Understanding Male Engagement in Child Welfare Practice

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Child welfare is an essential component of society, and agencies that ensure the safety, permanency, and well-being of children are faced with challenges in staffing, resources, and knowledge of how to properly engage communities, specifically males in rural communities. Rural communities were made the primary focus of this study due to a high number of rural communities in Pennsylvania and limited research exploring specifically male engagement in rural communities.

This study examined the rural child welfare practice as it relates to the engagement of males. The study examined, through interviews with active CWP, the barriers to male engagement, and the perceived differences between engagement with male and female family members. The study acquired qualitative data through interviews with twenty caseworkers. Through an examination of literature, this study theorized that gender bias and roles would factor in challenges with male engagement. The discussion and implications of this study will highlight three key findings: the role of sexism and cultural barriers, the importance of male engagement, and moving forward with male engagement.

It is recommended this study be used with ongoing research, and ongoing assessment efforts to implement macro level changes to practice to enhance male engagement. It is also recommended to conduct ongoing research exploring sexism and specific approaches for engagement with males.

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Preface

When I made the decision to enroll in the EdD program, I did not know what to expect except for one thing: the support of my people. The journey has disappointed throughout (to COVID-19, thank you for nothing), but my people have not. It is impossible for me to put into words everyone who has supported me, but if you feel it- you know it goes out to you. There are a few people and groups I want to shout out specifically.

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level of education. Specifically, to my colleagues in the Curriculum Department- you are a constant group of support and cheerleading no matter what.

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To my friends, my world:

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- Thank you to my #squad who step up every time support is needed and always believed I could get from #almostadoctor to #DoctorSnyder.

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1.0 Introduction

Child welfare practice is a field that never rests. The child welfare system is overwhelmed with cases and struggles with turnover rates averaging 12-20 percent annually (Boraggina-Ballard, 2021). Individuals selected to be child welfare professionals (CWPs) often come from backgrounds unrelated to social work or psychology and are not equipped to support the specific needs of families accessing child welfare services. The unpreparedness of CWPs can lead to decreased success in working with families (DePasquale, 2017). Lacking an understanding of the cultural needs of individual families often results in families not receiving the services or supports they need, limiting their success. As a result, families may stay in the system longer, return to the system more frequently, or have their family systems disrupted through out-of-home placement or termination of parental rights and adoption. This topic is essential to resolve deeply systemic issues in child welfare.

Child welfare is an essential component of society, and agencies that ensure the safety, permanency, and well-being of children are faced with challenges in staffing, resources, and knowledge of how to properly engage communities, specifically males in rural communities. Rural communities were made the primary focus of this study due to a high number of rural communities in Pennsylvania and limited research exploring specifically male engagement in rural communities. Part of the challenge in the child welfare system has been inconsistency in the priorities of CWPs and their understanding of the need for male engagement to support successful child welfare practice. Often, CWPs do not even reach out to males to attempt engagement, so active engagement is even less likely to occur. Coady and associates (2012) highlighted the

challenges presented in service delivery noting that child welfare professionals do not always engage or even contact men within families with whom the agency has worked (p.275).

Given these challenges to male engagement, the purpose of this study was two-fold: (1) to examine barriers to and facilitators of male engagement in rural communities, and (2) to explore how this knowledge can be used to inform macro level changes to increase male participation in services and supports. The cultural diversity of the populations supported by the child welfare system requires cultural awareness and responsiveness of the staff who work within the field. Current curricula for child welfare professionals do not specifically address the needs of rural communities or strategies for fully engaging men in child welfare practice. Enhanced training techniques could, if created and implemented, provide child welfare professionals with knowledge and skills to address the needs of men in rural communities through culturally competent child welfare practice. Enhancing training in the competencies of engagement, advocacy, and cultural awareness and responsiveness could result in better informed child welfare practitioners, who are comfortable identifying issues and addressing them when working with men in rural communities. The overarching goal of this study is to inform the development of curricula, technical assistance strategies, and supports for agencies to increase male engagement in child welfare practice.

1.1 Inquiry Questions

This study examined the challenges with male engagement in child welfare as guided by two inquiry questions, described within this section. To analyze the perceived barriers in place for CWP, inquiry question one examined; *What are the perceived barriers for engaging males in child welfare?* Barriers from research are explored in Chapter 2 and I hypothesized that barriers include

participation from males in service planning, unidentified fathers, and perceptions of gender norms both at the community and county agency levels. I also hypothesized that successful male engagement would have greater success through the case planning process, including improved reunification among families. Understanding how caseworkers perceive their engagement with different members of families with whom they work was important to this study and inquiry question two examined; *How does male engagement differ from female engagement in child welfare?* I predicted that the strategies used to engage males in child welfare are differ from the tactics used with female family members.

1.2 Study Context

The place of practice where this study was rooted is charged with providing training, technical assistance, and supports to county child welfare agencies. As the principal investigator (PI) leading this study, I work directly within the place of practice and possess a unique perspective on the challenges facing child welfare agencies, as well as potential educational strategies that can be employed to help CWPs in the field.

A major goal of this study is to identify root challenges to the engagement of males and identify the barriers in place preventing the successful engagement of males. The study aimed to be the foundation for larger examinations of training strategies, technical assistance modalities and ongoing supports for agencies to address male engagement concerns. The results of this study will serve as the basis for a further examination of barriers as they are observed within initial and advanced level training and ongoing in child welfare work. The results of this study will be shared

with additional departments and stakeholders within the place of practice to serve as a resource and support for ongoing research and evaluation.

This study examined practice within child welfare agencies, which provided rationale for this study to seek active CWPs for participation. The focus on rural settings for data collection allowed for a more detailed examination of the specific perceptions and barriers in those communities. The need for research in rural areas is identified as a gap in literature, providing rationale for including this is element in this study.

Male and father engagement is a challenge area consistently in federal and state assessments in child welfare. The Child and Family Service Review (CFSR) is a federal assessment through which child welfare agencies and systems are analyzed. On a national level, scores for engagement of and services provided to fathers are consistently lower than those of indicators assessing the same categories for mother (U.S. Department of Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, 2017). Knowing that challenges with engagement exist on a national level, this study serves as an exploratory examination to identify root causes for why challenges exist. This study can contribute to increased research and awareness of this challenge, allowing for innovations to occur at the agency level to improve engagement and outcomes.

From this inquiry, stakeholders at the state and local levels in Pennsylvania will be able to begin to identify issues related to male engagement in rural communities. The study can be followed with additional research and exploration into strategies to overcome perceived barriers to male engagement. The place of practice for this study will be the most immediate beneficiary of the results of this inquiry. Additional research can use existing training to attempt to identify gap areas which could support addressing root causes. Additionally, direct support professionals

who participate in the study will be able to review the results of the study and implement individual change based on the findings.

While this study began research into root causes of barriers to male engagement, the sample size of the study limits the application of the findings to a glimpse of issues facing this topic in specific regions of Pennsylvania. Additional research will be needed before the results of this study can be broadened to the entirety of the state. Additionally, I will not provide specific solutions for addressing the concern due to a need for further examination before making macro level recommendations. While next steps will be proposed, the scope of this inquiry does not support full conclusions at this time. I will outline the literature behind the inquiry, specific methods used, an examination of data themes and analysis, and recommendations for next steps to continue the inquiry.

1.3 Study Overview

The presentation of this study will be provided in the four chapters that follow. First, I will provide an overview and analysis of existing literature about rural child welfare practice, male engagement in child welfare, and male perspectives of engagement with child welfare. Within this examination, gaps in the literature and where the current study contributes to the literature are presented.

Next, I will explore the methods and approach of this study, including further examination of the basis for inquiry, the methods used for recruitment, a specific breakdown of the interview protocol, and the qualitative data analysis process. Recruitment of study participants and interviews, modified by the global COVID-19 pandemic, will be overviewed, including

limitations. Next is an overview of the major themes identified through data analysis, divided into two main areas of barriers to engagement and differing engagement strategies. The study will conclude with an overview of three key findings, including what they mean for future research and child welfare practice.

2.0 Review of Literature

Engagement in this study refers to the ability to initiate, interact, and maintain relationships with adult male family members to ensure participation in shaping decisions about needs, goals, supports, and services. Research shows that males are particularly difficult to engage within child welfare (Pfitzner et. al., 2017). Some of the challenges identified in this research include disparity in understanding of the role of father, a predominantly female child welfare workforce, and access to fathers in child welfare. These difficulties are compounded in rural communities where those communities experience significant challenges when accessing services and supports from child welfare agencies (Belanger et. al., 2007). This literature review aims to explore the challenges and barriers to engaging men in child welfare practice, describe rural child welfare practices, identify engagement processes in these communities and identify gap areas where this study aims to fill. The literature review is rooted in exploring research to understand persistent gaps in father engagement in child welfare practice nationally and in Pennsylvania, which is explored in this section.

2.1 Background of Male Engagement in Child Welfare

In 2017, a federally implemented Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) was conducted to examine the quality of the assessment, services, and practice of child welfare in Pennsylvania. The CFSR is a federally implemented assessment conducted in all states to identify areas needing improvement in child welfare practice based on a collection of indicators. The report

highlights an inconsistency in engagement with fathers as compared to that with those identified as mothers (U.S. Department of Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, 2017).

Of note in the report was the lack of parental engagement across all case types, most often with fathers (U.S. Department of Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, 2017, p. 5). Specifically, on multiple indicators, engagement and services were consistently provided at a lower level for fathers than mothers. Indicators are used in CFSR to rate the counties' ability to meet certain guidelines. Table 1 (U.S. Department of Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, 2017) examines a group of indicators where efforts by the county to engage mothers is 10-20% higher than that of efforts towards fathers. The data reflected in Table 1 is of cases where a father is known.

Table 1 CFSR percentages of effort

Indicator	Percentage of Effort: Mothers	Percentage of Effort: Fathers
Visiting with Parents in Foster Care: concerted efforts to ensure that both the frequency and quality of visitation between the child in foster care and his or her mother or father was sufficient to maintain and promote the continuity of the relationship.	77%	67%
Relationship of Child in Care with Parents: concerted efforts to promote, support, and otherwise maintain a positive and nurturing relationship between the child in foster care and his or her mother or father.	80%	71%
Child and Family Involvement in Case Planning: concerted efforts to involve mothers or fathers in case planning.	67%	48%
Caseworker visits with Parents: concerted efforts to ensure that both the frequency and quality of caseworker visitation with mothers or fathers were sufficient.	58%	45%

(U.S. Department of Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, 2017)

The challenges with father engagement remain consistent, as evident when compared with results from the 2008 CFSR. In 2008, the indicators outlined in Table 1 were all considered an Area Needing Improvement, demonstrating limited to no progress in those areas over 9 years. My

current study will aim to partner results with ongoing CFSR efforts with study outcomes to inform macro level decisions to enhance male engagement.

The literature examined for this review consists of research focused on identifying the challenges experienced by child welfare professionals experienced as child welfare professionals engage with families to identify challenges and provide appropriate and adequate services. The literature explores the experiences of rural child welfare programs and the view of male engagement in child welfare from caseworkers and father. The analysis of the literature provides a framework to examine experiences of caseworkers as they practice in child welfare in Pennsylvania. The review will be divided into three themes: rural child welfare practice, caseworker perspectives on engagement with males, and male perspectives on engagement with the child welfare system.

2.2 Rural Child Welfare Practice

Prior to examining the experiences of individuals encountering child welfare in rural communities, it is important to define rural for the context of this study. For the purposes of this study, we will consider population density as an indication of rural status for counties in Pennsylvania and will use the population density standard as outlined by the Center for Rural Pennsylvania. Based on 2010 Census data, Pennsylvania's population density is 284 people per square foot. Using this definition, 48 out of 67 Pennsylvania Counties meet the definition of rural based on people per square foot (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). These data demonstrate that most child welfare services are provided within communities defined as rural.

As indicated in the introduction to this chapter, the CFSR is the federal tool used to assess the quality of services and interventions provided by child welfare agencies. Belanger, Price-Mayo, and Espinosa (2007) utilized the results of the 2007 CFSR nationally to examine the experiences of rural child welfare agencies and their access to services and supports for families with whom they work. They note that many studies of child welfare focus their efforts on urban areas of child welfare because the caseloads are largest and provide larger sample sizes. They also acknowledge the challenges to rural research, including smaller numbers of cases, challenges with data confidentiality protocols for public data sets, and variations in definitions of what constitutes rural. A goal of the current study is to fill a gap of rural research to inform more conversations on male engagement. By accessing rural communities to understand engagement, this study will provide context of those experiences and how unique qualities of rural communities' affect engagement.

Using the CFSR assessment process posed its own challenges. While requiring each state to include rural counties in its on-site review, the process did not define rural, allowing for interpretations state by state (Belanger et. al, 2007). Small sample sizes, barriers with access to stakeholders and clients for interviews, and challenges with access to transportation for reviewers in rural counties, per Belanger, Price-Mayo, and Espinosa (2007) creates a need for more research, as their findings are preliminary and exploratory (p.7). The results of Belanger and colleagues' study reported rural issues in 46 states and Puerto Rico and divided results into the three main outcomes used in child welfare practice; safety, permanency, and well-being, as well as in systemic factors related to child welfare practice. Systemic factors affecting services were noted to include limited internet connectivity in rural areas, which impacts rural communities' ability to connect with statewide information systems. Additionally, services were either unavailable or inaccessible

within many rural communities including dental care, health care, mental health, substance use treatment, mental health and crisis intervention for children, home-based services, parenting classes, and transportation (Belanger, Price-Mayo, and Espinosa, 2007, p. 10).

Riebschleger and colleagues (2015) support the identified concerns of practicing child welfare in rural areas with challenges in accessing services, large geographic areas, limits in financial support for the communities and smaller case sizes to research needs. The study conducted by Riebschleger and colleagues focused on identifying the needs of the workers supporting work in rural communities. Many educational settings prepare social workers to engage in practice in more urban settings because they are perceived as the highest need area. Therefore, there are fewer curricula identifying and addressing the needs of individuals who are working in rural communities.

The needs of workers in rural communities differ significantly from those working in urban or suburban communities. As such, rural practice requires specific skills and competencies. Riebschleger and colleagues (2015) identify that social workers in rural communities experience the cultural contexts in those areas, including a diverse population of individuals living within these areas. Social workers report "rural challenges of professional and geographic isolation, inadequate access to formal community resources, the need to deal with dual relationships, multiple job roles, and a lack of personal anonymity" (p. S211). One of the goals of this study is to identify the rural welfare experiences, including how that experience impacts engagement efforts.

The competencies needed for caseworkers to successfully practice child welfare in rural communities were outlined by Riebschleger and colleagues (2015). Nine curriculum topic areas were identified, highlighting needed knowledge and competence areas for caseworkers to

successfully practice in rural communities including poverty, resources, trauma, cultural competency, generalist practice, autonomy and need for support, dual relationships, leadership, and university-community collaboration. For the purposes of this study, poverty, resources, trauma, and cultural competency, defined as the embrace of client groups of differing cultures and community positions, will be of primary focus because the identified study participants will be best situated to identify these components in practice. Poverty challenges parents involved in child welfare because it can be a barrier to meeting their case goals. The barriers exist because parents are less likely to be able to afford the services required or possess the availability to access services by leaving or missing work to attend appointments or visits as required by service plans (Riebschleger et. al., 2015, p. S214).

Resources have been consistently highlighted throughout this section as a challenge and understanding that challenge is essential for caseworkers serving rural populations. Much of the challenge with resources is limited availability within the immediate geographic locations. Rural communities are limited in treatment facilities, resulting in the need for additional finances for parents to be able to access the services. An essential competency for rural caseworkers to possesses is to have the knowledge and skills to access informal community supports to address family needs. Substance use is a significant issue in rural communities who do not have adequate resources to address it. Cultural competency is an additional area which needs to be enhanced for rural practice, and this overlaps with the needs to address male engagement in the practice, which will be addressed in the next section.

A study by Mathias and Benton (2011) additionally identified the need for more consideration for recruitment and retention of caseworkers for rural communities. Citing similar challenges as Reibschleger and Belanger, Mathias and Benton discuss practice differences that

require caseworkers to have more autonomy in decision making authority. Also noted was the challenge for caseworkers to maintain separate personal and professional lives, specifically if the caseworker worked and lived within the same county. A lack of separation was a cause for the need to recruit and enhance retention in these communities (Mathais & Benton, 2011, p. 284). The survey conducted by Mathias and Benton identified needs for rural communities including addressing recruitment and retention concerns, enhanced education individual to rural communities, and the need to identify and address barriers to accessing education for child welfare staff (Mathais & Benton, 2011, p. 289).

A thread anticipated in the literature, but not explicitly stated in the cited research, was the culture of rural communities as relates to societal and gender norms. A brief on rural child welfare practice identifies family and community history as an element of consideration regarding cultural competence in rural child welfare practice, however guidance on acknowledging and addressing those elements is not provided (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2012). Rather, most literature on cultural competency surrounds additionally key issues of racial and ethnic diversity in populations accessing child welfare services in urban communities. My current study seeks to identify the prevalence of the role of societal and gender norms in the engagement of males in child welfare in rural communities.

2.3 Caseworkers and Male Engagement

Child welfare professionals in Pennsylvania are trained based on ten competencies including engagement, assessment, teaming, planning, implementation, monitoring and adjusting, professionalism, cultural awareness and responsiveness, law and policy, and advocacy.

Engagement emphasizes the need to initiate and maintain relationships with family members to access services and complete case goals (University of Pittsburgh, 2018, p. 5). The competency seeks to ensure that engagement is not limited to certain team members, and instead encompasses all. It also highlights the need for caseworkers to initiate and maintain those relationships, ensuring a two-way street to engagement. The following section will examine the literature as it pertains to how caseworkers gain competency in engagement, what other competencies are intersectional for engagement, and how engagement with males can be initiated, implemented, and reinforced within child welfare practice.

Indicated in the study by Riebschleger et. al. (2015), cultural competency is a necessary area for enhancement for success in rural practice. Knowing and understanding the culture of communities and families supports caseworkers in understanding how to engagement and what strategies may work best for families. Cultural awareness and responsiveness have been identified within the Pennsylvania Child Welfare Competencies Practice Model as an essential competency for child welfare practice. Cultural competency or awareness can support the role of the caseworker when, as noted by Riebschleger and colleagues understand communities with whom they work, and how their role as a caseworker imbalances power between themselves and those with whom they work (2015, p. S217). Considering this competency in work with engagement with males, if caseworkers understand the role they play in the relationship and how cultural norms interact with the child welfare system, that can be a factor in how they engage. This same self-reflective process was encountered in other research describing the interactions between caseworkers and men accessing child welfare services. Working with individuals of different gender identities and expressions can challenge practice, self-awareness, and implicit biases.

Awareness of these dynamics can support the development of a mutual relationship and responsibility in engagement.

Before exploring self-reflection in practice, it is important to understand the perception of the role of men, as articulated in literature. Bellamy (2009) conducted an examination of literature addressing the needs of men served by the child welfare system and identified three themes: absence, unimportance, and dangerousness. Unfortunately, none of those categories fit the ideal strength-based approach for child welfare but serve as importance guidance in this study as to the motivation for child welfare engagement approaches. Regarding absence, Bellamy describes literature as addressing male participation in child welfare services as "inconsistent and fleeting at best" (2009, p. 256). While most studies indicate that there is a male playing the role of a father figure in many families accessing child welfare services, mothers are considered the heads of household for child welfare engagement.

Research indicates that males play an essential role in fathering, having parental influence, and contributing towards positive relationships with children. Those children who are consistently engaged with a supportive male figure perform better on cognitive testing and have increased confidence and social acceptance with peers. In contrast, those children without a positive male relationship have more behavioral and emotional problems (Bellamy, 2009). These data demonstrate the importance of a male figure, though child welfare outcomes and scores currently do not represent that importance in practice (Bellamy, 2009, p. 256). Additionally, much research dedicated to adult males looks at incidence of sexual or physical abuse, providing a narrow view of the role of men in child welfare. The studies do not consider the impact of male figures in positive outcomes. Bellamy considers if the perceived risk or association of male figures with sexual or physical abuse is reflective in negative outcomes related to males (2009, p. 256).

Exploration of self-awareness is a strategy used to research caseworker's perspectives on male engagement. Coakley and colleagues (2014) conducted research to identify worker attitudes and practices when working with fathers. A key question in their research sought to examine self-awareness of practices with fathers. Examination of participant demographics provides insights to use when conducting my current study. Those participating in Coakley's study included 22 females and 5 males, an uneven demographic factor that is present in much of social services. Researchers also asked about participant interactions and relationships with their own fathers growing up. Most participants (70.8%) reported having strong relationships with their own fathers (Coakley et. al., 2014, p. 3).

The Coakley and associates study provided interesting results regarding caseworker perspectives of working with fathers. The majority said overall, they feel equally as comfortable working with fathers as with mothers. Ninety-six percent acknowledge that caseworker's attitudes and behaviors can affect father involvement (Coakley et. al., 2014, p. 5). This study did not inquire of the participating caseworker what their perspectives were on challenges with male engagement. A focus of the current study is to specifically examine caseworker perspectives on barriers to engagement and will seek to identify the role, if any, caseworker biases and confidence play in perceptions of male engagement.

An additional area of examination is to look at how caseworker practices and attitudes affect father engagement. A study by Coakley and colleagues (2018) reviewed some systemic factors that challenge male engagement. Coakley and colleagues use family systems and parenting efficacy theory to hypothesize how caseworker's use of positive persuasion as a motivational tactic led fathers to putting goals into action. Family systems theory can explain how fathers accessing child welfare services and their families deal with emotional challenges and conflicts. Using this

theory, the current study aimed to understand gender roles and family norms and the role of males in family relationships with CWPs.

Parenting efficacy theory is applied to understand the significance of the role of the child welfare agency in fathers' ability to gain confidence, become and remain successful in involvement with child welfare and following case closure (Coakely et. al., 2018, p. 366). Two key components to this theory are the motivation of the parent and engagement in activity to complete goals. Using this theory, the caseworker serves as a primary motivator. The role of the caseworker through the lens of the father will be identified and explored in the next section. My current study aims to identify this role of the CWP, as well as gain their perspective on the role of males in the child welfare system.

Brewsaugh and associates explored the role of sexism in male engagement in child welfare. Sexism and the idea of gendered parent roles overlap with social identities and cultural norms. Brewsaugh and associates identified the typical Western ideal for the family as a breadwinner male and a mother caring for children. Though a shift has occurred with more fathers taking on caregiving roles, social norms and public attitudes have not shifted (Brewsaugh, Masyn, & Salloum, 2018). Caseworkers in the study conducted by Brewsaugh and associates identified favorable attitudes towards father involvement and actively attempted to engage males. My current study aims to further explore how caseworker attitudes manifest in engagement with males.

In the study by Brewsaugh and associates, hostile sexism is defined to legitimize men's dominance by viewing women as inferior, while benevolent sexism idealizes a more traditional female role, including caregivers and those responsible for maintaining the home (Brewsaugh, Masyn, & Salloum, 2018, p. 133). Brewsaugh and associates found female caseworkers had more hostility than benevolence towards men. This finding relates to female case workers identifying

that they have encountered aggressive males or those who had been violent towards women (Brewsaugh, Masyn, & Salloum, 2018, p. 139). My current study aims to identify if sexist ideas manifest as barriers in male engagement, linking male aggression to rationale for not engaging and the dominant role of woman as caregiver for reason to focus engagement on females.

2.4 Male Perspectives on Engagement

The final area of exploration in this review of literature is how males perceive engagement and interactions with the child welfare system. This section will continue to explore Coakley and associates' studies regarding agency practices engaging men, as well as child welfare workers' attitudes towards practice with fathers. Further, the section will discuss a study that asked fathers to reflect directly on their experiences with child welfare services.

Coakley and associates first examined the barriers for fathers engaging in child welfare services in their 2014 study. The perspectives provided in this study were those of the 27 child welfare professionals who were surveyed. Major reasons for a lack of father involvement with children were issues with the child's mother, substance use problems, and issues with a valid address or phone number to remain in contact. Additionally, fathers reported feeling uncomfortable engaging with the agency. The discomfort included a distrust, feeling uncomfortable working with a racially different worker, and discomfort with a female worker (Coakley et. al., 2014, p. 6). Additional barriers relate to the father's efforts towards engagement with the agency. Those reasons include not returning calls, missing appointments, not complying with visitation or case planning.

Coakley and associates additionally explored the perspectives of men in a 2018 study. In this study, 56 fathers and father figures involved in services from a child welfare agency were surveyed to gain their perspectives on involvement with child welfare services. The results of the study showed that caseworker attitudes, more than skills, affected a father's understanding of case plans and confidence to complete the case plans. If a caseworker demonstrated a positive attitude towards the goals, the fathers were more likely to achieve these goals. This finding suggests that attitude can be easier to perceive than skills. Additionally, caseworkers' abilities ineffectively communicating accurate information was a large factor in fathers achieving goals. The findings of this study can have implications on how caseworkers are trained for practice by highlighting the need to increase emphasis on relationship building in a compassionate manner to increase engagement.

Coady and colleagues (2012) conducted a study interviewing 18 fathers whose reason for child welfare involvement included allegations of physical and sexual abuse, drug use, and neglect. Positively, fathers indicated that understanding and supportive workers increased their engagement with the system. As indicated by Coakley and associates (2014) as well, the attitudes of the workers contributed significantly to these positive outcomes. Additionally, the ability of caseworkers to provide practical assistance and connection to useful resources was highlighted as a positive aspect of involvement. Parents indicated that involvement in family meetings, mental health treatment, legal support, and parenting support were all supports that increased success for fathers. As indicated earlier when discussing the barriers in rural communities, service availability can challenge these successes in some areas and must be consistently assessed. Fathers also noted that child welfare involvement provided a wakeup call to them, which provided the motivation

needed to address challenges in their lives to ensure permanency for their children (Coady et.al., 2012, p. 279-280).

In contrast, if caseworkers were perceived by fathers as being uncaring, not compassionate, and unprofessional, fathers felt disinclined to participate or engage with the worker. Some fathers felt that they experienced prejudice as a function of their gender. noted prejudice against fathers which they felt was rooted in their gender. Additionally, fathers perceived that instances of violence were often viewed in a one-sided manner, with the male being to blame and the female as victim. The final negative attribute was the experience that the child welfare system was unresponsive, uncaring, and rigid. Fathers noted that it took a significant amount of time for issues to be addressed and response times were not quick enough. Fathers discussed the rigidity of service plans as a barrier to success, making them leap through hoops to satisfy the requirements of the agency. Even if they did not agree with the interventions, fathers were made to feel like they had to do everything the agency (Coady et.al., 2014, p.282).

2.5 Summary

Addressing the needs of rural communities and engaging men in child welfare practice are areas for development. The consistent low scoring in the CFSR assessment for engagement is an area of concern for Pennsylvania. Additionally, most Pennsylvania counties are rural, compounding difficulty supporting families. This study, rooted in the literature provided, examines the experiences of child welfare professionals in Pennsylvania as they engage men in rural communities. The reported experiences of men provided through the literature will provide a

framework to assess the strategies, barriers, and self-awareness of caseworkers in practice in Pennsylvania.

3.0 Methods

This study examined the rural child welfare practice as it relates to the engagement of males. The study examined, through interviews with active CWPs, the barriers to male engagement, and the perceived differences between engagement with male and female family members. While the study enhances previous findings, the results will require additional research prior to proposing macro level systemic changes. This section will outline the basis for research, context of the study, interview protocols and rationales, and will conclude with an overview of data analysis procedures.

3.1 Inquiry Questions

This study was guided by two inquiry questions, which provided focus for interview questions and a basis for theming in data analysis. Inquiry question one examined; *What are the perceived barriers for engaging males in child welfare?* Two sub-inquiries were considered within this main inquiry: How do those barriers manifest in casework practice? What strategies have been attempted to contest the barriers? What does it look like when engagement is successful? It was anticipated that barriers may include some elements of implicit bias for the caseworker, including stigma associated with males as perpetrators in child welfare. This bias can lead to additional challenges and distrust of both caseworker and agency. (Coakley et. al., 2014). Using a scenario and discussions of barriers or challenges, this research helps to identify what barriers exist, as well as the benefits of working towards the reduction of the barriers to increase positive outcomes.

Inquiry question two examined: *How does male engagement differ from female engagement in child welfare?* Further examination studied: Do caseworkers work differently with male members of a family with whom they are working than with female family members? What do efforts to engage look and sound like when working with male family members? It was predicted that there would be a difference in engagement techniques when engaging with males compared to females and when identifying services, resources, and kin options. It was also anticipated that the strategies used to engage males in child welfare will differ from the tactics used with female family members. As noted in the review of literature, males perceive that at times caseworkers do not even attempt to engage them in case practice. It is hypothesized that given a scenario and discussion, caseworkers will differ in engagement techniques for male engagement and efforts in contrast to female engagement. Engagement efforts encompass the inclusion of males in case planning, identification of all male supports, and assessment for all relevant services.

3.2 Study Context

The study was conducted through the Child Welfare Resource Center in partnership with the Office of Children, Youth and Families, Pennsylvania Children Youth Administrators, and University of Pittsburgh School of Social Work. The study was conducted by accessing caseworkers through Administrators of Child Welfare Agencies. The Principal Investigator (PI) for the study works within the curriculum development unit of the Child Welfare Resource Center and works in the creation of curricula on engagement within child welfare. The development of the recently launched Foundations of Pennsylvania Child Welfare Practice integrated new and advanced skills-based methodologies of which the PI was involved in the creation.

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This study is rooted in epistemology and assumptions about how caseworkers receive knowledge and apply knowledge in their practice in Pennsylvania. The Foundations of Pennsylvania Child Welfare Practice certification series concludes with the assumption that caseworkers have achieved the level of knowledge and skill they need to conduct their work in the field. The series includes work to be done in the field to immediately apply knowledge. The series does not and cannot account for all scenarios caseworkers will encounter in the field and does not specifically address engagement with males accessing services through child welfare agencies. The study aims to identify the perspectives of caseworkers and identify their perceived barriers to engagement.

3.3 Participants

Participants for the study were individuals working for child welfare agencies throughout the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania in a caseworker position. The study aimed to interview individuals who have completed the recently launched Foundations of Pennsylvania Child Welfare Practice however, due to time constraints of the study the launch of the curriculum occurring close to the time of data collection, and the temporary pause in offering the certification series due to COVID-19, interviews were also conducted with individuals who completed the previous certification series, Charting the Course. Individuals were asked to identify their length of service, and interviewing was limited to individuals employed for more than six months to ensure that those being interviewed carry a caseload. The PI provided recruitment criteria for those who have completed Charting the Course, rather than Foundations of Pennsylvania Child Welfare Practice

as: 1. Working in the county in a caseworker position 2. Currently carrying an active caseload 3. Employed six months or longer 4. Willing to participate in the research study.

To recruit participants for this study, the PI partnered with individuals in the Organizational Effectiveness (OE) department of CWRC to identify counties that may have had interest in participating in the study. Once identified, the PI emailed (Appendix A) six rural county administrators to begin the recruitment process. The PI identified four interested counties from initial outreach and was provided contact information for individuals in the agency to recruit individual caseworkers for participation. Recruitment for this study was temporarily halted in March 2020 when the COVID-19 pandemic forced the shutdown of offices and a large shift in child welfare practice. Agencies were temporarily unable to commit their staff to the study. When recruitment resumed, three counties provided contact information for a total of 30 caseworkers. Identified caseworkers were emailed (Appendix B) to schedule interviews. All interviews, initially planned for face to face, were modified to occur on web-based video conferencing software. Twenty interviews were scheduled for caseworkers representing three rural counties in Pennsylvania. The remaining ten caseworkers did not respond to email inquiring about scheduling.

The study was conducted through interviews of 20 CWPs from three rural counties in Pennsylvania. Active CWPs are defined in this study as individuals who have completed foundational training and are currently carrying a caseload of two or more families. Additionally, recruitment specifically targeted individuals who are considered 'ongoing' workers who support families currently receiving support and services through the agency. Recruitment did not screen for cases actively involving or with the likelihood for male engagement to occur. The study aimed to include male, female, and/or individuals identifying as non-binary.

3.4 Data Collection Procedures

Communication and consents for the study indicated that research was being conducted on engagement efforts of child welfare caseworkers but did not indicate specific intention to examine engagement with males to reduce influence on responses in the interview. The consent form (Appendix C) was emailed to all participants in advance of interviews and was reviewed verbally at the time of the interview with verbal consent recorded and documented. No participants denied consent or withdrew consent throughout the study.

The demographics form (Appendix D) consisted of demographic information including gender, level of education, years of service in child welfare, location of current and any past child welfare work, and background information on motives for entering child welfare field. The demographic information was collected to support me in exploring gender difference, and to understand root motivations for working in child welfare. Participants were asked to indicate their gender identity as male, female, or non-binary. I acknowledge that gender identification occurs on a spectrum. For the purposes of this study, different genders are presented as binary, as no study participants or families discussed identified outside of the gender binary.

Additional information was collected on the level of education and educational background to be able to analyze if those factors contribute to differences in engagement. Finally, information was collected on duration of employment and identification of what certification series was attended. Collecting this information allowed me to analyze if experience contributes to an increased level of comfort with engagement and if those experiencing different types of training, expressed high levels of confidence in engagement.

The interview (Appendix E) asked participants to reflect on a scenario and identify the steps they would take to address a specific concern. The scenario explored the instincts of child

welfare professionals to make certain case decisions with the information presented. Participants were randomly assigned to Group A and Group B, which determined the scenario they were presented. Participants were then asked about their experiences with male engagement and what challenges they have faced when discussing certain topics with males. They were additionally asked to provide their perceptions on the differences between engaging males and females throughout different service areas.

Participants were asked to take part in an interview, which was recorded for transcription and coding purposes. Participants are not identified within the study by name or specific county and are instead identified by participant number, gender, and county class size. The interviews were conducted one on one with me and the participant involved. I documented notes and set up all audio recording devices. The interviews were all conducted and recorded using a web-based video conferencing system due to the ongoing global COVID-19 pandemic.

3.5 Data Analysis

The interviews were transcribed manually into word documents and uploaded into NVivo 12 Pro, a qualitative analysis program. The analysis of results from this study involved examining data from demographic and engagement-related interview questions. I sought to identify differences in engagement techniques based on the gender of the family member with whom they were engaging. Analysis aimed to identify if challenges or barriers are similar with both male and female family members or if there are differences in perceived challenges. Also of interest were the gender of the caseworker, the type of educational program, and the certification series attended.

Analysis was conducted broadly and narrowed within the two inquiry questions to look at barriers to engagement, and differences in engagement. Additionally, categories of ideal engagement and techniques to support growth in understanding engagement were added due to prominence in responses. To address the research questions, four rounds of coding were conducted, with each round narrowing into the themes presented in Chapter 4. To identify themes, I looked at references to identified topics, meaning the number of times a topic was mentioned by an interviewee. Those topics were elevated to become major themes and subthemes for the presented findings. In Chapter 4, I will present the data analyzed and in Chapter 5, I will identify key findings and connections to literature.

3.6 Limitations

This study was impacted significantly by the COVID-19 global pandemic. My intentions were to conduct all interviews face to face, providing an opportunity for engagement with study participants. Interviews conducted by web-based video conferencing were adequate for the purpose of the study, however they were interrupted frequently due to internet connectivity challenges and study participants engaging from their home environments with confounding obligations occurring simultaneously. I hypothesize that these factors potentially reduced engagement in the interview and in providing adequate opportunities for participants to focus on the interview questions in depth.

An additional limitation of this study was the ability to specifically recruit individuals within the analysis levels. This includes recruiting individuals from specific gender identities. Most study participants identified as female versus male due to the nature of the demographics of

those employed in child welfare. Additionally, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, I was only able to obtain participants from three counties and the distribution of participants was not uniform among participating counties.

In the implementation of the interview protocol, further limitations affected analysis and the presentation of research. The scenario was developed to assess responses to hypothetical situations to prime the participants for thinking about engagement; however, rather than respond to the situation, participants predominantly responded with anecdotes about their actual experiences with specific families. As such, it was difficult to identify if their responses were linked to the hypothetical scenario or their lived experiences. Additionally, when discussing case situations on the successful engagement of males, much of the responses focused on what the male did, versus what the CWP did to make the engagement successful. This limited what could be taken for application to practice, however the implications of these results will be discussed in key findings.

3.7 Conclusion

The methods approach for this inquiry involved multiple steps of study and analysis. Initially, recruited participants were only partially informed of the full scope of the study in order to avoid biasing their responses. Following introductory sections of interview, including demographics and responses to a scenario, participants were informed of the focus on male engagement. I hypothesized that engagement with males would differ from that of females. Additionally, I hypothesized that strategies and perceived barriers for engagement with males would show difference between gender in child welfare practice. The analysis provides

opportunity to examine broad themes within the inquiry as well as specific demographic effects. While a diverse sample was ideal for this study, limitations due to a global pandemic and county availability to participate challenged recruitment and implementation of the interviews throughout the study.

4.0 Findings

Throughout this section, findings will be presented on demographic data of participants, analysis of barriers identified, and a discussion of the differing strategies used to engage males.

4.1 Demographic Data

Study participants consisted of 20 caseworkers of varying levels of experience and from three rural counties. A county was considered rural if its population density was below the statewide average density of 284 people per square mile, as defined by the Center for Rural Pennsylvania. Profiles for the specific counties will be provided later in this section.

Study participants were asked to identify their tenure at their agency from a range of options, as indicated in Table 2. Of interest within the study were the educational backgrounds and child welfare certification series attendance of the participants. The participants involved in this study demonstrated the variety of areas of study typically seen in child welfare agencies. Additionally, examined through the demographic inquiry was a determination of the certification course taken by each study participants to work as a caseworker in Pennsylvania. All caseworkers are required to attend 120 hours of training to become a certified direct service provider in Pennsylvania. The certification training, conducted through the Pennsylvania Child Welfare Resource Center, has undergone major revisions on multiple occasions to update best practice in child welfare and adult learning principles. The most recent revision launched in July 2019. The certification program shifted from an in-person synchronous, ten module series known as *Charting*

the Course, to a ten module hybrid format series with a combination of asynchronous online modules and synchronous, instructor led modules which include Team-based Learning™ and simulation-based training known as *Foundations of Pennsylvania Child Welfare Practice* (Foundations). All demographic information is featured on Table 2.

Table 2 Participant Demographic Information

Variable (n=20)	%
Gender Identity	
Male	20
Female	80
Non-binary	0
County Class Size	
Class 4	70
Class 5	10
Class 6	20
Tenure	
6-12 months	20
1-3 years	45
3-5 years	25
5-7 years	5
7-10 years	0
10 + years	5
Educational Background	
Master's Degree	25
Bachelor's Degree	75
Social Work, Psychology, or Sociology	50
Criminal Justice or Criminology	30
Other	20
Certification Course	
Charting the Course	65
Foundations	20
Other	15

Study participants were asked to provide estimates of their work with adult males and adult females throughout their careers. Affecting the caseload numbers included tenure length and work focus with intake workers, those who screen and initiate cases for the agency, serving more families overall compared to those working in ongoing or permanency units within their agency. Estimates were predominantly higher for those working in intake and those who had been with their agencies over one year. Twelve participants indicated having worked with more females than males in families overall, citing a lack of access to fathers, incarcerated fathers, and unknown paternity.

This study examined the profile of the counties for whom study participants work. The study included three counties, representing the diversity of rural communities in Pennsylvania. All data provided in this section are rounded to provide anonymity for participating counties. Counties within this study are identified by class size. In Pennsylvania, counties are separated into eight class sizes, with first class including counties with a population over 1.5 million and eighth class including counties with population under 20,000. The participating counties in this study are classified as fourth, fifth, and sixth class. Table 3 provides rounded data for the three participating counties.

Table 3 County Statistics

	County 1	County 2	County 3
Geographic Location	Southwest	Southcentral	Northeast
Class	Fourth	Fifth	Sixth
Area	900 sq. miles	500 sq. miles	1100 sq. miles
Population	210,000	100,000	40,000
Racial Distribution			
White	94.0%	93.0%	97.0%
Black	3.0%	1.0%	1.0%
Other	1.0%	4.0%	1.0%

Two or more	2.0%	2.0%	1.0%
Employment	59.0%	60.0%	53.0%
Poverty Rate	9.0%	8.0%	13.0%
Median Earnings **(Full Time, year round)**			
Males	60,000	50,000	45,000
Females	40,000	40,000	35,000

(United States Census Bureau, 2021)

The geographic and population differences demonstrate the diversity of communities who meet the definition for rural in Pennsylvania. In addition to the data presented, this study examined the industries of employment in each area, as well as the proximity to major urban areas of Pennsylvania. For the purposes of this study, Philadelphia, Harrisburg, and Pittsburgh were considered the major urban areas. Distances were calculated from the geographic center of the county to the geographic center of the urban area.

County 1, a fourth-class county, represented the largest rural county in the study with a population over 200,000. County 1 is located approximately 35 miles from Pittsburgh, 210 miles from Harrisburg, and 310 miles from Philadelphia. The average commute for individuals working in County 1 was 30 minutes (American Community Survey, 2019). Most individuals, 80%, commute alone to work. The five most prevalent work industries in County 1 are Healthcare, Retail/Trade, Manufacturing, Construction, and Accommodation/Food Service (Center for Workforce Information and Analysis, 2021).

County 2, a fifth-class county, represented a medium sized rural county in the study with a population around 40,000. County 2 is located approximately 200 miles from Pittsburgh, 40 miles from Harrisburg, and 150 miles from Philadelphia. The average commute for individuals working in County 2 was 30 minutes (American Community Survey, 2019). Most individuals (82%)

commute alone to work. The five most prevalent work industries in County 2 are Manufacturing, Healthcare, Accommodation/Food Service, Retail/Trade, and equally Construction and Agriculture/Forestry/Fishing and Hunting (Center for Workforce Information and Analysis, 2021). County 3, a sixth-class county, represented the smallest rural county in the study with a population over 100,000. County 3 is located approximately 225 miles from Pittsburgh, 150 miles from Harrisburg, and 250 miles from Philadelphia. The average commute for individuals working in County 3 was 25 minutes (American Community Survey, 2019). Most individuals (81%) commute alone to work. The five most prevalent work industries in County 3 are Healthcare, Retail/Trade, Manufacturing, Accommodation/Food Service, and Transportation/ Warehousing (Center for Workforce Information and Analysis, 2021).

The findings of this study will be presented in two categories: barriers to engagement and differing engagement strategies. Within each category findings will be detailed in identified themes including logistical concerns, differences in personality, cultural and gender norms, and caseworker characteristics. Additional factors of note, such as differences in reporting based on gender, educational focus, and certification will be presented as applicable to each theme.

4.2 Competence with Males

Before specifically asking questions about the barriers, study participants were asked to provide a rating for how competent they feel working with adult males and adult females to identify if there was a perceived higher competence with females than male. Table 4 shows the rating for each participant and the overall average rating per gender.

Table 4 Percieved Competence Engaging Males and Females

Participant Number	Gender Identity	County Class	Competence with Males	Competence with Females
		1- not at all competent, 5- extremely competent		
1	Female	Sixth	5	5
2	Female	Sixth	3	4
3	Female	Sixth	4	4
4	Female	Sixth	5	5
5	Female	Fifth	4	4
6	Female	Fourth	5	5
7	Female	Fourth	4	5
8	Male	Fourth	4	4
9	Female	Fifth	3	3
10	Female	Fourth	4	4
11	Male	Fourth	4	4
12	Female	Fourth	4.5	4.5
13	Female	Fourth	5	5
14	Female	Fourth	4	5
15	Male	Fourth	5	5
16	Male	Fourth	4	3
17	Female	Fourth	4	4
18	Female	Fourth	3.5	4.5
19	Female	Fourth	4	4
20	Female	Fourth	3	4
Average Competency Rating			**4.1**	**4.3**

Overall, participants noted similar competence with males and females. Six participants rated differences in competence, with five female participant identifying higher competence with females than males and one male participant identifying higher competence with males.

Participants who identified differences in their competence levels consistently felt more competent working with clients having the same gender identity as themselves. Some participants were able to clearly articulate why working with one gender was less challenging than the other.

Part of it is my own personal biases. I've always tended to be able to better communicate or connect better with females. I don't know if it's that I don't know what to talk about or what. I think I just connect better with females and I'm able to engage them more (Participant 2, female, sixth-class county)

I would say I struggle most with males because a lot of my situations have been DV [domestic violence] and they have been against a female. So mostly there have kind of been a barrier built up and I struggle to overcome that barrier. Often times when I go into families homes now, I have mostly females. They are easier to bond with and talk about things you like. They are easier to you know, engage with sometimes. Not all, but most of the time (Participant 14, female, fourth-class county)

I seem to better communicate more effectively towards men because sometimes… you know there's two sides to every story. I felt stigmatized not too long ago and I see the same thing continuously happen to some adult males that I work with where like you know this person is saying one thing about this person, and they don't have anyone in their corner. So like, I can kind of relate to that in some ways. I seem to get more pushback from females than I do from men for some reason. (Participant 16, male, fourth-class county)

4.3 Barriers to Engagement

Through analysis, four themes emerged related to inquiry one of barriers to engagement: logistical challenges, cultural and gender norms, personality attributes of adult males, and characteristics of caseworkers. Within each theme, analysis was broken down to sub-themes and considered in relation to caseworker gender, caseworker educational background, and certification series. A charted summarization of barrier concerns is provided in Appendix G, Table 8**.**

4.3.1 Logistical Challenges

For the purposes of this theme, logistical challenges include any challenges faced by study participants in accessing adult males or fulfilling service needs to adult males accessing child welfare services. Logistical challenges were indicated as a major barrier to male engagement by 70% (14) of study participants. Within the area of logistics, there was not a significant difference in study participants based on their certification training or educational programs. 75% (12) of interviewed female caseworkers reported logistical concerns as a barrier, as compared with 50% (2) of male caseworkers. Themes within logistics, listed in order from most frequent to least frequent included, father availability, father accessibility, locating known fathers, unidentified fathers, and access to resources.

One study participant indicated a concern about lack of services specific to males and one other study participant identified challenges with a lack of transportation for males to access services. Of note, almost half (6) of the 14 participants citing logistics as a concern indicated time, or father availability, as a barrier to engagement. Participant commentary on male availability is noted in Table 5. Male availability was connected to many of the barriers addressed related to

gender and cultural norms of males, specifically working to financially support a family, which

will be discussed in more detail in section 4.2.2.

Table 5 Male Availability

Participant Number	County Class	Commentary on Male Availability
5	5	*Moms are available more often- men tend to be working*
6	4	*A lot of men are worried about how they get everything done when they're working.*
7	4	*I think the hardest things about males would be to get services whenever they are home*
8	4	*Using work as an excuse, don't want to meet on weekends because that's "their time."*
17	4	*They're working*
20	4	*Employment- they are at work. It is hard to set up scheduled visits for them.*

The second grouping of themes includes accessibility to, locating, and identifying fathers.

The two most cited barriers in this grouping were accessing and locating fathers, with seven study

participants citing each of these barriers. Accessibility of fathers was broken down more with

discussions of mothers blocking access to fathers in four examples, and incarceration identified in

three interviews. Locating fathers invoked feelings of frustrations in interviews. In all seven cited

instances of locating as a barrier, the study participants expressed challenges knowing the identity

of the father but being unable to locate the father or having maternal family members intentionally

withhold information about the father.

Finally, two study participants identified resources as a logistical barrier. The two notes of

resources were two different concerns, one specific to services for men, while the other discussed

transportation. The study participant who identified transportation concerns was in the smallest

study county and noted:

A lot of them don't have vehicles. And some, even if they do have vehicles don't have valid

driver's licenses so transportation is a barrier for some of the services. Like I said we live

in a rural area so our public transportation services are limited as well (Participant 3,

female, sixth-class county)

With the smallest population, but largest geographic area of all participating counties, it was of

note that transportation was only indicated one time, by one individual in the county.

4.3.2 Cultural and Gender Norms

Identification of cultural or gender norms was the most frequently identified barrier

identified in interviews with 75% (15) of interviewed caseworkers identifying a barrier in this

theme area. Across all interviews there were 72 references to barriers. There were 48 total

references of a cultural or gender norm barrier, representing 67% of all barriers referenced during

interviews. Males represented 20% of the 48 mentions of cultural and gender norms. Female study

participants represented 80% of cultural and gender norms references. Of those study participants

referencing cultural and gender norms, 53% (8) of participants held social work, psychology, or

sociology degrees, 27% (4) of study participants held criminology degrees, and other degree

concentrations represented 20% (3) of participants reporting barriers in this theme.

The mentions in this theme surrounded three main areas: culture, family structures

engrained with societal gender norms, and gender stereotypes. The cultural element of this theme

was presented with commentary around the influence of community and upbringings on how males

take on roles within the family. Pride was mentioned in 25% of all interviews, with a secondary

association in all examples with masculinity or stigma associated with being a man and not needing

help. Additionally, there were four mentions of upbringing as a factor affecting engagement. The

perception presented by study participants was that males felt they were doing better for their kids

than their fathers did for them, so everything was okay. Others mentioned the need to break family history of physical discipline and feelings of "being a man".

Throughout the interviews, rural culture emerged as a theme. Participants reflected extensively on their communities always having been this way, with limited changes in their belief systems over time. The following quotations represent a sampling of how culture presented in interviews.

I think women tend to struggle with self-reliance. It's still very much a two-household situation, whether it's a good or bad situation women tend to rely more on men to take care of them still (Participant 1, female, sixth-class county).

It's a very old-school mindset and I never thought in the 21st century that we would be in this situation, given all the advancements we've had. But there are still people out there who believe the girls should be in the home taking care of the kids and the house and all of that and the guys should be working. A lot of our providers are female-oriented as well, and if they don't click, there can be issues with individual service providers. That's not something I get from guys (Participant 8, male, sixth-class county).

I would say it's a gender thing and the way society makes DV [domestic violence] look. There are issues that society has made DV look. I'll give you an example. A male should always hold a door for a female or always pay for dinner. Those are things that I believe that society has created from a long past history and just keeps going (Participant 14, female, fourth-class county)

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Participants were not specifically prompted within the interview to identify how to address cultural norms, but when asked how to increase male engagements, no participants identified a need to address cultural norms.

Five study participants presented the perception that it is more acceptable for women to acknowledge and accept help. One participant describes this barrier:

So many males are raised being told 'don't cry' brush it up and get up. A lot of them carry that through life and don't know how to ask for help when they need it. They are told they must be the stronger individual to prove themselves. It starts as a child- drug and alcohol, poverty is passed down. They are told they have to figure it out and do it on their own. Another reflected specifically on family discipline:

I have noticed that in some cases it is harder for males to understand why their way that they were brought up is not ok in society to raise their kids that way. You can't send your kid out to get a switch by a tree branch. That's not acceptable in this day and age but some of my dad's day and age it was ok. That's what their parents did to them and they survived.

Study participants confirmed what was hypothesized in this study: that gendered beliefs factor largely into engagement. Though study participants highlighted the importance of the male role, it was clear in interviews that a cultural perspective on gender factored into what they perceived as barriers.

The parental or family situation factored into the cultural and gendered themes because much of the commentary from study participants was embedded in societal gender norms. Perceptions of gender roles were present with the role of the father in the household described as the individual working outside of the home while the mother was home with the children and more available to access services. Table 6 highlights commentary about family structure and how gender factored in engagement.

Table 6 Family Structure

Participant Number	Gender Identity	Class Size	Commentary on Family Structure
1	Female	Sixth	*I think women tend to struggle with self-reliance. It's still very much a two household situation, whether it's a good or bad situation women tend to rely more on men to take care of them still.*
10	Female	Fourth	*If they haven't been involved, getting them up to speed, so to speak, with what's going on. And getting them to realize that they could play a part in this even if they don't want to necessarily be a fully-engaged parent.*
11	Male	Fourth	*Parents of younger kids, moms are usually home while dads are working. A lot of time home repairs and dependent on dads hours. Have to push the females in the home to make the males understand what needs to get done* *Females overall are more involved with the kids life-stay at home moms. Dads are working, want a timeframe are busy/frustrated, doesn't see an issues. Fathers aren't always involved. They want to be involved but then they have to take all these steps to get involved.*
12	Female	Fourth	*I think the females are the primary caregivers so they feel like they have to work with us. It's not really an option. This is my kid and I have to do what I have to do. Where as the dads if they are not the primary caregiver they may not feel like it is anything they even have to bother with.* *I think just in general, I hate to stereotype, especially if the mother is the primary caregiver and they feel like they have to because we are there.*
17	Female	Fourth	*I think because it's more often times than not that the mom has the child. So if there's behavioral issues with the child or mental health with the child, we really have to work on mom saying "Okay we have to, you have to work with this service and you have to make sure you get to this appointment. More often than not it is mom's responsibility. We put more pressure on the mother than the father when it comes to goals or services or whatever*

Linking to the logistical concerns mentioned previously, caseworkers indicated males cited work as the reason they did not have time to engage or meet with caseworkers. In eight instances, females were described as the primary caregivers in homes, with males being optional to engage

because the children are with the females who are in the caregiver role. Consideration should be given to making accommodations to meet the needs of fathers while considering changes in the culture surrounding the male role in the family and society. There is opportunity for expansion of how we meet the needs of fathers, with one caseworker noting:

> *I do find lately that it's been pretty beneficial to do things with teleconference, so dad can participate on his way home from work. He can just put it in hands-free and just chat while he's going and just talk about things, or on his lunch break, you know, step away from the group and have his drug and alcohol interview. So being able to work with the schedules of the males is something I think that needs to be tweaked a little bit (Participant 7, female, sixth-class county).*

The final element of this theme included gender stereotypes. Many instances of gender stereotypes involved the emotional level and engagement of males versus females. In half of those references coded for gender stereotypes, it was mentioned that females are more emotional and cry more than males. In ten out of 12 references to gender stereotypes the barrier of admitting to needing help, insult to pride in accepting services, and not believing in getting help were prominent. These factors should also be considered in conjunction to the commentary provided to culture. It is essential to consider the role culture plays in impacting stereotyping of individuals based on gender.

4.3.3 Personality Attributes of Adult Males

Personality attributes were identified as barriers by 14 study participants, with an incidence of 32 references to personality across all interviews. These attributes were narrowed to three areas; denial of issues, resistance to participate in the process, and aggression or intimidation tactics.

Denial of issues was the most prominently mentioned personality attribute, with nine study participants stating denial as a barrier and ten total references to denial. Many of the comments included denying issues when drugs or alcohol are involved, when the male was not historically involved with the child or is separated from the female caregiver and identifying that any issues are occurring in the home. Pride was mentioned on three occasions in this area as a barrier to accepting services or acknowledging the need for help or support. Some participants discussed the role of pride explicitly.

> *Getting buy in- it's a pride thing where men are not going to agree that they need services, that they can handle it themselves, unable to be vulnerable about needing services (Participant 1, female, sixth-class county)*

> *I think it's a pride thing. As a male, I don't necessarily want people coming in and telling me I'm doing something wrong, but you have to understand that it's constructive criticism (Participant 8, male, fourth-class county)*

> *Some have not been receptive to any service being put in place. I think a lot of it too is like pride. It is not for them, they don't need it, they are weaker if they need to work with these services (Participant 12, female, fourth-class county)*

Resistance featured prominently in this area, specifically to being cooperative or open to involvement with the agency. Six study participants made nine references to resistance to working with the agency, using words such as 'less cooperative', 'more difficult', and 'unwilling' to describe male engagement. Resistance was linked to buy in, and pride was mentioned in one reference in this area.

Finally, aggression and intimidation were referenced 14 times by six caseworkers (one male, five female). In this area, caseworkers described some fathers as 'scary' and using their physical bodies to get in caseworker's faces to intimidate them. One female caseworker described knowing a male's criminal history of violent crimes made their simple physical presence an intimidating element. Another female caseworker described an incident where a father threatened to ram her head into a truck when she was on a phone call with him. Some participants disclosed how aggression and intimidation manifested.

> *I think a factor that can make it more difficult with males is sometimes the demeanor or past history, where they come from. I've had males that basically do get in your face to try to intimidate. You see their criminal past and know why they're there—that can be intimidating in and of itself, especially if it's a violent crime. I guess just like physical presence. It goes along with the intimidation. Sometimes just right off the bat they're in your space and they know they're physically intimidating to you and they'll definitely use that (Participant 18, female, fourth-class county)*

> *The dad called me after having a discussion with his own dad in regard to the children. Because the kids were allowed to go back home for a little while due to the dad's aggressiveness and as he said 'I wish you were here so I could ram your f*cking head into the side of the truck'. I said that's why I'm not there and you really do not mean it. The next time I saw him, he apologized because he was upset and angry over the situation. You don't take things to heart. They are upset. We're in their lives at the worst part ever. Most people don't know how to react and the only way they do act is with anger and aggressiveness so I don't take things to heart. Most of the time, if not all of the time, they have apologized (Participant 4, female, sixth-class county)*

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4.3.4 Characteristics of Caseworkers

A noteworthy, though less frequent, theme was the mention of their own individual characteristics when study participants described barriers. Seven caseworkers mentioned individual characteristics in nine references which included factors of age, gender, perceptions of offenders, and their own biases about topics. Six female participants and one male participant indicated their own characteristics. The male study participant specifically discussed using his own authority when engaging. In contrast, the six female study participants noted their young age, gender, and other biases and perceptions as barriers. Their gender and young ages were noted as possibly resulting in not being respected or taken seriously by males when attempting to engage.

> It is sometimes going to be because I am a female. Most agencies are female driven. They might not respect what I have to say. I am only 26 so 4 years ago, going out to a home of a parent who is in their 40s they look at me like who am I coming out to their home telling them how to parent their teen. (Participant 12, female, fourth-class county)

> I'm a 26-year-old girl. I think sometimes walking into a house, well I've been told, I've been looked at before, saying "You don't look like you have kids. You don't look like... How can you tell me how to parent when you don't have kids yourself? You appear too young. You haven't been through life's experiences, and I've experienced more of those conversations men than women. (Participant 17, female, fourth-class county)

Two female caseworkers specifically noted individual biases when engaging with men, including a belief that males are going to react violently, that intimate partner violence was most often male against female, and that they feel more connected to those of the same gender.

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My own biases, and the difficulty in talking about certain topics, like domestic violence or mental health. Even when I was a child, I felt like I connected better with females and I had very few male friends compared to female friends, and I tend to gravitate towards females. So even in home visits, I can sense myself focusing more on females, when really it's a family unit so both parents should be talked to. (Participant 2, female, sixth-class county)

So, I would say I struggle most with males because a lot of my situations have been DV and they have been against a female. So mostly there have kind of been a barrier bult up and I struggle to overcome that barrier. (Participant 14, female, fourth-class county)

4.4 Differing Engagement Strategies

One of the primary research questions in this study was to examine if and how engagement strategies differ when caseworkers engage with males and females in child welfare practice. This section will begin with a discussion of the broad strategies identified by caseworkers for male and female family members with whom they work, this will be followed by an overview of addressing personality difference between males and females and conclude with an overview of the approaches study participants identified specific to male engagement.

During interviews, when prompted to consider if study participants approach engagement with males differently than with females, many indicated that they had never considered or thought about how their approaches may differ. While some, to be described next, indicated that their approaches did not vary, many pointed out that they felt it was important their approaches did vary. Two participants described feeling like that could be perceived as sexist, but that they saw it as

approaching the individual, versus a gender. A charted summarization of commentary on engagement strategies are provided in Appendix H, Table 9.

4.4.1 Broad Strategies for Engagement

Seven study participants indicated that they did not perceive their engagement techniques as differing between males and females. Instead, study participants identified three areas of focus as strategies to address any family member with whom they work. Those areas include addressing all parties equally, refraining from judgement, and tailoring their engagement strategies to each person specifically to their personality and style.

All seven participants who did not perceive their engagement as differing between males and females stated their main strategy regardless of gender was to address each person individually by meeting them where they were. The intention in this strategy was to gauge what works for each individual person and adjust their engagement strategy to meet their needs. Participants emphasized the need to have an individualized approach when working in this field and being willing to adapt and be flexible when working with people.

You have to be able to adapt and be flexible and respond to people. We try to make things family-specific rather than gender specific. But there are different ways of doing things that get better results with different people (Participant 8, female, fourth-class county).

Three study participants identified the need to approach each member of the parenting unit as an equal party in the work with child welfare. A common practice discussed was taking time to meet with each parent individually and then together to ensure all parties were on the same page. Additionally, one study participant noted their effort to always ensure when the parties were together, they addressed the parents the same way, with the same tone and

strategies. A strategy mentioned by one person was to ensure judgement does not enter the conversation, emphasizing the importance of acknowledging they are meeting people at some of the hardest moments of their lives and remembering the intention of helping in the child welfare field.

We just reiterate that that's not our place to judge you know who did what and what caused the issue from the ongoing and placement perspective. And that we are offering these services to both parties and that it's in the best interest… if they're looking for case closure as the goal and for the child to return home, then this is what they need to do and if they try to deny that there's whatever issues then I just sort of present it as great, if there's no issues and you should be able to get through this real quickly and we can reassess the situation more quickly (Participant 3, female, sixth-class county).

4.4.2 Addressing Gender Norms and Stereotypes

An interesting theme that emerged through analysis was the need to acknowledge the differences between males and females, which often linked to gender norms and stereotypes. Half (10) the study participants interviewed noted differences between males and females as a factor when engaging. Nine of those indicating personality differences were female identified caseworkers, while one male identified caseworker provided information referencing personality differences. A common theme was emotionality of males with one participant describing males as 'a different animal' and indicated you can learn to talk, act, and think like them. Others noted that males are inclined to not wear their emotions on their sleeves and be forthcoming with their thoughts or feelings to move forward with the work that needs done. Study participants indicated

the need to be patient in conversation to gain trust of males in these cases, more frequently than with females.

How gender affected engagement strategies differed amongst the respondents. While some noted how males compartmentalize differently or process information differently, some expressly stated that how a male responded to them would change how they engaged. One caseworker indicated;

I think if they give me a little resistance, I may be a little more apprehensive about pushing them. I feel like when I push with a father, I don't have that same comradery that I feel like I do when I talk to the women (Participant 20, female, fourth-class county).

Another study participant stated that some female caseworkers would flirt with males and use charm and attraction to gain cooperation from the male;

Sometimes female caseworkers are more flirtatious with males- might use charm and attraction to get along better. Treat them like they are "the man" of the house. Speak to them like they are the authority in the house (Participant 5, female, fifth-class county).

4.4.3 Approaches Specific to Males

Three categories of strategies emerged that caseworkers indicated as being specific to males with whom they interacted. Those include tonal and differing verbal strategies, explaining concepts, and breaking down information in more detailed ways, and providing tangible or specific guidance to the male family member.

Six participants specifically mentioned differences in their tone and verbal approaches when engaging with men. Five of those indicating this difference noted that they take a more

strict, stern, or authoritative tone with males than that with females. One caseworker described

this approach by saying that when it is known that a man has been more aggressive,

> *We might look "taller" or use a stronger voice and take a breath of courage (Participant*
>
> *5, female, fifth-class county).*

Similarly, one caseworker indicated feeling the need to doctor language and choose words

carefully when approaching males about allegations while they feel the ability to be blunt with

females. Both accounts were provided by female identified caseworkers. In contrast, one

caseworker said that they took time to talk longer with males about a situation, specifically

noting the need to take more time to talk with the male when they were not previously

extensively involved with the child.

      The remaining two differences in engagement strategies involved the way information or

goals are presented to males. Six participants noted that breaking down information and being

specific in explanations was helpful for male engagement. Three caseworkers discussed males

not knowing or understanding their rights or responsibilities as a parent and providing males that

information supported their engagement going forward. Additional strategies provided included

being scientific with information, working through schemas and preconceived notions that males

may have and being prepared to discuss rationales for service identification and steps.

> *When I approach a man I try to be more scientific, "studies have shown that children*
>
> *who participate in programs…" Mention all those sorts of points (Participant 20, female,*
>
> *fourth-class county).*

> *Just really trying to consider schemas and what preconceived notions males have about*
>
> *service providers, caseworkers and other options we offer to them (Participant 3, female,*
>
> *sixth-class county).*

Additionally, five participants discussed the need to provide males with specific steps and tangible goals to inform the forward movement of case progress. Some strategies discussed were providing specific timeframes and steps to resolve, being direct and factual with tangible goals, using check lists or bulleted lists of items for them to achieve.

> *If we can get down a list, and I will just say like "hey, give me five things that we need to work on as a family" and then they can just list a few things. ... With the males I found that it's easier to start with point blank "I have questions and I need you to answer them, so just be straight with me on this." (Participant 7, female, fourth-class county)*

The findings of this study present a different perspective from that of the literature on CWPs' experiences with male engagement in rural child welfare counties. While much research identified challenges with accessibility to services and logistics, the most prominent theme which emerged in the present study was the perseverance of gender role norms, stereotypes, and the cultural norms of rural communities. Study participants emphasized and referenced their experiences in rural communities as a factor in engagement, noting generational factors in rural communities that affect how males interact within family structures. Caseworkers in these communities have adapted to those cultures, indicating in their individual strategies the inclination to approach males with different techniques and tones. Additionally, self-awareness of caseworkers, though not mentioned explicitly in all interviews, is an area for continued exploration as some study participants stated they do things the same no matter who they talk to but would then identify differences they would adapt as needed.

4.5 Ideal Engagement

Study participants emphasized in their discussions that they felt the involvement of males was important to case progress and the family unit.

A child is better off with as many positive parental figures as they can have regardless of gender or biological. If there is a dad out there who is not involved but can be and would be positive, we want them to be there. There are so many kids who grow up and have trauma because of what they have been through. It is important we do as much as we can to get those parents involved so the child doesn't have as much trauma and issues as they get older (Participant 12, female, fourth-class county).

They are 50% of the child- it is so important. Sometimes a dad's support and support system changes the trajectory of a child's life. It's unethical to not look at dads. There can be reasons for a child to not have involvement with fathers- but that is not a decision to be made by the caseworker or even the mother (Participant 5, female, fifth-class county).

When asked to describe ideal male engagement, study participants emphasized the role that the male plays in that engagement dynamic. Many participants noted that ideal engagement involved the male being the one to initiate, be there, and show up. Participants emphasized the need for males to be cooperative, step up, and do what they need to do to get to case closure. Absent from the responses to this question was the role that the study participants played themselves to gain engagement in an ideal way. Based on interviews, study participant's idea of ideal engagement was rooted in their personal and professional experience, rather than training.

Study participants were asked to consider how their own experiences contributed to how they engaged with males, followed by a discussion on how to improve male engagement from their perspectives. Increases in education and experience were the two most noted strategies when discussing how to better male engagement. Within their responses, there were ideas to increase education on the scientific understanding of what makes males different from a biological, hormonal, and how the human brain differs between males and females. Other recommendations discussed strategies such as motivational interviewing, knowing how to match males to appropriate and effective services and service providers, de-escalation, field coaching, and resources specific to male engagement. One additional recommendation was training specifically for female caseworkers and peer support allowing caseworkers to respond to scenarios, share their experiences, and ideas for engagement.

5.0 Discussion and Implications

Child welfare practice is an essential component of our society's work towards safety, permanency, and well-being for all children. Emphasis is often placed on the role of the mother in child welfare, as research often assigns males or fathers into the categories of absence, unimportance, and dangerousness (Bellamy, 2009). Absence and dangerousness were themes that emerged within this study, while the importance of male involvement was highlighted through this study and supported through the work of Brewsaugh and colleagues (2018).

The aim of this study was to explore the perceived barriers to engagement with males in child welfare practice and what differences exist between engagement with males and females in rural communities. The study conducted twenty interviews with caseworkers working in rural communities in Pennsylvania. Through an examination of literature, this study theorized that gender bias and roles would factor in challenges with male engagement. The discussion and implications of this study will highlight three key findings: the role of sexism and cultural barriers, the importance of male engagement, and moving forward with male engagement. The study will conclude with recommendations for next steps in this area of study.

5.1 Key Finding: Sexism and Cultural Barriers

A major theme which that emerged from interviews during this study was the mention of gender specific attributes effecting male engagement. Explicit commentary connected to the role males play in family units and specific attributes of men which affect their ability to engage with

the child welfare system. This pattern was consistent with what previous studies have found. Bellamy (2009) identified three themes, absence, unimportance, and dangerousness, of which two were prominent in this study, absence, and dangerousness. Unimportance will be discussed related to key findings in the next section.

When discussing absence, Bellamy and associates (2009) describe father participation as fleeting, or inconsistent and unavailable. In the current study, participants' descriptions of the absence of fathers correlated often to a lack of availability, versus a lack of accessibility. While the themes of unidentified fathers, incarcerated fathers, and an inability to locate fathers emerged, a larger volume of concerns in this area revolved around fathers not having the time or ability to be engaged. This concern connected to a gender norm that was prominent during interviews with those working in rural communities, the father as bread winner and the person working in the home. Coakley and associates highlighted that fathers are often have financial obligations, reducing their availability (Coakley, Washington, and Gruber, 2018, p. 365). One study participant expressed an observation of increased engagement from men since the adoption of tele-conference or meetings considering the COVID-19 pandemic. They noted that it was easier to have meetings with the father over the phone on lunch breaks or as they drove to and from work.

Bellamy described the theme of dangerousness meaning that males are excluded from engagement because they are dangerous or contribute little but risk to families (Bellamy, 2009, p. 255). The perspective of males indicated that they feel stigmatized by past behaviors and seen as unable to be rehabilitated. One study participant specifically brought up the idea of males being stigmatized, supporting this idea from males in research. Research tells us that a criminal history or past substance use can be used against males involved with the child welfare system; males with these kinds of histories are often marginalized and/or seen as dangerous (Coady, Hoy, & Cameron,

2012). Again, these themes were supported by study participants who noted how knowledge of a violent history or intimate partner violence affected their comfort and confident in engaging men.

According to the research, even when CWPs believe they are treating males and females comparably, they still tend to favor female perspectives (Coady, Hoy, & Cameron, 2012) or automatically equate 'caregiver' as 'mother' (Pfitzner, Humphreys, & Hegarty, 2015). While nearly half of participants in the current study expressed no differences in how they engage men, research indicates that different approaches may be necessary to adequately engage males in the field. When gender-blind approaches are espoused, caseworkers still tend to favor female caregivers (Pfitzner, Humphreys, & Hegarty, 2015). Study participants indicated the need to adjust to differences in individual personality; research would indicate a particular need for this practice consistency with males. Noting that prior experiences influence how individuals respond to situations, it is important to consider how the child welfare system can work to recognize preconceived notions of gender and work to create a system that works within those notions to enhance family outcomes.

5.2 Key Finding: Importance of Male Engagement

The second finding emphasizes the importance of male engagement to child welfare practice and to the outcomes in child welfare. Study participants acknowledged that children are better off when they have as many positive parental figures as possible and that as a caseworker, they want the father involved. There was a prominent theme of fathers having equal rights to mothers, though seven caseworkers indicated that many fathers they encountered were unaware of their rights. Spending time engaging the males revealed to many study participants the limited

understanding or the assumptions that the males had about their role in the eyes of child welfare and the courts. These sentiments contrasted themes in Bellamy's (2009) literature review. Bellamy noted that unimportance was a theme, indicating that males were not perceived as important to child development and success as mothers (Bellamy, 2009, p. 255). Further research on the topic revealed a complex understanding of how the role of a father could influence a child's development. Nurturing fathers who have positive relationships with their children resulted in better outcomes while children with inconsistent or aggressive father figures were more likely to experience fewer ideal outcomes (Bellamy, 2009, p. 256). These contrasts identify a specific skill needed for caseworkers to assess the father role. Brewsaugh and colleagues (2018) describe that caseworkers overall support and encourage father involvement in cases, though they are not immune to gendered views of parenting (p. 134), which presented as described in this study.

When asked how ideal engagement presents, all study participants identified things they would like to see from the male figure, including how they connect with child welfare, communication, respecting the agency, and making time for involvement. There were no mentions of the role the agency plays in that engagement process. From research, fathers indicated they needed to feel that the caseworkers acknowledge and appreciated that they have something to add to the discussion. Fathers appreciated being at the table for decisions and when caseworkers understood their other obligations in life, specifically work, when it came to accommodating scheduling (Coakley, Washington, & Gruber, 2018, p. 369). Coady and associates confirmed this attribute of males, wanting to feel respected, having their perspectives understood, and being involved in decisions and kept in the loop with movement in the case (Coady, Hoy, & Cameron, 2012, p. 283).

5.3 Key Finding: Moving Forward with Male Engagement

The perspectives from study participants will be connected in this section to recommendations from literature to inform next steps for engagement of males in child welfare. The themes described in this section will include education, experience, and specific strategies aimed towards male family members.

The present study suggests the need for male-specific engagement training for CWPs. This is consistent with recommendations in the literature. For example, Pfitzner and associates (2017) concluded that learning specific engagement strategies can play a significant role in helping CWPs translate theory into practice (Pfitzner, Humphreys & Hegarty, 2017, p. 545). The recommendation by study participants to obtain more training is supported by Pfitzner and associates' emphasis on the approach over theory. This is corroborated by Coady and colleagues (2013) in their recommendation for training programs which acknowledge the male experience in child welfare, and acknowledge the social constructs surrounding males' experiences in parenting (Coady, Hoy, & Cameron, 2013, p. 283).

Experience was also a significant factor for study participants in gaining the skills and increased confidence in interacting with and engaging males. One participant expressed that experience is more important than training, because learning happens most when interacting with families in the field. This experience is acknowledged by research (see, for example Forgey and associates, 2013 and Bogo and associates, 2011), though consideration can be made to create experiential educational opportunities for practicing and enhancing skill development prior to executing the skills in the field. Simulation training, which allows learners to practice new skills in a realistic scenario, provides such an opportunity for CWPs. Forgey and associates (2013) found that participants gained valuable experience engaging in an intimate partner violence scenario with

Standardized Clients. The experience provided the opportunity for the caseworkers to practice engagement and assessment in a true-to-life, learning environment (Forgey, Badger, Gilbert, & Hansen, 2013). Another suggestion from a participant was support from field coaches, where supervisors or experienced, highly skilled CWPs would accompany caseworkers into the field and provide support with engagement.

While study participants expressed a desire to understand the inner workings of the males with whom they work, they also discussed the need to have education, experience, and support specific to male populations. Currently, curricula from the Child Welfare Resource Center are provided to teach foundational over-arching engagement strategies not specified to any population specifically. Additional advanced level trainings focus on specific populations, such as Latinx parents or incarcerated parents, but do not address fathers specifically. Recommendations from research, in addition from study participants emphasize the need for training on these specific techniques. Participants emphasized the need for such curricula; this recommendation is consistent with the research literature (see, for example, Riebschleger and associates, 2015 or Pfitzner and associates, 2017).

Additionally, study participants identified an area documented extensively in research, the need for services and service providers specializing in supporting males. Study participants acknowledged, specifically in their rural communities, that there were limited or no programs specific to males or who acknowledge the gender experiences and stereotypes for males and females. Again, this finding is consistent with the literature. For example, Pfitzner and associates (2017) acknowledged the need for service providers to consider gendered differences when engaging caregivers, even when programs were not gendered specifically. They noted the need to prioritize trust building through engagement strategies rather than focusing on theoretical

approaches to casework and safety or risk management (Pfitzner, Humphreys & Hegarty, 2017, p. 545). Engagement at the outset can contribute to subsequent engagement in services, which emphasizes the need for CWPs to be able to build rapport with males early on (p. 542).

5.4 Implications for Research and Practice

This study was designed as an exploratory look at male engagement in rural child welfare communities. This section will describe the recommended next steps for research in this area, as well as implications for practice ongoing.

5.4.1 Implications for Research

Findings from the present study highlight the need for future research before macro-level recommendations can be made. Two additional areas of research are recommended: a further exploration of the manifestation of sexism in interactions with males, and a study on the merits of taking individualized, personality-based approaches to engagement including how to train for this style of engagement.

Within my place of practice there is a mechanism for examining the manifestation of sexism in interactions with males. Using simulation-based training with standardized clients, researchers would have the ability to standardize a case and identify whether caseworkers have differing responses if a standardized client is male identified versus female identified. It is recommended that this research use implicit bias assessments in partnership for self-assessment of caseworkers on their own biases. Using implicit bias assessments, education about gender norms

and stereotypes, and a simulation-based training, researchers could provide baseline education, examine pre and post implicit bias assessments and in the moment responses in simulation to understand caseworker responses during male engagement. This research could support further understanding of the manifestation of sexist in child welfare practice and provide additional context for macro-level changes.

A similar research technique could be applied to examine a theoretical approach to engagement versus a personality-based approach. First, an additional literature review of theoretical engagement techniques would be completed. Working within simulation, researchers could standardize case information for a simulation and provide training to caseworkers on theoretical approaches to engagement. Others could be trained to follow the lead of the Standardized Client and adjust based on the personality of the client. Reflections on the experience from caseworkers and Standardized Clients could be considered.

5.4.2 Implications for Practice

The overarching goal of this study was to inform the development of curricula, technical assistance strategies, and supports for agencies to increase male engagement in child welfare practice. The study aimed to be the foundation for larger examinations of training strategies, technical assistance modalities, and ongoing supports for agencies to address male engagement concerns. It is anticipated that ongoing assessment of engagement of males will continue as Pennsylvania begins the CFSR review process for 2021. An understanding of underlying concerns from study participants can be partnered with the outcomes in 2021 CFSR results to inform practice ongoing.

From this study, it is apparent that more work is needed to address gender and cultural stereotypes and biases. To approach gender and cultural stereotypes, the implementation of a practice process (illustrated in Figure 1), is recommended to begin to facilitate the work of enhancing male engagement in child welfare.

| Acknowledgement, Acceptance and Processing | → | Training | → | Implementation |

Figure 1 Recommended Practice Process

The first step in the process is to acknowledge that there are differences in engagement with individuals in child welfare practice, accept that those differences occur, and process how those differences manifest. With this, it is important to acknowledge the experiences of those involved, including that of the caseworker and the family members, play a role in the implementation of practice. Additionally, it is important to acknowledge the existence of gender norms, stereotypes, and preconceived notions that will impact practice. The acceptance and processing of these experiences needs to occur within training environments and in county child welfare practice, which connects to the step of training. This can be achieved within my place of practice by specifically designing training and technical assistance programs to provide time and space for processing implicit bias, and how it manifests in engagement practices. Recommendations from research, in addition from study participants, emphasize the need for training on techniques to connect and engage with males. It should be considered that caseworkers may benefit from training specifically oriented to educate about gender bias and its manifestations in child welfare practice. In the counties, CWPs and supervisors should have the education and

awareness needed to identify, address, and process information as they are working with families to understand possibly biases or cultural norms in play.

An exploration of the history of gender bias, norms, and their effects on the child welfare system is essential to moving change for male engagement. This implication is supported by the notion of not taking a gender-blind approach and instead acknowledging the differences that exist and how those manifests in counties. Within my place of practice, the technical assistance provided directly to counties would provide an avenue to directly support the implementation of a more gender aware approach to male engagement, including looking at what efforts are made from the caseworker perspective, as well as the family member's perspective to increase successful engagement.

5.5 Conclusions

Male engagement is an important component of successful outcomes for children, as evidenced both through this study and supporting the extant literature. Barriers are prominent to engagement with males, which is reported to differ from engagement with females. This study aimed to conduct an exploratory examination of male engagement in child welfare. The study specifically targeted rural counties to explore barriers to male engagement and the differences in engagement techniques with males and females. The methods for this study included interviews, data coding and analysis to identify three key findings. The study concluded with a recommendation to conduct ongoing training exploring sexism, and specific approaches for engagement with males. Finally, it is recommended this study be used with ongoing research, and

ongoing assessment efforts to implement macro level changes to practice to enhance male engagement.

Appendix A Recruitment Email

Subject: Understanding Male Engagement: Dissertation in Practice Research

Dear Mx, [County Representative]

My name is Amber Snyder and I am the Simulation Program Supervisor for the Child Welfare Resource Center. In addition to my role there, I am currently a Doctoral Candidate with the University of Pittsburgh School of Education. I am working towards my dissertation in practice and am currently seeking support from some PA counties to conduct research to understand male engagement in child welfare practice. Please let me know at your earliest convenience if your county would be interested in participating.

The study will involve a up to one-hour interview, conducted remotely. I am aiming to interview child welfare caseworkers with an active caseload who have been employed over 6 months and work in a rural community.

Project: *Understanding Male Engagement in Child Welfare Practice.*
I am seeking to explore what makes male engagement different in child welfare than engagement with females. I am planning to interview up to 20 child welfare caseworkers to discuss their engagement strategies, what, if anything, differs when they engage males versus females, and what barriers exist when attempting to engage males. Each interview may take up to 1 hour. The study aims to be exploratory, with the intention of doing some additional research following my dissertation. I hope to look at the interview results, identify some themes, and see if some differences emerge depending on length of service and/or training technique used at hiring (i.e. CTC versus Foundations). I am only looking to use participants from rural counties, as defined by the Center for Rural Pennsylvania as seen on this map: https://www.rural.palegislature.us/demographics_rural_urban_counties.html

Participant Aim: Caseworkers with active caseloads, who have been working for over 6 months, in a rural county.

What Participants will get: Each county will get access to the results of the study (all participants will be anonymous)

Appendix B Participant Interview Coordination Email

Subject: Dissertation in Practice Research Interview

Good Morning,

My name is Amber Snyder and I am the Simulation Program Supervisor at the Pennsylvania Child Welfare Resource Center. In addition to my work with the resource center, I am a doctoral candidate working on my dissertation for my Doctorate in Education, to be completed in December 2020.

If you are receiving this email, it is because you have been selected by your agency to participate in an interview with explores engagement in child welfare practice. I appreciate your willingness to set up time to speak with me about this topic. I will coordinate with each of you to set up a 90 minute block of time to conduct these interviews. I am currently aiming to schedule all interviews by the end of June.

I appreciate your support of my research project!

Amber Snyder, M.S.
Simulation Program Supervisor
University of Pittsburgh, School of Social Work
The Pennsylvania Child Welfare Resource Center
403 East Winding Hill Road
Mechanicsburg, PA 17055
Doctoral Candidate 2020, School of Education
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Cell: (717) 208-2132
Fax: (717) 795-8013

Appendix C Consent to Act as a Participant in a Research Study

Amber Snyder, Prinicpal Investigator

amber.snyder@pitt.edu

Pitt Office Phone Number: 717-795-9048

Understanding Engagement in Child Welfare Practice

By agreeing to this consent, you are agreeing to participate in an exploratory research study which examines engagement in child welfare practice. This research is being conducted as the Dissertation in Practice for the Prinicpal Investigator. The results of this study will be analyzed and used to complete a Doctorate in Education from the University of Pittsburgh. You have been asked to participate in this research study because of your role as a caseworker in a county child welfare agency. Approximately 20 individuals will participate in this study.

Your participation in this study will include a 1-hour interview. The interview will be conducted using online video-conferencing software and will be recorded for the purposes of transcription and analysis. The interview will focus on the topic of engagement as applied in the work with families in child welfare practice. Questions will ask you to reflect on engagement techniques, barriers to engagement, and difference in engagement with differing family members. At the conclusion of the study, you will be provided the option to receive the final analysis.

It is anticipated this study will pose infrequent risk to study participants. Infrequent, but possible risk includes emotional responses to questioning as related to your occupation and job performance and the risk of breach of confidentiality.

This study aims to be an exploratory study on engagement within child welfare. Dependent upon findings, this study may be the base to further studies on this topic. Benefits could include

the creation of enhanced training techniques, enhancement in agency policy or procedure, or legislative change. There is no direct benefit to individual study participants.

Your responses will be analyzed in conjunction with other study participants. Source materials including audio recordings and transcriptions will be securely stored for 7 years following study completion.

You can, at any time withdraw from this research study. This means that you will also be withdrawn from further participation in this research study.

To formally withdraw from this research study, you should provide a written and dated notice of this decision to the principal investigator of this research study at the email address listed on the first page of this form. Your decision to withdraw from this study will have no effect on your current or future relationship with the University of Pittsburgh.

Your participation in this research study is entirely voluntary. The investigators will be available to answer your current and future questions. Whether or not you provide your consent for participation in this research study will have no effect on your current or future relationship with the University of Pittsburgh.

Do you agree to participate in this study as described?

Appendix D Demographic Information

Please indicate your gender identity

☐ Male
☐ Female
☐ Non-binary

Please identify the county for which you currently work

Click or tap here to enter text.

How long have you worked for your county?
☐ Less than 3 months
☐ 3-6 months
☐ 6-12 months
☐ 1-3 years
☐ 3-5 years
☐ 5-7 years
☐ 7-10 years
☐ Greater than 10 years

Have you previously worked for another county?

Click or tap here to enter text.

If yes:

What county?

How long did you work for that county?

What differences in approach to engagement did you observe between the counties?

Please indicate the highest level of education obtained
☐ High School Diploma/GED
☐ Associates Degree
☐ Bachelor's Degree
☐ Master's Degree
☐ Doctoral Degree

If you have an educational degree exceeding a high school diploma, please identify the concentration of your degree

- ☐ Social Work (BSW of MSW)
- ☐ Psychology
- ☐ Sociology
- ☐ Education
- ☐ Other (please describe)
  - Click or tap here to enter text.

If you possess a degree in Social Work, please indicate if you are a CWEB or CWEL Graduate
- ☐ CWEB
- ☐ CWEL
- ☐ Neither

Please indicate which certification series you completed to become a Certified Direct Service Professional
- ☐ CORE
- ☐ Charting the Course
- ☐ Foundations of Child Welfare Practice
- ☐ Unsure/Unknown

What main factors contributed to your decision to pursue a career in child welfare?
 Click or tap here to enter text.

For this study, we are examining how caseworkers approach engagement with families, including with individual family members. This interview will ask you to reflect on some scenarios as well as your own experiences working with families in child welfare. Now, we are going to ask you to consider a scenario. We ask you to describe your best thinking on how you would approach the situation. Note that all scenarios and names are fictional, any likeness to real cases are purely coincidental. [Interview Note: Some Participants will be Group A, some will be Group B]

Scenario, Group A: To include a situation where a male member was found to be a perpetrator in a scenario. In the scenario the biological father and mother were engaged in a fight. The biological mother had slapped the father and the father grabbed the arms of the mother to prevent her from hitting him again. A 14-year-old male child attempted to intervene and was pushed to the ground by the father, resulting in a broken wrist. When the incident was reported to the ER doctor, Children and Youth was notified. It is determined that the child would stay with the maternal grandparents on a safety plan.

1.What steps are necessary for the child to return home?

2.What services would you put in place? Who would be responsible for utilizing the services?

3.What strategies would you use to engage each parent in services?

Scenario, Group B: To include a situation where a female member was found to be a perpetrator in a scenario. In the scenario the biological mother and father were engaged in a fight. The biological father had slapped the mother and the mother grabbed the arms of the father to prevent him from hitting her again. A 14-year-old male child attempted to intervene and was pushed to the ground by the mother, resulting in a broken wrist. When the incident was reported to the ER doctor, Children and Youth was notified. It is determined that the child would stay with the paternal grandparents on a safety plan.

    1.What steps are necessary for the child to return home?

    2.What services would you put in place? Who would be responsible for utilizing the services?

    3.What strategies would you use to engage each parent in services?

In your career as a child welfare professional within your current agency, approximately how many adult males have you engaged throughout the case planning process?

    ☐Less than 10

    ☐10-25

    ☐26-40

    ☐41-60

    ☐61-75

    ☐More than 75

In your career as a child welfare professional within your current agency, approximately how many adult females have you engaged throughout the case planning process?

    ☐Less than 10

☐10-25

☐26-40

☐41-60

☐61-75

☐More than 75

On a scale from 1-5, with one being not at all competent to 5 being extremely competent, how

competent do you feel engaging with adult male members of families with whom you work?

> **Probe:** Why did you choose that rating? Click or tap here to enter text.
>
> **Probe:** Describe a situation where your engagement with a female family member went
>
> really well. What was the situation, and how did it contribute to case progress?
>
> Click or tap here to enter text.

On a scale from 1-5, with one being not at all competent to 5 being extremely competent, how

competent do you feel engaging with adult female members of families with whom you work?

> **Probe:** Why did you choose that rating? Click or tap here to enter text.
>
> **Probe:** Describe a situation where your engagement with a female family member went
>
> really well. What was the situation, and how did it contribute to case progress?
>
> Click or tap here to enter text.

For our study we are aiming to identify how child welfare professionals engage with adult males

who are involved with the child welfare system and how that engagement may differ from

engagement with females. Throughout the remainder of this interview, we would like you to

consider interactions you have had with adult males throughout your tenure as a

caseworker. Adult males include any individual receiving services through child welfare agencies

or whose immediate family is receiving services through child welfare agencies. This includes

fathers of origin, biological fathers, paramours, and kin. Please do not include children, resource

families, or services providers in your responses. In some questions, we may ask you to reflect on how your experiences with males have differed from those with females.

How competent do you feel discussing case goals and objectives when working with adult male members of families with whom you work? **Interview Note:** Example case objectives and goals may include steps necessary for reunification such as parenting courses, therapy services, medical intervention, housing support. Objectives may also include specific timeframes by which goals must be reached.

> *What conversations with males around case goals and objectives do you find to be most challenging?*
>
> Click or tap here to enter text.
>
> *Do the challenging topics around case goals and objectives differ when speaking with female family members?*
>
> Click or tap here to enter text.
>
> *If yes, what are the differences? Why do you feel those differences exist?*
>
> Click or tap here to enter text.

How competent do you feel identifying services when working with adult male members of families with whom you work? **Interview Note:** Services may include drug and alcohol services, mental health, legal services, housing services etc.

> *What conversations with males around service identification do you find to be most challenging?*
>
> Click or tap here to enter text.

Do the challenging topics around service identification differ when speaking with female family members?

Click or tap here to enter text.

If yes, what are the differences? Why do you feel those differences exist?

Click or tap here to enter text.

In your experience, what are the top three barriers you encounter when engaging with males in child welfare practice?

Probe: Some examples provided in literature include; unknown or unidentified nmale family members, engagement of male family members in the process, access to male family members, my comfort engaging male family members, restricted access to male members by other family members, and challenges building rapport with male family members. Do you feel any of these are barriers for you?

Click or tap here to enter text.

Why do you feel male engagement is important for successful child welfare practice?

Click or tap here to enter text.

Please describe what positive male engagement looks like to you.

Click or tap here to enter text.

After reflecting on the questions so far, do you feel your engagement strategies differ between male and female members of the family?

Click or tap here to enter text.

If yes, how do your strategies for engagement differ between males and females?

Click or tap here to enter text.

On a scale from 1-5, with one being not at all significant 5 being extremely significant, to what extent do you feel your personal understanding of approaches to use to engage males contributes to successful engagement with male family members?

    Why did you choose that rating? Click or tap here to enter text.

        If applicable, what could contribute to increasing your rating? **Interview note:** Examples could include additional training, different training techniques, more experience, agency culture.

Click or tap here to enter text.

Your participation in this study is incredibly value and we thank you for taking the time to discuss engagement with us. Before we conclude, is there anything additional you feel we should know for our study?

Click or tap here to enter text.

Thank you for your time and attention. We look forward to sharing the results of our study with you

Appendix F Full Participant Demographic Information

Table 7 Participant Demographic Information

Participant ID	Gender Identity	County Class	Tenure	Level of Education	Degree Concentration	Other Concentration	Certification Series
1	Female	6	3-5 years	Master's Degree	Social Work		Charting the Course
2	Female	6	1-3 years	Bachelor's Degree	Social Work		Charting the Course
3	Female	6	6-12 months	Bachelor's Degree	Psychology		Foundations
4	Female	6	1-3 years	Bachelor's Degree	Other	Criminal Justice	Charting the Course
5	Female	5	5-7 years	Bachelor's Degree	Sociology		Charting the Course
6	Female	4	1-3 years	Bachelor's Degree	Social Work		Charting the Course and Foundations
7	Female	4	1-3 years	Master's Degree	Other	Criminology	Charting the Course
8	Male	4	3-5 years	Bachelor's Degree	Other	Criminology	Charting the Course
9	Female	5	1-3 years	Bachelor's Degree	Social Work		Charting the Course
10	Female	4	> 10 years	Bachelor's Degree	Other	Criminal Justice	Core
11	Male	4	1-3 years	Master's Degree	Other	Criminal Justice	Charting the Course
12	Female	4	3-5 years	Bachelor's Degree	Education		Charting the Course

13	Female	4	1-3 years	Bachelor's Degree	Other	Liberal Arts, Leadership	Charting the Course
14	Female	4	1-3 years	Bachelor's Degree	Social Work		Charting the Course and Foundations
15	Male	4	6-12 months	Bachelor's Degree	Psychology		Foundations
16	Male	4	6-12 months	Bachelor's Degree	Sociology		Foundations
17	Female	4	3-5 years	Bachelor's Degree	Other	Philosophy	Charting the Course
18	Female	4	3-5 years	Bachelor's Degree	Other	Criminal Justice	Charting the Course
19	Female	4	1-3 years	Master's Degree	Other	Organizational Leadership	Charting the Course
20	Female	4	6-12 months	Master's Degree	Social Work		Foundations

Appendix G Participant Commentary on Barriers to Male Engagement

Table 8 Selected Participant Comments on Barriers to Male Engagement

Participant Number	Gender Identity	County Class	Commentary on Barriers to Engagement
1	Female	6th	Their pride gets in the way Well-being tends to be a struggle for men Finding services tailored specifically for men. Getting buy in- it's a pride thing where men are not going to agree that they need services, that they can handle it themselves, unable to be vulnerable about needing services Females tend to be more agreeable to outside services. Meeting with them- tend to be less willing to meet with us at all Getting services established in the form of referrals and follow through. It may be something they talk about and agree to but don't follow through unless forced Measurable progress. They like to pretend that everything is fine- don't give a lot of information Building rapport with men can be difficult because they tend to have women deal with children's services
2	Female	6th	Engaging absent fathers in services My own biases Even when I was a child, I felt like I connected better with females and I had very few male friends compared to female friends, and I tend to gravitate towards females. So even in home visits, I can sense myself focusing more on females, when really it's a family unit so both parents should be talked to. Difficulty in talking about certain topics, like domestic violence or mental health

3	Female	6th	Getting them to acknowledge and accept responsibility for the problems that exist involving their case. A lot of them struggle to acknowledge that there's a problem with their anger, so that's when I try to direct the conversation as, it's not a problem that you're angry, it's a problem with how you're responding and expressing that anger.

They do not receive mental health services very well when those are suggested. They really just have a lack of knowledge base as far as what services actually look like. They almost have like an ego issue that they don't want to acknowledge that they could benefit from services.

In this area for a lot of our clients and males in particular is transportation. lot of them don't have vehicles. And some, even if they do have vehicles don't have valid driver's licenses so transportation is a barrier for some of the services. Like I said we live in a rural area so our public transportation services are limited as well. |
| 4 | Female | 6th | The dad called me after having a discussion with his own dad in regards to the children. Because the kids were allowed to go back home for a little while due to the dad's aggressiveness and as he said 'I wish you were here so I could ram your fucking head into the side of the truck'. I said that's why I'm not there and you really do not mean it. The next time I saw him, he apologized because he was upset and angry over the situation. You don't take things to heart. They are upset. We're in their lives at the worst part ever. Most people don't know how to react and the only way they do act is with anger and aggressiveness so I don't take things to heart. Most of the time, if not all of the time, they have apologized.

I would have an easier time with females. I guess getting the guys to buy in to what they need to change. Not for them just to say ok I'll do it whenever but to get a true buy-in to actually have a true change.

Mom doesn't want the dad to know about a situation that's going on. It comes back to honesty. Not wanting the other to know that they have an open case in their house. They're going to go after custody then. We don't want them involved and we say we have to contact them. They are the parent. Sometimes they don't give us the numbers. In most cases we are able to find it but I have some cases where I have not been able to find it. Until you remove a kid then they want to be a part of their life after they haven't had contact for 14 years. And then they want the kid back that they've had no relationship with. |

I can't get him to buy in to the fatherhood program because he's doing better than what he had. In his eyes, he's there for his kid and he's doing better. Which, in reality, just because you're there doesn't mean you are a good dad. You have to be a parent. If you don't have one, then you really don't know what it is to be a good parent.

5	Female	5th	A lot men in my community don't believe in therapy- perception of challenges to masculinity. Visitation- moms are available more often- men tend to be working Harder to talk to males about being perps of sexual assault. Male appropriateness- wearing clothing, closing the door to the bathroom. Discipline- a lot of men feel like kids should be able to be spanked or hit with belts. Status- professional status when they are not blue collar Belief that men are going to react aggressively/violently
6	Female	4th	A lot of families are very intimidated by the agency and fearful. They fear the worst. A lot of men are worried about how they get everything done when they're working. One of the biggest issues for women and men is getting them to accept why they're involved. Being honest about where they are, if they're in addictions, admitting to their addiction. Until they recognize their own issues, you can say anything you want but they're not going to get where they need to be. Blaming. Blaming others, blaming the ex, blaming the mother. A lot of that happens. Blame the system.
7	Female	4th	They're emotional, and what their emotions are responsible for. So if it's domestic violence, like "well I only got mad because my hours were cut last week and she went out and bought this…" It's like but no we need to rewind. You got upset about something that she didn't necessarily know about. She didn't know your hours were cut. She didn't know the paycheck was gonna be shorter. So we need to work on communication. They have a harder time understanding that b/c then it's more "Well if she didn't just spend the money, then we wouldn't even be fighting here." Also we he didn't get upset about, then we wouldn't be here. I think the hardest things about males would be to get services whenever they are home Their presence, so whether or not they live in the home, are willing to work with me. I have some dads that are in jail and the only way to meet with them is to go there. Understanding where they could adjust things in the family. Accepting that they are in need of help.

8	Male	4th	I think it's a pride thing. As a male, I don't necessarily want people coming in and telling me I'm doing something wrong, but you have to understand that it's constructive criticism.

There's a lot of reluctance to having people come into their homes and into their lives and giving them tips and pointers or, you know, just meeting with them.

It's a very old-school mindset and I never thought in the 21st century that we would be in this situation, given all the advancements we've had. But there are still people out there who believe the girls should be in the home taking care of the kids and the house and all of that and the guys should be working. A lot of our providers are female-oriented as well, and if they don't click, there can be issues with individual service providers. That's not something I get from guys.

Acceptance. Just getting through the door. Pride you could put on that list, too. That's another thing because you don't see very many guys out there that willingly welcome you with open arms when you come to their home. Indecisiveness to meet, you could say? Avoidance? Using work as an excuse, don't want to meet on weekends because that's "their time." |
| 9 | Female | 5th | Where the dad is resistant to the services so I'll kind of give an example, like I have this case that was for sexual abuse of a teenager and the stepdad that live in the, the stepdad of the teenager, there's other biological kids there, is in the home and he was the perpetrator so he's supposed to have a psycho-sexual evaluation and other things and he gets very escalated about those topics because he doesn't admit to any type of abuse and he doesn't feel that there's any type of issue that could be addressed within himself.

So if we're talking about dads, some dads are receptive and polite.... and other ones are extremely I'll say, like, passive aggressive, and get escalated and they'll like yell or speak in an escalated tone and become frustrated when I'm just trying to go over what goals are with them and not escalating myself.

Parents that aren't together but both still do parent the child because I feel like a lot of times, it's more the mom parenting the child most of the time or the mom has more custody time with the child so engaging the dad is a little bit more of a challenge cause I want to say it's not so much the dad's priority as it seems to be the mom's priority in a lot of cases.

I just feel like it's more that dads or the the male figure, dad, boyfriend, whatever, isn't involved with kids as much than there are moms. And I think that's really unfortunate. No matter which parent it is but I definitely see it more with dads. |

10	Female	4th	Sometimes dads that aren't regularly involved are difficult to encourage them to become involved fully. Sometimes fathers will say "oh that happened at Mom's house, I won't deal with that," or something like that. Or sometimes we can't locate them, or Mom doesn't know who they are… engaging them is challenging. Sometimes locating them, first and foremost, especially if there's multiple dads on a case and mom hasn't had any contact with them for a while. And if they haven't been involved, getting them up to speed, so to speak, with what's going on. And getting them to realize that they could play a part in this even if they don't want to necessarily be a fully-engaged parent. That any little bit that they do could be beneficial.
11	Male	4th	Harder to engage any type of services. I wouldn't say they are not as compliant, they are just not as involved or in the mind set that services will work. A lot of times males are better with specific timeframes and steps to take to resolve the case. More frustration with males versus females when there is uncertainty in a timeframe/ length of time that it will take to complete the goals. Try to explain that it's the needed route and get understanding. Meeting in person is often better/easy to explain what needs to be done in a way they are more agreeable to. Females overall are more involved with the kids life- stay at home moms. Dads are working, want a timeframe are busy/frustrated, doesn't see an issues. Fathers aren't always involved. They want to be involved but then they have to take all these steps to get involved. I don't think there is a lot of difference between males and females, though males are a little harder. Parents of younger kids, moms are usually home while dads are working. A lot of time home repairs and dependent on dads hours. Have to push the females in the home to make the males understand what needs to get done
12	Female	4th	When parents aren't together fathers are sometimes reluctant in general to work with us. I don't know if because they think they are men and its not necessary or they don't think they have to be in that position, Sometimes they need more engagement. I mean sometimes it is just engaging them at all. I haven't seen him in 10 years so I am not interested in dealing with this. Other times it is blaming it's the mother's fault, its nothing on me. Just getting them to buy into the services.

I think the females are the primary caregivers so they feel like they have to work with us. It's not really an option. This is my kid and I have to do what I have to do. Where as the dads if they are not the primary caregiver they may not feel like it is anything they even have to bother with.

Some have not been receptive to any service being put in place. I think a lot of it too is like pride. It is not for them they don't need it they are weaker if they need to work with these services. I don't think I have struggled much to have those conversations. I think parenting and discipline issues- often they say that is how I grew up, I can smack my kids if I want to. That is probably the big one.

It is sometimes going to be because I am a female. Most agencies are female driven. They might not respect what I have to say

I am only 26 so 4 years ago, going out to a home of a parent who is in their 40s they look at me like who am I coming out to their home telling them how to parent their teen.

| 13 | Female | 4th | I feel like I can get further with males than I can with females. Males compartmentalize more than females do. They only deal with the emotions in that moment. They can zoom in and focus. They are more reasonable. Sometimes they help translate things to the mother if they aren't being reasonable or rational about something. |

No information on the father

Family restricting access to father

So, I would say I struggle most with males because a lot of my situations have been DV and they have been against a female. So mostly there have kinda been a barrier bult up and I struggle to overcome that barrier.

They won't admit a problem.

In DV it is very hard for a female to talk to a male about hitting there significant other. I would say it's a gender thing and the way society makes DV look. There are issues that society has made DV look.

14 Female 4th

Ill give you an example. A male should always hold a door for a female or always pay for dinner. Those are things that I believe that society has created from a long past history and just keeps going. Like Domestic Violence, they feel that a male always hits on a female and it is never the other way around. Males go to jail more than females.

I think it is like a stigma too. Guys don't always want to admit. Back to the stigma thing. should never cry or be wear. It is more harder for men to admit there is an issue and there is a problem and that they are upset about the situation than it is for a female to break down and cry.

I said its just really hard like you know dads you know they are incarcerated and like mom you know can have an affair and you know like they are nobody they are awful I don't want my kid going with them. It isn't hard to engage them but to find them is a struggle.

15	Male	4th	They get defensive whenever you're telling them what to do. The court orders make it a lot easier to explain it to them because the judge ordered it and they have to do it. If I had to pick a topic that would be most difficult, I would say drug & alcohol, because they need to accept that and get the eval first. Also, domestic violence would be up there, too, because they're kind of embarrassed about that. They're embarrassed about what had happened in the past with domestic violence. Males seem like they're more defensive. Maybe they're denying it and they're not ready to accept that they need help in that situation, or maybe they're too proud. Mothers are maybe more attached to their children anyway, so that's more of a motivation, more of an impact.
16	Male	4th	I've dealt with several families where it's a split home, so you know dad is either not present or you know there is a father involved and I've spoken with them in that effect. But you know a lot of that stuff is legal based, it's all custody involved with us. I've had mothers say "Yeah I'd rather you not contact the father." That happened to me last Friday and it's like, well I have to but he wasn't listed on the birth certificate so there's no way to verify paternity, so I don't need to. I hear stuff all the time like you know "He's older. He won't understand why you're involved." Or "it's very dangerous for the child." "The father's not been here. It's just a one-night-stand." Stuff like that. So that one. And I guess, sometimes building rapport might be more difficult for males than females.
17	Female	4th	I think that a lot of males take the backseat sometimes and that that's very difficult. Again, I don't think that fathers always understand that they have just as much of a right to their child as the mom does. I've heard multiple times "Well if we go to court, mom's just gonna get the child," and you know, I don't think they have an understanding of that, so really to sit there and explain them their rights. Less likely to admit to mental health issues Communication- between partners, male and child If they are involved, its hard to engage them, get them to interact, they are working or haven't been involved Knowledge of their rights to a child
18	Female	4th	I think a factor that can make it more difficult with males is sometimes the demeanor or past history, where they come from. I've had males that basically do get in your face to try to intimidate. And I've had quite a few that have been incarcerated, so that's another intimidating factor, especially since I'm a female and they're a male.

It depends on who the male is. There's one case right now where its' just… every conversation is extremely difficult because they're very aggressive and don't want to work with me. They say horrible, almost on the threatening level, things.

I guess the denial on their end. You understand what they need from your point of view, but obviously on their end of it they might not think they need those services. A lot of people you work with in child welfare, they're not ever going to think they need that and agree to that and they'll fight you on it for sure.

Intimidation, like… I'm a man and you're a woman and you're not going to tell me anything. Getting real close, getting aggressive. I've encountered a lot of that.

Another barrier would be incarceration. That's difficult. It's hard to figure out exactly where they're at, get a hold of them, you're trying to explain things and they don't understand, you can't see them face to face. You see their criminal past and know why they're there—that can be intimidating in and of itself, especially if it's a violent crime.

I guess just like physical presence. It goes along with the intimidation. Sometimes just right off the bat they're in your space and they know they're physically intimidating to you and they'll definitely use that.

19	Female	4th	There have been a couple of scary guys A father who is a little older than the mother so he has a different value system Open hostility Unwillingness to communicate- not necessarily hostility Pre conceived- they already have their mind made up about something. Perception of who I am and what my role is
20	Female	4th	When I get to the point of discussing goals and things like that- I am good at doing that. It is the initial meeting with the male members because a lot of time men have different view points of things. When it deals with the relationship with the mother of the child because very rarely do the stories match from the father's view point and mother's view point. Locating them. If their names are on the cases, there are no addresses Incarceration Employment- they are at work. It is hard to set up scheduled visits for them.

Appendix H Participant Commentary on Differing Engagement Skills

Table 9 Selected Participant Comments on Differing Engagement Skills

Participant Number	Gender Identity	County Class	Commentary on Differing Engagement Skills
1	Female	6th	Same approach with both parents It isn't a male/female situation, my approach is it's a parenting situation It's addressing a parent, not mother over father. Most parents are willing to understand concerns for their kids or understand ways they could use some help if approached correctly I have to explain things differently to men. With men you have to be more matter of fact and cut to the chase. With women you work your way in slowly through conversation, positive reinforcement/feedback. Men just want you to get in, say what you want to say and get out. I do better getting to the point than small talk- probably started off better with men then women.
2	Female	6th	With females I could be a little more blunt, whereas with males it might be a little… doctored. Still obviously talking about the presenting problems, but making them or the presentation of them nicer.
3	Female	6th	I pretty much take the approach of addressing the males and females in the same way when they're together. Just to reiterate the consistency. When I'm addressing males individually I typically use a more straight forward and to the point approach and I let them know just for transparency's sake, I'm going to very straightforward and they seem to respond well to the honest, straightforward, not beating around the bush approach. So just presenting things as, this is what the situation is, this is how it's going to be moving forward, he realized that it would be in his best interest to comply with working with me.

I think I'm more direct and factual with the males and I'm mor empathetic and I do more validation with the females.

I try to be flexible with how I engage males. Some of them are very cooperative and I think it's the cooperation piece that determines how I engage the male figures. If they're more cooperative then I go back to my standard validation empathetic stuff, and the more hesitant they are and the more resistant they are to cooperate, that's when I usually apply the more black and white straight forward factual approach.

Consider schemas and what preconceived notions males have about service providers, caseworkers and other options we offer to them. The more we reframe and repitch the idea, I think they're more open to it.

			I don't think my engagement skills differ.I might have to ask the guys to explain more what they mean or why he believes what he's saying more than a female but I don't think there is any difference.
4	Female	6th	I think honesty. What can I do to help the situation? What can I do to make the situation better? If we don't fix the situation, and this is the outcome, have that hard conversation. Be honest with them
			I was in the military with guys. You learn very quickly, how to talk like them, act like them, think like them, very quickly. Worked in the gas industry for years…same situation. They're a different animal.
5	Female	5th	Sometimes female caseworkers are more flirtatious with males- might use charm and attraction to get along better. We might look "taller" or use a stronger voice and take a breath of courage when you know certain men have been more aggressive.
			Treat them like they are "the man" of the house. Speak to them like they are the authority in the house
6	Female	4th	No. They [engagement strategies] are the same.

I found that males are a little bit more fact-driven. If we can get down a list, and I will just say like "hey, give me five things that we need to work on as a family" and then they can just list a few things. … With the males I found that it's easier to start with point blank "I have questions and I need you to answer them, so just be straight with me on this." The emotional connection, they don't really tend to show as much emotion when we're there, whether or not that happens when we leave is of course is not nothing that I have to deal with.

Just being very factual about it and not, as much as I believe in engaging emotionally, it's a lot harder with the males and so it's more beneficial if they can meet with a therapist or a counselor to talk about any emotional concern b/c males don't usually share that with us in the field.

| 7 | Female | 4th | I think that the guys are more factually driven. Like I said, I give them a time frame and I give them the steps. I tell them like I will be here every week, so expect me. Just being straight forward with them and, not that I'm not concerned with their emotional connection, but they… I found out most males have their guard up with us. |

I do find lately that it's been pretty beneficial to do things with teleconference, so dad can participate on his way home from work. He can just put it in hands-free and just chat while he's going and just talk about things, or on his lunch break, you know, step away from the group and have his drug and alcohol interview. So being able to work with the schedules of the males is something I think that needs to be tweaked a little bit.

I like to give males a bulleted list of things that they need to do or things they need to consider, phone calls to make. It's like "Here, do this. I'll check up next week." It's 50-50 on whether they complete the list. Usually dads do at least one or two phone calls. Whereas moms, it's like "this helps because of this. And this will be beneficial because it will address the root of the problem, which is this."

| 8 | Male | 4th | I think being a male makes it easier. A lot of times, when it comes to talking to guys, it seems they respect a male opinion more, which is sexist and I don't agree with it in any way but it's what I've noticed. I feel like I'm pretty confident overall in being able to engage with people from the feedback I get from them. |

You form your own style of communication with people, your own unique way of engagement.

I'm straight-up with people about the things they have to do, both genders. But I feel like my ideas are more willingly accepted when it comes to females. I don't know if it's an authority thing, or an open-mindedness thing. Females tend to listen a lot better. They listen to everything as a whole rather than pick and choose tidbits of information and reject what you're saying based on that.

As much as I try to keep a level playing field with everybody, you have to adapt. Part of this job is being able to. There's definitely different engagement styles. You have to find what works for you. You have to be able to adapt and be flexible and respond to people. We try to make things family-specific rather than gender specific. But there are different ways of doing things that get better results with different people.

Clients in general, they want to see fact-based things. They want to see truths, they want to be able to recognize truths. A lot of what I find is the way I can talk to one person is completely different than the way I'd have to talk to another. It's kind of the same with genders, as we talked about. It's extremely important.

9	Female	5th	[Engagement skills are] A little bit different I guess, because I'm a woman. I guess that sounds kind of sexist which is probably what you're looking for in this study. You just kind of outline what the goals are and if there're questions, you answer the questions. I don't think that differs a lot, no matter what gender the parent is.
10	Female	4th	I think I can be a little more straightforward with the guys than with the women. I think that's just gender. I guess it depends on the personality. Sometimes there's male caregivers that are just as sensitive as the women. And sometimes there's women that are really insensitive. I don't know. It just depends on the individual, I guess.
11	Male	4th	Adult males are overall more difficult to engage Tone of voice/way I address concerns initially are different. At first- male and female reactions at the door step is different. I don't necessarily change my engagement- but my initial tone, choice of words differs

12	Female	4th	Umm, I don't know. I mean maybe, Maybe I. I don't know I have never thought about it before. I feel like I come at everybody, try to have a smile on my face, even in difficult situations. I try to be respectful and not talk over people. I think also I respond to whatever they give me. I don't go in thinking I am using a different strategy, I just respond to them and adjust to them.
13	Female	4th	Have a nice firm approach. I can be very authoritative, I am never intimidated. Even if they don't like me, they engage with me. I am one of the oldest in our unit so I have a mother like role and style. Sometimes I can give them the motherly direction that they didn't get. I am a realist, I don't hide things from m family, I don't sugar coat it. That is a big deal, especially with the mothers. No matter the path they go down, I still have a good relationship with them. I don't judge- that helps. No differences. I am firm with both. Depends on the case and who I am talking to. Maybe just identify when one is more emotional than other. Male's emotions can be different than women's. Some men get angrier or are more withdrawn and held back with their emotions. Once you understand that, it's easier to work with them. I feel like I can get further with males than I can with females. Males compartmentalize more than females do. They only deal with the emotions in that moment. They can zoom in and focus. They are more reasonable. Sometimes they help translate things to the mother if they aren't being reasonable or rational about something.
14	Female	4th	Engagement strategies do not really differ

			Saying that the sooner we work everything out, the sooner the case gets closed. I just need to make sure everything that needs to happen is happening.
15	Male	4th	The father's just as responsible as the mother. The father needs to do those services… you have that child, also. Once you have that child, that's your responsibility, you need to accept your responsibility and you need to do what you have to do for that child. It can't all fall on the mother. It's a lot easier to have that home environment work with two parents.
			I just kind of like listen to what they're saying, but sometimes you know it seems like whenever I show up I'm like the bad guy. You know like "Why is this person coming here? Everything's fine." I seem to get more pushback from females than I do from men for some reason. .
16	Male	4th	It's not cookie cutter, mind you, it's you know tailored. You know how I give myself off is tailored to each situation, but you know I just kind of like work with them, let them know that I'm not… You know, I get that no one wants CYS to show up. But I'm a pretty understanding person, so I just let them talk and kind of figure out what's going on. That seems to contribute well across the board.
			For all intents and purposes, they don't want me there and I don't want to be there, but at the same time, there's a reason why I'm there. So you know, I kind of communicate that to my families and I'm like "Listen, we gotta work on some stuff and we'll see what we can do. Normally we stay open for this long, it could be shorter, it could be longer. It just depends on what we get done in the timeframe we get it done in.
			I try to keep everything the same, it doesn't matter about gender in my opinion, but I don't know. I'm sure the way I would present myself, my demeanor, tone of voice would not change from male to female. You know you always want to keep an open distance between you know… I don't know. I don't think so
17	Female	4th	I think I do have to try a little harder with dads sometimes. When you talk to mom, she knows she is going to be the one dealing with us. The dads have to be walked through the steps sometimes but here is how we want to help and here is how we will be here for you. Have to break things down more, they don't know all their rights and responsibilities in the process.
			I don't think we push as hard to have males involved. Unless we have a guy that wants to take the kids and is great, we just let the dad slide.

So really just sitting down and talking to him, and explaining to him the rights that he shares just as mom does. So I guess just taking the time to inform them and make sure that they're knowledgeable as to the rights to their children as well.

| 18 | Female | 4th |

Talking to them both individually and then bringing them together would be how I would engage them.

I think the other big thing is those first few engagements, you can see somebody's demeanor or personality or what works with them, because everybody is different.

| 19 | Female | 4th |

No, generally not different.

A child has two parents. I don't see one being more or less than the other as a general rule their fathers play an important role in the child's life I think it is important to give equal weight to the family dynamic when it is possible.

When I approach a man I try to be more scientific, "studies have shown that children who participate in programs…" Mention all those sorts of points. When I talk to women about the same services I may approach it more with more heart or compassion. I can get a connection when I am trying to build rapport with the mother. I am a mother and a grandmother and she is a mother. Mother's tend to have desires for achieving for their children.

| 20 | Female | 4th |

Not a big difference, but how I present myself in talking with them and trying to build rapport may feel or be a little different with males. One time I noticed when I went in a house there was a lot of Steelers stuff. I started talking to him about the Steelers. I am by no means a Steelers sports expert, but I am a fan. Would I do that with a women? Probably not. There are so many other things that I can connect with them on.

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