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**DOCTORAL STUDENTS' ACADEMIC AND PROFESSIONAL
NETWORK DEVELOPMENT: A COLLABORATIVE
AUTOETHNOGRAPHY OF STUDENTS ENGAGED IN
FATHERHOOD RESEARCH**

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ABSTRACT

Aim/Purpose	The overarching purpose of this paper was to examine how a collaborative working group of doctoral students from different institutions evolved into a community of practice and developmental network. Specifically, the aim of this study was to examine this group's progression from working group to support group, a process that occurred through academic support, social support, professional networking, professional development, and skill development.
Background	Although doctoral cohorts are often formed within the same school, some informal groups may develop among students in the same discipline from different schools. The authors explored how the formation of a working group, through attendance at an annual academic conference, enhanced their doctoral education and expanded their network through social and academic support.

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Doctoral Students' Academic and Professional Network Development

Methodology	The participant-researchers in this study used collaborative autoethnography to collectively examine their participation in this group formed outside of their respective schools of social work. Having worked together for over a year, meeting monthly through video calls, on a discrete project, the participant-researchers embarked on this collaborative autoethnography as they discovered their transformation from working group to support group. This group of five participant-researchers examined their own feelings about their participation in the group and the consequent benefits of belonging to such a group.
Contribution	This study makes an important contribution to the doctoral education literature about how doctoral students from different schools can form informal groups that serve as a key source of intra-disciplinary networking, resources, opportunities, and support. This contribution helps to further the research on what kinds of supports doctoral students need in order to remain in their programs and graduate.
Findings	We found that a working group of doctoral students from different schools of social work can develop into a community that can be used for social, academic, and networking support. We discovered that relationships with peers across schools provided a supportive environment that was distinct from those formed within our schools. Joining together to achieve a common research goal encouraged members to extend content-specific support. In addition, this group found that members had the opportunity to compare experiences at their respective doctoral programs, which enhanced peer support.
Recommendations for Practitioners	Special interest groups at national conferences should encourage doctoral students at different schools to form communities of practice or similar groups. This group formation may lead to opportunities for doctoral students to work on a common project (e.g., website, publication) and serve as a source of social and academic support.
Recommendations for Researchers	More research is needed on whether this relationship among doctoral students within the same discipline at different schools is equally helpful among students in different disciplines. Additional research is also needed on whether communities formed during doctoral studies can promote future collaboration as students become professors or researchers.
Impact on Society	The present study's model is applicable for use in academic settings where doctoral students convene for conferences relating to research, teaching, and practice. This model can facilitate the formation of inter-university working groups among students with similar research interests, career trajectories, and life responsibilities. Such groups can enrich peer support, promote collaboration, and enhance professional development.
Future Research	More research is needed on whether this kind of social support group amongst doctoral students can be sustained as the students transition into academic careers. Additional research is also needed on whether these types of informal groups work across research focus or whether it works best when students have the same research focus.
Keywords	doctoral students, collaborative autoethnography, social support, communities of practice, developmental networks, higher education

INTRODUCTION

Doctoral students need supportive social networks, including peer support during their time in a doctoral program (Pemberton & Akkary, 2010; Podolny & Barron, 1997; Sweitzer, 2009). Peer support allows doctoral students to build a community that provides moral support and a network of fellow scholars to collaborate with as their careers progress. Most doctoral students in the United States are members of cohorts at their home institutions. The expectation for cohorts is that their shared experiences will help them to progress through their doctoral program (Pemberton & Akkary, 2010; Podolny & Barron, 1997). As their doctoral education progresses, however, many students need additional academic and social support that extends beyond their fixed cohort, and they may become part of an informal cohort or group that comes together with a common purpose or with common interests (Pemberton & Akkary, 2010; Wolfe et al., 2018). This study explores the ways in which a collaborative group of doctoral students from different institutions came together through the Fatherhood Special Interest Group (SIG) at the Society for Social Work and Research (SSWR) Annual Conference and built their own supportive peer group.

Using collaborative autoethnography (CAE), this study examines how members of a working group of doctoral students with common research interests built their own small community that centered on a common work project and subsequently developed into a group that provided members with mutual academic and emotional support during their respective doctoral programs. This group was like Pemberton and Akkary’s (2010) notion of an informal cohort, one formed outside of the structure of the academic institution that can be a source of academic and personal support for doctoral students. This support was instrumental in the continued academic and personal development of this group of doctoral students. Members shared personal experiences including child-raising, childbirth, and a wedding, in addition to key doctoral milestones such as proposal defenses, qualifying exams, dissertation defenses, and job searches. As a group, we marked these personal and professional milestones and helped one another navigate the difficulties of “imposter syndrome,” meeting doctoral program requirements, and balancing caregiving, scholarship, and work.

This study aims to examine the following research questions: (1) How does working together on a collaborative project contribute to the development of a community of practice of a group of doctoral students? (2) How do doctoral students across different schools view a collaborative project and its contribution to their expanded network and development as scholars? This study begins at the point of collaboration on a discrete project—the creation of a website for the Fatherhood SIG at SSWR—and continues through the development of networking and social relationships among the members of the group.

The CAE nature of this study allows the researchers to examine how they view the process of collaboration with each other and their feelings about the relationships that were built over time. Specifically, CAE allows the participant-researchers to study their own contributions to the project and reflect on their own processes throughout the collaboration (Chang et al., 2013). These narratives demonstrate that the established relationships have gone beyond the typical peer mentoring relationship that occurs among students in the same institution and contributes to the study of peer-to-peer relationships across doctoral programs.

LITERATURE REVIEW

While there are few studies that focus on the work of a group of doctoral students from different institutions on a discrete project, prior research has examined peer networks and peer mentoring among doctoral students and their relationship to doctoral students’ career advancement (e.g., Flores-Scott & Nerad, 2012; Holley & Caldwell, 2012). These peer networks provide support and encouragement to doctoral students, as well as a sense of community and belonging (Podolny & Baron, 1997). Professional groups can lead to friendships that can bolster productivity and lead to further collaborations (Holley & Caldwell, 2012). In particular, peer mentoring and collaboration have been

shown to give doctoral students a supportive environment for accountability, scholarly identity development, social support, and professional collaboration (de Janasz & Sullivan, 2004; Mullen et al., 2010; Peltonen et al., 2017). Prior studies on doctoral collaborations have included topics such as academic-community engagement, doctoral writing groups, and doctoral cohort collaborative development (Reyes et al., 2020; Vacek et al., 2021; Wolfe et al., 2018).

Studies have also shown that accessing a community of peers allows doctoral students to support each other and develop a sense of shared experience (Lawrence, 2002; Maher, 2005; Pemberton & Akkary, 2010; Pilbeam & Denyer, 2009). This can occur through formal groups such as cohorts, which are formed based on students' year of entry into an academic program. However, communities of peers can also develop through informal groups that share a project, research interest, or type of personal or professional experience. While these communities come in different forms, they may have the same supportive effect. Pemberton and Akkary (2010) argue that informal groups developed outside of school or program-based cohorts can help members achieve their goals while building long-term collaborative relationships. Informal groups with members from different schools or at different stages of their doctoral studies provide benefits like those of formal cohorts—shared learning, social support and a commitment to each other (Lawrence, 2002; Maher, 2005; Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2014). Additionally, peer relationships among doctoral students allow for emotional and personal support through shared experiences that go beyond academics (Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2014). Lake et al. (2018) examined doctoral retention and found that the combination of professional and personal support among cohort members does contribute to doctoral students' motivation to complete their program. In addition, Ames et al. (2018) recommend a holistic approach to support for doctoral students in the dissertation phase, which could help to ease the isolation that influences retention rates. This holistic approach could address the skills needed for a doctoral student to finish their program like developing independent research skills, communicating effectively with the dissertation committee, navigating the financial stressors of being a student, and finding various ways to decrease isolation once students are no longer in the classroom setting.

Outside of one's home institution, academic conferences are a place where doctoral students from different institutions come together for networking and collaboration. Doctoral students have used the conference space to create new groups and to build their networking community (Chapman et al., 2009). Conferences are also a place where doctoral students increase their skills in research through presentations or through participating in workshops (Kuzhabekova & Temerbayeva, 2018).

There is a gap in the literature on how doctoral students develop and nurture peer networks across schools and programs that will carry through to their professional development. Thus, more studies are needed to examine the breadth of doctoral students' support networks. These broader networks include peer relationships, relationships with external mentors (like those facilitated by conferences), and participation in professional organizations (e.g., special interest groups at national conferences). Relationship building during doctoral studies serves as one of the key early stages of faculty career development (Austin & Wulff, 2004).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

DEVELOPMENTAL NETWORKS THEORY

Sweitzer (2009) developed the developmental networks theory of identity development for doctoral students. This theory posits that doctoral students build developmental networks around themselves to support them through their doctoral program. These developmental networks include faculty mentors, peer mentors, family, friends, and others whom the doctoral student considers instrumental to their professional development in their program. Sweitzer (2009) formed the theory based on Kadushin's (2004) social networks theory, which describes social networks as groups of people who are connected to each other. According to social network theory, these networks can be ego-centric (i.e., connected to one individual, like a group of friends), socio-centric (i.e., a group connected within a

workplace or school), or open-system (i.e., connected in some way that is not concrete, like a group of people who are connected through their status or through a common interest). Building on Kadushin’s (2004) general social network theory, Sweitzer (2009) articulated the development of social networks amongst doctoral students. For example, doctoral students within the same school may be in a socio-centric network and therefore have proximity and connection to each other and to that school. Doctoral students from different schools who come together as a network may do so as an open-system network. These students have a common connection, perhaps a field of study or research focus, and therefore form a network around that connection. Further, Baker and Lattuca (2010) noted that doctoral students with a broad network made up of peers, faculty, family, and community may experience more support during their doctoral education. We extend this idea of a broad network to include peers from other schools who have a common area of research, a networking strategy that could contribute to our development as independent scholars who seek collaborators from among a group outside of our home institution (Higgins & Kram, 2001).

COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE

Communities of practice are self-formed groups that develop out of a common interest or goal and evolve and expand through shared learning and collaboration (Wenger & Snyder, 2000). Working together on a concrete project that is meaningful to its members helps the group form its identity as a community (Brown & Duguid, 1991; Cousin & Deepwell, 2005). As a community, members exchange ideas that can lead to innovative and creative solutions to their common focus over time. In addition, the ongoing nature of the group may lead them to form into other communities of practice where members continue to work collaboratively on new projects (Brown & Duguid, 1991). For doctoral students, a community of practice may include all of the points at which the student connects with others—with their formal cohort, with faculty mentors, through workshops, and through attendance at conferences (Chapman et. al., 2009; Nerad, 2012). Doctoral students may form a community of practice with a common interest while still in their program, but that community of practice may also continue once their doctoral program ends and they are working as faculty or researchers, moving from a doctoral community of practice to a professional community of practice (Tahir & Asmuni, 2016).

METHODOLOGY

QUALITATIVE INQUIRY AND COLLABORATIVE AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

The study uses qualitative inquiry to gain insights into our experiences collaborating on an academic conference SIG project. Specifically, we used CAE to explore and understand how our collaboration on a fatherhood SIG website mutually contributed towards our programmatic, professional, and scholarship development as doctoral students. CAE, as a qualitative research approach, is “simultaneously collaborative, autobiographical, and ethnographic” (Chang et al., 2013, p. 17). When used as a social science research method, CAE leverages the self-reflexivity of autobiography, cultural interpretations of ethnography, and the multi-subjectivity of collaboration (Chang et al., 2013). To this end, we served the dual role of researcher and participant to self and group to explore our experiences in collaborating on a fatherhood website as part of an academic conference SIG project. During our self- and group-reflexivity, we leveraged our positions as participants to share our experiences from an insider perspective as well as our positions as researchers to critically interpret and interrogate our experiences. Our dialogues were positioned in the context of diverse doctoral students navigating a new academic and professional space dominated by our advisors and university faculty members. Furthermore, our contexts were rooted in our competing roles as relationship partners, parents, family members, and friends.

When deciding between methodological paradigms, we chose qualitative inquiry based upon Padgett’s (2017) seven scenarios in which qualitative research is a better choice than quantitative research: (1)

exploration from an insider perspective; (2) a topic of emotional depth; (3) obtaining a lived experience from those who live and create meaning from it; (4) phenomenon not adequately evaluated through standardized measures; (5) quantitative research methods unable to answer research questions of study; (6) merging advocacy with research; and (7) the study of complex social processes. Our study fits within each of Padgett's criteria. For example, we wanted to explore the lived experience of doctoral students collaborating on a project as a means to network with faculty and connect with other doctoral students entering into academia, and to understand these transitions from our diverse perspectives. Furthermore, the transition through each of our doctoral programs, emergence into an established field of fatherhood scholars, and the progression into each of our respective areas of fatherhood scholarship was a deeply personal and complex experience made more difficult by familial obligations, unclear professional expectations, demanding doctoral program requirements, and lingering doubts about our ability to succeed in academia (what we call "imposter syndrome") – experiences common to each of us.

The commonalities in each of our experiences paired with the benefits of CAE is what led us to selecting this qualitative approach over others. Chang et al. (2013) highlight five benefits of CAE: "(1) collective exploration of researcher subjectivity; (2) power-sharing among researcher-participants; (3) efficiency and enrichment in the research process; (4) deeper learning about self and other; and (5) community building" (p. 25). Our study organically fit within the CAE research method as we designed our study to understand our experiences individually, collectively, and equally in collaborating on an academic conference SIG project, as well as to reflect on our experiences, build equitable friendships with each other, and to foster working relationships for future research and writing collaborations. Similar benefits have been reported in other studies using CAE to self and collectively understand doctoral student experiences of conference attendance (Black et al., 2020), giving back to home communities (Reyes et al., 2020), student writing groups (Vacek et al., 2021), and cohort evolution (Wolfe et al., 2018). Furthermore, studies have demonstrated that CAE is an effective approach to conducting qualitative research remotely during the Coronavirus disease pandemic (Roy & Uekusa, 2020; Wilson et al., 2020).

RESEARCHERS AND PARTICIPANTS

At the time of data collection, each of the five of us were doctoral students from different social work programs across the United States. Geographic locations of our institutions varied from the mid-Atlantic to the Midwest to the south. At the start of the project, Author #2, Author #3, and Author #5 identified as candidates who had recently completed defending their dissertation proposals, Author #1 as a pre-candidate who completed qualifying exams and had not defended her dissertation proposal, and Author #4 as a pre-candidate who was preparing for her qualifying exams. Among us, Author #2 identified as male. Authors #1, #3, #4, and #5 as female. In terms of race and ethnicity, Author #1 and Author #5 identified as White, Author #4 as White and Jewish, Author #3 as Asian, and Author #2 as biracial (Black and White).

STUDY CONTEXT

In May of 2018, the SSWR Father Related Research (Fatherhood) SIG established a website working group charged with creating a resource hub for social work fatherhood researchers. The Fatherhood SIG is a subgroup of researchers who are members of SSWR. Members of this subgroup of scholars are focused on the same research topic—fathers and fatherhood. Members of the Fatherhood SIG meet at the annual SSWR conference to discuss father related research and participate in networking opportunities. The SIG also plans periodic webinars to highlight father related research. The website working group was formed to help further the networking mission of the Fatherhood SIG. Membership of the website working group was open to all doctoral students and faculty members in the SIG. However, only doctoral students volunteered to join, leading to the formation of this informal cohort of doctoral students who are the participant-researchers in this study. In May 2018, three

of the participant-researchers began working together on the website project. They were soon joined in the summer of 2018 by the fourth member, and January of 2019 by the fifth member. They met on a monthly basis using video calls and communicated by email in between meetings. They also met in person at the annual conference that occurs each January. After a year of working together, the participant-researchers realized that their group had become more than just a working group on a discrete project and had developed into more of a support community. This prompted them to examine their relationships further and led to the development of this paper. They continued to meet monthly and work together on the website during the period in which they collected data for this paper.

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

We adopted conventional data collection and analysis methods used in previous studies using the CAE approach (Chang et al., 2013; Ngunjiri et al., 2010). Consistent with the approach used by Chang and colleagues (2013), data collection and analysis were done through solo and group work. This work was done remotely both individually and as a group through web-based online meetings. Preliminary data was collected through a 17-question survey developed primarily by two of us and approved by the other three students. The survey was distributed by email to all five of us in September 2019. Survey responses were completed and returned in October 2019. The survey questions asked each of us to elaborate on our fatherhood research focus, our motivations for volunteering in the Fatherhood SIG website committee, our experiences working with peers at different institutions, and our recommendations for other doctoral students based on lessons learned from the process of our current group. We distributed the survey in individual Excel files to each of us via email with the instruction to complete them within a span of 1.5 weeks and submit them to Author #2 and Author #3 who were responsible for merging the Excel files and distributing them to others for coding.

We were all involved in the coding and analysis process, which involved each of us independently reading peer students’ responses to the 17 questions and discussing common themes during remote online team meetings. We all wrote memos in which emerging themes and subthemes were noted following each reading of the participant responses. These themes and subthemes were discussed during bi-weekly research team meetings, and constant comparison of each memo was utilized to reach a consensus of themes. During the coding and theming stage, we foregrounded individual and group meaning making to learn from our group experiences and ensure that both common and outlying individual experiences were included in our interpretations and understanding.

MEMBERSHIP AND NARRATIVES

As stated in the introduction, this group was formed as a working subgroup of the Fatherhood SIG to develop a website that the SIG members could use to share information and to find networking opportunities. Two members were originally responsible for recruiting the subgroup and succeeded in recruiting the other three members—two early on and one a bit later. We meet regularly over a video meeting platform and collaborated on the different parts of the site. As we continued to meet as a working group, we discovered that we had also become a source of social and academic support for one another, much like a traditional doctoral student cohort. In contrast to traditional doctoral cohorts, we were joined by our similar research focuses rather than our schools or stage in our doctoral studies.

BECKY’S NARRATIVE: PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL BALANCE

My area of research focuses on social welfare policy and families’ use of benefits allocated by state and national policies. I am especially interested in fathers’ use of work-family benefits like family leave—through their workplace as well as through state policy.

I found the Fatherhood SIG during one of the annual SSWR meetings. After that meeting, an email was sent out asking for volunteers to help build a website focused on the work of the researchers in the Fatherhood SIG. I wanted to get more involved, so I volunteered to be a part of the group. At first my main goal was to volunteer more so that I could add that to my curriculum vitae and to potentially find peers with whom I could possibly collaborate on papers or projects. I also just wanted to be more involved with the activities at SSWR as a way to build my network. For the website project, I helped to set up the section of the site that outlines policies having to do with fathers. I also am working on using the site to track membership in the SIG. I have enjoyed learning how to use the platform that we are using to build the website. I have had the chance to add to my technical skills through working on the site.

More importantly than the development of my technical skills, however, I have really enjoyed the camaraderie that has developed among those of us working on the site. While I was hoping to develop professional relationships through this project, I was not expecting to develop such supportive and close friendships with the rest of the group. This was a pleasant surprise and a positive outcome that I hope will continue as we move through our professional lives. I have found that our regular meetings give me a chance to check in with others from different schools who are going through the same process and who are experiencing similar ups and downs. A couple of us already had children when we joined the group and others have had children while being part of the group. This has led to further conversations and support around balancing the work of the doctoral program with the pressures of family life and caregiving. I have found these conversations supportive personally, but I have also found them interesting from a professional viewpoint, considering my research focus on how families balance work and caregiving.

During this project, I have at times found it difficult to carve out time for working on the website. This is reflective of the rigor of trying to get through a doctoral program with substantial caregiving duties at home. I have found that this group has been forgiving and supportive through these difficulties, and we have found ways to work on the project when we can, relying on one member who has been a leader throughout the course of the project. We have worked well together, meeting regularly, but each having our own tasks to do between meetings. I have learned that we are all doing our best to work on our parts. I have also learned that doctoral students are very busy and are doing the best they can, but that sometimes your own work gets in the way of this collaboration. I have learned that it is good to have someone who emerges as a leader ... that person moves everyone else along. It has been somewhat challenging to coordinate our schedules, but not as challenging as I would have thought at the outset.

While I have not collaborated with any other members of the group outside of this project, I am hopeful that we will find common areas of interest about which we can collaborate in the future. All of the members have been really supportive, and if we had an overlap of subject area for some kind of additional project, I would welcome the collaboration. Outside of the possibilities for collaboration, this project has helped me to develop as a scholar in that I have observed others in their scholarly pursuits and learned a lot about advancing scholarship from their perspectives. I have found it to be beneficial to hear from the others what it is like to be a student at their schools. I really hope to continue the connections I have made, either through continued friendship or through joint scholarship if an opportunity arises.

I think other doctoral students could look at our group and see that we have developed good working relationships and have developed our skills in collaborative efforts. They could also learn that volunteering for this kind of activity helps to increase your networking reach, which may lead to further collaborations down the line. It is important to have someone to serve as a leader of the group, even if that person is just the one who reminds everyone else about the goals and the timeline. That person does not have to be a leader in name, but more a leader in action. Other doctoral students can also learn that collaboration with doctoral students from other institutions helps to develop what may become long-term collaborative relationships with future colleagues, but also helps to develop

friendships that will be emotionally supportive even if never professionally collaborative. Finally, if other doctoral students see a volunteer opportunity that they think they would like, they should go for it because what you get from the experience is much more than the project itself – introduction to mentors who are already faculty members, friendships that develop from the collaboration, professional relationships that develop from the collaboration, and professional experience that is different from what you may receive at your own institution.

JUSTIN'S NARRATIVE: BUILDING A NETWORK

My research focuses on father involvement in child welfare services and fatherhood in foster care. I was first notified about the Fatherhood SIG from a faculty member at my university who is a member of the SIG. During the first Fatherhood SIG I attended, members discussed ways to connect fatherhood researchers to other interested researchers in related fields and thought a Fatherhood SIG website was the best forum for that. I wanted to help create the website with other father-focused doctoral students as a way to connect with other fatherhood researchers and learn more about existing fatherhood researchers and research. Originally, Author #3 and I designed what we wanted the website to contain as well as what we saw the purpose of the website being. After the three additional members joined, we all divided up tasks and I was responsible for adding fatherhood researchers to the website as well as existing research on fatherhood at the intersection of child welfare.

The most positive experience I have had with this process has been interacting with fatherhood researchers at various points in their career. I have been able to build relationships and collaborations with faculty that I have contacted to be included in the website list as well as faculty doing fatherhood research that are interested in the website. Since the website is featured during our SIG meetings, I have been able to talk to faculty about the website that I may not have spoken to otherwise. I have also been able to connect with male fatherhood researchers that have helped me with issues around being one of the few male fatherhood researchers navigating a space predominantly dominated by female researchers.

In terms of group meetings, it has been a challenge scheduling meeting at times given everyone's competing schedules. Additionally, I have found it difficult to find time to complete website tasks due to other obligations I have. When thinking about my expectations about the group, I primarily expected to connect with other doctoral students and faculty conducting fatherhood research. My initial goals in joining the Fatherhood SIG were to form academic relationships with other fatherhood researchers since I was coming into a research field where I didn't know a lot of people. For the large part, I have met those goals. I have been able to form meaningful and supportive academic relationships with other doctoral students and faculty conducting fatherhood research. These academic relationships have led to great friendships, meaningful collaborations, and much needed advising.

The collaborations that have arisen from my participation in the website group and with other students and faculty in the SIG has been tremendous. I have collaborated with doctoral students and faculty on a diverse range of fatherhood topics. It has also been great to collaborate in various ways such as research and webinars. I believe these collaborations with father-focused faculty and students have directly resulted from my participation in the website group. Perhaps the most rewarding outcome of my participation in the group has been the meaningful bonds I have formed with others in the group that I look forward to cultivating as we enter academia together. I have learned that in addition to our mutual interests in fatherhood research, we all have similar events in our life that we lean on each other to process. At some point, we were preparing for our qualifying exams, dissertation proposal hearings, addressing "imposter syndrome", and navigating parenthood. I have learned that we have become a significant source of support network for each other.

I consider this group, and the interactions within, as foundational in my development as a scholar. I have learned important lessons in collaborating with peers, networking, and leveraging peers for support. These lessons have made me a more grounded and stronger researcher. I have found that

having members at different institutions helped me understand how different processes at schools differ as well as how some are the same. This has helped me understand the difficulties that we have faced and how certain schools lessen, or make more difficult, responsibilities of the doctoral program. It has also helped me normalize some of the stress I feel around program obligations and requirements. In terms of my role within the group, I have largely served as a spokesperson for the website with other doctoral students to inform advisors of the site and incorporate feedback they suggest. I have also interacted with advisors around ways that the website can be used to benefit fatherhood researchers and research. I plan to stay actively engaged with group members through our website planning meetings as well as meetups at conferences. I also plan to invite other members regarding future collaborations. I believe that other doctoral students can learn that working towards a common task among doctoral students can be a meaningful way to get to know peers better as well as a valuable way to network and collaborate with more established faculty and researchers.

JOYCE'S NARRATIVE: IMPORTANCE OF CARING FOR EACH OTHER

I found the SSWR Fatherhood SIG by regularly attending the SSWR conferences and networking with doctoral students and faculty engaged in fatherhood research. I wanted to volunteer to help with creating the Fatherhood SIG website in order to build a network of colleagues—doctoral students and faculty—studying fathering and engage in collaboration and mentorship. This is how and why I got involved in the SSWR Fatherhood SIG website subcommittee.

In terms of specific tasks related to the subcommittee, I have helped facilitate and organize monthly meetings. This involves creating an agenda, recording notes, and sending out meeting minutes to team members after the meeting. With regards to the website, we all have taken a piece of developing the website so it feels like it is a product that we built together. I have taken responsibility for creating the “publication” page of the website, which includes updating the website with recent and relevant fathering peer-reviewed journals and a list of publication outlets for fatherhood research. The articles and list of journals are organized by individual topics (e.g., child welfare, child development, health/medicine). It has been really interesting to see where scholars publish their fatherhood research. Not surprisingly, it is not always in social work or psychology journals. I have noticed articles in medicine, information, and family studies.

I have benefitted from the subcommittee by being able to build relationships with fellow doctoral students engaged in fatherhood research. We all attend different institutions and being able to hear what they are working on and their progress in the program, as well as share common struggles (e.g., defending dissertation prospectus in time) have been incredibly helpful. I know that I am not the only one thinking about fathers and facing occasional challenges in a doctoral program. I have friends and colleagues who are going through similar things and that sense of camaraderie is assuring. Grad school life is way more than academics. Some of my colleagues have children and now I have a child of my own. We get to chat about parenting and work-life balance, which has been helpful.

Relatedly, I learned that relationships are more important than getting things done. I mean being productive is great (and we made a ton of progress on the website the past year) but I have really enjoyed and cherished the relationship building process, which means getting to know my colleagues and their interests as well as sharing mine. I think my colleagues have taught me the importance of caring for each other and extending kindness.

Moreover, it is great to catch up at our monthly meetings. Everyone comes with creative ideas and different skills (e.g., qualitative analysis, literature review, quantitative research) just making this group diverse and holistic. Additionally, we all study different aspects of fathering so being able to build on each other's strengths not only makes our group stronger but helps move the fatherhood field forward. Despite these differences, we built our group with common interest, goals, and vision to advance fatherhood research. Relatedly, we are the next generation of fatherhood scholars in social work so future collaboration absolutely makes sense and hope we will continue to have conversations about that. I

also very much enjoy the occasional mentorship we get (usually in person at SSWR conference) with faculty regarding the website, fatherhood research, and career development in the field.

On the other hand, some of the challenges I experienced include meeting deadlines regarding website updates and taking on a little more than I can actually handle given my current workload in the PhD program. We primarily communicate via video chat (which is amazing!). That said, finding a time that works for everyone for monthly meetings and actually taking the time to attend regularly can be challenging since life is unpredictable and things come up at the last minute (e.g., a child is sick, overlapping meetings). I also hope more doctoral students will be involved going forward and that we will set up more regular times for mentorship from a different set of faculty in the Fatherhood SIG.

Per recommendations for other doctoral students who might be interested in forming a similar group, I would say create a network of colleagues early on when they are in their doctoral program. These collegial relationships are likely to continue as students go on the job market and become faculty. Additional collaborations are likely to transpire which will collectively shape and move their respective fields in the future. Another recommendation is to have a collective project, be it a website or manuscript, that allows the group to come together regularly to brainstorm, collaborate, and build community while contributing to the field.

LARA'S NARRATIVE: SHARED DEDICATION

I was introduced to one of the members by her doctoral advisor, who knew of our shared interest in fatherhood research. Although our doctoral programs are in different cities, her program is in my hometown, so we often met when I was in town visiting. She knew that I was seeking an academic community of other fatherhood researchers and invited me to join the SSWR Fatherhood Research SIG doctoral student website group. I was excited about the opportunity to learn about others' research and what they perceived to be the key issues, gaps in knowledge, and promising emerging research in our field. In addition to the peer academic support and collaboration, I was excited about helping to create a website that would disseminate information about research, programs, and policies. My primary role has been to gather information about academic courses from different institutions and disciplines that address fatherhood. This has involved collecting syllabi that have been shared online and compiling information about professors, departments, and universities that include courses on fatherhood. In the future, I'll be working more on the policy section of the website.

Working with this group has given me the peer academic camaraderie I was seeking. It has been helpful to talk about our shared challenges in conducting fatherhood research. Part of what draws me to fatherhood research is its interdisciplinary nature, but this can also make it more difficult to connect with and learn about others' research. Our group members attend different academic institutions in various geographical regions, giving us diverse perspectives and experiences. One of the most salient characteristics of this group is its members' enthusiastic and generous sharing of resources and information about scholarships, conferences, recently published articles, and training opportunities.

I have also gained invaluable personal support from this group in the face of new motherhood during the Coronavirus pandemic. The group has high expectations of its members while extending understanding when members have experienced major life events including job searches, moves, homeschooling, societal events, and dissertation proposal defenses. We take these parts of life into account when scheduling meetings and creating timelines for our work. Despite having full schedules, we meet regularly and achieve our goals, even if deadlines have to be adjusted.

My experience as a member of this group has shown me how much a peer group of doctoral students with a shared dedication to a research area and a strong sense of individual responsibility can accomplish. Our close collaboration, realistic goal setting, and clear communication have contributed to the group's high level of organization and capacity to meet our goals despite academic and personal demands. I hope to continue to collaborate with group members as we progress in our careers and reach out to them for both professional and personal support and guidance.

JAIMIE'S NARRATIVE: KNOWLEDGE SHARING AND PRODUCTIVITY

I was initially introduced to the members of this group by attending the Fatherhood Research SIG at the SSWR Conference. As a doctoral student, I attended the SIG to gain exposure to different fatherhood research topics and methods and to network with researchers at various stages of their careers. A small group of people who attended the SIG participated in monthly conference calls to begin expanding the Fatherhood SIG website. I wanted to do my part and I offered to be responsible for researching and adding fatherhood, and related professional and research, conferences. Our monthly calls quickly evolved from strictly website building to a doctoral student support group.

The support that I have received from the group has been both academic and personal in nature. I have received emotional support through the highly stressful academic job search process, which took place during the height of the Coronavirus pandemic. The group has also provided academic support in the form of resource sharing (e.g., dissertation grants, workshops, and personal introductions) that have elevated my research skills and ability to be a productive scholar. I am the first member of the group to transition from doctoral student to junior faculty. I attempt to reciprocate the support given to me by sharing with the other members resources and insights from my experiences of successfully defending my dissertation and being on the job market.

Collaborating with individuals from different universities with different ideas, skills, and approaches to fatherhood research has been helpful in guiding how I approach my scholarly work. I think the most valuable aspect of this group has been networking, meeting future research collaborators, and meeting individuals who can connect me with research and job opportunities. Although I am no longer a doctoral student, I plan to remain closely connected with this group to make a positive difference for families through collaborative research endeavors. The group continues to grow and evolve in ways that have exceeded expectations and scholarly needs. The team works well together and does a good job of moving projects forward even though we are all busy with other commitments.

I believe doctoral students can greatly benefit from having a network of like-minded, yet diverse scholars that regularly meet. Such networks are important for a myriad of reasons. First, we offer each other support. We are a group of doctoral students who can share in each other's successes and commiserate on the difficulties of the process as well. Second, engaging with a group of scholars from different research backgrounds and universities exposes the entire group to different techniques, conferences, initiatives, webinars, funding opportunities, datasets, measures, etc. If this group consisted of individuals from only one university, the knowledge would be much more limited. Finally, this group has been important by providing opportunities to collaborate. If I have an idea for a project or want help with a project, I have a group of scholars with a variety of knowledge and skills that I can reach out to for help. As we progress through academia, publishing expectations can be daunting; it is nice to know that we have a support network and resources to help each other succeed.

FINDINGS

The narratives reflect both agreement and some variation among members of the group. The narratives and answers to the qualitative questions also reflect challenges. We agreed broadly that our working group was supportive on several levels—academic, personal, and professional. These broad indicators of support are described in more detail below in the Major Benefits section. The variation occurred when we answered questions about research focus, how we discovered the SSWR Fatherhood SIG, what led us to volunteer with the website working group, and each of our individual roles in contributing to the website's development. We noted various research interests related to fatherhood such as child support policy, family leave policy, father involvement in early childhood, fathers' role in young children's socioemotional development (specifically low-income, unmarried couple families), and father involvement among non-resident fathers impacted by challenges including poverty, involvement in child welfare services, and foster care. We became involved with the Fatherhood SIG

in various ways including being introduced to one of the members by faculty members, seeing the SSWR meeting schedule, networking with fatherhood doctoral students and faculty at the SSWR conference, and being notified by a SIG faculty member at their institution. Finally, we did encounter challenges to working together as a group across institutions. These are described in more detail in the Challenges section below.

All group members said that we decided to volunteer with the website group because we wanted to join a peer academic community. Furthermore, we were drawn to the opportunity to develop a website aimed at disseminating fatherhood research, program, and policy information. We perceived this as an opportunity to become more involved in the SSWR Fatherhood SIG, to collaborate with fatherhood doctoral students and faculty, and to learn more about existing fatherhood researchers and research. Two members were part of the initial group that identified the need for a website and wanted to contribute. Individual roles in developing the website included gathering information about academic courses about fathers and families, collecting information on father-related policies, gathering peer-reviewed journal publications on fatherhood, compiling a list of fatherhood-related conferences, creating the membership listserve, and compiling profiles of fatherhood researchers.

MAJOR BENEFITS OF WORKING ON A MUTUAL PROJECT

Results from the CAE analysis of the website development working group suggested several benefits of using joint projects to promote inter-university collaboration among doctoral students. Benefits were identified as major and minor. The major benefits outlined in more detail below that emerged from the results were related to academic support including professional networking, personal support, and skill development

Academic support

Academic support related to enrollment in a doctoral program (e.g., normalizing doctoral program related stressors) and sharing of personal and family matters that intersect with academic life. The evolution of academic relationships into meaningful personal friendships and sources of social support was mentioned in this theme. All group members noted that a major benefit was that opportunities for collaboration emerged from the formation of these professional friendships. The current paper is one such collaboration. In addition, all five group members indicated interest in continued collaborations as a group. Professional networking opportunities for the purposes of building a group of fatherhood scholars, improving fatherhood knowledge and research, and investing in individual career development were mentioned as additional benefits. Following are quotations reflecting this theme:

I have been able to talk to these individuals to get perspective, advice, and support regarding an array of topics from dissertation writing, funding sources, and potential employment opportunities.

I’ve been able to form meaningful and supportive academic relationships with other doctoral students and faculty conducting fatherhood research. These academic relationships have led to great friendships, meaningful collaborations, and much needed advising.

At some point, we were preparing for quals, dissertation proposal hearings, addressing imposter syndrome.

I know that I’m not the only one thinking about fathers and facing occasional challenges in a doctoral program. I know that I have friends who are going through similar things and that sense of camaraderie is incredibly comforting.

As each student attended a different university, a key benefit that emerged from this theme centered on the opportunity to learn about varying academic and professional development experiences at different institutions:

It is beneficial to be exposed to different processes of the various universities. It is interesting to hear about the culture and climate of doctoral work at the various universities because it gives me perspective and insight into what it may be like to conduct fathering research or to become a professor at a particular university within a particular community.

Personal support

Group members also found that they benefited from personal connections in the group as well, apart from the academic social support. Our monthly meetings begin with time for each member to share updates and personal reflections and for the group to discuss common doctoral experiences. Following are quotations reflective of this theme:

Grad school life is way more than academics. Some of my colleagues have children and now I have a child of my own. We get to chat about parenting and work-life balance, which has been helpful.

Supporting each other through life circumstances (e.g., dissertation defenses, sick children, parenting, preparing for qualification exams) while also making progress on [the] website as [a] common project.

Combined academic and personal support

Group members also mentioned social support as a pairing of academic and personal. For some, the two were intertwined, such as combining friendship with collaborative writing efforts. The comments below reflect those feelings of combined academic and personal support:

I really hope to continue the connections I have made, either through continued friendship or through joint scholarship if that is ever an option.

Other doctoral students can also learn that collaboration with other doctoral students from other institutions helps to develop what may become long-term collaborative relationships with future colleagues, but also helps to develop friendships that will be emotionally supportive even if never professionally collaborative.

Skill development

Finally, skill development related to website building and maintenance emerged as well. Collaboration skills as well as website development skills were mentioned by multiple members. The following are examples of some of the collaboration skills:

I've learned important lessons in collaborating with peers, networking, and leveraging peers for support. These lessons have made me a more grounded and stronger researcher.

Collaborating with individuals from different universities, with different ideas, skills, and approaches to fatherhood research has been helpful in guiding how I approach my work.

I have learned more about collaboration with peers.

We have developed good working relationships and have developed our skills in collaborative efforts.

Since the working group's initial goal was to develop a website for the use of the Fatherhood SIG, there were also some comments about skills around website building itself:

I have also enjoyed learning how to use the platform that we are using to build the website. I have had the chance to add to my skills through working on the site.

I tried to figure out how to develop the website...by trial and error and YouTube tutorials.

I wanted to be a part of a peer academic community, and liked the idea of working on a website that would disseminate information about research, programs, and policies.

These benefits were rooted in peer relationships that involved mutual respect and understanding rather than traditional power dynamics (e.g., faculty and student relationships). Mutual trust among the doctoral students as peers was enhanced by being in different stages or years in their doctoral programs and attending different institutions. These factors allowed the group to share resources (e.g., time, energy, and information) freely and generously. These noted benefits also translated to the values of the group's shared academic discipline: Social work. Social work's common values of fairness, equity, and inclusion were experienced by our group as we worked through this project. We tried to help each other with the skills needed to create and maintain the website and include each member in the process, allowing each member's skill sets to be used toward the goal of website development.

MINOR OR DISTINCT EXPERIENCES WORKING ON A MUTUAL PROJECT

Individual and distinct themes also emerged. These distinct experiences were not common across all group members but were notable. For example, one member noted the importance of a member assuming a leadership role focused on organizing the group's efforts and encouraging its progress. This person indicated that the presence of an organizational leader was a benefit because the leader kept the group moving along and was responsible for planning the meetings. Two group members noted their early involvement in the website: establishing the website's purpose and identifying key content. This was a distinct benefit for the group because these two members allowed for establishing the baseline for the rest of the group to join. Another member served as the main contact with faculty mentors, which involved keeping faculty updated on the website's progress, discussing ideas on how the website can be used to benefit fatherhood research, and incorporating faculty feedback into the website. The same individual's participation in the project led to formal collaborations with faculty outside of the group. The group has been foundational in this member's development as a fatherhood scholar, making them a stronger and more grounded researcher. Most members joined the group as a result of attending the SIG meetings at the annual conference; however, one member noted that they were invited to join by an established member, reflecting the different pathways to membership. For another member, participation in the group enhanced their professional development by exposing them to information about the breadth of opportunity for publication outside of social work journals.

CHALLENGES OF WORKING ON A MUTUAL PROJECT

In addition to major and minor benefits, group members experienced challenges while collaborating on the website project. These included difficulties finding additional time and energy to work on individual website responsibilities given the demands of doctoral programs and competing priorities (e.g., dissertation prospectus, qualifying exams, childcare), meeting deadlines for group projects, and coordinating monthly meeting times given group members' varied schedules. Other noteworthy challenges included not always having enough information about how to complete assigned website development tasks. Finally, while group members reported benefitting from membership in a group of doctoral students in their own area discipline (social work), members noted the lack of perspectives from fatherhood researchers in other disciplines.

DISCUSSION

This CAE contributes to the literature on doctoral students' peer mentoring and network relationships, adding the unique aspect of examining the relationship of a group of doctoral students from different institutions who came together for a discrete project. This collaboration of doctoral students from across campuses allowed the participants to form a network outside of their institutions, expanding the support network that has helped each of them to persevere in their respective programs and finish. During their collaboration, two members of the group graduated and obtained

tenure-track jobs, two members defended their proposals and are on track to graduate in spring of 2022 and the final member will defend her proposal in the fall of 2021 with a plan to graduate by summer of 2022.

The results show that our group became a developmental network, as well as a community of practice. We formed a developmental network (Sweitzer, 2009), with a common goal of designing a website to be used by the special interest group within the SSWR conference. We expanded this developmental network further by continuing to work together and supporting each other through personal and academic milestones. By meeting regularly, we were also able to discuss things like scholarships, other conferences, and publications. Our network became more than a working group. We developed friendships, collaborative working relationships, and emotional support. We became what Pemberton and Akkary (2010) describe as an informal cohort. In this case, we were joined by a mutual goal rather than entering a program together in the same year.

We became a community of practice through our mutual development of skills while designing and building the website for the special interest group. We had a common purpose and learned the skills necessary to complete that purpose. In addition, while we did not form our group all at once, newcomers were welcome and able to observe the group's process before participating as full members (Wenger & Snyder, 2000). Chapman et al. (2009) recommend that students engage in "legitimate peripheral participation" in conferences as they form communities of practice. This legitimate peripheral participation reflects the ways in which newcomers interact with those more senior to become part of a community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991). As doctoral students who volunteered to help to create the website for the Fatherhood SIG, we as newcomers moved from the periphery of the SIG to core contributors. Our interactions with the more senior members of the SIG, who were both tenured and tenure-track professors gave us insight into the community and allowed us to become more active members. We then used the SSWR conference to build this small group and enter a social-academic community outside of our own respective programs and institutions. Our experience mirrors that of the doctoral students studied in Kuzhebekova and Temerbayeva (2018) but also expands upon their findings. Like the doctoral students in their study, we found that as we approached our final years in our programs, we looked forward together, discussing job opportunities and possible collaborations together as we entered the tenure track. We expanded on these professional interactions by adding personal support of each other as we navigated the job market and collaboration as we balanced partnerships, parenting, and for the last 18 months, a pandemic. We continue to plan to work together as colleagues but also be sources of social support as we move forward.

This group became more than a working group—we developed friendships, collaborative working relationships, and an academic peer support group. We became a community of practice formed through a shared goal and common research area. While working on this paper, the Coronavirus pandemic affected all of our studies. We have conducted our meetings virtually since the group's inception. However, due to Coronavirus-related restrictions, we have had to contend with new stressors presented by working in a virtual office space—shared space with children, spouses, or other family members—as well as additional caregiving responsibilities that have come with closed daycares and school buildings. We have also had a couple of members have to navigate the job market during this pandemic and we have been able to share those experiences. While we usually meet in person at the yearly SSWR meeting, we were not able to do that this year.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR OTHER DOCTORAL STUDENT GROUPS

Our results confirm what other studies have shown about attendance at conferences—that doctoral students can use the conference to form their own group or community of practice that helps them to progress through their doctoral program and provides a peer group for further collaboration (Chapman et al, 2009, Kuzhabekova & Temerbayeva, 2018). Other doctoral student groups could learn from the process of this group coming together and working towards completing a common

website project. Building relationships with peers from across institutions in the same discipline, especially early in the doctoral program, can lead to friendships that grow out of emotional support and intellectual exchange and lead to academic and professional collaboration (e.g., publications, conference presentations) with each other and other more established researchers over time. Participation in this kind of group may yield important indirect benefits such as introduction to faculty mentors and professional development experience different from what one may get at their own institution. Because this community of practice was formed across institutions and with doctoral students at different stages in their doctoral program, it is recommended that one or two members take a leadership role to provide structure and organization (e.g., focusing on common goals, project timelines). In addition, it is recommended that this kind of community of practice or working group meet regularly and identify concrete goals while remaining flexible and adjusting expectations accordingly to accommodate group members’ personal circumstances.

LIMITATIONS

Several limitations to our study need to be acknowledged. First, the sample size is only five. A small sample size is ideal for CAE since it allows for deeper engagement with the sharing of experiences and collaboration. However, the findings from the small number of researcher-participants in our study should be interpreted with caution since it may not be representative of the broader doctoral student group in our SSWR fatherhood SIG. Second, our study relies on self-data that can be easily influenced by our individual experiences and presumptions. While we have attempted to present our experiences in an unbiased way, our study lacks the interrogation with and questioning of presumptions and potential biases among the researcher-participants. Therefore, findings should be understood through a lens of autoethnography without the additional step of critical engagement. This leads to our third limitation. Without the critical engagement of an external researcher nor intergroup critique, our study self-perpetuates our individual and group insider perspectives since as researcher-participants, we had no mechanism to hold ourselves accountable to analyzing our data through an outside lens. In this light, we should acknowledge that we self-interpreted our data and that findings may not represent other SSWR fatherhood SIG doctoral students who did not collaborate with us. Despite these limitations, the study certainly adds to our understanding of the importance and advantages of peer group support and collaboration among doctoral students stemming from conference attendance and participation in conference SIGs.

IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION

Our findings suggest that doctoral students across institutions with shared research interests can be a source of mutual support during doctoral studies and early academic scholarship. We formed a developmental network that joined for a discrete purpose. We also formed a community of practice by working collaboratively on the project; we also became a community of support as we progressed in our respective programs. Future research is needed to examine whether this group’s experience is transferable to other doctoral students. Bringing together doctoral scholars from different institutions allows for the possibility of collaborations about their common research topic and can result in a collaborative relationship that will continue to develop and strengthen throughout their academic careers. As this group plans to continue collaborating throughout our academic careers, future CAE examinations of our group could reveal how our relationships evolve. Future studies should engage in CAE with a larger number of diverse doctoral students at conference SIGs. Finally, future research should examine other doctoral student groups, specifically at different schools as well as students who are not participating in conference groups. This would illuminate whether and how these groups result in similar outcomes.

This collaborative autoethnography allowed us to look more deeply at the relationships that we built and provide a framework for how these relationships can be developed among other groups of doctoral students. This paper contributes to our knowledge about communities of practice,

developmental networks, and doctoral student retention in several ways. First, our development as a group across institutions expands on previous literature on developmental networks by examining how a network expanded to include peers from other institutions can increase doctoral students' sense of support. Second, our study improves our understanding of how such a community can form through conferences or through a discrete project. This additional supportive network involves academic, professional, and personal support and indicates that doctoral students may be able to expand their supportive networks beyond their institution. As a result, students may be more likely to find others who are experiencing similar academic and social issues (e.g., dissertation writing, balancing work and family). Students and programs could use the knowledge gained from this study to leverage additional sources of support to help students remain in their programs and increase graduation rates. This knowledge revealed additional ways through which doctoral students can extend their support network and therefore provide the support needed to finish their dissertation and move on to careers in academia, equipped with a community of possible collaborators and colleagues. This study's example of doctoral students coming together across institutions as a community of practice adds to the literature on the holistic support that can help to deter students' attrition in doctoral programs (Ames et al., 2018) and help them to build stronger support networks that can continue after graduation and into the academic workforce.

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AUTHORS



Rebecca Logue-Conroy, MSW, is currently a 7th year doctoral candidate in the school of Social Work at a mid-Atlantic university. As stated above, she identifies as a White woman and is in her 40s. At the start of the project, she had finished her qualifying exams, but had not yet defended her proposal. She earned a bachelor's degree in psychology and American Studies. She received her master's degree in Social Work from a northeastern school and while there wrote a thesis on the experiences of young mothers and their choice to breastfeed their babies. Throughout her graduate studies, she has been interested in the intersections of policy and family life and how families are affected by the presence or absence of family policy at the state and national levels. She is the mother of twins and received state benefits like SNAP and LIHEAP while finishing her Masters degree. This experience has influenced her interest in family policy and families' use of state and federal social welfare benefits to support their families.



Justin Harty, MSW, is a 7th year doctoral candidate at the School of Social Work at a midwestern university. He identifies as bi-racial (Black and white) male, in his early 40s, and is a student parent. He earned bachelor's degrees in both sociology and philosophy from a midwestern university and received his master's of social work, with a concentration in children and families, from a midwestern School of Social Work. After earning a master's degree, he worked for three years as a foster care worker in a large midwestern city. He is a licensed clinical social worker serving child welfare involved fathers and provides father-focused trainings to child welfare, foster care, and family strengthening agencies around father involvement and engagement. His experience in the child welfare system as a child as well as growing up in a low-income family has shaped his research and practice experiences.



Joyce Y. Lee, PhD, MS, MSW, LMSW, recently completed her joint PhD in Social Work and Psychology at a midwestern university and has transitioned to a tenure-track assistant professor position at a midwestern university. Her research focuses on family processes—with a focus on father involvement—that promote children’s socioemotional development and wellbeing. She is also a licensed clinical social worker in a midwestern state, with extensive experience working with children and families involved in the child welfare system. This informs a second area of research, which is to prevent child maltreatment. She identifies as a cis-gender female and first-generation Korean American. She is from a western state, where she was born and spent most of her early childhood and adolescent years. Prior to pursuing her doctoral education, she worked as a mentoring program coordinator at a youth empowerment service agency in a mid-Atlantic city, supporting children and adolescents’ academic achievement and socioemotional development. She has a bachelor’s degree in social work from a mid-Atlantic university, a master’s degree in social work and developmental psychology from a northeastern and midwestern university, respectively.



Lara Markovitz, MSSW, is currently a doctoral student in Social Work at midwestern university. She identifies as a Jewish female. She is originally from a midwestern state and received her B.A. from a midwestern university. She and her younger sister and brother were raised by their parents. Her research focuses on father involvement and child support policy. Her fatherhood research is informed by years of work as a bilingual (Spanish) social worker and case manager in a northeastern city. Her grandmothers’ experiences with public welfare programs drive her work as a social work researcher.



Jaimie O’Gara, PhD, LISW, is currently an assistant professor at a midwestern university. She identifies as a White female. She is from the Midwest and was raised in a middle class, intact family. She earned her B.S. in psychology from a midwestern university and her MSW from a midwestern university. Prior to her doctoral education at a southwestern university, she was a child and family therapist. As a therapist, she worked with primarily low-income and underserved populations. She is determined to use her clinical experiences and privilege to conduct research that is used to understand and promote resilience in her community.