subsidize[ing] dependency and poverty". When a state does this, he argued, "you get more of both".

New York (1998). In the following year, Governor Pataki described the period when he took office as a time during which New York State "was leading the nation in welfare dependency", with "one in every eleven New Yorkers was trapped on welfare". In New York City, where one in seven city residents received welfare, the problem was "even worse". Pataki

stated, “One in seven: a shameful, unacceptable number. For all too many, New York was not the place of dreams. It was a place of despair and hopelessness.”

Wisconsin. Wisconsin (1995). In his 1995 address, Thompson highlighted Wisconsin’s role as a leader in welfare reform and drastically reducing the number of people receiving welfare, he stated that Wisconsin had “changed the dynamics of the welfare debate by laying down the very simple premise that if you accept a check from the state, you will accept certain basic responsibilities in return”. He explained that by distributing assistance without an expectation of work in return, the system is no longer one of public assistance. Instead, he asserted, “it is public apathy. It is silent compliance with a system that discriminates against women and children ... that traps them in a life without hope ... and without a future.” In the same address, Thompson went on to describe welfare reform as a “revolution” aimed at “completing the connection between welfare and work”. In announcing the policy implementation plan for welfare reform, he stated that “welfare will no longer exist. It will no longer be part of the vocabulary. Welfare is going to become a jobs program”.

Wisconsin (1996). The following year, Governor Thompson highlighted policies that he argued resulted in incentives to have more children and for young people to have their own children:

...in the real world you don't automatically get more - money just because you have more children. It should be the same for welfare. And I see absolutely no sense in encouraging teenage mothers to move out of their parent's homes - and setting up their own households - in order to receive higher welfare benefits. The current system encourages this. I have signed legislation to change it. Let's put a stop to it.

He then described Wisconsin Works (W-2), Wisconsin’s innovative welfare reform program, stating that:

For nine years, we have been working to end welfare in Wisconsin. Tonight, we stand on the precipice of doing just that with our Wisconsin Works program, more commonly known as W-2. With W-2, we're not just ending welfare as we know it. We're ending welfare. Period. We are done experimenting. We're replacing the welfare check with a paycheck, creating an entirely new system for helping families in trouble. Why? Because we care about the children and families trapped in an apathetic welfare system. A state devoted to helping others lead better lives cannot tolerate a welfare system whose intentions may have been noble but whose results have been tragic.

4.3.4 Rules and tools.

Table 7

Themes in the content analysis: Rules and tools

...Require those delinquent fathers to participate in supervised job search programs or our Earnfare program so they can meet their obligations to their children.	IL, 1995, Gov. Edgar (R)
This spring, we'll release our first Ten Most Wanted poster featuring parents who owe the most child support. This is one poster nobody wants to be on.	WI, 1996, Gov. Thompson (R)
...We are adding a new weapon to our child support arsenal, a system to track down new hires so we can collect child support through the workplace.	IL, 1999, Gov. Edgar (R)
Together, we passed a law that allows us to suspend the driver's license of a deadbeat parent. Let's expand that law. It's unconscionable that a deadbeat parent can hold a professional license that enables him to earn hundreds of thousands of dollars while his children live in poverty.	NY, 2001, Gov. Pataki (R)

Taken together, the findings of the policy content analysis suggest that non-resident fathers with low incomes were constructed negatively overall. However, the ways in which non-

resident fathers were constructed as a population varied by state. For example, Illinois was the only state in which a governor highlighted welfare rules as a barrier to father involvement. In New York and Wisconsin, the influence of the rules used to implement policies were not addressed. In addition, in Wisconsin, where welfare was diminished and child support rules became increasingly tied to sanctions as enforcement mechanisms, much of the governors' language focused on public welfare as an unjust system that trapped families, thus creating a need to free them. While father employment was championed as the solution to an increasing number of children on welfare, none of the governors discussed a lack of jobs or low wages among fathers as barriers to paying child support. Finally, constructions of non-resident fathers varied most by year, rather than governor political party or state, with the greatest emphasis on child support during the years immediately preceding welfare reform.

Chapter 5: Findings of the Interview

Analysis

5.1 Father Identity

In the present study, two key components of father identity were explored. Parenting self-esteem was comprised of perceived role value, parenting self-efficacy, and parenting satisfaction. The effects of child support policy on role strain were explored to improve our understanding of how role strain impacts parenting self-esteem. Overall, fathers in this study believed that their role was critical (Johnston & Mash, 1989; Ohan et al., 2000). Even as some felt over the course of the study that others' perceptions of their role value had changed, they felt that "being there" was a central role with important implications for their children. Most fathers felt that they were doing "my best". They described the fathering role as a generative one, one which requires that "we learn everyday". They described fatherhood as something you "have to grow into", a process which takes time (e.g., "time will conquer all") and direct caregiving. It was important to fathers that their children "really know me".

Fathers' chief concerns about fatherhood were related to new parenthood occurring unplanned and "too early". Among the younger fathers, the sense that they had not yet had the chance to finish school or advance in their careers contributed to concerns about their self-development and ability to support their children. Fathers who were in new relationships at the time that the mother became pregnant also reported concerns about not having gotten to know each other well enough before having the focal child. Some fathers described concerns about providing for their previous children with other partners while building a new family with a new partner. These concerns included limitations on both time and money.

Most fathers did not cite their fathers as their role models for their own fathering; instead, they cited their mothers, another male family member (usually a grandfather, uncle, or cousin), or a stepfather as their role model. Three fathers (1 in Illinois and 2 in Wisconsin) stated that they did not know anyone who they thought was a good father. Many fathers talked about not knowing their fathers or having only occasional contact with them as children and then developing close relationships with them as adults. These experiences contributed to fathers' perceptions of fathering generative. As a result, while in the initial coding I focused on relationships with fathers and father figures; however, for many of these fathers, the role that their mothers, stepfather, grandfathers, and uncles played in raising them was so integral that I chose to include all parents and parent figures in one category. Many of the fathers who had not had a father figure present and did not experience trauma felt strongly that having a family of their own was important to them because of their personal experiences. These fathers made statements such as, "I really do want it to work out, because it's like, I've always wanted a family...because I never had one myself".

Fathers across cities talked about wanting to parent differently from the way their fathers or parent figures had parented them. Various fathers talked about learning to manage anger and impatience. Many fathers described wanting to be more demonstrative in their affection for their partners and children, although they had not been raised that way (with several fathers describing their own fathers as "financial providers"). Yet many of these fathers also expressed concerns about their capacity and comfort with being warm and demonstrative with their children and expressing their emotions openly with their partners. Various fathers described these internal conflicts as everyday battles that they fought to be good parents.

While not explored in depth in previous literature, an important dimension of fathers generative fathering perspective was related to changes in their children's needs as they grew older. For example, while some fathers felt that financial support was very important over time, they believed that spending as much time as possible with their children while they were young was a priority. Fathers felt that they could learn how to be parents alongside their children, and that this was a long-term process. At the start of the study, many fathers described the changes wrought by fatherhood. Nine of the fathers described specific changes in themselves since becoming fathers. These changes were related to two dimensions: "growing up" (3 fathers) and leaving behind aspects of their lives that they no longer fit them once they become fathers. The need to change resulted in both positive changes and disappointments and stressors. For example, fathers made statements like, "I couldn't keep doing the things I was doing. I gotta be a father now." Four fathers described fatherhood as motivating them to "keep off the streets" or stay out of jail. To achieve these goals, fathers talked about working on becoming more patient, addressing issues with anger, and reducing or quitting substance use. Fathers described positive effects of fatherhood such as "slowing me down" and "looking at life differently". Part of the process of growing up, they described, was seeing that "everything is about them [child]". This experience, they said, "makes you a man". Many fathers described a drastic shift in their daily lives, focusing solely on work and family.

Yet the financial demands of fatherhood left respondents with "no time to better yourself". This was particularly evident among young fathers (e.g., "I was still a kid myself"), fathers with child support debt, as well as fathers struggling to provide enough informal child support to avoid the CSP. During the first wave of the study, three fathers described feeling

motivated to complete their GEDs after taking time off to support their new babies. However, none of the fathers was able to return to school due to financial constraints.

Parenting satisfaction was lower among fathers who had broken up with their co-parents and who were involved in the formal CSP. While fathers who reported feeling that they were not doing enough in the first two waves expressed conflict between the need to work enough hours to support their children financially and wanting to spend as much time as possible with them. By the third and fourth waves when their children were older, sources of conflict changed for many fathers who had broken up with the focal child's mothers. Overall, they reported increasing challenges in maintaining their relationships with their children and co-parents. These barriers included mothers moving out of state, increasing child support debt, losing contact with children (due to moves out of state, conflict with the child's mother, new romantic relationships, and domestic violence), and practical obstacles such as lack of reliable transportation.

5.2 Child Support

The majority (69%) of the fathers in the study had had some CSP involvement at some point before and/or during the course of the study. Most of the fathers in each state reported some CSP involvement; however, fathers in Wisconsin (82%) and New York (70%) were far more likely than fathers in IL (55%) to report CSP involvement. Most participant fathers (66%) had already had some CSP involvement at Wave 1. Fathers in Wisconsin (73%) and New York (70%) were more likely than fathers in Illinois (55%) to have already experienced CSP involvement at Wave 1.

5.2.1 “They’re putting the good guys in with the bad”. Fathers made statements such as “they’re putting the good guys in with the bad”, putting them all into “one category”, regardless of the extent of fathers’ involvement with their children. The CSP, they

said, treated fathers the same “whether you’re an active father, whether you’re a non-existent father”. They said that this lack of differentiation by the CSP sent a message that “it doesn’t make a difference” if fathers have been living in the home and paying child support or not.

Fathers felt that these messages were unjust and could ultimately be damaging to fathers’ intrinsic motivation and discourage them from making informal and in-kind contributions voluntarily and communicating with the child’s mother. Fathers felt that the emphasis on financial contributions minimized their other efforts and contributions. For example, fathers described feeling that while their contributions “may not be much, in other people’s eyesight” but they were doing what they could and “being there” for their children.

Fathers also asserted that they knew what their children needed because they were raising them and caring for them. Some fathers described feeling conflicted about mothers applying for public assistance as this automatically triggered a child support case being opened. Many fathers stated that their partners would not need to open a case if they broke up because “I take care of my kids”. They largely believed that mothers did not need to apply for assistance and viewed this as mothers and the courts negating fathers’ contributions. They said that they would provide enough support without state intervention because they knew “exactly how much it takes to take care of them”. Yet, when probed as to how much they contributed, several fathers described providing a box of diapers or wipes every month or even several months (approximately \$15-30), a small proportion of the cost of raising a child.

5.2.2 “It works against the parents”. Fathers described the CSP as unnecessary in most cases, arguing that “it works against the parents” and is “getting in your business”. Fathers also talked about the practical constraints and limitations placed by formal child support. Three fathers (New York, n=1; Wisconsin, n=2) described child support rules (e.g., paying 17%

of their income) as contributing to tension with their children's mothers. Fathers in each state made statements such as, "you want to do for your kids, and you want to give them more than that!". In addition, by paying formal child support, some felt that they lost the opportunity to be able to provide other types of support such as informal in-kind.

Some fathers also expressed concerns about the state being too slow or cumbersome to meet their children's immediate needs (e.g., medication or needs that emerged while the CSP office was closed). Notably, some fathers described using in-kind support as a form of control over the mothers spending. Several fathers in Illinois and Wisconsin described buying clothes and toys and ensuring that they were kept at the fathers (or fathers extended families) homes.

"It's all going to the same place". Nineteen percent of the fathers in the study had paid child support while living with the child at some time point (before or during the study). However, while nearly half (45%) of the fathers in Wisconsin reported having paid child support while co-residing, none of the fathers in Illinois and only 10% of the fathers in New York had. During the period of the study, 16% of the fathers paid child support while co-residing; all of these fathers lived in Wisconsin, representing nearly half (45%) of the participating fathers in that state. One father who resided in Wisconsin, stated that he and the focal child's mother declined public assistance (which they were eligible for and needed) because the system would have required the father to pay child support. Among these fathers, the perception of the CSP was that it was not appropriate for fathers in their circumstances. While they pointed out that the money "ends up going into the same place", they expressed concern about being involved in the CSP.

Among the fathers that were paying child support while residing with their children, many had little knowledge about the system. Fathers described receiving little information about

their individual rights and responsibilities from the CSP. Most fathers described receiving most information about the CSP in the form of letters. Several fathers described being unaware of how and why the CSP case was opened; however, when probed, a few stated that they were living together most of the time while applying for public assistance. Notably, fathers were widely aware of pass-through policies.

“It’s nothing out there for us”. Fathers also questioned the value of CSP involvement in cases where fathers are involved, and mothers have higher earnings or new partners who contribute financially. These fathers asked if it was reasonable to “take from someone who has nothing” and transfer it to someone who “already has something”. Several fathers said that the mothers did not want child support but were “almost forced” to cooperate when they applied for public assistance. One father in Wisconsin suggested that the state does not allow mothers to decline cooperation because the state wants to be able to show that they force men to pay.

Several fathers stated in New York and Wisconsin described believing that neither the state nor the children’s mothers realized how much the CSP can hurt fathers. Fathers described facing serious financial challenges as a result of child support involvement, and a lack of services to support them (e.g., “it’s nothing out there for us”). Many fathers thought that the CSP should solicit feedback from fathers about their needs and perspectives of the CSP, saying that the CSP needed to “hear it from a man’s point of view”. Fathers described the CSP as “their system”. They felt that their needs and financial abilities were not considered by the CSP. Many fathers pointed out that their contributions to their children might mean that they might not have housing or other basic needs. They pointed out that while the government determines need and ability based on income, they should also ask fathers “where do you live and how are you living”.

In Wisconsin (n=2) and New York (n=1), fathers discussed the standard 17% of their paycheck that were required to pay. This led them to believe that the CSP did not take their living situations and income into consideration. Fathers in each state described the CSP as failing to understand fathers' financial ability, particularly when they had changes in income. Fathers also having little access to information about the CSP (e.g., "they don't have much communication with me and I don't have much with them"). Fathers described not having received or understood information about how to request adjustments to their child support orders. For example, fathers across the three states described receiving child support-related information in the form of letters. They described these letters as containing complex and personal information and having trouble accessing other methods of support (e.g., in person). Fathers in Wisconsin (n=6) were far more likely than fathers in Chicago (n=3) or New York (n=2) to talk about the negative effects of these letters.

Fathers in New York and Wisconsin described being seen as "criminals" when they went to ask for help with their child support orders. Several fathers in Wisconsin described being treated with disdain or indifference by child support workers. These experiences left fathers feeling "disillusioned" about the states' fairness, accessibility, and acknowledgement of fathers' contributions to their children. Fathers in each state described feeling helpless, making statements such as "I can't really fight the government so I might as well just hold my head up and pray until I can get a better job".

5.2.4 "Some kind of way, you're gonna pay". Fathers described the CSP as an inevitable and long-term force in their lives, even in cases where fathers were living with their only child and supporting them but had received public welfare for a short period (e.g., pregnancy). Once the CSP was involved, fathers said, "there's nothing you can do", "they don't

stop”. They described the CSP as “regulating” their lives, “taking everything” and wanting to know everything about fathers’ lives: “who you’re sleeping with, where you’re going, what kind of job you have” and even “what are you eating”. Wisconsin was the only state specifically mentioned by fathers discussing these issues. It was also the only state in which a father named a governor when describing his experiences.

Fathers perceived child support debt as insurmountable. Fathers made statements such as “it keep building up and building up and building up”. The bill, they said, “never goes away”. Fathers in New York and Wisconsin described long-term debt related to birth costs (from Medicaid), paying arrears on child support cases for children who had already aged out, and paying interest that had accumulated over many years. One father in New York explained that a change in the law left him responsible for child support until his child was 21 years old rather than 18.

Fathers perceived the CSP as employing tools to force fathers to pay, regardless of their ability or the harm that these tools could do. Fathers in New York (n=3) and Wisconsin (n=2) specifically discussed income tax return withholding by the government as a penalty that either they or a family member or friend had experienced. Fathers in Wisconsin (n=2) and New York (n=1) had had their licenses revoked or had a close family member or friend who had. Only two fathers (in Illinois) talked specifically about wages being garnished.

The possibility of jail due to child support arrears was discussed by fathers in each state (Wisconsin, n=8; Illinois, n=4; New York, N=2). Several fathers described the CSP as “tracking fathers down”, language that closely matched that of the governors in their states. For example, when asked by TLC3 interviewers what happens in situations where fathers cannot pay, many respondents answered that, from the perspective of the state, this was “impossible”. In other

words, fathers believed that the state was unwilling or unable to acknowledge their inability to pay. As a result, fathers stated, they would have to find jobs, or the state would “lock them up”.

Two fathers (Illinois, n=1; Wisconsin, n=1) had a close family member or friend who had gone to jail due to child support arrears. One father in Wisconsin had gone to jail before the study period due to unpaid child support debt for a child from a previous relationship. One of the fathers in Wisconsin expressed concern that he might go to jail. Fathers described money being taken from fathers when they go to jail and accumulating child support arrears while in jail. “One way or another”, fathers explained, “they will get it”. Coming up with funds to pay child support was described as the “back door”, or the ticket to freedom for fathers. Yet, “how are they gonna pay child support if you lock them up?”, fathers asked.

5.2.5 “Everything I’m doing is just going back to the government”.

Fathers identified various reasons that they felt that the CSP was unfair; however, one of the most salient issues was that the government retained father’s child support payments rather than using pass-through policies to send the money to the mother and child. In fact, 7 of the respondents (Illinois, n=2; New York, n=3; Wisconsin, n=2) specifically cited the lack of pass-through as a reason that the system did not make sense. Fathers stated that they would avoid the formal child support system because mothers would “get less than they do now”. These fathers reported that there would be no benefit to participating in the CSP, and in fact, they would “still be losing out” because “with the state withholding, they’re not getting the full amount”.

While fathers disagreed about whether the child support system was unfair to both fathers and mothers (e.g., several fathers talked about the CSP “built for the mothers”), most agreed that participating in the CSP was not in the father or mothers’ best interests as “mothers don’t get that support”. Most fathers felt that this was unfair to parents and children; however, several stated

that since this system did not benefit mothers directly, they did not feel as concerned about being forced to open CSP cases as they would have. Overall, many fathers agreed that the state “takes advantage of people” by taking more from fathers than it gives to families. The CSP was described as lacking transparency, a perception which was driven in large part by the state’s retention of fathers’ child support payments. Fathers in New York and Wisconsin posed questions such as “who’s going to regulate it?” and “where is the money going?”.

Fathers also described serious, long-term challenges stemming from involvement in the CSP. Once child support became involved, many fathers felt that mothers began to emphasize only fathers’ financial contributions, and that this had become their children’s priority too. In fact, several fathers described having become estranged from children from other relationships and their co-parents due to strain related to child support. These fathers said things like, “they learn from their mother and their mother just wants me to pay. Now they got paid. I don’t have anything to do with them.” Fathers described financial strain of child support as having “destroyed” them or other men they had close relationships with. They felt that neither the system nor their children’s mothers recognized or understood this. These experiences influenced fathers’ identities throughout the course of the study.

Fathers described making difficult choices about how to pay child support. For several fathers in New York, this meant taking on overtime, night shifts, and long hours for some, while for others, it resulted in pay cuts and fewer hours to be able to be closer to their children. Yet they described being unable to “see any progress” and paying bills just to stay afloat or break even. Fathers described wanting to contribute to society but finding that “if everything I’m doing is just going back to the government” their efforts to juggle multiple jobs, work night shifts, or work on the books might not pay off. Notably, 3 fathers (1 in each state) talked about how the

strains of the CSP had caused them (n=1) or a friend or family member (n=2) to consider going back to doing illegal work after having chosen a “different life” when they had children. Fathers in each state described these choices as causing fathers to lose hope, or even become self-destructive. Some described child support as “killing the man” and one likened it to being “in slavery”. A summary of child support-related themes is presented in table 8, below.

Table 8

Themes in the Interview Analysis: Child Support

Theme	Summary
They're putting the good guys in with the bad	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Fathers largely agreed that child support is an important system and agreed that it should be used when fathers do not support their children• Fathers are treated the same by the child support system regardless of the level of their involvement with their children• Ability to pay and willingness to pay are different, yet the child support system does not make this distinction when using enforcement mechanisms
It works against the parents	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Fathers paying child support while living with their children (in order to receive public assistance) pointed out that "it's all going to the same place"• Fathers felt that there was "nothing out there" for them when they faced financial challenges. They perceived the public welfare system as serving mothers and children, not fathers.• The CSP should ask fathers "where do you live and how are you living" in addition to income.• Fathers reported difficulty accessing information and resources from the child support program.
Some kind of way, you're gonna pay	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Fathers perceived child support debt as insurmountable, describing it as "building up and building up" and "never going away"• Many fathers knew someone who had gone to jail due to unpaid child support, and most fathers feared that this could happen to them
Everything I'm doing is just going back to the government	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Fathers reported having their tax returns withheld, working just to pay fines and fees related to child support debt• They felt that they could not make progress• To support their children, some considered returning to illegal work or working under the table after having worked hard to obtain formal employment. These decisions caused great strain.

Taken together, the findings of this study suggest that fathers perceive their roles as highly important. While they value the provision of financial support, they believe that spending time with their children and “being there” is equally critical. Fathers sense of parenting self-efficacy and parenting satisfaction was generally lower after breaking up with co-parents, as they spent less time with their children and often experienced greater financial strain. Overall, while fathers believed that child support should be enforced by the government if fathers are unwilling to pay, they thought that the government should differentiate between unwillingness and inability and alter policies (e.g., government retention of child support payments) that they perceived to be inequitable. These perceptions and their implications will be discussed in depth in the following chapter.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

6.1 Discussion

This study explored the influence of child support policy on father identity. Specifically, this study examined the influence of policy design on parenting self-esteem, which is composed of role value, parenting self-efficacy, and parenting satisfaction. This study also explored the influence of policy design on role strain, and the subsequent effect of role strain on father identity. The present study is among the first to examine how child support policy influences father identity using longitudinal interview data from fathers. By triangulating 4 waves of in-depth interview data for 32 fathers in 3 states with in-depth policy design data and governors state of the state speeches, I was able to explore the relationship between policy design and father identity. The TLC3 study explored fathers' attitudes and behaviors related to child support and father identity at each wave. While the data gathered from each interview wave varied depending on the extent of fathers' experiences with and perceptions of the CSP, each interview captures important aspects of father experiences and how their perceptions of the CSP change over time (e.g., after a new child support case has been opened, a new relationship has begun).

Overall, fathers and policy makers shared the view that child support matters. Both fathers and policy makers highlighted the importance of personal responsibility, provision of financial support, employment, and fathers' presence. Fathers perceived the child support program as playing an important role if fathers are unwilling and able to pay; yet most fathers felt that they were doing their best and enforcement was inappropriate. Yet, the findings of this study suggest divergence of opinion about how fathers should fulfill these responsibilities. For example, while policymakers emphasize child support enforcement, regardless of fathers' ability to pay, fathers highlight the importance of doing the best that they can. While policymakers use

language evoking the sense that fathers are unwilling to pay (e.g., “tracking fathers down”; “making them” pay), fathers overwhelmingly stress that they want to be there for their children. In fact, some fathers filed child support by themselves or with their co-parents. Yet fathers emphasized the value of informal support and time spent with children too. Policymakers highlighted the need for jobs programs to reduce “dependency” among “welfare families”; yet most of the fathers in this study were employed, primarily in full-time jobs. Their low wages, not a lack of employment, were the key barriers to child support payments.

The findings of this analysis suggest that the effects of child support rippled across various dimensions of fathers’ identity, co-operation with co-parents, trust in government and employment. While the current study does not try to prove a causal relationship between policy and father identity, the findings allow us to embed fathers’ language, attitudes, and experiences within these broader environments. For example, fathers identified discrepancies between their own fathering values and identities and those imposed on them by the government. Specifically, while fathers described their role as consisting of multiple dimensions including spending time with children, “being there”, and providing in-kind support (e.g., clothes, diapers); they felt that the state was interested only in their financial contributions. From their perspective, public welfare programs were “just set up for money from the man”. Overall, fathers agreed that “if you have children, you’re supposed to support them”. Yet the desire to support and care for their children was described as an *intrinsic* value.

While many expressed financial concerns, they prioritized building relationships with their children over time and providing resources informally regardless of their financial abilities. These values stemmed from their own experiences of developing adult relationships with fathers who had been estranged during their childhoods, their awareness that for every hour they spent

working to earn money, they “lost out” on critical time with their young children, and that the two or three jobs they worked might still not result in enough money to support their children while ensuring that they also had their basic needs (e.g., stable housing) met.

The findings of this analysis indicate that fathers perceived child support as an appropriate *enforcement* mechanism that should be used only if the mother “got a problem where daddy doesn’t want to pay”. In those cases, fathers agreed, the program could be used to “make you stand up to your responsibilities” but argued that it should be called “child enforcement” to reflect its purpose. Otherwise, most fathers thought that it was best for co-parents to try to “work it out” because the CSP was “just a way to get into people’s private lives”. Ultimately, the CSP was perceived as potentially damaging to both fathers’ intrinsic motivation and ability to care for their children. However, it is important to note that, when discussing their contributions to their children, some fathers cited providing amounts that represented a small percentage of the actual cost of raising a child. Although fathers stated that they were doing their best because these amounts reflected a large percentage of their income, these informal contributions were far less than the amount of a formal child support order.

Several groups of fathers had particularly negative perceptions of the CSP. These groups included fathers who (1) had paid or were paying child support for children they were living with at the time; (2) had child support debt; and (3) experienced sanctions and other methods of enforcement. Among the fathers who had experienced sanctions and other enforcement methods, fathers whose tax refunds had been retained reported frustration. These findings point to important considerations in policy design. For example, tax refunds are a major incentive for employment and filing taxes (particularly among low-income workers).

Fathers in the study were keenly aware of inequities in the child support system. While little is known about the effects of fines and fees on father self-esteem, the findings of this study suggest that fathers who continue to accrue administrative fees and interest on retroactive CS debt while making current payments and fathers who owe child support from before the current order was established (regardless of fathers' previous level of financial and emotional involvement) experience high levels of role strain.

While federal law protects the rights of fathers to adjust their CS orders to reflect their current earnings, there are multiple barriers to obtaining "right-size" CS orders (Plotnick & Kennedy, 2018). Fathers in this study reported barriers to adjusting their child support orders so that they would match their current income. Obstacles reported by fathers in the study included lack of information, trouble getting time off from work, frequent changes in income, shifts, and other work-related factors, and previous negative experiences with the child support office. These findings build on previous research (e.g., Pate, 2016) findings that unstable earnings, lack of reliable transportation or time off from work, lack of information about their right to update their orders serve as major barriers. Even once fathers are aware of their rights, navigating the system can be difficult and costly. Pate found that many of the fathers in his study expressed the desire to adjust their orders, but did not have the financial means to hire a lawyer. While the law permits fathers to change their CS orders without representation, or *pro se*, most of the fathers did not "understand how to advocate for themselves in a court of law" (p.125). In addition, fathers in the study largely felt that the formula (e.g., 17% in Wisconsin) used to calculate their child support orders was arbitrary and largely unfair. It is interesting to note that while some fathers felt that this percentage was too high, others felt that it was too low; their main concern was that it was not based on their children's needs or fathers' abilities.

While these issues have been little studied, Plotnick & Kennedy (2018) discovered that among NCPs who are unable or unwilling to provide information about their income, CS orders are calculated using a formula that assumes higher incomes than NCPs actual earnings. Ha, Cancian, & Meyer (2018) found in their study of administrative data in Wisconsin from the years 2000-2005 that between 23 and 31% of crucial information about father' income was missing. In fact, the authors found that, over time, between 23 and 31 percent of fathers' income was missing. Father's income was missing for various reason. While some fathers had no income due to incarceration or other factors, others did have earned income that was not reported or for other reasons missing from these records (p. 152). This level of missing data makes it impossible to correctly calculate a CS order.

The findings of the interview analysis highlighted decisions with "tragic trade-offs" (Nussbaum, 2011). Father respondents' lives were rife with *tragic trade-offs*, leading to role strain and diminished sense of parenting self-efficacy. While fathers described feeling torn between paid work and caring for their children, many felt that spending time with their children was the highest priority. While many fathers reported initially having concerns about their ability to parent successfully due to financial instability or lack of father figure in their own childhoods, fathers described nurturing children as a point of pride and "joy". In contrast, while most fathers made their dedication to paid work clear by working long shifts, often in more than one job, their work was seasonal, unstable, under-paying, and took them away from their children. In several cases, fathers chose to reduce the number of hours they worked or take lower paying jobs to be closer to their children or care for them during the day while the children's mothers worked. Some fathers expressed frustration about not fulfilling the traditional breadwinner role, but they acknowledged the value of taking turns with their partners. Others felt that staying with their

children was more meaningful for them and helped them establish a strong basis for their relationship.

6.2 Limitations

This research project presents several important limitations. First, the TLC3 study does not permit researchers to use full quotations in publications. Qualitative studies use full quotations as a tool to demonstrate how the researchers' assertions emerged from the data; therefore, the quotations play an important role in indicating study rigor. Fragments of quotations could be used, but only if the fragment expressed a sentiment shared by at least 7 participants. Finally, researchers are not allowed to provide any identifying information along with the quotation fragment. Of relevance to the current study, this includes restrictions on including information about which city or state respondents lived in. While my ability to conduct thematic analysis was not hampered by these restrictions, I was unable to provide some key information related to that process and its rigor.

In addition, while FFCWS and TLC3 data were originally linked by a shared ID number (considered one of the study's strengths), the ID number has been removed from the transcripts and due to IRB restrictions, I was not able to use the FFCWS to obtain demographic data. Furthermore, the TLC3 dataset contains no demographic cover sheets. As a result, I extracted as much demographic data as possible manually. While I did this methodically and checked my work several times, this process involved examining 4 waves of data for 32 fathers in addition to the baseline couple interviews which I used solely to obtain demographic data that was not available from the individual interview transcripts. In addition, there was a large amount of data on fathers' ethnicity missing, particularly from fathers in Illinois and Wisconsin. Additionally, these restrictions limit the possibility of conducting future research examining the research

questions longitudinally using quantitative FFCWS data to triangulate and extend the TLC3 data findings.

Furthermore, while child support was a central topic that yielded rich answers and discussion, each city had some missing data on child support. In New York, 8 fathers conducted interviews in which the interviewer did not ask about child support. Data on these 8 fathers was missing at 1 wave (n=5), 2 waves (n=2), and 3 waves (n=1). In Chicago, 1 father was not asked about child support in 2 waves of interviews. In Milwaukee, 3 fathers were not asked about child support during 1 of the interviews. While this is a limitation, this study has an exceptionally high participation rate among fathers overall, and very low rate of attrition over time. In addition, it is the only secondary qualitative data source that I am aware of that explores these questions. Finally, as the questions posed by interviewers were similar throughout the interviews and the data are longitudinal, the data for each father are rich when taken together.

Additionally, there were various interviews in New York and Milwaukee in which fathers reported that they did not pay child support and no follow up questions were posed by the interviewer. New York had the most interviews (n=7) in which the father responded that he did not pay child support and no follow up questions were asked by the interviewer. Interviews with no discussion of child support occurred in W3 (n=4) and W4 (n=3). In Illinois, 4 interviews did not include discussion of child support (W3, n=3; W4, n=1). Two interviews with no follow up content related to child support were conducted in Wisconsin (W1, n=1; W3, n=1). However, as these fathers were not paying child support at that time and generally discussed their friend and family members experiences with child support and other perceptions of policy, these short responses do not pose a major limitation.

Finally, while FFCWS data are considered the best for studies of father involvement and policy at this time, these data (TLC3 + FFCWS) were collected between 2000 and 2005. However, although these data were collected many years ago, they are largely relevant to today's policy landscape.

6.3 Areas for Future Study

The findings of this dissertation study point to several areas that warrant further investigation. First while the data in the current study were triangulated in several innovative ways, future studies should take advantage of the presence of both couple and individual interviews for mothers and fathers (as well as social fathers in some cases) as well as the extremely high participation rate among the couples.

To the best of my knowledge, no study has examined the present research questions using couple data. The findings of this study highlighted an important discrepancy between father's recognition that they had limited ability to provide financially and their assertion that, as they were doing as much as possible given their financial limitations, they were therefore doing enough. This finding illuminates a source of strain in fathers' relationships with their co-parents and the state. Some fathers felt that mothers should not apply for public assistance because fathers were doing the best that they could. In most cases, fathers did not believe that the mother was receiving too much assistance; in fact, fathers broadly acknowledged that mothers received minimal assistance due to the CSP's retention of child support payments.

Yet, they felt that the mothers were doing this to hurt them, or instead, because they did not realize that this hurt them. While several fathers stated that their co-parents had entered new relationships and did not need the financial support, we do not know what motivated the mothers to apply for public assistance. Was it financial need or was it, in fact, as some fathers asserted, a

way of punishing fathers for starting new relationships or other relational issues? In addition, while fathers stated that their co-parents no longer needed assistance due to their new relationships, we do not know the income of the new partner, nor the financial constraints placed on him. Finally, if a new partner is present, does this absolve the father of the responsibility to provide financially for his child? This study also lays the groundwork for future studies using mixed methods to build on the findings by transforming them into longitudinal quantitative data. This would contribute to our understanding of which policy and father conditions are necessary and/or sufficient to contribute to strong father identity.

Notably, the interviews used in the present study were conducted during a period in which the emphasis on the CSP was on collecting child support, not father involvement. As the CSP in some states has begun to shift its focus to family functioning, it would be interesting to explore whether fathers' perceptions of the CSP have changed. In other words, if the CPS changes its messages but not its policies, does this change fathers' perceptions? Or would this only be true in states that have also reformed their policies? Thus, future studies could explicitly set out to investigate how fathers perceive policy makers' direct messages and how these perceptions influence their fathering and child support-related attitudes and behaviors.

6.4 Contribution to Theory

Taken together, the findings suggest that fathers largely viewed fatherhood as a generative process. Father respondents emphasized doing the best that they can, over time, learning, and engaging in “everyday battles” of working on aspects of themselves that they feel restrict their abilities to parent effectively. Fathers also viewed their contributions from a generative perspective, emphasizing providing for their children to the best of their ability depending on their financial circumstances, which were often in flux. Furthermore, the findings

of the current study indicate that while fathers believed that their financial contributions were important, it was their time and presence that they used to demonstrate their dedication to their children. Many fathers in this study recognize that their ability to contribute financially is limited, despite working multiple jobs and long hours and therefore choose to emphasize time. Yet, once they or their co-parents began new relationships, had other children, moved, or began to disagree about child support, fathers often had less access to their children. In some cases, this was due to domestic violence, in others due to strain related to financial disagreements and child support, and others due to physical distance.

In addition, fathers' emphasis on fairness is in keeping with theories of institutional justice. As previous scholars (e.g., Kumlin, 2002) have argued, citizens value just and fair government. For fathers in this study, child support was viewed as an enforcement mechanism-appropriate for fathers who were unwilling to support their children, but intrusive and punitive for those who were doing their best. In addition, fathers' rich descriptions of their identity and experiences related to fatherhood contrasted with what they saw as the superficial role constructed by the state.

6.5 Implications for Policy

A key finding of this study is that fathers believe that there is a need for a child support enforcement agency. They believe that fathers who are unwilling to pay must be required to fulfill their financial responsibilities to their children. In fact, several fathers thought that the system could be too lenient, not taking the steps needed to identify fathers and enforce payments. The problem, as perceived by the participants, was that CSP is a blunt tool. Fathers believed that the CSP failed to take fathers individual circumstances and financial capabilities into account. By treating all fathers whose children receive public assistance as though they were unwilling to

pay, fathers felt that the CSP undermined its legitimacy. This perspective lent itself to broader concerns about the CSP's transparency and a lack of regulation surrounding its retention of payments.

Fathers reported preferring to use informal child support to avoid the state retaining most or all of their child support payments. They viewed the states retention of these payments as a sign that their contributions ultimately did not matter. This led to efforts to avoid the child support system among most fathers in the study. In fact, fathers who had had previous experiences with the CSP were far more likely to state that they would rely on informal support. Ultimately, the findings of this study suggest that specific components of child support policy including pass-through policies, play a central role in determining how fair and just fathers perceive the CSP to be. Perceptions of the CSP's fairness, in turn, influence fathers' decisions about employment, participation in government.

6.5.1 Existing policy alternatives. The findings of this study are relevant to the current U.S. child support policy landscape. As of 2017, all but 5 states had pass-through policies (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2017). The amount "passed-through" ranges from \$50 to between \$100 and \$200 in states that take the number of children into account (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2017). In 2017, only Illinois, New York, Pennsylvania, and West Virginia had established pass-through policies allowing families to receive up to \$100 for one child and up to \$200 for two or more children. New Mexico also introduced this policy, but only if funds permit (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2017). Despite the benefits associated with full pass-through, only two states, Minnesota and Colorado, had introduced full pass-through as of 2017 (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2017). Furthermore, nearly

half (23) states currently require child support cooperation for childcare subsidies for low-income working parents and 7 require cooperation for SNAP (Selekman & Holcomb, 2018).

6.5.2 Emerging policy alternatives. While the CSP has not shifted away from its emphasis on child support collections, it has enhanced its focus on fathering in recent years. While some policy alternatives directly address fathers' obstacles to paying child support (e.g., low wages, seasonal employment), many policies require participation in responsible fatherhood programs that are more focused on fathers parenting. Although this may be appropriate in some cases, these programs do not distinguish between fathers parenting ability and financial capacity. This is problematic for several reasons. First, because it sends the message that low-income fathers, many of whom are ethnic minorities, and particularly, African American, "lack the required knowledge on how to be a father" (Jordan-Zachery, 2009). Second, this approach reflects a failure to distinguish between family structure and family function and father involvement. This is important because we know that NRFs who are African American are less likely to have their involvement with their child negatively affected by being an NRF, it may be that these parenting classes are less appropriate for them than other groups. If this is the case, and structural racism and SES related barriers to sustainable work, etc. are more of a problem, it would be more appropriate to focus on these issues. In fact, Jordan-Zachery (2009) argues that "policy cannot focus simply on personal development while not challenging existing structures such as the child support system" (p.215).

The findings of this study suggest that a strengths-based perspective is important in working with low-income NRFs. A strengths-based perspective refers to three factors: resilience, membership, and empowerment (Higgs et al., 2018; Saleebey, 1996). Resilience describes the knowledge, understanding, and capabilities that fathers have gathered over their lives that help

them cope with current challenges (Higgs et al., 2018; Saleeby, 1996). Membership refers to fathers' roles as members of a broader community and society (Higgs et al., 2018; Saleeby, 1996). Finally, empowerment refers to the process of helping fathers become aware of their own resilience and use these skills, insight, and knowledge to navigate their lives within the context of a broader community and society (Higgs et al., 2018). Empowerment approaches are important for low-income fathers, particularly African American low-income fathers, as previous research has discovered that they are more likely to report experiencing a lack of confidence in their parenting abilities, and perceiving others as believing that they are not capable of caring for and providing for their own children (Fagan & Stevenson, 2002; Johnson et al., 1999). The findings of this study are also in keeping with those of previous research (e.g., Pleck, 2007; Roy & Dyson, 2010) suggesting that fathers are likely to be strongly influenced by their own fathers' behavior, either by emulating them or trying to engage in very different fathering behaviors. While more research is needed to explore intergenerational factors, such as fathers' experiences with their own fathers, the findings of this study build on previous findings that point to the need to take these factors into account when addressing the needs of low-income and African American fathers (Coates & Phares, 2014; Cooper et al., 2019; Roy & Dyson, 2010; Roy, 2006).

Additionally, while current policy alternatives are somewhat effective in reducing debt and promoting CS payments, they do not enhance families' long-term stability or family capital. Recently, various national organizations (e.g., National Conference of State Legislatures, the Center for Policy Research) have introduced two-generation approaches to enhancing family capital among low-income families with NRF by promoting continuing education, policy reform to increase access to programs like EITC, and supporting NRFs in seeking employment (Davis & Thoennes, 2018; National Conference of State Legislatures, 2018; Sorensen, 2016). By

promoting fathers' human and financial capital development, children and co-parents could potentially benefit long after public welfare benefits have expired.

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Appendix A: Data Sources: Governors State of the State Addresses

Year	Illinois	New York	Wisconsin
1994	IL General Assembly https://www.ilga.gov/previousga.asp	NY State Library Digital Collections https://nysl.ptfs.com	WI State Legislature https://docs.legis.wisconsin.gov
1995	IL General Assembly https://www.ilga.gov/previousga.asp	NY State Library Digital Collections https://nysl.ptfs.com	WI State Legislature https://legis.wisconsin.gov
1996	IL General Assembly https://www.ilga.gov/previousga.asp	NY State Library Digital Collections https://nysl.ptfs.com	WI State Legislature https://legis.wisconsin.gov
1997	IL General Assembly https://www.ilga.gov/previousga.asp	NY State Archives https://archive-it.org/organizations/1228	WI Historical Society https://www.wisconsinhistory.org
1998	Hathitrust Digital Library hathitrust.org	NY State Archives https://archive-it.org/organizations/1228	WI State Legislature https://legis.wisconsin.gov
1999	IL General Assembly https://www.ilga.gov/previousga.asp	NY State Archives https://archive-it.org/organizations/1228	WI State Legislature https://legis.wisconsin.gov
2000	IL General Assembly https://www.ilga.gov/previousga.asp	NY State Archives https://archive-it.org/organizations/1228	WI State Legislature https://legis.wisconsin.gov
2001	IL General Assembly https://www.ilga.gov/previousga.asp	NY State Archives https://archive-it.org/organizations/1228	WI Historical Society https://www.wisconsinhistory.org
2002	IL General Assembly https://www.ilga.gov/previousga.asp	NY State Archives https://archive-it.org/organizations/1228	WI State Legislature https://legis.wisconsin.gov
2003	IL General Assembly https://www.ilga.gov/previousga.asp	NY State Archives https://archive-it.org/organizations/1228	WI Digital Archives https://www.wistatedocuments.org/
2004	IL General Assembly https://www.ilga.gov/previousga.asp	NY State Archives https://archive-it.org/organizations/1228	WI Digital Archives https://www.wistatedocuments.org/
2005	IL General Assembly https://www.ilga.gov/previousga.asp	NY State Archives https://archive-it.org/organizations/1228	WI Digital Archives https://www.wistatedocuments.org/

Appendix B: TLC3 Study Themes Relevant to the Present Study

Individual interviews

Module 2 History and evaluation of relationship to this partner

Module 3 Values re marriage, parenthood, gender roles

Module 4 Bargaining and the Struck Bargain
Who does what for the child
Who pays for what for the child
Income and expenditure

Module 5 Policy knowledge about child support

Module 8 Future plans

References: England & Edin, 2016

Appendix C: TLC individual interview questions

Module 3: Values re marriage, parenthood, gender roles

16. What do you think that a father ought to do for a child? How much time should fathers spend with children? What kinds of things should a father do with a child?

19. What makes for a good father? Ideally, what kind of a father would you like to be for this child? Are you/Is the child's father like this? Tell me about that. How do you feel about that?

Module 5: Policy knowledge about child support

66. From what you know about the child support system, what might be good for the mother and child about using the system? What might be bad about using the system? Do you think the government is very strict and most always gets the dads to pay, or is not strict enough so a lot of them don't pay even though they should? From what you've heard, do you think they make the fathers pay too much or let them get off with too little.

If unmarried & living with one child, (cohabiting or not): **68.** Have you ever tried to use the formal child support system to get your partner to help pay for your baby?

69. Have you ever had any contact with the child support system, with this new baby or with a past child? Right now, do you have child support order or pay child support for a child?

If yes: **69a.i.** What effect does the child support system have on your relationship with the other parent?

If not married to other parent-(cohabiting or not): **70.** A lot of people tell us that the father gives money to the mother informally, rather than through the formal child support system. Does this description fit your situation? Tell me about that. Sometimes fathers give other things besides money, like they buy diapers or groceries. Does that describe your situation? Has how you deal with this formally or informally varied according to whether you are living with the father/mother of your child?

70a. What is good and bad about doing things informally rather than through the formal child support system?

70b. What effect does doing things informally have on your relationship?

References: England & Edin, 2016

Appendix D: Employment Status of Fathers Included in the Study by Wave and City

	New York City								Milwaukee								Chicago							
	W1 N=10	W2 N=9	W3 N=10	W4 N=9	W1 N=11	W2 N=11	W3 N=10	W4 N=9	W1 N=11	W2 N=9	W3 N=8	W4 N=9	W1 N=11	W2 N=9	W3 N=8	W4 N=9	W1 N=11	W2 N=9	W3 N=8	W4 N=9				
<i>Full-time</i>	4	40%	3	33%	6	60%	5	56%	9	82%	7	64%	8	80%	7	78%	8	73%	7	78%	4	50%	6	67%
<i>Part-time</i>	3	30%	3	33%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	2	18%	0	0%	0	0%	1	9%	1	11%	0	0%	0	0%
<i>Seasonal</i>	1	10%	1	11%	10	10%	1	11%	1	9%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	1	9%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
<i>Occasional</i>	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	1	9%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	1	11%
<i>Unemployed</i>	1	10%	1	11%	2	20%	2	22%	1	9%	1	9%	2	20%	2	22%	1	9%	1	11%	4	50%	2	22%
<i>Disability</i>	1	10%	1	11%	1	10%	1	11%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%