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A POST-INTENTIONAL PHENOMENOLOGICAL EXPLORATION OF A SENSE OF  
SAFETY IN THREE-GENERATION LOW-INCOME FAMILIES

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to the Faculty of  
Montclair State University in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements  
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

by

KAITLIN BRIGID MULCAHY

Montclair State University

Upper Montclair, NJ

May 2019

Dissertation Chair: Dr. Bradley van Eeden-Moorefield

MONTCLAIR STATE UNIVERSITY  
THE GRADUATE SCHOOL  
DISSERTATION APPROVAL

We hereby approve the Dissertation  
A POST-INTENTIONAL PHENOMENOLOGICAL EXPLORATION OF A SENSE OF  
SAFETY IN THREE-GENERATION LOW INCOME FAMILIES

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## ABSTRACT

### A POST-INTENTIONAL PHENOMENOLOGICAL EXPLORATION OF A SENSE OF SAFETY IN THREE-GENERATION LOW-INCOME FAMILIES

by Kaitlin B. Mulcahy

Despite a wide body of literature that suggests safety as critical to human development and individual well-being (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978; Bowlby, 1969; Fosha, Siegel & Solomon, 2009; Marvin, Cooper, Hoffman & Powell, 2002; Porges, 2011; Tronick, 2007), a comprehensive review of the literature found a paucity of research that addresses the phenomenon of a sense of safety within family units. This study sought to fill this gap through an entirely strengths-based design that made use of post-intentional phenomenological methods and arts-based analysis. The research question that guided this study was: *How is the phenomenon of a sense of safety experienced within three-generation families with reported incomes at a maximum of 150% of the federal poverty level?* Four families were invited to collaborate in activities of the study, including a 60-minute Open View (Fenton, 2013), the collection of children's drawings, and an exercise of Family Sculpting (Duhl, Kantor, & Duhl, 1974; Satir, 1972). The phenomenological material produced seven tentative manifestations, which then combined into four post-intentional provocations about a sense of safety for these families: implicit, intergenerational, vigilant, and proximal. Findings from this study suggest that a sense of safety for three-generation families reporting incomes at a maximum of 150% of the federal poverty level is experienced implicitly, across generations, through actions of vigilance and physical proximity.

*Keywords:* families, post-intentional phenomenology, poverty, safety, strengths-based, multi-generational

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And finally, this work was completed because of my own three-generation family, who joined me on this journey of “Dr. Mom”, patiently taking care of many morning routines, carpools, dinners, and bedtimes, while consistently providing me encouragement, reassurance, and patience, and backing me up and boosting me up with laughter and love.

## DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my own three-generation family: my mother, Kathleen, my father, Thomas, my husband, George, and my two children, Mairead and Kieran, who collectively provide me with a sense of safety and love every day of my life.

*Here is the deepest secret nobody knows  
(here is the root of the root and the bud of the bud  
And the sky of the sky of a tree called life;  
Which grows higher than soul can hope or mind can hide)  
And this is the wonder that is keeping the stars apart  
i carry your heart (i carry it in my heart)*

(Cummings, 1952, pg. 128)

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## CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

### Personal Lived Experience

One evening not long ago, while tiptoeing out the door of my three year old son's room, falsely believing that he had finally fallen asleep, a hesitant but serious question rose from the dark folds of his covers, "Mommy.... am I safe?" I found this question unexpected, but I calmly and without much reservation assured him that he was safe: "Of course! You are safe". He continued, "So, I won't be taken by a robber out of my room?" I answered confidently, "No, sweetheart. I am here and your Dad is here. No one will take you." He continued for a third time, "But how do you know?" Pausing in response to this simple, yet existentially deep question, I responded, "Because our house is safe and our neighborhood is safe and Daddy and I won't let anything bad happen to you." Seemingly satisfied, my son replied, "Ok! Goodnight!" and then gave me permission to slip into the hallway and out of his room, closing the door behind me, leaving him, alone, but safe, in his bedroom for the night.

Despite my outward appearance of ease in answering this question, internally, I was abuzz with wonder. What did he mean by 'safe'? What was his definition of this word? Was he only concerned about his physical safety, or could he also have meant his psychological, emotional, or spiritual safety? His last question was prescient – how, in fact, did I know that he was safe? What was I using to inform my own reaction of reassurance? I had a cognitive knowing that we live in a neighborhood known to be free of violence, within the protective cast that privilege affords. I had an understanding that both my son and daughter were beneficiaries of this privilege and that our safety was almost an implicitly "of course!" guarantee. Yet, it also seemed that my response was informed by a knowing that was not logical, but body-based and sensory, located centrally - in the same place where a dancer's center is found, just below the belly button in the abdomen, primarily responsible for keeping balance when unstable. There

was a knowing, in that spot. The knowing felt like something more than just cognitively rationalizing the checklist of things that keep us safe (e.g. the unearned privilege of dominant race, ethnicity, religion and sexual orientation, residing in a middle class neighborhood, benefiting from multigenerational familial and economic support, experiencing physical and psychological health). Instead, it felt like a *sense*, a subcortical knowing, that was informed before I could have had factual knowledge about home safety technology and neighborhood crime statistics. This felt sense of safety was experienced as a knowing inside the body, akin to knowing how to swallow or how to breathe, activities universally understood as necessary for humans to thrive.

I began to wonder whether this felt sense of safety would also be considered necessary to thrive, and if so, how it came to be within the human experience. Was it co-constructed through interaction, as it was experienced in my family during an otherwise unremarkable evening routine, or through some other means? And further, how might families respond to this kind of question if their felt sense of safety was more uncertain than mine. Would their response be different than my effortlessly provided message of safety? If unsafe, either factually or perceptually, do they lie to their children in those circumstances, believing that providing a definite message of safety to a three-year old is a better idea than uncertainty? And would they consider this a lie? Or do they tell the truth in an effort to provide a protective awareness that they believe the child may need in order to survive in a threatening world? I found myself wanting to both learn more about the phenomenon of a sense of safety within families, as well as how this universal experience lives in and with them.

### **Statement of Opportunity**

Inspired by my lived experience, this research aimed to gain further awareness of the phenomenon of a sense of safety as it may be experienced in family systems. This study

specifically looked at the phenomenon of a sense of safety as it was experienced within three-generation families who reported incomes at a maximum of 150% of the federal poverty level. This study was rooted in the belief that a sense of safety is an experience to be explored rather than a problem to be solved. Therefore, it was necessary to shift from traditional research methodology motivated by the identification of a problem, to a strengths-based approach motivated by the identification of opportunities (Fenton, et. al., 2015). Accordingly, this study identified three opportunities offered by the exploration of the phenomenon of a sense of safety in families.

First, this study has the opportunity to contribute to the literature about the construct of a sense of safety. Diverse bodies of literature has posited safety as a biological and evolutionary imperative (Porges, 2001, 2003, 2007; Siegel, 2001; van der Kolk, 2014), the underpinning of psychological wellness (Maslow, 1943; Sandler, 1960), the formation of our earliest relationships (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978; Bowlby, 1969; Marvin, Cooper, Hoffman, & Powell, 2002), necessary for the learning of new skills and innovation (Bernier, Carlson, & Whipple, 2010; Kopp, 1982; Oppenheim, Koren-Karie, & Sagi-Schwartz, 2007; Shanker, 2012; Twemlow, Fonagy, & Sacco, 2002), the organizing model of adult relationships (Holmes & Murray, 2007; Ryan, Brown, Creswell, 2007; Sadikaj, Moskowitz, & Zuroff, 2015), and the foundation of moral behavior (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2001; 2003). Further, literature on neurological development suggests that conditions of safety potentiate proper neural development (Shonkoff, 2016). Studies conducted with trauma survivors explain symptomology of lasting post-traumatic stress as being due to the experience of the loss of the sense of safety (Bath, 2015). Research on community violence and zones of conflict advance the restoration of safety as one of the first strategies towards healing (Igreja, 2003; Yablon & Itzhaky, 2015). Despite the above wide body of literature that suggests safety as critical to human development and individual well-being, a comprehensive review of the literature has found a paucity of

research that addresses the phenomenon of a sense of safety within family units. In fact, research on family process has yet to consider the co-constructed sense of safety as a contributing factor to family resilience, climates, or strengths. Although two well-researched topics of inquiry, attachment theory (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978; Bowlby, 1969; Marvin, Cooper, Hoffman, & Powell, 2002), and emotional security theory (Cummings, 2003; Forman & Davies, 2005), suggest that feelings of security originate from relational interactions with caregivers, both theories only measure security on the individual child level. Theories that do consider system level phenomena, such as work on family resilience (Ungar, 2016; Walsh, 2006) and family strengths (Stinnett & DeFrain, 1985), have not explicitly included safety as a factor that builds resilience or strength. Research has not yet explored the sense of safety through systemic inquiry. By exploring the phenomenon of the sense of safety as it is experienced within families, this proposed study has the opportunity to blend research that suggests the foundation of the sense of safety is critical for positive individual development with evidence from family strengths literature that views healthy family systems as the basic unit of a healthy society.

Second, this study has the opportunity to contribute to the growing body of strengths-based research. The majority of prior research focused on an identified social problem, dysfunction, or pathology (Solarz et. al., 2004), and privileged problems over possibilities (Gates & Kelly, 2013). Strengths-based research serves to uphold that which is resilient and positive about the population being highlighted (Maton, Schellenbach, Leadbeater, & Solarz, 2004; McMahon, Kenyon, & Carter, 2013), rather than focusing only on deficits and vulnerabilities. Focusing on strengths throughout the research process allows for a shift in perception of family experience such that what is promising about families can emerge. According to Weick and Saleebey (1995),

The legacy of family pathology has geared treatment and policy to ever more sophisticated analysis of failure. It has not prepared us to recognize, celebrate, and

support family strengths. Our cultural preoccupations with family weakness and disintegration have led us to reactive and punitive policies and a demoralized view of human change. It is time to assert a renewed focus on family strengths and empowerment in order to encourage optimism about human capacity and to resurrect communal commitments to family well-being (p. 147).

In family science, using a strengths-based perspective includes a movement towards viewing families as a cornerstone to a healthy society (McNeill, 2010). Strengths-based work can influence social change by identifying that which is going well and sharing these qualities with others. Strengths-based research includes a strengths-based research topic, the philosophy which frames the research, the way questions are asked, the perspective through which responses are heard, and the manner by which the findings are interpreted and shared (Fenton, Walsh, Wong, & Cumming, 2015; Robinson, Preide, Farall, Shapland, & McNeill, 2012). For example, a study conducted in 2013 by researchers Blitz, Kida, Gresham, and Bronstein utilized a strengths-based participatory research approach to study a family engagement program focused on prevention of trauma and toxic stress in schools located in communities of rural poverty. In contrast, other researchers conducted a 30 year longitudinal study on problematic pathways to pathology in families living in poverty (Serbin, Temcheff, Cooperman, Stack, Ledingham, & Schwartzman, 2011). Both studies had an aim towards prevention, but the latter did so through focusing on what was going well and using a collaborative, participatory research approach with the community, whereas the former did so through a longitudinal project entitled with the word “risk” while only measuring pathological behaviors so as to eventually learn factors to avoid in the future. The current study has the opportunity to contribute to the growing body of strengths-based research by conducting research about a sense of safety in families, a potential topic of strength, through a strengths-based epistemology, with a strengths-based methodology and strengths-based design.

Third, this study has the opportunity to advance policy and practice recommendations about the phenomenon of a sense of safety as a potential strength in family life. This is especially relevant in our current sociopolitical history that has witnessed increases in concerns about safety among the public. For example, a 2017 survey of 1,019 English and Spanish speaking adults over the age of 18 living in the U.S. conducted by the Harris Poll group for the American Psychological Association (APA) found that the overall stress level between August 2016 and January 2017 rose from 4.8 to 5.1 (10-point scale) due to fears about the election results and political climate (American Psychological Association, 2017). This finding not only emphasizes the increase in stress due to the election results of 2016, but also demonstrates the American Psychological Association's motivation to vary from their annualized schedule in surveying stress in America because of the perceived spike in stress due to the political climate. In the five months between the 2016 and 2017 studies, overall stress in the population increased about both political and personal safety. For example, in the 2017 survey, 34% of respondents reported significant levels of fear about their personal safety, up from 29% in August 2016, and at the highest level since the question was first asked in 2008 (American Psychological Association, 2017). The same research found that 63% of the population reported feeling stress due common threats to safety such as uncertainty with health care, crime, terrorism, global wars, and mistrust in government (American Psychological Association, 2017). Overall, stress about safety was higher for African-American, Latinx, and people living in poverty in both of the 2016 and 2017 surveys than in the White and/or middle or upper-middle class communities, with percentages of stress for African-American, Latinx populations rising between 2016 and 2017. Given the increasing economic divide, social divisiveness, and bigoted rhetoric being permitted to infect the current political climate (Hook, 2017), it is likely that public concerns about safety may continue to rise, with deepening disparity (American Psychological Association, 2017). This study has the opportunity to address the increased perceived threat to safety by using

information learned about how families experience a sense of safety to inform promotional and preventive programs and policies.

### **Collaborators of the Study**

The opportunities of this strengths-based study necessitated an intentional collaboration with the population under investigation. Prior strengths-based research suggests that those agreeing to be part of a study should be given respect to be considered the experts on their experience (Gates & Kelly, 2013; McCashen, 2005) and are collaborators, rather than participants, in the research process (McCashen, 2005; Fenton, 2013). With this guidance in mind, this study defined the families included in this sample as research collaborators (Whyte, 1991). Collaborators were families who self-identified as a three-generation family, with at least one child over the age of 3 years, and who reported incomes at a maximum of 150% of the federal poverty level (approximately \$31,955 in 2019; <https://aspe.hhs.gov/poverty-guidelines>), which is the typical qualification criteria used to gain access to many social programs in New Jersey, including WIC (<https://www.state.nj.us/health/fhs/wic/participants/apply-wic/income.shtml>) and Medicaid eligibility (<https://www.benefits.gov/benefit/1314>). This study allowed for broad inclusion of collaborators' definition of family as those self-identified with emotional, biological, cultural or relational commitment to one another over time (Goldfarb, Grinberg, & Rana, 2017). A three-generation family was defined as living in close enough proximity for daily contact, and including at least one member from the first generation (grandparent, grandaunt, granduncle, grand-friend or fictive kin, etc.), at least one member from the second generation (biological parent, adoptive parent, legal guardian, etc.), and at least one member from the third generation over the age of 3 years (biological child or children, adoptive child or children, kinship/foster child or children). The three-generation family was chosen as the unit of analysis because of the opportunity to use the strengths-based perspective in full family

research, rather than an individual's perspective on the family, a methodology unfortunately lacking in the family science literature (Olson, 2011). Also, prior research has demonstrated that protective factors, such as the sense of safety, can be transmitted inter-generationally. For example, research has suggested that adults with high felt security, who likely had secure attachment relationships in infancy, are more likely to create secure attachment relationships with their children (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). This study aimed to build on prior research to explore the sense of safety within the three-generation family system.

Income level was determined based on self-reports from the second-generation family members. Poverty is measured in various ways, including the official poverty measure and the supplemental poverty measure (Annie E. Casey, 2018). This study is defining this as incomes that are 150% of the official federal poverty level (approximately \$31,955 in 2019; <https://aspe.hhs.gov/poverty-guidelines>). The choice to focus this study on families reporting incomes at a maximum of 150% of the poverty line was made because of the opportunity to increase strengths-based research with this population. Strengths-based researchers put intentional focus on the strengths of populations traditionally studied through a deficit lens, or who are disproportionately pathologized or marginalized (Gates & Kelly, 2013; Munford & Sanders, 2005). Overwhelmingly, research conducted on families living in poverty uses a deficit-lens (see Eden & Kissane, 2010), producing research findings such as behavior and health problems (Linver, Brooks-Gunn, & Kohen, 2002), social and economic stress (Ackerman, Kogos, Younstrom, Schoff & Izard, 1999; Roy & Raver, 2014), academic and educational challenges (Aber, Jones, & Raver, 2007; Yoshikawa, Aber, & Beardslee, 2012), internalizing symptoms (Dearing, McCartney, Taylor, 2006), and disrupted attachments (Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University, 2015; Tronick, 2007), rather than identifying the protective factors that may exist alongside these concerns.

### **Families Reporting Incomes at a Maximum of 150% of the Federal Poverty Level**

The prevalence of families living in poverty in this country (1 in every 5 children) is a significant social problem that needs to be addressed (Dreyer, Chung, Szilagyi & Wong, 2016). However, alongside the challenges of poverty, families also have strengths which should be highlighted and leveraged. Research that has been done from a strengths-based perspective has identified factors such as emotional warmth and consistent routines that allow families to sustain through harsh conditions stemming from economic disparity (Becvar, 2013; Masten, 2001; Orthner, Jones-Sanpei, & Williamson, 2004). For example, the pioneering longitudinal study on individual resilience among children living in poverty in Hawaii done by Werner and Smith (1992) found that many children demonstrated resilience when they had positive relationships at least one caregiver. A more recent study by Wilson-Simmons, Jiang, and Artani (2017) from the Center on Children in Poverty looked at a portion of the data from the national Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study (N=2,210) using a strengths-based lens to identify parental resiliency factors. These included communicating clearly, spending leisure time with children, having routines and schedules, and providing nurturing, among others. Despite the typical deficit-based stories about low-income families, the researchers found the majority of children rated their caregiver as high in parental resiliency (Wilson-Simmons, Jiang & Artani, 2017). This current study aimed to contribute to the recent strengths-based research on this population.

### **Three-Generation Families**

Since 2000, the prevalence of three-generational living situations in the U.S. has trended upward (Ruggles, 2007; 2011). The recession of 2007-2009, the continual increase of females in full time out-of-home employment, the necessity for multiple-income earners per family, increased life expectancy, and single-parent families may have contributed to this rise (Bengtson, 2001; Pilkauskas, 2014, Pilkauskas & Cross, 2018). In fact, according to an April 2018 Pew Research Center report, approximately 20% of American families were living in

multigenerational households in 2016, defined as having at least two adult generations living in one domicile, up from 17% in 2009 and at the highest percentage on record. The same report noted that the population of three-generation homes, defined as two adult generations and at least one child, rose from 26.5 in 2012 to 28.4 million in 2016, or approximately 8.7% of the population (Pew Research Center, 2018). Another study that used data from the 1996-2008 panels of the Survey of Income and Program Participation and 2009-2016 data from the American Community Survey found that 9.8% of the population were living in three generation households, a 17% increase from 20 years prior (Pilauskas & Cross, 2018). This practice is even more common when families have infants and young children, including up to 25% of U.S. young children (Pilkauskas & Martinson, 2014). Even when not in the same household, but in close proximity, young children are spending up to 23 hours per week in grandparent care (Laughlin, 2013). Accordingly, grandparents appear to be playing a potentially large role in families' lives and development.

The frequency, duration, and experience of three-generational living varies by ethnicity, race, religion, and socioeconomic status (Chadda & Deb, 2013; Waites, 2009). For example, a 2014 study by Pilkauskas on three-generation living in early childhood found that living in three-generations increased expressive language development in the third generation in Hispanic children, but not for White, Asian, or Black children. Pilkauskas also found that externalizing behavior increased for White and American Indian/Alaskan Native children, but not for Hispanic and Black children. Finally, regardless of ethnicity, Pilauskas found that immigrant families benefited from three-generation living. A study that looked at three-generation families living in poverty conducted by Scaramella, Neppl, Ontai, and Conger (2008) found that growing up in poverty predicted an earlier age of parenthood for the second generation, and increased externalizing behaviors in the third generation, resulting in conditions that exacerbate the intergenerational transmission of poverty. A study using secondary data from the 2001 Survey

of Income and Program Participation found that the third generation children in three-generation families living in poverty demonstrated higher health risks than in dual or single parent families (Baker & Mutchler, 2010).

As evident in the studies reviewed above, research on three-generation families has a history of working through a deficit lens. For example, research from a deficit lens has found that living with grandparents can increase emotional or economic stress for the second generation (Couch, Daly, & Wolf, 1999; Spencer, et al., 2002). Research has suggested that grandparents who live with grandchildren are more likely to be less educated, earn lower incomes and have less social support than grandparents who do not live with their grandchildren (Kochhar & D'Veira Cohn, 2011; Ellis & Simmons, 2014). In general, the second generation in three-generation households tend to be younger, less educated and with lower incomes than those in two generation households (Pilkauskas & Martinson, 2014). Many studies conducted with this population in urban or rural settings highlight the absence of the second generation due to parental substance abuse, child abuse or neglect, and the subsequent burden of health, economic and social resources leveled on the first generation (Gibson, 2002; Mills, Gomez-Smith, & De Leon, 2005; Shakya, Usita, Eisenberg, Weston, & Liles, 2012).

However, research has occasionally focused on the strengths of these families. An example of strengths-based research conducted in 2002 by Caputo found that for African-Americans, living in multigenerational families appeared as a strength, as these families demonstrated more resilience against social challenges. This result was replicated by Waites in 2009, which also demonstrated strengths stemming from multigenerational living in African American families. In 2017, a study by Akhtari, Malik, and Begeer with almost 300 people apportioned evenly among the three-generations, found that having a close emotional relationships with grandparents increased social skills and decreased assertiveness in the third generation, as well as ameliorated negative family climates. Other research has demonstrated that living with grandparents provided

parenting support to the second generation (Barnett, 2010; Silverstein & Marenco, 2001), and reduced psychological distress and developmental support in the third generation (Ali & Malik, 2015; Ruiz & Silverstein, 2007). This research suggests that multigenerational ties may contribute to the well-being of families. This current study aimed to move past the traditional deficit view of three-generation families living in poverty to contribute to the recent strengths-based research on this population.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The lived experience of a family interaction had with my son sparked my interest in exploring the phenomenon of a sense of safety in families. While our conversation lasted for one moment in time, it is possible that the phenomenon of a sense of safety is co-constructed continually through multiple interactions throughout generations of family life. As such, the purpose of this study was to utilize a constructivist, strengths-based epistemology, and a strengths-based, post-intentional phenomenological approach to understand the phenomenon of the sense of safety as it may be experienced in three-generation families with reported incomes at a maximum of 150% of the federal poverty level. The research question that guided this study was: *How is the phenomenon of a sense of safety experienced within three-generation families with reported incomes at a maximum of 150% of the federal poverty level?*

If a sense of safety is implicit or inceptual, yet foundational to human and social development and well-being, it is critical that the sense of safety within family life be explicitly explored and better understood within family science research. As written by McNiff (2008), “the way we treat the most mundane or apparently inconsequential experiences may have the most to offer in suggesting a larger vision of social transformation” (p. 37). This study has the unique opportunity to fill this gap in the literature, contribute to the growing body of strengths-based research by using a strengths-based approach and methodology to study a potential

strength in family life, and use learning from the collaborating families to inform practice and policy towards social transformation.

### **Summary**

This chapter provided an accounting of a lived experience of an encounter of the phenomenon of the sense of safety in families which provided inspiration for the purpose of this study. The chapter outlined the three opportunities provided by this study, including understanding more about the sense of safety within family process, contributing to strengths-based research, and informing practice and policy about the inclusion of the sense of safety in practice and policy making. It also reviewed the population of study, or collaborators, of this study, and introduced the research question that guided the study. In the following chapters, the literature basis, methodological design, tentative manifestations emerging from data collection, and implications and applications of this study are detailed. In Chapter 2, the sensitizing epistemology of the study is proposed. Also in Chapter 2, a multidisciplinary literature review on the sense of safety, including the areas where the phenomenon appears lacking in family science, is outlined. In Chapter 3, the methodology of phenomenology and the specific design of post-intentional phenomenology is described in relation to its use in this study, complete with the data collection and analysis protocols. In Chapter 4, the seven tentative manifestations and four provocations that emerged from data collection are suggested. Finally, in Chapter 5, the implications and applications to practice, policy and future research stimulated by this study are discussed.

## **CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW**

This study is grounded in a social constructivist, strengths-based epistemology that seeks to illuminate the phenomenon of a sense of safety, as experienced in three-generation families with reported incomes at a maximum of 150% of the federal poverty level. This chapter first presents the characteristics of the specific epistemology that grounds this study. It then clarifies the conceptualization of safety used in this study. In doing so, this researcher provides justification for the differentiation of safety from security. Next, the chapter provides a multidisciplinary empirical understanding of the sense of safety including from the disciplines of neurobiology, early caregiving relationships, adult relationships, psychology, sociology, and family science. The chapter then identifies areas of opportunity to further understand sense of safety using a family science lens that includes attention to family resilience, family emotional climates, and family strengths. Finally, the chapter ends with a justification for centering the sense of safety as an explicit area of focus within the discipline of family science.

### **Sensitizing Epistemology**

Epistemology is a way of knowing conceptually and perceptually about the world (Reiners, 2012). The epistemology used here incorporates the paradigm of social constructivism with a strengths perspective. Social constructivism holds that meaning is constructed based on the perspective of those interacting in the social world (Cottone, 2007). A strengths perspective upholds the strengths and assets of a population alongside their challenges (Maton, Schellenbach, Leadbeater, & Solarz, 2004). When combined, a constructivist, strengths-based epistemology maintains that knowledge is manifest both through interaction in the social world, and through the inclusion of strengths and resources within particular populations of intervention or investigation. It assumes people are experts on their own lives (Kelly & Gates, 2010) and that

reality is a subjective experience co-created through interaction (Hughes & Seidman, 2002; Hughes, Seidman & Williams, 1993).

### **Social Constructivism**

A social constructivist paradigm maintains that multiple truths are possible and are experienced and constructed by people engaging within their particular cultural, historical, political, contextual, and communal social world (Furman, Jackson, Downey & Shears, 2003). In this view, ontology is relativistic and reality is subjective (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Social constructivism rejects the positivist assertion of ontological realism (Guba & Lincoln, 1994), or of a universally known truth (Reiners, 2012). Instead, a social constructivist view holds that knowledge is constructed through interactions in the social world (Cottone, 2007). A social constructivist paradigm suggests that knowledge is created through social interaction, not through an individual cognitive process (Gergen, 1985). Meaning is constructed in relationships, rather than discovered in consciousness, and thus has the proclivity to change in continual encounters and interactions (Furman, Jackson, Downey, & Shears, 2003; McNamee & Gergen, 1992). In social constructivism, knowledge is socially situated and constantly in flux (Cohen, Marion, & Morrison, 2007). As such, there may be multiple meanings and conclusions made about similar experiences.

### **Strengths Perspective**

A strengths perspective calls for a focus on the possibilities and abilities of individuals, families, and communities, rather than on problems or pathology (Saleebey, 1992). It also suggests people have resources that can be used toward building resiliency over obstacles or problems (Early & Glen Maye, 2000). Those working from a strengths perspective employ a careful, intentional, principled honoring of the entirety of a family's story. To do so, strengths-based practitioners listen to the whole of the family's experience, not just the presenting problem, and intervene in family processes through the existing possibilities in family life

(Saleebey, 1996). For example, a practitioner working from a strengths-based perspective would not only listen carefully to the challenges facing a family's life, but also be intentional about asking about the strengths inherent in their family and surrounding supports, and use this information to leverage these strengths to help families face their challenges.

Researchers have begun to adapt the clinical application of a strengths perspective into a framework with which to ground research (Maton, Schellenbach, Leadbeater, & Solarz, 2004). Strengths-based research shifts away from deficit-focused research approaches that target inquiry primarily on problems. Deficit-based research can serve to reduce the population of study into characterizations or stereotypes (French & D'Augelli, 2002). In deficit-based research, the identified problem becomes the lens through which the family is perceived (Oliver & Charles, 2015), at the expense of adaptive, resistant, or resilient qualities that also may be operative (McMahon, Kenyon, & Carter, 2013, Solarz, Leadbeater, Sandler, Maton, Schellenbach, & Dodgen, 2004). This tendency is particularly concerning when research is focused on marginalized or oppressed communities, as researchers risk further oppressing the community by only focusing on problems rather than strengths (Gates & Kelly, 2013).

In contrast, strengths-based scholars approach their research questions through the lens of possibility, shifting the research plan from identifying a research problem to discovering a research opportunity (Fenton, Walsh, Wong, & Cumming, 2015; Kana'iaupuni, 2005). A strengths perspective in research avoids stereotyping populations (French & D'Augelli, 2002), instead allowing a broader view of communities usually cast rigidly into particular characterizations or conventions. Strengths-based research centers the strengths of populations of inquiry, particularly those who have been traditionally researched through the deficit lens (Kelly & Gates, 2010; McCashen, 2005). As written by Saleebey (2009),

[Strengths perspectives] assume that [our subjects] know something, have learned lessons from experiences, have hopes, have interests, and can do some things masterfully. These

may be obscured by the stresses of the moment, submerged under the weight of crisis, oppression, or illness but, nonetheless, they abide (p. 15).

Approaching research with these strategies serves to reinforce and enhance the population of study through a strengths perspective (McMahon, Kenyon & Carter, 2013).

Taken together, this study was grounded in a sensitizing epistemology that weaves together social constructivism and a strengths perspective to explore the phenomenon of sense of safety. The epistemology is a fitting perspective with which to consider the social construction of meaning (Tilsen & McNamee, 2015) and include the strengths of communities often unheard or underserved (Furman, Jackson, Downey, & Shears, 2003). This study specifically explored the phenomenon of a sense of safety within three-generation families with reported incomes at a maximum of 150% of the federal poverty level, a group typically researched with a deficit lens. A constructivist, strengths-based epistemology provided the lens with which this study explored a sense of safety with this population, and guided the choice of methodology and analytic strategy outlined in Chapter 3.

### **Definitions**

In order to ensure conceptual clarity, it is necessary to define the main terms used in this study. This conceptual clarity is necessary and relevant given the conflation of the terms safety and security in the literature. The terms safety and security are frequently used interchangeably, as if describing the same phenomenon with kindred terms. Some theories (e.g. attachment theory, felt security theory, emotional security theory) may commit to one term in the name of the theory, but use the other in the description of the theory (e.g. Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978; Bowlby, 1969; Cummings, 2003; Forman, & Davies, 2005). Although the term safe and the term secure often are used as if cognates, the two do not share the same linguistic root. This results in a subtle conceptual difference in meaning between the two terms. According to

Merriam-Webster (2018), the word safe is from the Latin, *salvus*, meaning uninjured, or protected from unintentional accidents or mishaps. Secure is from the Latin, *securus*, meaning, without care, or feeling no apprehension, or protected from intentional dangers or threats. The condition of safety is about being protected from danger, whereas the condition of security is about being free from danger. As explained by Twemlow, Fonagy, and Sacco (2002), “security is an expectation of safety” (p. 319). Accordingly, safety is used in this study. This decision was made because of the sense of safety seeming to be sequentially experienced before security. The choice was also made because of additional understandings of the meaning of *salvus* as “whole” and “healthy” (Twemlow, Fonagy & Sacco, 2002). From a strengths perspective, this definition seemed appropriate.

It follows then, if safety is an experience so foundational that it may be considered primal or inceptual, it may be closer to a visceral experience, or a sense. As such, this research uses the phrase, *sense of safety* to describe the subjective experience. Prior researchers have suggested that feeling safe and being safe are not the same experience (Twemlow, Fonagy, & Sacco, 2002). It is possible that people experiencing safe circumstances may feel unsafe. For example, a family living in an upper middle class suburban neighborhood may not statistically be facing immediate threat to their safety, but they still all may have an overall sense of fear and worry, similar to an anxious family climate. Conversely, people experiencing empirically unsafe conditions may still feel safe. For example, a family living in a neighborhood with a statistically high crime rate, or a family with an ethnicity or religion under current public persecution, may maintain an overall sense of safety within their family climate regardless of actual threat. Thus, being safe and feeling safe are conceptual differences much like the use of the terms safety and security. This exploration focused on the collaborators’ visceral felt sense of safety, rather than an objective measurement.

### **A Multidisciplinary Conceptualization of a Sense of Safety**

A social constructivist paradigm suggests that we need to consult seemingly disparate literature to gain a complex understanding of the concept of a sense of safety in family units (Palinscar, 1998). This is consistent with a family science disciplinary approach as well (Douglas, 2010). A strengths perspective asserts that many areas of research might have something to contribute to a better understanding of a phenomenon. This research's utilization of a post-intentional philosophy and methodology asks the researcher to 'think with' theories (Vagel, 2018), wherein a researcher considers many theoretical conceptualizations and joins with them to explore the phenomena from multiple lenses. The below literature review follows the constructivist, strengths-based epistemology and post-intentional philosophical perspective to illuminate prior understanding of the sense of safety within selected fields of research, and then presents an opportunity for the inclusion of the sense of safety as an area of further research in the field of family science.

#### **Psychology**

Research from different variations of the field of psychology have looked at the experience of safety and security, including psychoanalysis, neuropsychology, early attachment, and adult attachment. The reviewed subfields of psychology have a long history of demonstrating the foundational importance of a sense of safety for psychological, developmental, and relational well-being. Although the literature appears to suggest that a sense of safety is imparted to individuals through relationships, each of these subfields of psychology consider the construct of safety on the level of the individual.

##### **Psychoanalytic perspective.**

Psychoanalysis is one of the first theoretical schools of thought and practice within the field of psychology, and is a foundational theory of the understanding of human development within the humanistic, or organismic, paradigm (Costa & Witten, 2009). The concept of safety as

a part of psychological process was first introduced within the discipline by psychoanalyst, Joseph Sandler. Sandler wrote about safety as not just the absence of anxiety, but as an unconscious feeling quality in and of itself. Sandler (1949/1960) places a safety principle alongside Freud's (1920) pleasure principle, suggesting that the drive towards safety is a universal and inborn motivation (Holder, 2005). For Sandler and Freud, safety was a similar unconscious drive toward pleasure and away from pain (Holder, 2005). In his conceptualization, Sandler believed that the ego sought safety not just to reduce anxiety, but as an end in itself (Twemlow, Fonagy, & Sacco, 2002). In this way, he considered the pursuit of safety in the same vein as instinct theory (Gampel, 1999), as a motivator of behavior. For Sandler, the drive for safety was stronger than the drive towards gratification, as often subjects have to impede gratification if such a desire is dangerous (Twemlow, Fonagy, & Sacco, 2002).

Similarly, Abraham Maslow (1943) posited safety as foundational to the human psyche. According to Maslow's hierarchy of needs model (1943), one of the most foundational needs is psychological security. In this model, basic needs are those that must be met before all other subsequent abilities can be actualized (Maslow, 1943). Maslow (1942, 1962) considered the need for safety to be at the foundation of all other psychological functioning, just above physiological needs that also ensure safety of body. Maslow's hierarchical model posits that those needs higher up the hierarchy, such as belongingness, esteem, and self-actualization, cannot be attained without attending to the basic. As stated by Maslow (1956),

Assured safety permits higher needs and impulses to emerge and to grow towards mastery. To endanger safety, means regression backward to the more basic foundation. What this means is that in the choice between giving up safety or giving up growth, safety will ordinarily win out. Safety needs are prepotent over growth needs...In general, only a child who feels safe dares to grow forward healthily. His safety needs must be

gratified. He can't be *pushed* ahead, because the ungratified safety needs will remain forever underground, always calling for satisfaction. (p. 38)

Another psychologist influenced by the psychoanalytic tradition, Wilfred Bion (1961), theorized the action of containment as producing the sense of safety. For Bion, containment is an interpersonal process whereby one person holds the information that is creating feelings of unease in the other; thus, making the other feel safe (Twemlow, Fonagy, & Sacco, 2002). Twemlow, Fonagy, and Sacco (2002) explained Bion's concept of commensal containment, writing that this kind of containment, "allows a natural give and take without either dependency or destructiveness" (p. 314). This concept is similar to psychoanalyst Donald Winnicott's (1960) holding environment, which describes the caregiving space provided to a child by a caregiver where the child can feel safe to learn, express, and explore. For both Bion and Winnicott, the concepts of containment and holding are enacted interpersonally within relationships to create feelings of safety from one person to another. These influential psychoanalytic theorists and practitioners provided a framework for understanding human motivation and behavior that included safety as central to psychological well-being.

### **Neuropsychological perspective.**

The field of neuropsychology studies the connection between brain functioning and resultant behavior, cognitions, and emotions (Fosha, Siegel, & Solmon, 2009). A neuropsychological perspective suggests that the sense of safety is evolutionarily built into neurological structures developed to orient to safety, potentiate because of conditions of safety, and operate more efficiently when in states of safety and calm (Porges, 2003; Perry, 2009; Siegel, 2001). These neurological structures are found within the right hemisphere of the brain, specifically in the limbic system (Devinsky, 2000), which is responsible for detecting safety and danger (Cozolino, 2006). The neurological structure that regulates emotional response to external stimuli, known as the amygdala (Siegel, 2001), sits within the limbic system. Another structure,

the hypothalamus, which is responsible for keeping the body physiologically balanced, also sits within the limbic system. The hypothalamus is involved in the activity of the physiological stress response system known as the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) axis. This process utilizes the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems to maintain physiological safety, or felt safety (Best & Lambie, 2016; Cozolino, 2006). The HPA axis is evolutionarily prepared to respond to threats of safety by initiating active protective responses such as readying for a fight or preparing to flee, and then, once perceived safe, restoring a calm state (Blair, Granger, & Razza, 2005). Other researchers such as Eisenberger and colleagues (2011) proposed the ventromedial prefrontal cortex as the location of the brain most likely to detect signals of safety. The ventromedial prefrontal cortex serves as the arbiter of interactions, modulator of emotions, and, ultimately, safety and danger (Beer, Heerey, Keltner, Scabini, & Knight, 2003).

Neurological structures oriented towards safety are shared with other animal species, and active from birth in humans. Despite human neurology bypassing that of other animal species to develop higher level problem solving, the limbic system is still primarily operative in the face of threat. Cozolino (2006) explains,

The most primitive subcortical fight or flight circuitry, shared with our reptilian ancestors, is interwoven with the most highly evolved association areas of the cerebral cortex used to consciously analyze threat. Thus, although conscious input is possible during stressful situations, under conditions of extreme threat, later evolving emotional and cognitive processes are directed by ancient, rapid-acting neural networks that are fundamental to survival. (p. 28)

Although the human ability for executive functioning and complex analysis has allowed our species to dominate the natural world, these higher cognitive capacities are dependent on a neurobiological sense of safety (Purvis, Cross, & Sunshine, 2007). Other researchers have suggested that higher cognitive capacities necessary for learning can only occur when the need

for neurobiological safety is satisfied (Best & Lambie, 2016; Holmes and Murray, 2007; Katz, McLeigh, & El szwec, 2017; Purvis, Cross, & Pennings, 2009; Twomley, Fonagy & Sacco, 2002). Similarly, epigenetic research has found that chronic stress produces genetic changes such that trauma literally gets under the skin. A longitudinal study by Essex and colleagues (2013) with 109 adolescents demonstrated differences in neuron myelination in adolescents of parents who reported higher stress levels in the adolescents' early years of development (2013). This research demonstrates the prominence of the neurological condition of safety for healthy and productive neurobiological functioning.

Porges extends neurobiological work on the structures of safety by connecting the neurological to the body physical. Porges' work, known as the Polyvagal Theory (2001, 2003, 2007), also extends the more conventional fight-flight response expectation of the human defense system by demonstrating that, when stressed, humans are readied first for social connection before defensive strategies. Polyvagal Theory describes how the sense of safety is imparted through the tenth cranial nerve, also known as the vagus (Cozolino, 2006). The vagus nerve provides bidirectional feedback from the brainstem to the heart, lungs, and digestive system, and seeks regulation and homeostasis between the brain and body (Porges, Doussard-Roosevelt, & Maiti, 1994). Porges asserted that the messages passed back and forth between the brain and body are influenced during social engagement, and are either regulated and calm when safe, or reactive and protective when under perceived threat (Porges & Carter, 2017; Porges & Lewis, 2009), including a response from an evolutionarily older unmyelinated vagus nerve (thus, the term 'poly' vagal), which initiates a shutdown response when perceiving life threat (Porges & Carter, 2017). Porges' work highlights the idea of a *sense* of safety, proposing a concept of neuroception (Porges, 2003, 2007), which is explained as an implicit, subconscious, visceral evaluation of threat in the environment (Geller & Porges, 2014). Neuroception allows humans to give and receive messages from one another through facial expressions and tone of voice. If

safety is detected through neuroception from cues of calm facial movements and even vocal prosody, the social interaction system is engaged. Instead, if threatening tones or expressions are conveyed, the threat response system is engaged. As explained by Geller and Porges (2014),

When the newer mammalian vagus is optimally functioning in social interactions (i.e., inhibiting the sympathetic excitation that promotes fight-or-flight behaviors), emotions are well regulated, vocal prosody is rich, and the autonomic state supports calm spontaneous social engagement behaviors. The face– heart system is bidirectional with the newer myelinated vagal circuit influencing social interactions and positive social interactions influencing vagal function to optimize health, dampen stress-related physiological states, and support growth and restoration. (p. 182)

When this bidirectional communication of safety is conveyed, the sense of safety is potentiated and enhanced. Porges' work helps to explain human behavior as people for connection and relationship, rather than only bodies for survival (LaMothe, 2013).

Research from neurobiology asserts the centrality of the sense of safety in human neurological structures. The extensive research on Polyvagal Theory, specifically, centers safety as a human biological imperative necessary for healthy early neurological functioning and all subsequent learning and connecting. This research points to the importance of attachment relationships with others in potentiating neurobiological readiness for experiences of safety.

### **Early attachment perspective.**

The study of early attachment relationships demonstrates the importance of early experiences on neurological and emotional development in infants and young children, as well as the significance of relationships in shaping the trajectory of a child's neurological and emotional future. From birth, the human infant is expectant of safety and looks to caregiving adults to provide such an experience (Cozolino, 2006). In infancy, the experience of safety is obtained through the organization of behaviors that are meant to establish and sustain connection with

others (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978; Marvin, Cooper, Hoffman & Powell, 2002).

John Bowlby was the first to study such behaviors, both through his work with children orphaned by World War II, and through ethology, or the study of animal behaviors. Bowlby developed Attachment Theory (1969) to describe the human infant's biological drive towards protection and proximity to others to ensure safety. In his ethological research, Bowlby found that the attachment system is not human specific, but found in other species as well (Fraley, Brumbaugh, & Marks, 2005). Yet, different than other mammals, humans require secondary altriciality, or the experience of needing care from others in order to survive (Portmann, 1969). Bowlby's research suggested that human infants enter the world with attachment promoting behaviors such as smiling, looking, vocalizing, clinging and cueing, evolutionarily meant to attract protection and proximity from caregivers (Bowlby, 1969). When an adult caregiver meets these behaviors contingently, the infant's need for protection and proximity is satisfied. As stated by Best and Lambie (2016),

The explicit meeting of these needs creates an experience of physical and emotional safety. In addition to this experience of 'felt' physical and emotional safety there is also a simultaneous, implicit, non-conscious process occurring in the body; a physiological experience. (p. 300)

Thus, the attachment promoting behaviors that are biologically primed in each human infant allow for the immediate needs for safety to be met. Additionally, as stated over two decades ago by Bowlby (1998), "for a person to know that an attachment figure is available and responsive gives him a strong and pervasive feeling of security" (p. 27). The contingent meeting of attachment promoting behaviors results in the internalization of the experience of being safe, which is both an emotional and physiological experience. Best and Lambie (2016) echo this concept,

In the crucial formative early years of life, this interpersonal attachment relationship creates a foundational template of behaviour patterns determined by the infant's 'felt' experience of safety or non-safety. This 'felt' experience of safety or non-safety also influences the developing child's confidence in exploring the world (p. 298).

Mary Ainsworth and colleagues (1978) worked with infant-parent dyads using the Strange Situation Procedure (SSP) to further operationalize the concept of attachment. In this work, they developed three classifications of attachment styles in children based on children's behaviors with their caregivers during post-separation reunion episodes: secure, insecure-avoidant and insecure-ambivalent (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978). A wide body of literature on the SSP demonstrates that children classified as securely attached display the ability to effectively utilize their caregiver to relieve their distress separation (for meta-analyses, see: Van Ijzendoorn & Kroonenberg, 1988; Van Ijzendoorn, 1995; Fraley, 2002). For example, a child classified as securely attached in the SSP is more likely to first respond with distress to separation from their primary caregiver, then use that caregiver to gain comfort and reassurance, and then again be able to explore and play with confidence, all because of an internalized model of safety, security, and surety of their primary caregiver's ability to provide both a comfort and a place from which to be confident to explore. Relational qualities assumed to constitute secure attachment relationships include, caregivers who are available for and sensitive to the child when they seek comfort following a distressing experience (Bowlby, 1969; Eisenberger et al., 2011), including responding contingently to infant cues of distress or pleasure (Beebe, 2006), caregivers with the ability to adequately reflect on their own childhoods and experiences as well as strive to understand the experience of their children, sometimes called mentalization (Fonagy, Steele, Moran, Steele, & Higgit, 1991), and an infant-caregiver dyad who engage in a mutual process of affective attunement (Stern, 1985; Weinfield, Sroufe, Egeland, & Carlson, 1999). When these qualities are present, the child is assumed to experience safety and security within the

relationship, and the relationship is used as a secure base from which the infant autonomously launches to explore and learn (Bernier, et al., 2010; Kopp, 1982; Marvin, Cooper, Hoffman, & Powell, 2002; Oppenheim, Koren-Karie, & Sagi-Schwartz, 2007; Stern, 1985). For example, a recent study conducted with 177 toddlers being raised in families with incomes reported at below 150% of the federal poverty level found that attachment security moderated the stress of living in poverty (Johnson, Mliner, Depasquale, Troy, & Gunnar, 2018).

Conversely, when these qualities are not present, as may be the case for children of parents who have experienced inadequate or unsafe caregiving themselves, children are left with a sense of ambivalent or anxious insecurity (Best & Lambie, 2016). Children classified as insecure-ambivalent are not able to utilize the caregiving relationship to relieve distress (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978). Children who are classified as insecure-avoidant do not look to the caregiving relationship to relieve distress, tending instead to avoid assistance (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978). Adult caregivers under threat or stress experience a neurological process that privileges their own safety and security, but impedes their ability to provide the relational environment for safety and security to develop in interaction with their child (Berlin, Appleyard & Dodge, 2011; Buckholdt, Parra, & Jobe-Shields, 2014; Mills-Koonce, et al., 2011; Sloman, Atkinson, Milligan, & Liotti, 2002). Appleyard and Dodge (2011) conducted a prospective, longitudinal study of 499 mother-infant dyads and found that caregivers who were raised within chronic stress may experience compromised physiological and neurobiological regulatory systems, which render them less able to model a state of regulation for their children. Similarly, Berthelot and colleagues (2015), used a 20 month longitudinal design and found that infants with disorganized patterns of attachment often had mothers who had unresolved histories of childhood abuse or neglect. In these cases, children are less likely to internalize the experience of a sense of safety, and instead function under the neurobiological and emotional protection of defensive strategies. The significant canon of attachment research, as

well as more recent work on the impact of stress and trauma on the caregiving behaviors that potentiate relational attachment, suggest that safety is both a foundational necessity to form attachments, as well as a byproduct of positive, healthy infant/young child – adult relationships.

### **Adult attachment perspective.**

Many studies have looked at the longitudinal sustainability of attachment classification over time, demonstrating that patterns of attachment sustain from infancy through adolescence into adult relationships (for meta-analyses, see: Van Ijzendoorn & Kroonenberg, 1988; Van Ijzendoorn, 1995; Fraley, 2002, Verhage, Schuengel, Madigan, Fearon, Osterman, Cassibba, van Ijzendoorn, 2016; Sroufe, 2005; Weinfield, Sroufe, & Egeland, 2000). Bowlby himself, as well as later attachment researchers, found that the attachment system served to organize behaviors and relationships, not just in infancy, but throughout life (Bowlby, 1969; Sroufe & Waters, 1977). Influenced by Ainsworth, Main, and others' early attachment research, adult attachment research identifies adult classifications of: secure, dismissing, preoccupied and fearful (Main, Kaplan & Cassidy, 1985). Those adults classified as secure demonstrate an experience of felt security (Main, Kaplan, & Cassidy, 1985). Researchers define the experience of felt security as the expectation of responsiveness to needs, perceived caring, and perceived regard (Sroufe & Waters, 1977; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007; Holmes & Murray, 2007) when in relationship with others. Felt security can be considered an amalgamation of attachment security, self-esteem, meaning making systems, and beliefs about social connection and support (Holmes & Murray, 2007), and essentially a barometer by which adults decide whether a relationship is safe to pursue or continue. Put simply, an adult approaches relationships with the same expectation as was patterned in infancy from the relationship with their primary caregiver. For those adults, who, as children, had their attachment needs met, they expect positive regard, care, and responsiveness. For adults who, as children, found that their attachment needs went unnoticed or incompletely addressed, their expectations of adult relationships will follow suit. Ultimately,

adults who experienced safety through relationships as a child will expect that intimate adult relationships will both create and maintain safety, whereas adults who did not experience safety as a young child will expect that they will need to protect themselves in adult relationships.

Studies have shown that when someone has a strong sense of felt security, they are more likely to experience relationship satisfaction because of both the propensity for proximity-seeking behaviors and the reduction of protective behaviors (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2011; Holmes & Murray, 2007; Murray, Holmes, & Collins, 2006). For example, researchers Sadikaj, Moskowitz, and Zuroff, (2015) measured felt security in 93 couples using a quantitative coding method of social interactions between the couple over 20 days, followed by an immediate survey on relationship satisfaction, and a second measure after 7 months. Results demonstrated that lower felt security predicted more relationship dissatisfaction, whereas positive relationships were used to buffer other life stressors (Sadikaj, Moskowitz, & Zuroff, 2015). Additionally, studies have demonstrated that pain tolerance and fear responses are dampened when in the presence of a positive attachment figure (Gillath, et al., 2006; Eisenberger et al., 2011), even when that attachment figure is either primed through a picture or a verbal memory, rather than being there in person. Eisenberger and colleagues conducted a study in 2011 with a sample of 17 female participants to explore the impact of looking at pictures of loved people when enduring pain. The researchers found that those figures considered safe can inhibit fear responses and help condition survival. The longevity and replication of findings from the body of literature on the positive influence of felt security on adult relationships and overall well-being again suggests the central importance of the experience of safety on well-being throughout the life span.

Additionally, studies have demonstrated that those high in attachment security tend to show less prejudice behaviors towards others (Hofstra, van Oudenhoven, Buunk, & Buunk, 2005; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2001; van Oudenhoven & Hofstra, 2006). As an example of this type of research, Mikulincer and Shaver (2011) partnered Israeli Jewish college students with

both an Israeli Jew and an Israeli Arab colleague, and were asked to add hot sauce to one of their partners' food, even though it was announced that the partners did not like hot sauce. Then, one Israeli Jewish student was primed with either the name of a secure attachment figure, a familiar person, or an acquaintance. When primed with the name of an attachment figure, students were less likely to use the hot sauce against the Israeli Arab, but without positive priming, they were more likely to choose the Israeli Arab than the Israeli Jew. This study demonstrates the influence of felt security on bias towards intergroup solidarity and outer group aggression. Their research found that high felt security increased empathy, and reduced the perception of threat from others, which resulted in less degrading and disparaging behaviors about the other. Further, when faced with a threat, research has found that a sense of security mitigates negative psychological reactions (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2003). Research by Hart, Shaver, and Goldenberg (2005) demonstrated that when adults felt safe in relationships, they were more likely to accept those different than them, and less likely to react irrationally to existential threats. Another quantitative study by Gillath and Hart in 2010 demonstrated that people with higher felt security would be less likely to support politicians within a fear-inducing political rhetoric. In this study, those participants with higher felt security tended to perceive strong caricatures of political candidates with less respect, and responded with less support for the Iraq War. This research suggests that an experience of safety not only leads to individual well-being, but also positive connection to others in society as well.

This cycle of safety is repeated intergenerationally as well, such that adults with high felt security, who likely had secure attachment relationships in infancy, are more likely to create secure attachment relationships with their children (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). For example, a prospective, longitudinal study conducted in 2014 by Sawada and colleagues with 135 new mothers found that prenatal maternal felt security predicted fussing behaviors of the infant at 12 months, with higher prenatal maternal felt security corresponding to less fussing by their infants.

For infants with medical complications, it was found that mothers with lower felt security prenatally had infants that cried more than infants of mothers with higher prenatal felt security than medically fragile infants of mothers with high felt security. Another longitudinal study conducted by Ensink, Normandin, Plamondon, Berthelot and Fonagy in Canada in 2016 with 57 cases from a secondary data set found that significant trauma histories and low reflectivity in parents predicted a disorganized attachment in their infants. It is clear from this research that the longevity and intensity of the internalization of the early attachment relationship has a strong impact on the experience of the sense of safety in adulthood and across generations.

### **Political Science**

The sense of safety is also considered within the broad field of political science, a field known for the study of governance, politics, and political behavior. For example, political scientist, Ronald Inglehart (1990; 1997) was inspired by Maslow's work to include security within his investigation of societal values alongside freedom, self-expression, and the like. His original work in 1990 demonstrated family security, or the family being free from harm, as one of the top five value concerns for Americans. Also, after the events of September 11, 2001, studies were conducted on the differences between how individuals perceived and processed existential threat. Huddy, Feldman, Taber and Lahav (2005) found that people who experienced a lack of safety in their early relationships tended to support an aggressive foreign policy agenda in the face of the existential threat of terrorism. Work in 2007 by Huddy, Feldman, and Webber, through the use of a national random digit dial survey method of over 1,500 Americans, found that lower levels of felt security in the years immediately following the 9/11 attack led to support for the restriction of domestic civil liberties. These researchers also found that people with a high level of felt security did not experience the need to embrace patriotism or government defensive action at the same level as those who had low felt security (Huddy, Feldman & Webber, 2007). Similarly, Weber and Federico (2007) found that interpersonal attachment styles contributed to

political ideologies. This work demonstrates how a sense of safety may contribute to political beliefs, ideologies, and policy.

On a more micro level, political science research also uses a sense of safety to explain societal processes. For example, in a qualitative study conducted in 2015 by Finnish researchers Heino and Veistila on the experience of Russian immigrants in Finland, the authors described the impact of social support on the themes of integration, recognition, and safety within Finnish society. This study stands alone in the extant research that qualitatively explores a sense of safety. The authors found that a sense of security mentioned by participants rose from early attachment relationships, but also social support from relatives, faith communities, and financial support from the government. They also concluded that a sense of contextual security, or feeling safe as the family interacted with Finnish society, contributed to an overall sense of safety. As Andrews, Kinnvall, and Monroe (2015) wrote in their introduction to a special journal issue focused on how the narrative of security influences personal political belief and action, “the building and rebuilding of progressive multicultural societies and peace are intimately related to how self and others are being reproduced through security narratives and the extent to which these narratives allow for historical inclusion or exclusion” (p. 144). This work demonstrates how the sense of safety may not just be an individual experience, but also extend to the formation of societies that are not only defined by war or conflict or defense, but by safety and inclusion.

### **Family Science**

A sense of safety has occasionally been explored within family science, specifically in studies that investigate the absence of safety, as is the case for systems of discord or violence. Predominantly, this literature has influenced the protocol of child protective systems (Carlson, Oshri, & Kwon, 2015), work focused on the dynamics and effects of intimate partner violence (Khaw, 2016), and strategies for restoration of safety within family units that have been unsafe to

individual members (Ribaudo, 2011). For example, family safety literature discusses the ruptures in relationship that occur in systems that experience inter-member violence, including intimate partner violence (Coates & Howe, 2016; Cooper & Vetere, 2005), child abuse or neglect (Fallon, Trocmé, Filippelli, Black, & Joh-Carnella, 2017; Rostad, McFry, Self-Brown, Damashek, & Whitaker, 2017; Teti, 2017), or sibling aggression or violence (Caspi, 2008, 2012). This literature resulted in various programs and practices aimed at restoring safety within the family system. Within the family field also exists literature about how families stay physically safe, as is described in studies of injury prevention (Ingram, Deave, Towner, Errington, Kay, & Kendrick, 2012; Setien, Han, Zuniga, Mier, Lucio, & Treviño, 2014), firearm safety practices (Martin-Storey, Prickett, & Crosnoe, 2015), and safe sleeping practices (Zoucha, Walters, Colbert, Carlins, & Smith, 2016), as a few examples. There is also literature focused on families of color that examine how these families communicate safety as a response to racial discrimination and explicit racial profiling (Benner, & Yeong, 2009; Burton, 2010; Harbin Burt, Simons & Gibbon, 2012). Although this diverse literature all use safety as a salient and central construct of study, this research spends little time conceptualizing safety and has not explored how a sense of safety is experienced within the family system.

One of the evidence-based models includes work initiated by Davies and Cummings (1994) on Emotional Security Theory [EST]. EST investigates children's emotional impact in situations of family discord and inter-parental violence. The theory is primarily focused on child outcomes based on parent behavior, rather than the family system as a collective unit. This model assumes that when parents have low conflict children experience emotional security, but when parents have high conflict children are less emotionally secure (Davies & Martin, 2013; Forman & Davies, 2003). The theory also posits that children ultimately do what they need to attain or preserve emotional security (Forman & Davies, 2005), whether or not those behaviors

are interpreted as maladaptive (e.g., attention seeking behaviors, taking on the scapegoat role in the family, etc.). EST is explained in this way by Davies and Martin (2013),

The central tenet of EST is that maintaining safety and security within the emotion-laden context of inter-parental conflict is a prominent goal for children. Within this framework, repeated exposure to parents' conflicts containing hostility, violence, and unresolved endings creates a toxic environment, making achieving and maintaining emotional security a difficult task for children (p. 1435).

Research on EST measures emotional security in children when in the context of their family system using the Security in Family Scales measure (Forman & Davies, 2005). This scale measures whether the child believes that the family unit can be used for security (Forman & Davies, 2005). When children cannot find security within the family, they respond with defensive coping strategies that may have subsequent negative developmental consequences, including child psychopathology (Davies & Martin, 2013). However, when children do experience the family system as safe, further developmental growth can occur.

Emotional Security Theory and the wide body of literature on intra-family violence speak to the concept of safety within families. However, this research is typically conducted with a deficit lens, as evident from the examples provided above. Additionally, although researching with families in mind, the actual data is often gathered from the perspective of individual members within the family rather than from the family as a unit. There is space within the discipline of family science to approach safety within the family unit from a strengths-based perspective and through systemic, rather than individual, measurement.

### **Opportunity to Further Understand a Sense of Safety Using a Family Science Lens**

Although family science theorizes from a systemic lens, research is often conducted using an individual as the unit of analysis (Olsen, 2011). This is the case for the largely deficit-

focused studies currently conducted on family safety. There is opportunity for family science to explore the sense of safety within families as a systemic factor. In fact, a comprehensive review of the literature has found a paucity of research that explicitly addresses the phenomenon of a sense of safety within family systems. Although qualities suggested in healthy family process may contain the experience of safety as implied or inherent (Walsh, 2003; Ungar, 2016), research has not yet explicitly explored the impact of the sense of safety within family units on these aspects of family process. Specifically, there may be an opportunity to include the exploration of the sense of safety within three main theoretical areas of family science literature: family resilience, family emotional climates and family strengths. These three areas of the discipline theorize systemically and often attempt to explain the strength of family process; yet, seem to either ignore, or consider implicit, the sense of safety as a factor within family process.

### **Literature on Family Resilience**

Family resilience theories emerged from earlier models of family stress and adaptation. The examination of family stress began in the post-World War II zeitgeist with Hill's (1948) ABCX model. Ironically, although the model was initiated to examine how stress impacted family meaning making and functioning after a war, safety was not included as an explicit construct. Drawing from the ABCX model, additional theories of family stress and adaptation, including the Double ABCX model (McCubbin & Paterson, 1983) and the Family Adjustment and Adaptation Response Model (Patterson, 1988), continued to examine how families adjusted and adapted to stressors in their lives. Following the stress model, the study of family resilience emerged to better understand the ability of a family unit to adapt, adjust, and advance in situations of adversity (Hill, 1949; McCubbin & Patterson, 1983; Patterson, 2002; Walsh, 2006). Family resilience is a collectively constructed process that develops within family systems over time (Walsh, 2003). The Framework of Family Resilience developed by Froma Walsh (2006) is the most well-known model of family resilience and has been one of the most often cited in the

conceptualizing of family resilience (Lane, 2011; Taylor, 2013; Sixbey, 2005). Walsh's framework (1998) outlines three main aspects of family resilience: belief systems, organizational patterns, and communication processes. Within each of these three categories, Walsh includes three subcategories. For example, belief systems include the factors of the way the family makes meaning out of adversity, their ability to have a positive outlook, and their use of spirituality. Within organizational patterns are included the factors of the family's ability to be flexible, be connected, and have social ties. Within communication processes, the three factors of clarity, open emotional expression, and collaborative problem solving are included (Walsh, 1998). Yet, Walsh does not explicitly include a sense of safety in this conceptualization. It is possible that a sense of safety is implicitly included in one or all of the constructs of the model, but without explicitly being named and included within the model the influence of the sense of safety is left undetected.

More recent models of family resilience, such as McCubbin and McCubbin's Relational and Resilience Theory of Ethnic Families (2013), were developed as a contrast to previous models that upheld dominant paradigms of family roles, patterns of functioning, and strategies for adaptation. Work by Ungar (2013; 2016) and Kirmayer et al. (2011) critiqued models that did not include systemic racism and racial and ethnic socialization as constructs fundamental to the characteristics of resilient families. Specifically, in his review of seven typologies of family resilience, Ungar (2016) argued that some typologies may be assessed as maladaptive to those with social and cultural power, but are adaptive options for families facing oppressive and discriminating social structures. These contemporary theories of family resilience do consider the larger societal and cultural structures that impact the family response when encountering crisis, and appear to understand that these structures may be threatening, discriminatory, and ultimately unsafe to families. However, the experience of a sense of safety is not included as an explicit construct. In fact, the study of family resilience has focused more on whether families

meet criteria for resilience, rather than how they are constructing resilience as a process within their units (Taylor & Distelberg, 2016). It is possible that safety, for Ungar (2016) and others (McCubbin & McCubbin, 2013; Kirmayer et al., 2011), is considered implicit within family meaning making or belief systems, but it simply is never included as an explicit construct or variable. Considering the amount of literature on the experience of safety necessary for individual resilience and well-being as described in the review outlined above, the exclusion of safety makes the exploration and measurement of family resilience incomplete. A sense of safety within the family needs to be explicitly explored and measured in order to understand if the elusive, foundational, inceptual and primal experience of safety is underlying other factors that contribute to family resilience.

### **Literature on Family Emotional Climates**

The emotional climate of the family is defined as the overall affective atmosphere that exists within the family, or the predominant emotions shared by the collective group (Bar-Tal, Halperin & De Rivera, 2007). Family emotional climates have been studied with family level constructs such as emotional expressiveness (Bodovski & Youn, 2010), emotional negativity (Brophy-Herb et. al, 2013; Froyen, Skibbe, Bowles, Blow, & Gerde 2013), and marital cohesiveness and/or discord, (Modry-Mandell, Gamble, & Taylor, 2007). Positive family emotional climates have been found to be protective against the debilitating effects of chronic stress (Houltberg, Henry, Morris & Sheffield, 2012), lead to overall family adaptation (Bar-Tal, Halperin & De Rivera, 2007; Orthner, Jones-Sanpei, & Williamson, 2004), and foster family resilience (Bynum & Brody, 2005; Saxbe, Margolin, Spies Shapiro, & Baucom, 2012). Selected research has demonstrated that overall family emotional climate significantly contributes to the emotional understanding of children in the family, more so than the attachment relationship of one subsystem of the family (Raikes & Thompson, 2006). However, no research has looked at the influence of safety as contributing to the overall climate of a family. It might be assumed

that positive emotional climates have a sense of safety at their foundation, but this has not been examined explicitly to date. Again, given the foundational nature of safety as necessary for individual physiological and psychological wellness as described in the literature review above, research on the experience of safety within family climates is incomplete.

### **Literature on Family Strengths**

The investigation of family strengths began with Otto (1962; 1975) as the initial researcher to look at the components that make strong and sustainable families. Stinnett and DeFrain (1985) followed with a six factor model of family strengths, including the demonstration of appreciation and affection, commitment to the family, positive communication styles, enjoyable leisure time together, sharing spirituality and/or value systems, and the ability to manage stress and crisis. DeFrain and Stinnett's (2002) later work also highlighted the importance of the cultural context and surrounding social and environmental community as supporting strong families. At a similar time, Olson, Sprenkle and Russell (1979) developed the circumplex model of marital and family systems, which was developed to look at family cohesion and family adaptability as elements of family strength. Researchers have used the six factors of the circumplex model to measure family strengths, and have adapted the model to better reflect cultural and linguistic diversity. For example, McCreary and Dancy (2004) interviewed 20 adult African American family members who reported communication, leisure activities, nurturance and assistance as factors towards family strength. A study conducted with Asian families, including both parents and children, found that parents who help, open communication, leisure activities, respect for the autonomy of children, and parents' sacrificial love as factors that bring about a perception of family strength (Wong, Wong, & Obeng, 2012). Avon and Villa (2013) conducted a study with Latino families that revealed that family rituals, respect for Latino culture, work, and education, and having goals contributed to their strength. As related to this current study, family strengths have been identified in research on three-

generation families, including reduction of social isolation and increase in health in the third generation, parenting support to the second generation (Barnett, Scaramella, Neppl, Ontai, & Conger, 2010; Silverstein & Marenco, 2001), and reduced psychological distress, increased social engagement, and developmental support in the third generation (Ruiz & Silverstein, 2007; Ali & Malik, 2015). Yet, again, a sense of safety is not explicitly included in testable models or qualitative investigations of family strengths. Given the fact that a sense of safety appears to be a factor towards individual well-being, it is important to explicitly explore whether a sense of safety is a factor towards family well-being, and, in fact, a factor of strength that has yet gone unnoticed.

### **Justification for the Sense of Safety as an Explicit Construct**

Multidisciplinary fields of study seem to suggest that the sense of safety is a contributing factor to child and adult well-being (Bowlby, 1969; Holmes & Murray, 2007; Porges, 2011; Sadikaj, Moskowitz, and Zuroff, 2015). Taken together, previous work suggests that a sense of safety is a human physiologic and emotional experience made expectant by our neurobiology, but potentiated within relationships. Previous work has demonstrated the neurological functioning of a sense of safety (Porges, 2011), and dyadic work has demonstrated how a sense of safety contributes to individual development and well-being (Marvin, Cooper, Hoffman & Powell, 2002; Tronick, 2007). Now, the field of family science needs to investigate whether a sense of safety within family units is a similarly impactful factor towards family resilience and strength. It stands to reason that the evidence for the sense of safety for individual neurological, developmental, and relational health would also be true for the health of family systems. However, without investigation that explicitly explores and measures the sense of safety on a systemic level within the family system (Minuchin, 1985), the influence of safety within family process will continue to go unnoticed. It seems that this would be critical to explore, given the

prominence of healthy families as the basic unit of a healthy society (Novilla, Lelinneth, Barnes, De La Cruz, Williams, & Rogers, 2006).

### **Justification for the Current Study**

This study sought to fill this gap and begin the exploration of the phenomenon of a sense of safety within family units. This researcher chose to begin contributing to the exploration of the sense of safety with three-generation families who report incomes at a maximum of 150% of federal poverty level. This is a population often researched through a deficit lens (Aber, Jones, & Raver, 2007; Ackerman, Kogos, Younstrom, Schoff & Izard, 1999; Dearing, McCartney, Taylor, 2006; Linver, Brooks-Gunn, & Kohen, 2002; Roy & Raver, 2014; Yoshikawa, Aber, & Beardslee, 2012), yet often demonstrate remarkable resilience and strength (Becvar, 2013; Masten, 2001; Orthner, Jones-Sanpei, & Williamson, 2004). The methodology and design for this study follows in Chapter 3.

### **CHAPTER III: METHODS**

Although the phenomenon of the sense of safety in family units has yet to be adequately explored within the discipline of family science, this study had the opportunity to both contribute to the wider body of literature on safety, as well as the growing canon of strengths-based research. This qualitative study explored the phenomenon of the sense of safety as it may be experienced in three-generation families with incomes at a maximum of 150% of the federal poverty level. To do so, this study used an epistemology that wove together a social constructivist paradigm and a strengths perspective with the methodology of qualitative phenomenology and post-intentional phenomenological design (Vagle, 2014), and included an arts-centered research (McNiff, 2008) body-based analytic process (Laban & Lawrence, 1974). In this chapter, the use of phenomenology is reviewed, followed by a description of the study design. Next, the framework of the five-step post-intentional and arts-based design plan is outlined.

#### **Phenomenology as Methodology**

Qualitative approaches intend inquiry to explore and discover a deeper understanding of a given research topic from the perspective of the participants (Creswell, 1998). Qualitative methodological approaches, such as discourse analysis, grounded theory, and phenomenology, are particularly useful when seeking to investigate how a specific group of people make meaning of particular experiences, and how they organize and understand their worlds based on their interpretation of that meaning (Merriam, 2009). Of these, phenomenology stands apart as the qualitative approach most appropriate to understand new, elusive, or emergent phenomena (Merriam, 2009), as is the case with the phenomenon of a sense of safety within the family. Additionally, phenomenology is particularly suited when studying the essence of an aspect of the human condition, such as understanding emotions, interactions, or processes (Urban & van

Eeden-Moorefield, 2017). As van Manen (2017) writes, researchers using phenomenology “investigate the primal, eidetic, or inceptual meanings that are passed over in everyday life” (p. 812). As was described in Chapter 2, a sense of safety in families may be a foundational or primal phenomenon of the family experience frequently ignored or considered implicit in the everyday life of families. For these reasons, phenomenology is a fitting methodological choice for the study of the sense of safety in the family. Additionally, phenomenology is committed to bring to awareness a researcher’s biases so as to intentionally reduce preconceptions and create space to learn from indigenous meaning making (van Manen, 2001). This respect of the population of study is akin to a constructivist, strengths-focused epistemology that upholds the experience, interaction, and interpretation of the life-world of the population of study (Gates & Kelly, 2013), without the assumption of deficit. Therefore, phenomenology is an appropriate methodology for the epistemology that grounds this study.

### **Philosophical History of Phenomenology**

Advanced in the twentieth century by the German mathematician, Edmund Husserl, the philosophy of phenomenology sought to better understand how people make meaning of their experiences (Alase, 2017; Reiners, 2012; van Manen, 2017). Husserl contended that meaning was made out of the perceived interaction of the observer with the subject of inquiry, rather than in objective facts (Gogoi, 2017). This contention was in direct contrast to the prevailing concept of the separation of object from subject, known as the Cartesian split (Vagle, 2015). Husserl rejected the idea that there was one objective truth or reality to be known as separate from human consciousness (Giorgi, 2017). In Husserl’s view, objects were only known as they were understood within human consciousness, and thus objects were known differently depending on the observer, as further explained by Groenewald (2004):

To arrive at certainty, anything outside immediate experience must be ignored, and in this way the external world is reduced to the contents of personal consciousness. Realities are thus treated as pure “phenomena” and the only absolute data from where to begin. (p. 42)

Reality, then, is a subjective phenomenon based on the perceptual experience of each individual. Van Manen (2017) further explains, “What appears in consciousness is the phenomenon or event that gives itself in lived experience” (p. 811). Husserl discussed phenomena as emerging, or, as described by van Manen above, giving itself, as a way of explaining that phenomena show themselves through subjective consciousness or reflection (Giorgi, 2017). Another significant figure in phenomenology, Martin Heidegger, differs subtly from Husserl in understanding phenomena, believing that phenomena are not waiting to burst their meanings forth, but instead are every day, mundane, experiences (van Manen, 2017) that become known by being interpreted by humans within the lived world (Reiners, 2012). Husserl and Heidegger’s slight differences in understanding how phenomena come to be known in consciousness inspired two different threads of phenomenology, Husserl’s descriptive phenomenology (Gogoi, 2017) and Heidegger’s interpretive phenomenology (Reiners, 2012; Vagle, 2014). For Husserl, phenomena are to be observed, experienced, and described for meaning to be discovered (Gogoi, 2017). For Heidegger, observation is only meaningful insofar as the observer interprets what she/he/they are experiencing (Reiners, 2012).

Common between both of these early variations of the philosophy of phenomenology are four main concepts: intentionality, lived experience, essence, and epoche. First, intentionality describes the meaningful connection between all related things. Intentionality is not an individual’s intended behavior, but instead is described as the meaning link between people and things (Freeman & Vagle, 2009). Vagle, Clements, and Coffee (2017) further explain intentionality in the following way,

In this way, intentionality means those in-between spaces where individuals *find-themselves-intentionally-in* relations with others in the world. However, these in-between spaces are not objects that can be poked and prodded, nor can they be observed in the traditional sense. They must be philosophized—conceptualized, discussed, opened-up, and contemplated. (p. 434)

Intentionality, then, is a consideration of the relational space between people, something that cannot always be seen but may be able to be felt or sensed. Second, phenomenology is concerned with lived experience. Lived experience is the ordinary life experiences that are encountered every day (van Manen, 2017). These every day occurrences are considered mundane until noticed and reflected upon, at which point they become phenomena (van Manen, 2017). Third, phenomenology focuses on the essence, or underlying structure, of these phenomena. Through conscious interaction, phenomena are considered for their essence (van Manen, 1997). In some conceptualizations of phenomenology, the essence of a phenomenon is uncovered or emerges at a particular moment, whereas for others, essence unfolds through the interpretation and meaning making of the observer. Fourth, phenomenology calls for the process of ‘*epoche*’, a word from the Greek meaning to stay away or to abstain, which today is known as bracketing. This process ensures that preconceived notions of the phenomenon do not muddy the consciousness of the thing itself. By doing so, a phenomenon begins to reveal its essence without influence from the observer (van Manen, 1997).

### **The Research of Phenomenology**

Applying research methodology to the philosophy of phenomenology allows scholars to explore essential or primal experience (van Manen, 2017). Informed by its philosophy, phenomenological research is subjective, inductive, and dynamic (Reiners, 2012). As a research methodology, phenomenology is particularly useful to illuminate how meaning is made out of elusive or indefinable characteristics of the human condition, such a grief or love (Merriam,

2009). As written by van Manen (1984), phenomenological research, “makes us thoughtfully aware of the consequential in the inconsequential, the significant in the taken-for-granted” (p. 36). If a sense of safety is an everyday human experience often implicit or unseen, phenomenology as a research methodology is appropriate.

Phenomenological research has three main distinguishing characteristics: the investigation of the intentionality of lived experience, the exploration of the essence of the phenomenon, and the use of ‘*epoche*’, or the bracketing of a researcher’s preconceived knowledge or biases about the phenomenon (Merriam, 2009; Reiners, 2012). In phenomenological data analysis, researchers engage in a process of whole-part-whole analysis which consists of capturing the entirety of a story (the whole), deconstructing the story into relevant, bursting-forth pieces (the part), and then reconstructing the story in a new way to illuminate the phenomenon across individual accounts (i.e., the whole again) (van Manen, 1997). Stemming from the two early variations of philosophical phenomenology, there are now a number of variations of phenomenological research, including transcendental, embodied, existential, hermeneutic, and others that continue to enhance and modernize the core phenomenological approach to research. For example, whereas transcendental phenomenology focuses more on the experiences of the life worlds of participants rather than the researcher’s interpretation of these experiences (Alaise, 2017), hermeneutic phenomenology makes meaning by the interpretation crafted in text or words by the researcher based on the participant’s experiences (van Manen, 1997). Merleau-Ponty’s (1964) embodied phenomenology moves emphasis from cognitive conceptualization of phenomena to focus on the body-based, physical experiencing of phenomena. Each of these variations have subtle differences in their understanding of the main concepts of phenomenology and in the specific analytic strategy used to explore the phenomena of interest (Reiners, 2012).

### **Post-Intentional Phenomenology as Method**

The current study used the specific method of post-intentional phenomenology (Vagle, 2010; 2014; 2015, 2018). Within phenomenological approaches, post-intentional most appropriately captures the constantly changing, unstable, never complete, and flowing meaning made about phenomena based on continual, varied interactions (Vagle, 2016). Because research has not yet adequately explored the experience of the phenomena of the sense of safety, post-intentional allows for as much openness to variation as possible within a phenomenological inquiry (Vagle, 2010; 2014; 2016; 2018). Additionally, post-intentional phenomenology stands apart from other variations of phenomenology to include the social construction of phenomenon and the influence of culture and social class on experiencing and interpretation of phenomenon (Jones & Vagle, 2013; Vagle & Jones, 2012). As Vagle (2018) explains, “post-intentional phenomenon is shaped, produced, and provoked by context” (p. 146). For the exploration of a sense of safety within three-generation families who report incomes at a maximum of 150% of the federal poverty level, this is an appropriate inclusion. It also resurrects some of Merleau-Ponty’s early perspective of the centrality of the body and not just the head in the experiencing of phenomenon (Vagle, Clements & Coffee, 2017), and embraces arts-based methodology in exploration of the phenomena (McNiff, 2008). Last, post-intentional phenomenology considers phenomena as existing within systems, what Deleuze and Guattari (1987) term, wolf-multiplicity. As stated by Vagle (2018), “the intentional connection might be re-conceived as a multiplicity, where the subject is not seen in a linear connection with the world, but always in a contested and moving relationship among centers and crowds or packs” (p.131). This is a particularly helpful perspective when exploring phenomena within family units. Therefore, post-intentional phenomenology fits the strengths-based, social constructivist epistemology grounding this study with family as the unit of attention, as well as the particular body-based analytic process used in this study and described shortly.

Post-intentional phenomenology was advanced by Vagle (2014) to address what he considered the residue of positivism in traditional phenomenology. Vagle joins with others that critique Husserl's aim of discovering one stable essence of the phenomenon of study, arguing that this does not allow for multiple perspectives and experiences. Instead, he asserts that it reduces phenomenological essence to an objective truth antithetical to the initial intent of phenomenology. Alternatively, a post-intentional phenomenological approach expands on the core concepts of intentionality, essence and epoche, and places emphasis on the multiple and momentary aspects of phenomenological inquiry.

First, in relation to the intentionality of lived experience, post-intentional phenomenology expands the concepts of intentionality to include the concept of lines of flight, as advanced by Deleuze and Guattari (1987). Post-intentionality is not just one linear, fixed connection between subject and object, but instead the multiple ways that intentionality can flee or elope in many directions. As written by Vagle, Clement and Coffee (2017), "Intentionality, then, is running all over the place, all the time – at times with clarity, but most often in the gnarliness of life" (p. 435). Instead of a fixed connection like a static string connected with tension at two ends, intentionality is constantly 'in flight' or in flux, like the unpredictable trajectory of tossing paper, or the flight of a feather between two points.

Second, post-intentional phenomenology pushes against the traditional understanding of essence as something whole and solid to identify. Instead, essence is unstable, never complete, and constantly changing and flowing based on continual interactions (Vagle, 2010). Post-intentional phenomenologists understand essence as a snapshot of what it might be in that one moment of inquiry, while holding that it may change, move, or shift at any moment after. Similarly, Vagle (2014) uses the term "tentative manifestations" instead of themes to describe what begins to emerge in the moment of inquiry. This term is used to describe the discovery of

pieces of the ever-shifting essence of the phenomena. In post-intentional phenomenology, findings or results are tentative, partial, specific to the moment of inquiry, and open to change.

Third, post-intentional phenomenology expands the use of epoche from the bracketing plans of Husserl to the bridling plan advanced by Dahlberg, Dahlberg, and Nystrom (2008). The term bridle is meant to evoke the complementary motions of restraining and a slackening of the reins when riding a horse (Vagle, Hughes, & Durbin, 2009). To effectively bridle, a researcher must restrain preconceptions, preunderstandings, and bias and assumptions, so as to allow the phenomenon to emerge without influence from the researcher. Yet, a researcher must also remain open throughout the journey of the emergence of the phenomena; thus, metaphorically slackening the reins on the design to allow unexpected twists and turns within the investigation (Givens, 2015). Doing so will allow for energy within the investigation to be moving constantly forward, in contrast with the pulling back of energy that may occur because of a bracketing plan (Dahlberg, Dahlberg, & Nystrom, 2008).

Fourth, post-intentional phenomenology is influenced by critical and post-structural contextual theories that acknowledge the impact of culture and context on how a phenomenon is experienced and considered by both the population of study and the researcher (Vagle, 2014). Post-intentional phenomenology stands apart from other variations to include historical, socio-cultural, and contextual influences that intertwine within life experience. Post-intentional phenomenology explicitly discusses the influence that social structures and socio-historical context have on the subject-object experiences in a way not fully articulated in previous phenomenological discourse (Vagle, 2012). For Vagle, the tentative manifestations of a phenomenon are both influencing and being influenced in the same moment, so subject to change at any point. Additionally, the observer is a contextual being, whose experiences shape her/his/their conceptualization at the same time as the observer's interaction with the phenomenon is shaping it as well. In his more recent conceptualizations of post-intentional

phenomenology, Vagle (2018) also posits the work as becoming an agent for social change and considers phenomena as social apparati, remarking that “the post-intentional phenomenon is produced and produces, is provoked and provokes through social relations in the world” (p.141). Privileging the experience of phenomena without trying to oppress experience into essence interpreted through a power position can allow for authentic experience to be highlighted, especially when highlighting experiences of communities often unheard.

### **Description of Study Design**

This study used a constructivist, strengths-based epistemology and a post-intentional phenomenological methodology to conduct an entirely strengths-based effort to explore how the sense of safety is experienced in three-generation families who report incomes at a maximum of 150% of the federal poverty level. The study design blended strengths-based techniques from prior strengths-based research with the five-component process from post-intentional phenomenology (Vagle, 2014, 2018), and included a body-based data collection (Duhl, Kantor & Duhl, 1974; Satir, 1972), and intermodal analytic process (McNiff, 2008) from arts-based research, which post-intentional phenomenologists have begun to include in the analytic process.

Conducting strengths-based research includes not only framing the research topic of interest from a place of strengths rather than deficits, but also how the research is conducted, the questions that are asked, and the way the results are interpreted through a lens of strengths (Dew, Anderson, Skogrand, & Chaney, 2017; Fenton, Walsh, Wong, & Cumming, 2015; Robinson, Priede, Farrall, Shapland, & McNeill, 2012). The researcher used qualitative research methods that privileged and respected the voice of the collaborating families (Hughes, Seidman & Williams, 1993; McCashen, 2005), including non-verbal data collection methods that included multiple ways meaning was made by the collaborators. The researcher maintained flexibility in the analysis of the data (Hughes & Seidman, 2002), and used trustworthiness strategies such as

transparency in the data analysis process (McCashen, 2005). Lastly, strengths-based research advocates for reflexivity about the context within which the research is being formulated and conducted, as well as how researcher's culture and context influences data gathering and interpretation, particularly when the researcher is of a culture and/or context of power (Gates & Kelly, 2013). According to Guba and Lincoln (1994), the researcher is a passionate participant whose experiences are a part of the research itself. As such, the research process included researcher reflexivity throughout the study to ensure that issues of context and culture, dynamics of power, and intersections with the researcher's personal experiences, were continually brought to awareness (Gates & Kelly, 2013; McCashen, 2005).

These strengths-based techniques were used within the structure of the post-intentional five-component process (Vagle, 2014, 2018), which proceeded as follows. First, the phenomenon was identified, in context and around a social issue, as encouraged by Vagle (2018). Second, a clear, but flexible, process for collecting phenomenological material was chosen, including a body-based data collection method known as Family Sculpting that stems from both the discipline of family therapy (Duhl, Kantor & Duhl, 1974; Satir, 1972), and is used in arts-based research (McNiff, 2008). Third, a post-reflexion plan was considered and actualized, although flexibility allows this plan to be in constant flux as the researcher is in interaction with the phenomenological material and the process. Fourth, the researcher processed the phenomenological material in a systematic, circular method of deconstruction and (re)construction with theory, phenomenological material, and researcher post-reflexion. To do so, this researcher chose to echo recent post-intentional phenomenologists who have included analytic processes from arts-based research (Vagle & Hofsess, 2016; Vagle, Clement & Coffee, 2017), using both found poetry (Patrick, 2016) and movement analysis (Laban & Lawrence, 1974) to consider and process the material. Fifth, the researcher crafted a text that includes information learned about the phenomenon, which Vagle termed tentative manifestations,

productions, and provocations (Vagle, 2018). The remainder of this chapter will outline how this study employed these five components of a post-intentional design with strengths-based research techniques.

### **Component 1: Identification of the Phenomenon**

Inspired by the researcher's lived experience described in Chapter 1, the phenomenon of a sense of safety within family units emerged as an interest of further exploration. During the time of this writing (2016-2019), the issue of safety has been made central to cultural discourse due to political debates about the safety and security of our country in relation to immigration policy and racial, ethnic, sexual orientation, and religious diversity. Not only is a sense of safety in families a personal family issue, as experienced in the researcher's own family, but has recently been elevated to a legislative, deeply social, and, ultimately, existential matter of importance due to intensifying cultural and political discourse. As post-intentional phenomenological inquiry is called to focus on a topic of social significance (Vagle, 2018), the choice of attempting to learn more about how families experience a sense of safety together is appropriate.

Based on the literature reviewed in Chapter 2, the phenomenon of the sense of safety in families has not yet been explored in the discipline of family science. As a potential foundation, primal, or inceptual felt experience, the phenomenon itself is worthy of exploration from a phenomenological perspective which seeks to understand more about that which is new, elusive, or emergent (Merriam, 2009). Incorporating the post-intentional lens on phenomenology allows for this initial exploratory study to reveal tentative understandings of the phenomenon of a sense of safety in family life. A post-intentional lens (Vagle, 2014, 2018) also fits with the epistemology of this study, as a post-intentional paradigm honors the influence of content on the

experiencing of the phenomenon, as well as the freedom of indigenous meaning making from the perspective of the collaborators.

### **Research Question**

For this study, the researcher decided upon one primary research question. In current projects incorporating a post-intentional design, the inclusion of multiple questions is permissible when necessary to appropriately study the phenomenon at hand (Vagle, 2018). However, due to the lack of research on this topic, this research chose to remain with one research question. Using one research question also led to the choice of conducting an interview with only one initial prompt. The research question follows the post-intentional formula advanced by Vagle (2018) (e.g. How might a phenomenon take shape for a particular population in a particular context?). In this study, the researcher asked: *How is a sense of safety experienced in three-generation families who report incomes at a maximum of 150% of the federal poverty level?*

### **Criteria for Collaborators of the Study**

Strengths-based research maintains that those who participate in studies are experts of their own lives and can serve as co-researchers who join the researcher in the exploration of the identified topic of interest (Allison et al., 2003). This study used the term collaborator rather than participant to describe those that joined the researcher in exploring the phenomenon of family safety. Post-intentional phenomenologists also select participants who are the experts of their own experience with the phenomenon, who can provide a rich description of the phenomenon of inquiry, and who represent a range of the variations possible within a phenomenon (Vagle, 2018). For this study, collaborators were families who self-identified as a three-generation family who live in close proximity and who have daily contact, with at least one child over the age of 3 years, with incomes at a maximum of 150% of the federal poverty level (approximately \$31,955 in 2019; <https://aspe.hhs.gov/poverty-guidelines>), which is the typical qualification criteria used to gain access to many social programs in New Jersey, including WIC

(<https://www.state.nj.us/health/fhs/wic/participants/apply-wic/income.shtml>) and Medicaid eligibility (<https://www.benefits.gov/benefit/1314>). Justification for the specific criteria of the collaborators invited to contribute to this study was outlined in Chapter 1.

### **Invitation of Collaborators**

Strengths-based research strives to be continually aware of the power dynamic between researcher and collaborators. As such, the term invitation is being used instead of recruitment to move the researcher positionality from power-over to power-with (McCashen, 2005). It also echoes the guidance by Goldfarb, Grinberg, and Rana (2017) to work *with* families rather than do work *on* families. Invitation to the study was conducted with the aid of key informants at agencies within the early childhood field in New Jersey. A key informant is a person with expert knowledge about the population of interest who is also in a role that allows them to appropriately help the researcher access participants best suited to share their story (Marshall, 1996). Because collaborators were purposefully invited by key informants to contribute their experience, invitation to the study fits a purposive sampling technique. Purposive sampling is useful when wanting to invite collaborators who may be the most likely to contribute towards the specific research exploration of the study (Merriam, 2009). Initially, the researcher contacted over sixty colleagues in the early childhood field in New Jersey to seek key informants. The researcher informed these colleagues about the purpose of the study and the criteria for participation. A flyer detailing the study, inclusion criteria, incentives for participation, and the researcher's contact information was shared with these colleagues, and is included as Appendix A. The key informants then posted the flyer and identified particular families with whom to personally share information about the study and the researcher's contact information. From the initial group of over sixty colleagues, fifteen professionals invited twenty collaborating families to contact the researcher to gain more information about the study.

### **Screening Protocol**

Using the information on the invitation provided from the key informant, the twenty interested families then contacted the researcher. During this screening call with either the first or second generation family member, the researcher explained the purpose of the study, ensured the family met all inclusion criteria for the study, informed the family about their rights in participating in the study, and inquired about their interest in participation. If only the first or second-generation adult member participated in the screening call, the research asked for a second call or email to request consent from the other adult before confirming participation in the study. Families were also offered compensation for their participation, following the guidelines of ethical research so as to be mindful of coercion, undue influence, or oppression (Largent, Grady, Miller & Wertheimer, 2012). This is especially true when working with families experiencing poverty, as too high a compensation may risk replicating an oppressive power structure by purchasing their participation (Padgett, 2008). The opposite is true if the compensation is too low, as the researcher risks taking advantage of participant families (Padgett, 2008). In their case example examining compensation models for research participants, William and Walter (2015) considered a wage-payment model where participants receive the equivalent of the minimum hourly wage (\$8/hour) or up to the living hourly wage (\$15/hour) for their participation. Radley and colleagues (2016) have suggested an average of \$25 per half-hour of participation for qualitative studies. As this study designed the visit with the family to last for 60-90 minutes, participants were offered a \$75 gift card for their participation (or \$25 per half-hour of participation), an amount within previous research guidance.

During screening, four families were screened into the study, and sixteen families were screened out of the study. These sixteen families were not included for the following reasons: the interested family did not meet all study criteria, all generations did not choose to participate, or the researcher could not speak properly with all generations in the family due to the researcher

being a monolingual English speaker. The four families screened into the study had at least one representative from all three generations participate. Demographic information about the four families screened into the study, using pseudonyms for both first and family names, and including family role, age, occupation, reported ethnicity, and income is included as Table 1.

Table 1  
*Demographic Profile of Collaborating Families*

Family name	First name	Family role	Age	Occupation	Reported Ethnicity	Parental Income	
Garcia	Mariana	Mother	27	Family support worker	Hispanic	\$30,000	
	Paula	Grandmother (maternal)	51		Hispanic		
	Natalia	Child	4				
Williams	Jayden	Mother	52	Stay at home mother	Hispanic	\$5,000	
	Layla	Grandmother (paternal)	27		Black		
	Evelyn	Child	9				
Colon	Gabriela	Child	7	Stay at home mother	Italian		
	Lillian	Mother	37				
	Adrian	Father	43				
	John	Grandfather (maternal)	74				
	AJ	Child	5				
Fernandez	*JJ	Child	18 mos.	Stay at home mother	Puerto Rican	\$15,000	
	Elena	Mother	31				
	Maria	Grandmother (maternal)	53				Puerto Rican
	Alma	Aunt	33				
	Zoe	Child	3				

*\*JJ is included on this grid because he was present in the room for the encounter and is referenced within the data, but as his age did not fit criteria for the study, he was not considered a collaborator.*

In the Garcia family, the mother, Mariana, grandmother, Paula, and 4-year-old daughter, Natalia, participated. The Williams family had the mother, Jayden, grandmother, Layla, 9-year-old daughter, Evelyn, and 7-year-old daughter, Gabriela, participate. In the Colon family, the mother, Lillian, father, Adrian, grandfather, John, and 5-year-old son, AJ, participated. In this

family, their 18-year-old son, JJ, was also present in the room. Finally, the Fernandez family had the mother, Elena, grandmother, Maria, aunt, Alma, and 3-year-old daughter, Zoe, participate in the study. These four families were invited by four key informants. All four key informants were considered as having expert knowledge on all the families either currently or formally at their programs, or to have had established relationships with families. Two of the key informants had the role of Mental Health Consultants with Head Start programs, one had the role of Family Outreach Worker for a home visiting service, and one as a Lead Teacher in a public education program. All of the key informants identify as female, two identify as Caucasian, one as African American, and one as Latina. Key informants provided signed agreements to assist the researcher in this study, included as Appendix B. On the screening call with the four participating families, the researcher began the demographic form, included as Appendix C, and described the informed consent information and signature documents approved by the Montclair State University Institutional Review Board that would accompany the researcher to the first visit with the family. The first visit was then scheduled at the time, day and location chosen by the collaborating family. The protocol for the screening call is included as Appendix D.

### **Component 2: Process for Collecting Phenomenological Material**

The methods used for material collection were informed by the epistemology and post-intentional phenomenological design of this study. Phenomenological material was collected through the completion of a demographic form, and a 60-90 minute Open View discussion (Fenton, 2013) that included arts-based data collection methods. A review of materials collected can be found in Table 2.

Strengths-based research suggests against the use of the term interview in favor of the term, Open View (Fenton, 2013), as prior research participants/collaborators have explained that the term interview has a “power-over” connotation (McCashen, 2005, p. 32), such as being put on

the spot, or going to a job interview (Fenton, Walsh, Wong, & Cumming, 2015). According to Fenton (2013), an Open View should take place in a familiar setting for the participant as a manner for reducing the power dynamic. All material collection took place in a location chosen

Table 2  
*Phenomenological Material Collection*

Research Question	Phenomenological Material
RQ1: <i>How is a sense of safety experienced by three-generation families who report incomes at a maximum of 150% of the federal poverty level?</i>	Demographic form Open View Family Sculpting activity Children's drawings

by the family. Two visits occurred in the family home, one at a neighborhood pizza place, and one at the researcher's place of work. At the start of the visit, informed consent information and signature documents approved by the Montclair State University Institutional Review Board were offered to the families for their review, consideration and signature before the Open View conversation began. Examples of the consent forms for the adults (Appendix E), consent for child participation (Appendix F), and assent forms for the children (Appendix G) are included.

### **Open View Material Collection**

Fenton's (2013) Open View holds space for lines of flight (Deleuze and Guatarri, 1987) or aspects of the intentionality of the phenomenon that may prompt wonder and surprise (Givens, 2015) through the utilization of prompts guided by the researchers instead of direct questions. This type of discussion fits with a phenomenological lens that prefers interviews to be unstructured or semi-structured in order to allow the experience of the phenomenon to emerge, to show itself, to come-to-be (Vagle, 2008) without too much interference from the researcher. In post-intentional phenomenology, the interview is meant to have enough structure to frame the phenomenon of study, but also enough space to elicit contextual variation of the phenomenon (Vagle, 2014). To balance the post-intentional aims of both frame and freedom, the Open View

began with the grand tour prompt of, “Please share how you experience a sense of safety together as a family.” The protocol for the Open View is included as Appendix H.

### **Expressive Methods Material Collection**

The Open View also included non-discursive methods of data collection. In arts-based research, defined as the use of artistic processes in meaning making and inquiry (McNiff, 1998; 2007; 2008), providing variation of options for demonstrating understanding and experience allows for greater empathic understanding of both the lives of the collaborators, and the complex phenomena of inquiry (Barone & Eisner, 2012; Greenwood, 2012; McNiff, 2008). Additionally, non-discursive methods provide opportunities to capture multiple ways of meaning making (Kay, 2013; Pentassuglia, 2017), and allow expression of that which would otherwise be unintelligible. This is often the case for sensorial or kinesthetic experiences (Barone & Eisner, 2012), such as is assumed of the sense of safety. Body-based expression, specifically, allows the physical body to bring encultured and embodied knowing to inquiry, a form of knowing which is often overlooked or ignored (Snowber, 2012). Employing options for the expressive ways of knowing is consistent with a constructivist paradigm, as the arts can be considered a physical form of the construction of meaning (Green, 2015). It is also consistent with a strengths-based perspective epistemology, as arts-based expression allows for the liberation of a more natural and indigenous meaning making (Green, 2015). The use of expressive methods within the Open View format also fits a post-intentional phenomenological design that does not believe in the linear progression of the investigation of essence, but instead in an interactive, non-linear, rhizomatic interview (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987).

This study used a drawing assignment offered to the children to complete during the discussion, and an exercise of non-verbal expression known as Family Sculpting (Duhl, Kantor & Duhl, 1974; Satir, 1972) conducted with all members of the family. The children were provided an option to draw their responses during the Open View, and then describe their

drawing. Researchers who use drawing with children stress that drawings may be more symbolic than true-to-life (Malchiodi, 1998), so having the children describe their meaning of the drawing is critical (Katz, McLeigh, & El szwec, 2017). Then, the family was asked to engage in a technique known as Family Sculpting (Satir, 1972) to demonstrate how the phenomenon of safety manifests in their family system. The family was asked to be a team of sculptors to “mold” the bodies of their family members in the shape or motion of what it feels like when safety is present in the family, taking into account the space of the room, shape of the bodies, pacing and type of motion, and placement of the family members in relation to each other. More information about the expressive process is included in the Open View protocol in Appendix H.

### **Trustworthiness**

Qualitative research works toward creating a level of trustworthiness, comprised of credibility and dependability which act as indicators of rigor and the likelihood that findings captured the participants’ lived experiences (Creswell, 2013), as well as triangulation of data to be sure that the phenomenon is considered from multiple sources. Credibility in qualitative research is the process by which researchers weigh their own interpretation of the participant’s story against the participant’s report. Dependability is the extent that researchers document their processes transparently, following ethical guidelines for research (Merriam, 2009).

Triangulation is the use of two or more data sources, methods, and/or theoretical perspectives to allow for multiple ways of experiencing the data and understanding the phenomenon (Cho & Trent, 2006; Green, 2015). To establish triangulation, this study collected the audio files and transcriptions of the Open Views, photographs of the family sculptures, and photographs of the family drawings as multiple forms of data. To establish credibility, the researcher used member checking (Cho & Trent, 2006; Creswell, 2013). The researcher emailed a summary of the Open View discussion to one adult member of each family to be sure of accuracy of the interpretation of what they have said and expressed, and sent a version of the final found poem (detailed later)

that was co-constructed through the stories of the collaborating families, and asked for their feedback. To work towards dependability, the same forms and protocols were used across all collaborator engagement in data collection and storage.

Trustworthiness is also established through following proper ethical guidelines in research, including confidentiality and protection of human subjects. All print data was labeled and kept confidential in a double locked cabinet following ethical and Montclair State University IRB guidelines. All electronic data was backed up and uploaded to a HIPAA compliant drive accessible only to the researcher and three identified graduate assistants responsible for transcription assistance. Photos were taken on the researchers' phone, downloaded backed up, labeled, and subsequently deleted from the phone. All families were assigned a numerical code on a coding chart that was based on the day of the month when the visit with the family took place, coupled with a family role code, and a sequence in the family code (i.e. 26FAM as a code for the family, with M26 as the mother, D26 as the father, G26 as the grandparent, and C126 for the oldest child and C226 as the younger child). Three of the Open Views were video recorded, backed-up and both copies uploaded. The fourth Open View that was conducted at the researchers' place of work was saved on the HIPAA compliant video system within the building, with access only to the researcher and graduate student responsible for transcription assistance. Transcription began directly following the first Open View, uploaded and printed, with print copies in the double locked system of the researcher's office. The researcher also kept a reflective journal, which began at the start of screening calls.. The researcher also worked with a peer reviewer to check the researcher for unconscious or implicit bias in the data collection or analysis process.

### **Component 3: Post-Reflexion Plan**

A post-intentional phenomenological design considers the researcher part of the research process, both influencing and being influenced by the relationships formed, stories shared, and phenomena discovered (Vagle, 2016). It is a necessity that the researcher engage in a post-reflexion plan, or a continual process of self-reflection, to consider the unearthed awareness that emerges from within the research journey. The researcher must consider how her/his/their own experiences and positionality impact all aspects of the study design, including the discernment of research topic, sampling decisions, interview questions, and the interpretation and analysis of data. To do so, the researcher's post-reflexion plan began with an initial post-reflexion statement, written as the study was in the conceptualization and design phase, followed by a journal kept over the course of the study where the researcher's thoughts were unearthed and processed, and engagement with a peer reviewer to provide a one-step-removed perspective on the research process and the researcher's experience and interpretation of this process.

#### **Initial Post-Reflexion Statement**

As I continually grow in my identity as researcher, I am also consistently becoming aware of my positionality as it relates to the population or the phenomenon that has emerged for study. Using classic demographic categories, I identify as a White, cis-gendered, heterosexual, married woman and mother, descendant from Irish immigrants, with a progressive political philosophy. While I was raised upper-middle class, I am now living and raising my children within the middle class economic bracket. I have been formed with the Catholic social teaching value of service to others, particularly the 'least of these', and the Jesuit higher education motivation to choose a vocation that strives for social justice. My current practitioner identity as a family play therapist and an infant and early childhood mental health specialist, as well as my researcher identity as a family scientist, are influenced by my background and history, and, in turn, my continuing awareness of my own positionality also influences who I am becoming in

these identities. Due to this positionality of privilege, I experience a continuous process of deepening awareness of this privilege and, because of it, my participation in structural, historical, and institutional oppression. I continually work against the blinders of privilege to attempt to make explicit that which is experienced by me because of privilege, instead of expecting that everything that makes up my existence, psychologically, spiritually, relationally and materially, is a universal guarantee for all people.

The central topic of this study, the phenomenon of a sense of safety, may very well be one of these experiences. I believe I have come to ‘double up’ on the privilege afforded me, not just because of my ethnicity, race, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, education level, and position within dominant social structures, but also because of an early relational climate that I experienced as safe. Because of my privilege, I have experienced the sense of safety as implicit for most of my life, thus ‘doubling up’ on that privilege.

I also wonder how safety is passed down through the generations in families who may not live with an unearned privilege that shields and protects. To help me understand my own experience of intergenerational transmission better, I have recently asked my children to share their definitions of feeling safe, believing that children are closer to honoring the wisdom of their central knowing than adults. My daughter said “it makes my heart warm...it’s required”. My son said “it feels like this...” and then proceeded to stand in a pose with legs spread, hands in fists and on his hips, chest out, chin up, like a superhero, and explained this body positioning as feeling brave. For my children, safety is required bravery. But is it also implicit for my children, a byproduct of their privilege for them as well? And is it, in fact, privilege in triplicate, in that they benefit not only for living in unearned privilege, but also within my parenting as a person who considers safety implicit, as well as their own experience of felt-safety? And if so, what does this mean for their future development?

As I continue reflecting on the phenomenon of the sense of safety in families, I am struck with the foundational, yet, elusive nature of the phenomenon, and want to work to make it more explicit. I wonder whether doing so will illuminate the inequity experienced by those whose safety is in question which I believe impacts all other characteristics of well-being. I am conscious of needing to become aware of the myriad of emotional states these wonderings stir up in me, and ensuring that I have my own process of reflecting on these topics as I begin to engage with the participants who will open their lives and share their stories.

### **Continual Post-Reflexion Process**

This initial reflection was followed by continual reflections by the researcher that spanned all aspects of the lifeworld, including work life, home life, political life, social life, spiritual life, in addition to the life lived as a researcher. The post-reflexion plan was meant to ensure that preconceptions were not coloring the phenomenon in a way that was not indigenous to the participants' experiences, insofar as was possible given the researcher's positionality, but also that the researcher interaction with the phenomenon was considered and brought to awareness. Portions of the researcher's reflections were considered part of process, and others are included more explicitly in the analysis and discussion of the study. As a part of the researchers' post-reflexion plan, the researcher worked with a peer reviewer. The peer reviewer was a colleague of the researcher familiar with research procedures who assisted with trustworthiness to the participant's experience (Givens, 2015). The specific peer reviewer for this project was a colleague of different racial, ethnic background, religion, and socioeconomic developmental experience as the researcher. The peer reviewer was provided with researcher reflections during the data collection and analytic process and provided a one-step-removed perspective on the process and reflective feedback to the researcher on any blind spots or yet-to-be conscious judgments that may have clouded the analysis.

#### **Component 4: Explore the Phenomenon Using Theory, Phenomenological Material and Post-Reflexions**

In post-intentional phenomenology, data analysis can present a philosophical problem, as the typical goal of phenomenological analysis is to render essence as something stable and known, but in post-intentional perspective essence is always partial and momentary. Thus, the goal is to gain awareness of what the phenomenon might become, rather than what it is (Vagle & Hofsess, 2016). In phenomenological data analysis, researchers often engage in a process of whole-part-whole analysis which consists of capturing the entirety of a story (the whole), deconstructing the story into relevant, bursting-forth pieces (the part), and then reconstructing the story in a new way to illuminate the phenomenon across individual accounts (i.e., the whole again; van Manen, 1997). Data analysis in a post-intentional design follows this guidance from general phenomenology in the first step of post-intentional analysis to deconstruct the whole of the phenomenological material. Next, post-intentional analysis asks the researcher to ‘think with’ the theories that best help understand the phenomena at hand. Last, analysis from a post-intentional lens requires that the researcher consider their own reflections, biases and perspectives as these might impact the emerging, tentative, manifestations.

#### **The Deconstruction of the Wholes of the Phenomenological Material**

The phenomenological analysis suggested by Vagle (2014) begins with a whole look at the phenomenological material in order to take a broad lens of the entirety. This researcher began by witnessing all Open View videos in their entirety. Then, the researcher and three graduate assistants transcribed the four encounters. Next, the researcher watched the videos again to add any movement qualities, gestures or facial expressions not included in the textual transcriptions. Vagle suggests a line-by-line approach where each line of the transcript is assessed for how that piece of information contributes to the understanding of the essence of the phenomena of study. Following this guidance, the researcher read through all transcripts in their

entirety, then read through the transcript a second time and took personal notes of reflections and wonderings that arose from the reading of the transcripts. Next, Vagle suggests highlighting the pieces of information that speak to ideas that might be emerging about the phenomenon (Vagle, 2014). The researcher again followed this guidance and read through the transcripts again, this time highlighting in different colors the areas within the transcripts that appeared to be illuminating the phenomenon in particular ways. This process resulted in nine different colors being used throughout the phenomenological material. The researcher then deconstructed the material by pulling out the pieces of the conversation that contained highlighted sections and grouped each of these statements by color, thus blending the family accounts together into nine groups. The ninth group contained only two statements of information from two collaborators, so was not considered as a group in and of itself, but included in the post-reflexion analysis. As a result of this process, nine groups of information emerged that illuminated eight initial themes, codes, or, in post-intentional terminology, tentative manifestations. For Vagle, there is hesitancy in coding too tightly because it might strangle the potential lines of flight of intentionality that exist within the data. However, the information provided by the four collaborating families seemed to group into these eight categories with ease and facility, incorporating any lines of flight or variety that may have emerged without restricting or selectively eliminating any relevant material.

This tension between the traditional use of coding in analysis and the post-intentional perspective on the elusiveness of intentionality has recently moved post-intentional researchers to consider other forms of analysis that may be less logical and linear than through text alone. Understanding this concern, the researcher also incorporated non-textual aspects of analysis into the analytic process, specifically an expressive arts intermodal transfer from arts-based researcher (McNiff, 2008), where the researcher used the phenomenological material to create found poetry, responded to the found poetry through natural movement, witnessed the movement

in deconstructed analysis, returned again to the found poetry to help illuminate the essence of the poem, and used this transformational process to provide a name to the eight groups of material.

To explain in more detail, using the eight groups of material, the researcher further deconstructed each of the statements within each group to only pull out the exact highlighted material within

Table 3  
*Laban Movement Analysis Efforts*

Effort	Space	Time	Weight	Flow
Float	Indirect	Sustained	Light	Free
Punch	Direct	Quick	Heavy	Bound
Glide	Direct	Sustained	Light	Free
Slash	Indirect	Quick	Heavy	Free
Dab	Direct	Quick	Light	Bound
Wring	Indirect	Sustained	Heavy	Bound
Flick	Indirect	Quick	Light	Free
Press	Direct	Sustained	Heavy	Bound

the statements. These pieces of data consisted of a gesture, one word, a few words, or a short phrase. The research constructed these gestures, words and phrases into a found poem (Patrick, 2016), playing with cadence and rhythm within the construction, but retaining the found textual material from the participants. Next, the researcher moved through the poem, recording the natural movement that flowed through the researcher's body when thinking and speaking the poem. This recording of movement was then shaped into choreography. The researcher then witnessed the choreography and used Laban Movement Analysis (Laban & Lawrence, 1974) to analyze the movement qualities, which then suggested one of eight Laban Efforts (Dab, Slash, Glide, Float, Press, Wring, Flick, Punch) as the overall effort quality of the movement (Moore, 2009). The eight Laban Efforts, listed in groupings of opposite efforts, are included as Table 3. Afterward, the researcher revisited the poem to determine whether the effort quality appeared to fit with the cadence of the poem. The researcher then used the learning from the body-based analysis and the found poetry to locate specific phrases within each grouping to use as the name of each of the eight groupings. During this process, two groupings appeared to have similar

content and shared the same Laban Effort. Due to these similarities in both content and kinesthetics, the researcher decided to combine these two groups together. These remaining seven groupings became the seven tentative manifestations rising from the phenomenological material: *it's just like so, how we get raised, always checking, our safety net is gone, know what to do, got your back, and family all around.*

The data collection for this study also included non-discursive material of the children's drawings and the family sculpture. The children's drawings were witnessed within the context of the children's descriptions, taking care to not interpret symbols or pictures from the researcher's point of view so as to remain open to the meaning made by each child. The drawings appeared to easily fit within the tentative manifestation of *know what to do*, and so were included as further evidence of this manifestation. Although one family did not create a family sculpture, choosing instead to produce individual sculptures of their individual sense of safety, the remaining three sculptures shared a remarkably similar shape and movement quality, so were included as further evidence for the manifestations *family all around.*

At one point in the analysis, the researcher noticed conceptual similarities between two of the tentative manifestations, *got your back*, and *know what to do*, as they both contain content about strategies for protection, and so attempted to combine these together. However, the movement qualities of these two thematically similar groupings were quite different, possibly because the material that inspired *know what to do* came mostly from the children, whereas the material from *got your back* was produced from the adults. Yet, in addition to this difference, the movement qualities of each actually caused the researcher to relook at the manifestation, *know what to do*, and think of it like the other manifestation that shared the same movement quality, *always checking*. Because of the information from the body-based analysis, the researcher chose to retain all seven manifestations so as to not dilute the difference between these two conceptually similar, but kinesthetically distinct, manifestations.

These seven manifestations were then considered together. The found poems for each of the seven tentative manifestations were combined together, duplicated ideas were reduced, and the poem was again transformed for flow, cadence, rhythm and meaning. This additional co-construction of the found poem revealed four distinct post-intentional provocations of the material that helped the phenomenon of a sense of safety in families to be made known, in temporal and social context. For Vagle (2018), a post-intentional provocation is the way that the phenomenon is ignited or elicited. The four provocations that emerged from this last step of analysis were: implicit, intergenerational, vigilant, and proximal. These provocations then led to the emerging post-intentional production of the study: For three-generation families with reported incomes at 150% of the federal poverty level, a sense of safety may be experienced across generations as implicit, imparted through vigilance and physical proximity.

### **Thinking with Theory**

Recent post-intentional phenomenological research has expanded the textual crafting of analysis to include other forms of expressive expression (Vagle & Hofsess, 2016; Vagle, Clement & Coffee, 2017). For example, Vagle and Hofsess (2016) used Hofsess' experience as a papermaker artist and art educator to use handmade stationary as a method on which the participants recorded data in a study about the phenomenon of the afterglow of artistic education. Vagle, Clement, and Coffee (2017) conducted a case study on the experience of being educated in an high-poverty elementary school through photo-storying, and used the data to create an embodied theatrical production, including transforming the data into a script, and performing the script for others. Their embodied analysis allowed for understanding of concepts as a felt experience on a non-verbal level. According to one of the researchers on the study by Vagle, Clement, and Coffee (2017),

The embodied act of my one-woman play of the dramatization forced me to inhabit the bodies of each person in the script, to see what they saw, say what they said, and feel

what they felt (or at least, what I imagined they had felt)...One example of opportunity for such insight offered by this playful, embodied analysis is in the tentative physical manifestations being produced in me, the researcher. Writing the “scene” of our interview allowed me to unearth some of the various tensions and concerns that I felt in my body with relation to some of the discordant elements of the study and its enactment that I found to be present in the experience of the interview (p. 431).

Both of these post-intentional research examples did not use the product of the artistic production as metaphor for the essence of the phenomenon. Instead, the process of the production contributed to the researchers’ understanding of the phenomenon of investigation. In the later study, the use of the body diluted the mind/body binary such that the corresponding body-based knowing revealed other insights not noticed in a cognitive, literal process (Vagle, Clement, & Coffee, 2017).

This researcher chose to expand on the previous use of embodied analytic strategies within post-intentional analysis in this study. Green (2015) further explains body-based analysis: Somatic sensitivity or a reflective body awareness may enable researchers to develop systems of reflexivity and “decenter” uncritical assumptions and perceived notions of a found and static reality. In this sense, somatic practice and sensitivity may resonate with a positionality, diverse perspectives, and an inner physical struggle with emerging ideas and issues (p. 74).

The use of the body in analysis in this study matched the request of the collaborating families to use their bodies in data collection during the Family Sculpting exercise. It was also consistent with the epistemology of the study in the body’s construction of meaning and knowledge (Barbour, 2011; Pentassuglia, 2017). The intermodal transfer from the co-construction of found poetry, to movement, to movement analysis, to the selection of phrase to name the tentative

manifestation, allowed for the inclusion of body-based knowing to contribute to the analysis from the inside out (Snowber, 2018).

Further, this exploration of the phenomenon is consistent with the sensitizing epistemology of this study. A constructivist, strengths-based epistemology maintains that knowledge is manifest both through interaction in the social world, and through the inclusion of strengths and resources within particular populations of intervention or investigation. The use of whole-part-whole analysis follows the conceptualization of constructivism that meaning is constructed through interaction (Cottone, 2007). In constructivism, meaning is constructed in relationships that bring about changes and transformations (Furman, Jackson, Downey, & Shears, 2003; McNamee & Gergen, 1992), so the bringing together the material from the collaborating families in analytic discourse allows for a new understanding, and a new construction of the phenomenon. Also, a strengths perspective listens to the whole of the family's experience, not just the presenting problem (Saleebey, 1996). The careful listening to the voices of the collaborating families through an Open View format, the inclusion of non-discursive methods of material collection, and the resultant bringing together of their stories into a collective whole, supports the strengths perspective that guides this study.

### **The Analysis of Post-Reflexions**

As stated in the earlier description of the researcher's post-reflexion plan, the researcher continually reflected upon the phenomenon of a sense of safety in families in all aspects of life throughout the duration of this study. As a result, the researcher began to see a sense of safety as relevant to all aspects of human development and interaction. Although the tentative manifestations that have emerged from this study are important, there is so much left to know about this phenomenon which appears to be everywhere and impact all aspects of human functioning, but remains implicit. Because of the wide-ranging and often existential nature of the entirety of this researcher's reflection, this researcher chose to only share the analysis of the

post-reflexive process that relates to the process of study. For this research specifically, the researcher followed the guidance provided by Vagle to focus reflection by noticing the following: moments of connection and disconnection with the collaborators and the material, our assumptions of normality, that which we refuse to shed in our own assumptions, and moments of shock and awe during observations and interactions (Vagle, 2018).

Related to the first consideration, noticing moments of connection and disconnection, this researcher consistently remarked at the willingness and commitment shared by the collaborators. Their honesty, thoughtfulness, careful consideration, generosity of time and conversation, and willingness to move through personal boundaries was experienced as remarkable. The researcher felt very connected to all aspects of their stories, and was also astonished as to how the entire conversation with the collaborating families felt as if it fit the phenomenon of inquiry. Vagle cautions researchers to reflect on that which we do not include, or that which appears out of scope. However, in these encounters, the researcher felt that everything the families shared was relevant, and that the researcher was connected with almost all information shared. There was one memorable moment of disconnection when one collaborator mentioned wanting to shield the child from seeing same-sex couples. At this admission, the researcher could feel herself move away and disconnect, having a personal reaction of strong offense to this statement. The collaborator quickly explained that she was doing this because she was not ready to answer the child's questions, causing the researcher to wonder whether the participant noticed her disconnection. Other than this moment of rupture, the researcher did not notice other moments of disconnection within the discussions.

The researcher did notice her own disconnection with the directive of the Family Sculpting exercise. The researcher appraised the Open View as a collaborative, flowing, shared conversation, whereas the Family Sculpting exercise felt like an impose, or as a recalibration of power towards the researcher's agenda to which the families complied rather than collaborated.

Because of this, the researcher did not commit to this exercise with the rigor the methodology would have afforded, leaving the researcher wondering whether more information could have been gathered from this experience. This is especially true for the family who did not complete a family sculpture, as it is assumed that this was because the researcher did not ask with enough commitment to motivate the family complete this activity. As a result of the researcher's ambivalence, this piece of phenomenological material was not collected from this collaborating family.

Related to Vagle's (2014) suggestions to reflect upon our own assumptions of normality, including those assumptions we cannot shed, this researcher continually reflected upon the ways her positionality impacted the stories being told and her interpretation of these stories, how the broader social and political context impacted her positionality, and how her positionality was being interpreted by the collaborating families. For example, the researcher was consistently aware of her own assumption that a sense of existential safety, or the idea that the very existence of the collaborators was under threat because they did not fit within the White, Christian, middle/upper class bubble of protection, would be the most significant finding. This assumption had been a 'bottom line' for this researcher, as she really believed that this would be heard in the stories shared by the families. This strong assumption was continually fueled with the current political discourse over immigration rights, discrimination, border walls, and family separation, as the researcher assumed that these macro-level considerations of safety would seep to the personal. Significant reflective work was done to try to keep this strong assumption at bay. Despite the researcher's surety, no collaborator mentioned race or socioeconomic status in our discussion, and only two collaborators referenced any aspect of their ethnicity, Adrian referencing his "Hispanic culture" and Paula remarking, "It may be because of my country. I'm from Ecuador". This is despite only two collaborators out of the fifteen (Lillian and John) identifying as White (with Italian as ethnicity) on the demographic form. The researcher was

consistently aware of the impact of power because of privilege in interactions, as well as how her skin color and access to education, both of which were clearly disclosed in the meeting of these families, communicated her own privilege. This researcher was also cognizant that a deeper relationship between researcher and collaborating family may have been necessary in order to hear about how race, social status, economics, and/or ethnicity played a role in the family's experience of safety, and how these may bring about an existential threat to safety. Alternatively, the researcher also wondered whether these categories would be spoken of explicitly by those who live everyday of their lives within an over-culture that has consistently been threatening, so may not bring these topics to the conversation unless explicitly brought up by the person in the conversation who represented power culture. This is especially true given the researcher's apparent Whiteness, economic stability, and educational level.

Additionally, twelve of the fifteen participants identified as Hispanic. The researcher wondered whether the cultural experience of familism, which is the concept of prioritizing the family over the individual and a cultural value that is often experienced within families of Hispanic/Latino ethnicity and culture (Campos, 2019), was being expressed by these families, and therefore having an implicit influence over the findings of this study. However, again, this researcher found it difficult to address this explicitly, because of the silence of the topic within the Open View format. During analysis, the researcher reflected consistently on the self-selection of a predominantly Hispanic/Latino group of collaborating families, and whether the tentative manifestations which emerged from this study were influenced more by familism, rather than a sense of safety, and whether there would be any difference between these two concepts explicitly defined by the families. More study is needed with families who identify across the spectrum of human socio-cultural constructed groupings by researchers who both share and do not share the backgrounds of the collaborators, in order to explore this potential distinction with this lens in more depth.

The researcher also found herself ruminating over the challenge of the fact the term “safety” holds so much assumption in and of itself. For example, when asking about safety, the researcher reflected that it would be perfectly normal to speak of physical safety, safety measures within the home, ways that bodies are kept safe through basic necessity, or of emotional safety within relationships. The researcher worried that so many differential understandings of the word “safety” would lead to extremely divergent data. Also, the researcher worried that it would be too difficult to gather data about a phenomenon which may be so neurologically foundational, or subcortical (Porges, 2015). For example, when each of the four families responded to the initial Open View prompt with silence, and all asked for clarification of the question, the researcher could feel building anxiety over the choice of this inquiry. At these times, many collaborators demonstrated reflective effort in response to sub-prompts, and much body language and facial expression after the initial as well as sub-prompts demonstrated a blend of pensive thought and cynicism. And at these times, the researcher began to doubt the choice of this study, how she was framing the question, and how she was experiencing her own confidence as a researcher while speaking to the families.

Interestingly, this researcher did not find many moments of specific shock when sitting with each of the families, as she has been working with families whose stories are similar for some time. Even so, the researcher could not help but be awed by the enormity of the things being vigilantly kept at bay. However, when the researcher shared the completed found poem with witnesses who shared similar positionality to the researcher, the witnesses were absolutely shocked at the enormity of threat. These witnesses also shared their personal gratefulness to the perception of their own safety after seeing how it may not be as secure in other families, motivating a future need to look at disparity in a sense of safety. Although not shocking, the researcher did find it interesting that most of the collaborators denied having routines or rituals in their family life. The researcher found herself remarking on this given extant research in the

child development field that points to routines as foundational to healthy child development (Strain, 2014). The researcher spent some time wondering whether this was another finding only normed on privileged populations.

### **Component 5: Craft a Text that Engages the Productions and Provocations of the Post-Intentional Phenomenon**

The final step in a post-intentional analytic process is the crafting of a text that helps to illuminate the phenomena of inquiry, as it is experienced in the current, but fleeting, temporal and social context. The text uses the tentative manifestations gleaned by the phenomenological material, the specific material that brought light to a particular area of the phenomenon, termed a provocation by Vagle (2018), and the particular way the phenomenon is being seen at the time of seeing, termed a production (Vagle, 2018). In prior writing, Vagle termed this process an “assemblage” to describe the partial coming together of many forms of knowing to craft a momentary and tentative manifestation of the phenomenon (Vagle, 2014; Vagle & Hofsess, 2016). As per Vagle’s post-intentional understanding, any manifestation is acknowledged as partial and incomplete, understanding that our engagement with the phenomenon was a snapshot in time that has the potential to change and shift at any moment after. Ultimately, the analysis provided a partial, time-limited understanding of the phenomenon of safety within families. A complete description of this final step and the implications of the tentative manifestations uncovered are included in Chapters 4 and 5.

### **Summary**

This chapter reviewed the use of phenomenology broadly, and the choice of post-intentional phenomenology as the specific methodology of this study. It then described the study design as including techniques and considerations from strengths-based research with the five component analysis plan suggested by post-intentional phenomenology. Within the five

component plan, the phenomenon of the sense of safety within family units was identified and explained, then, protocol and rationale for data collection was outlined, including how the researcher maintained trustworthiness in the research process. After, the data analysis plan was provided and the rationale for including an arts-based research methodology of body-based analytic techniques was explained. In the chapters following, the tentative manifestations of the data will be explored, followed by the potential limitations, implications and applications of this study to further research, practice and policy.

## CHAPTER IV: TENTATIVE MANIFESTATIONS, PROVOCATIONS AND PRODUCTIONS

Through post-intentional phenomenological inquiry, this study sought to begin to understand how the phenomenon of a sense of safety is experienced within three-generation families with reported incomes at a maximum of 150% of the federal poverty level. This chapter reviews the process of the analysis and the resultant seven tentative manifestations, four post-intentional provocations, and final post-intentional production that emerged from this study.

### Tentative Manifestations

The researcher used post-intentional analytic methods to group the experiences of the collaborating families into shared understandings. The researcher next used arts-based intermodal transfer methods to co-construct a found poem for each shared understanding. This poem was then moved in choreography, and the shape and effort of the choreography analyzed using Laban Movement Analysis (Laban & Lawrence, 1974). The found poem was then revised with experiential information from the movement exploration, and edited or transformed as needed. Next, the tentative manifestation for the particular shared understanding of the phenomenon were suggested, including, *it's just like so, how we get raised, always checking, our safety net is gone, know what to do, got your back, and family all around.*

### It's Just Like So

This observation of the consistency and universality of responses across collaborating families was especially true of the first manifestation, *it's just like so*, which was developed from the conversation with all collaborators. This manifestation seemed to suggest that a sense of safety may be an inceptual experience, one rarely noticed, rarely considered, and seldom discussed. Almost all the collaborators asked for clarification after hearing the Open View prompt for the first time. Many then demonstrated head motions and facial gestures to

communicate a reflective scanning to find their response to the question, with almost a preliminary assessment that they would not find an answer. For example, Adrian, 43-year-old father of the Colon family remarked, “Um...this is hard”. Jayden, 27-year-old mother of the Williams family commented, “That’s a good question”, and then paused to think it through. And the trio of female family members from the Fernandez family, 31-year-old mother Elena, 33-year-old aunt, Alma, and 53-year-old grandmother, Maria, all agreed when Elena paused in the middle of the interview to say, “What an interesting question”. When the families did find words, it was almost as though what they brought forth was not relevant to the question – as if what came up for them in response to the sense of safety was so obvious, or implicit, it could not possibly be the answer to the prompt. Mother in the Garcia family, Mariana, tentatively mentioned,

I feel like the fact that we’re just all together, we just feel safe like there’s nothing that we should feel like, occupied in the moment, and like, I’ve never really (shakes head, no), like, thought of it like in depth, It’s just the fact that we’re together.

Alma, the aunt in the Fernandez family noted with similar hesitancy, “We were just always around each other...always with each other”. The tentative response was also evident when speaking to the parents of the Colon family, 37 year old mother Lillian, and her husband, Adrian,

**Lillian:** Yeah – because, no matter what, family was always around, so...

**Adrian:** Yeah, because it was always...um...always, family was always first

The use of the qualifiers “just” and “so” while trailing off at the end of their conversations, the pause within Adrian’s answer, punctuated with the hesitant, “um”, coupled with the body positioning, gestures and energetic communication that seemed to express, <<*is this right?*>>, in their statements, communicates the hesitancy they had responding to the prompt. Many collaborators seemed to try to describe their experiences of safety, but found it challenging. Family members appeared to respond through movements, gestures and facial expressions when words did not come easily. The prominent uses of “like” as a word of pause, or “so” as a stand-in

for evidence, demonstrated an attempt of the collaborators to describe that which was verbally difficult to characterize. The found poem for this manifestation demonstrates this hesitancy,

*Well....*

*um....*

*it's...*

*just...*

*like...*

*so...*

The movement is small, starting at the center of the body, with hands in a wringing motion from the center, out, with shoulders raised. The movement moves in diagonal motions, crossing the body with one foot in front of the other. The direction is indirect, but the movement is paced instead of frantic. The Laban Effort is Wring – indirect, sustained, heavy and bound, communicating doubted wisdom, or a sense of <<maybe?>> or <<is this right?>>

### **How We Get Raised**

Yet, as families talked more about the phenomenon of a sense of safety, their understanding of its implicit nature began to evolve into understanding it as ‘always’. This brought forth the next tentative manifestation, *how we get raised*. All families spoke of the sense of safety as being imparted in their childhood. All members talked of learning about safety from older family members. It was again through this manifestation that the sense of safety as implicit or inceptual came through – as if it was always there in their family way. Paula, grandmother of the Garcia family, offered, “that’s how we- we get raised...it’s the way how we live”. Her daughter, Mariana explained, “We just always grew up like that”. Mother of the Williams family, Jayden, mentioned, “it just grew, it just got like that throughout the years,” and grandfather of the Colon family, John, revealed, “it was the way I was brought up.”

However in this manifestation, there were two distinct differences among the collaborators as to how this inceptual, intergenerational sense came to be. For some, it came through protective messages of trust, whereas, for others, it came through mistrust. For example,

Paula communicated the mistrust imparted by her mother, whereas Jayden and Adrian described their grandparents as teaching protective strategies to keep the family safe.

**Paula:** Because my mother was that way too. My mother didn't let hers go anywhere. She say, "I don't trust."

**Jayden:** Well, I could say my grandma, God rest her soul, but yeah, my grandma, yeah, she taught me a lot about how to be safe with my children and stuff, Because she was with me when I got pregnant with her (Evelyn), so she helped me a lot as to becoming a new mom, You know, what's this and what's that, so, she kind of helped me know how to be safe with my children. She made sure.

**Adrian:** I was raised by my grandparents, and just by me seeing the way they were with me, how protective they were of me, so they just installed in me, just the protection.

Lillian communicated her learning from her mother through her mother's fear, yet, Layla, like Jayden, talked of the protective strategies taught to her by her mother and grandmother,

**Lillian:** We actually, I guess, mommy was like that, my mother was like that too, because she would always say, you know, she would always be afraid of everything – don't go there, or, stay away from there, so. She learned through her, her parents, like, she would tell us stories that she wasn't allowed to go to certain parts of Hoboken, even Hoboken, because they were the bad parts, or no one was around there, you know...

**Layla:** I grew up old school, Old school, I grew up. Um, my grandmother and mom, both, because I was the first in the family, so they taught us about a lot of safety, like, "You can't go out here", when it's raining, TV's have to be off, and I do that to this day.

John described learning about how to stay safe through parental violence, whereas Maria talked of the trust that her mother had in her ability to make good choices to stay safe,

**John:** I learned from my father's fist, mostly about what not to do. I knew what he was getting at, but, you know, the way he did it wasn't too good

**Maria:** I don't know, I think um, I don't know, I wanna say maybe my upbringing? Um, although my siblings had such a, they had such a difference in age, age gap, so I never had anyone to really come with me to places and so, I guess I was an old soul and my mom always trusted me to do the right thing...

Maria continued to note this balance between trust and mistrust to impart safety in her own family. After saying that her mother trusted her, she talked of her father, who although was "tough", still imparted a sense of safety,

My father was like, so tough. You know it was like, freaking military. It was like, you know, um so, always pretty safe, I never felt unsafe.

This balance between these two experiences of protection, mistrust and trust, is communicated through the co-constructed found poem below,

*It's how we get raised:  
learning from fear...  
afraid of everything...  
she'd say, "I don't trust"...  
don't go there, don't do that...  
my father's freakin' fist...*

*learning from prayer...  
teaching about safety...  
yet my mother trusted me...  
but she made sure, set the tone...  
installed protection...*

The movement choreographed to this section of the poem is done with two bodies, working on either side of the space. The body on the left is moving in staccato, straight shapes, in indirect movements. The body on the right is moving in slower, rounded, sustained, open movements with easy transitions. The body on the left is moving through the space, indirectly with the Laban effort of Slash – indirect, heavy, quick and free. The body on the right is moving from the body, out, with central spatial tension, with the Laban effort of Press – direct, heavy, sustained and bound. These two bodies depict the two differential experiences of safety – mistrust and trust.

### **Always Checking**

Vigilance, one of the differential experiences of safety imparted in the collaborators' childhoods as 'always', was also mentioned as a way that safety was experienced in the current family system, pointing to possible intergenerational transmission of a sense of safety. Again, the tentative manifestation of *always checking* appeared in all of the families' stories of their experience of the phenomenon of a sense of safety within their family units. In listening to this piece of their stories, the researcher began to feel a sense of apprehension, or a tension to hold on to the sense of safety through vigilance. As the families moved deeper into their reflection on the phenomenon, *always checking*, seemed to stand as an operationalization of evidence of a sense of safety. Yet, there appeared to be a weight associated with this manifestation, and a

feeling that at any moment the experience of safety may flee. Hearing these comments felt more anxious than controlled. For example, the members of the Fernandez family described their way of being with each other this way:

**Alma:** Yeah, like if I ever, even in my adult age, if I ever parked the car and was trying to walk to the apartment, my mom has made it her business to come outside and meet me there just so that I don't take that walk by myself cause it's late at night. Same with my sister I dropped her off the other night and I watched her, I was like looking out the window watching the whole time

**Elena:** And yeah it's still with us. Like yesterday she came over, she (Zoe) slept over, you know, with them over the weekend, so she dropped her back off. As she was going back to her car, I had to watch her to make sure she goes to her car.

**Alma:** So it's like already we're on, like, high alert, like, all the time. And even at my age if she [Maria] knows like, if my boyfriend's not gonna be around she's like come to Linden, come stay with me, should I go there? Because even at our, like my age, if everyone has left the apartment, "I'm like oh...its real quiet around here!"

The members of the Garcia family also highlighted the checking in manifestation among siblings. Paula and Mariana described the way that the siblings in the family checks on each other this way,

**Mariana:** So, yeah, so she always told us like, "You're siblings." So I mean, its like - for example, in school. I would look for my sister, and if my sister wasn't there, I mean everybody would look for my sister because she was the oldest one. But if my sister wasn't there, my younger brother would look for me. And if not, I would look for my, I would look for my brother. And you know, and then I would go back to my younger brother like, I would like, check up on him. So we would all, like, check up on each other.

**Paula:** I'm always talk to- there are four kids, so I'm always... talk to them. You know, "If I'm not there, these are your siblings. Always together. Always, you, you have to look for each other." So, I say, "Because if I - the day that I'm not there, you have to keep, that done," you know? They gonna, "You're gonna have your husband, you gonna have, but you are... siblings. Always together. You have, don't forget that."

The action of *checking* exists within the relationship between parents and children as well. There appeared to be a sense of trying to shield the children from feelings of unease or of the threat of the loss of safety. Both grandmother of the Garcia family, Paula, and AJ's parents, Lillian and Adrian, spoke about wanting to keep the children safe by always checking for their fear:

**Paula:** So, we're trying to not do, because we know she has fear. So, I don't like to make for her to feel fear, you know.

**Adrian:** That's the whole thing – we don't let him go through, we protect him from it  
**Lillian:** We try to, as much as we can. There's some things that he just has to do.

From the children's perspective, this checking behavior instilled a sense of safety, as is explained by the daughters of the Williams family. In this family, the children, Evelyn and Gabriela, explained how their mother, Jayden's, practice of checking on them brought about a sense of safety for them.

**Gabriela:** Like, cause at night, my mom always checks on us to make sure that uh, none of us are going to fall off the bed, or ...

**Evelyn:** ...that we're ok

**Jayden:** Yup, I do my runs around the house. Even when they are sleeping, I still go in and check to make sure that nobody's falling off, that everybody's covered, that it's not too hot, that it's not too cold

Jayden also continued this manifestation as she explained what her mother-in-law, Layla, does for her,

Well, we check on each other a lot. Like she'll call me, or she comes to my house and sees something, she's like, take that out of there, put that there, that's dangerous....Me and her, she's like my mom, I talk to her all the time...That's why I listen to her and I take her advice. Because I just had my grandma, I didn't have my mom around, so I listen to everything that she tells me.

Jayden tells us that she is welcoming of her mother-in-law's advice and way of checking in.

Layla also endorses her pattern of checking, saying, "In my household, I'm always checking".

The adult sisters of the Fernandez family and Mariana, mother of the Garcia family, mentioned that while they did not like their mother's pattern of checking in on them as children, they now appreciate the practice, and have incorporated checking on as a method of their parenting, again bringing forth the intergenerational aspect of a sense of safety in families. Similarly, the manifestation of *always checking* came forth for John, grandfather of the Colon family, when he talked about his experience of a sense of safety in his childhood,

So, there was, I remember when I was young, I could actually play on the corner underneath the mailbox and nobody would bother me, nobody, because there was always people watching, always people watching.

The experience of being checked on or watched out for had contributed to John's sense of safety, and seemed to instill a sense of safety in the other family members as well. Paula, grandmother of the Garcia family also believes that the watching and checking in, which she terms, "overprotection" was a good thing. Paula explains,

My husband always used to tell me, "You look like, um, you know, you look like one of those people who got raped, abused." And he would tell me that and I say, "No I'm not." I say, "No, no, it's not" I say, "I'm watching the news every day and I see what they do. So you want me to put my kids in that?" No. Not with the cussing, not with the – no. With my kids, I take care of my kids. He'd say "You're acting like *something* happened to you." And I say, "No. I'm overprotective", you know, but it worked.

Paula used the term 'overprotective', an idea that was repeated in her daughter's description of parenting 4 year old Natalia, when she says, "we always are on top of her". Elena, mother in the Fernandez family, explained their watchful, 'on top of' strategies this way,

I'm just always with her. Being on top of things. Always trying to keep her busy. I try to get her involved in activities, and I'm just always- Make sure that she can't, grab any knives or anything sharp and check on her at night. She's always with me, so...But as far as her, she doesn't necessarily, she has so many toys and things at home, she doesn't really stick to one because she has such a busy mind that she'll be fixated on one thing and then the next minute it's something else.

In response to the tentative manifestation of, *always checking*, the researcher co-constructed the below section of poem,

*Watching,*  
*Checking,*  
*Protecting,*  
*Looking - the whole time,*  
*Always on high alert.*  
*You have to protect.*  
*We always are on top of her, always with her, on top of things.*  
*Always on high alert.*  
*We don't like to make her feel fear.*

When moving this poem, only the head moves from the neck, darting back and forth, the eyes open and blinking in staccato, and the toes tap consistently, quickly and anxiously. The body is stiff and straight, leaning slightly forward with flat back on the hind balls of the foot, hovering. The body shape is in plank with central spatial tension that sends energy into the transverse

spatial pathway in diagonal direction. The Laban effort is Dab – direct, light, quick and bound – communicating tension, watchfulness and vigilance.

### **Our Safety Net Is Gone**

After reflecting on these movement qualities and the emotional resonance of careful watchfulness communicated through the collaborators' stories, one might be called to wonder for what these families were tensely watching. The next tentative manifestation, *our safety net is gone*, may respond to this curiosity. In this significant portion of each conversation with all of the families, the researcher heard the many, many ways these families felt threat lurking very closely outside their system. All families spent significant time in our conversation discussing these worries, and when weaved together, the picture of the threat that looms over these families is stark. Their watchfulness included multiple categories of threats to physical safety, environmental safety, emotional safety, sexual safety, and children's safety in places that should be safe like homes, schools, and playgrounds. For example, grandmother of the Fernandez family, Maria, remarked,

I've always watched a lot of crime on TV - Unsolved mysteries on the TV - so maybe, maybe that's not good but it lets you, but you're so alert of wow! Things that you don't think of it...It happens! You almost have to be ahead of the game, you almost have to be thinking ahead. ...And then, that, the influence of TV plays a part when you're by yourself. You're like "well what serial killers are out there like, looking for me?" But it also prepares you in case, like you don't know how many times I've planned an escape route and like, wherever I'm at, I'm like, hmmm, where would I go?

Layla, the grandmother in the Williams family, took time to list the many ways that she is watching out for threats to physical safety within her home.

When it comes to their eating, drinking, um, I make sure the sockets, um, when they have the plug in it, that there's no water in the area. If they do eat and drink in the room, I want nothing wasted, um, no trippin' over the wires, because that can happen as well, and if they overload the surge protector, that could cause an outage, in your house as well. As far as the windows, I make sure that I lift them up and make sure there's no problem and that they are not falling back down so that when the kids are over there by the windows, they stay up and if they are in the window, it won't fall. Oh, and um, slip and fall – always pick up things, because you don't wanna fall because falling, you get hurt, so, sometimes it can be serious, sometimes it can be minor, but just, um, you know I'm

cautious, all the way around. Like going up and down the stairs, when you see something on the stairs, try to avoid stepping on it, um, because if you step on it, you're gonna slip and fall. We try to avoid accidents, point blank, accidents all the way around

Similarly, Layla's daughter-in-law, Jayden, also focused on physical safety measures taken within the home,

I put like all my cleaning products up on the top, every time we shop. Every time we shop, I tell my husband, put it up on the top because I don't want the babies to grab it. Like the utensils, the sharp utensils, we put them high enough so they won't grab it. And I try to get lost of plastic stuff, not to get glass, because of the kids.

Jayden continued,

I don't like them by the stove and every night I always check because for some reason, I think it's going to leak. Because when I was little, my grandmother, I put my hand on the stove and the fire was on, but I wasn't feeling it, so she was like "What are you doing?!" and my whole hand got red, red, red, red, and then she did one of her little home remedies, so now, ever since then, I always check my stove. I always keep them away from the stove, even when we are cooking, just like stay away from the stove. That's like my pet peeve is the stove

Mariana also shared the many threats that she encountered as a child that impact how she is parenting now.

Because look at- we live in such a crazy world. You never know if one of the little kids brought like, something with them or anything from home or if you were going to sleepover someone was going to come and you could've been like, shot or died. Or you don't know how the dad was. And in the sleepovers, there would be like- I remember sleepovers like the whole living room full of girls. And you know, and I was like, "Oh man, I can't sleep over." But then again I'm like, "Good, because I don't - I don't know her dad. Her dad could be nice and then later on, I mean, you never know what's gonna happen.

This wariness around sexual violence was echoed by Maria and Elena of the Fernandez family and by Adrian of the Colon family:

**Maria:** We had uh, an uncle temporarily stay with us just for like a month or two but um, and their doors did not have the latches, you know, and we made sure it was put in it just, you know, just not that there was ever a reason to, but I didn't want to give an opportunity either. 'Cause I think a lot of times a lot of things that happen are crimes of opportunities. But to allow that opportunity - you gotta avoid some as much as possible.

**Elena:** I think it's important for sure, um, I know that childhood trauma it carries on until adulthood so I definitely want her to be in a safe environment so she doesn't have to deal with that trauma, so she doesn't have to deal with too much trauma. So, just always being

cautious as to where she's at and who she's with, I don't keep her with anybody. These are the people and my brother and sister you know are the only people I let her stay with because it's so important. I know people who were molested, um her father even being one of them, so like, it's very important for me to keep an eye on her and make sure she's safe at all times.

**Adrian:** I was raised with my, um, my cousins, so, like in the Hispanic culture, they call it like cousin brother, cousin sister...if she's a female, you know, you've got to protect her first, you know, watch out for her – make sure they don't disrespect her. Make sure they don't touch her the wrong way, you know, so I was very protective of that.

The Williams family also spoke about “dressing right” as way of protection. The researcher remarked with note that sexual threat or violence was a concern for all of the four families.

Parents also discussed their worry about safety at schools. This was particularly salient for Lillian and Adrian, parents of the Colon family, as their son, AJ, is diagnosed with muscular dystrophy.

**Lillian:** He's not in school yet. I'm afraid to send him to school,

**Adrian:** Well, you see all this stuff that's going down now with all the shootings in the school, and all the bullying that's going on. You can't trust. And all the, look at all the kidnappings that are happening, it's horrible now.

**Lillian:** Because of, um, his condition with his muscles, he's not as fast as everyone else, and I think about, God forbid, if there's a fire or something, how would I make sure he's OK.

For Mariana in the Garcia family, her concerns about safety stem from the possible negative influences that might come from socializing with others,

She's never sleeping over anyone's. And I don't want any kids at the house. She asks me now and I'm like, “Yeah sure.” But no. It's too complicated too now. If a kid falls or something happens, you know, they sue you nowadays for anything. If you get peanut butter and you didn't know they could- no. I don't want it. I'm not having it.

In talking with the adults of the Williams family, they communicated concerns about getting to school because of threats in the environment,

**Layla:** Because we've had an instance where a van was riding around and trying to kidnap children. It was a couple that was trying. So we teach the children, sometimes, don't pay no business to no van that's riding around

**Jayden:** She asked me to walk to school by herself because we live, like a block away. But I still don't let her, but she just walks in front of me

Paula, Layla and Mariana also discussed threats from the immediate neighborhood,

**Layla:** Well, my, my, because I'm on the first floor – because I used to live on the 10<sup>th</sup> floor but I'm on the first floor now – and at first, when I first moved in, I checked my windows, because my window is on the first floor, but they can't reach my window because it is still very high up, my safety begins because when I first moved there, we had a shooting incident, and someone just came driving by in the car and just went ba, ba, ba, and my building got struck, but it got struck from the side of the window, so they were able to see the footage on the camera, go back, rewind and see who did the shooting. So I was a little scared by that, so I don't like going, I don't like kids near windows. I keep the shade down and I have the air conditioner in the window

**Paula:** Well, my kids never would play that much with the neighbor (points to the right) because - well, with this neighbor yeah. But this other neighbor (points to the left) never. I don't know, he wasn't around. And with this neighbor (again, points to the right) the kid from here, yes. But more they played with each other, and with my three nieces and nephew. But it's no more like that way around here. Because here in front they have a house...

**Mariana:** People have like mental illnesses that are like drug addicts I think?

**Paula:** So never, we never - that's the problem with the safety, then. That's why we never like for them to be out. They always *here*, we always protect them, you know?

Though all of these threats are significant, the most poignant was Lillian's admission that the reason these threats held such weight was because of what she perceived as the loss of the ultimate protector of family. As Lillian explained,

We also don't know anybody in the schools anymore. We don't have people, you know, that we know anymore. When my nephew was going, he has muscular dystrophy as well, but when my nephew was going to school, he used to have people looking after him, making sure he was doing OK. We don't have that now....our safety net is gone now.

With these threats in mind, the following found poem was created to try to capture the many threats that appeared just outside of the family for all of the collaborators.

*Our safety net is gone.  
It's too complicated now -  
Leaking stoves, school shootings, bullying, kidnapping, sharp things, needles in candy, fire...  
God forbid...  
childhood trauma, molestation, cyber predators, bad neighborhoods, poison ivy, GMO, mental  
illness, drugs, shooting at the building, flooding, storms,  
accidents...point blank...accidents all around.  
It could be your situation, it could be your children's situation, it could be health related...  
it just bothers...  
the more you think about it,  
then your nerves and your stomach starts to act up – like worms - twisting and turning.  
We live in such a crazy world, you almost have to be thinking ahead.*

*We don't have the people that we know anymore.  
We don't keep her with anybody.  
You have to protect.  
You have to be prepared, just in case,  
You never know.*

The movement to this poem is frantic at the beginning. The choreography is in indirect motions, seeming as if the body is bouncing off one thing and another in a ricochet fashion. The shape of the body is changing based on its encounter with the things in the world. When the movement stops, the shape is vulnerable. The movement moves through the transverse special pathway but there is no pattern to it. Towards the end of the poem, the head nods in a right to left motion at the neck, slowly at first, but then with more emphasis. The Laban effort is Slash – indirect, heavy, quick and free – communicating the anxiety at a sense of rampant, uncontrolled threat to safety that are seemingly found in all aspects of life, the sadness at the loss of what should be there instead, and the vigilance needed for safety.

### **Know What to Do**

The next tentative manifestation, *know what to do*, was another common piece of the conversation across all families, and arose almost as a salve to the previous manifestations characterized by anxiety and loss. The most remarkable of these conversations occurred with the children of the Williams family. When talking with 9 year old Evelyn and 7 year old Gabriela about how their family keeps them safe, the researcher remarked, “Wow! You both really know what to do!” They both had so many rules and strategies at the ready. One example is provided here,

**Evelyn:** Nobody could kidnap any children in our building because, or in her (grandmother) building, because they have the notepad, and then they can't come from the window, because the police are always in the back of the building and they can see from everybody in the window. I think since they can't come up or down that means that we are going to be safe in our house, and they can't break through even if they tried to, the police are going to be right behind the building and then they're going to run after them, and then, even, and then, we can just run and say, mommy, someone is trying to break in through the window, and then, we could just shut the door and lock it and then when they try to go back through the window, the police are going to be right there

**Gabriela:** Or, if our mom's not there, we can always ask our dad...

**Evelyn:** ...and tell him. And he'll be like, OK guys, and then we put on our shoes and then we put on our coats and then we quickly get out and then we just call 911, and plus we have to tell because we have to protect our baby sister, and then cause our dad will just put her coat on and then just run out and we'll be like, come on guys

The drawings done by the Williams daughters in response to the prompt, show what it looks like when you feel safe, provide a visual representation of this manifestation, *know what to do*. In Figure 1, Gabriela shows what she experiences as she walks in her neighborhood. She includes her house, herself and her siblings and her parents. She also includes stop signs, the crossing guard, and verbal directions given by her mother "stop here". Gabriela describes her picture in her words,

My picture, right now, we are going to cross the street to go to the store, I mean the park, and the crossing guard says stop and then my mom says stay there. I have our house, with a flag on top, and me, my brother, me, my sister, and my baby brother and here's my baby sister, my mom and my dad, and there's the crossing guard, and then here's a sign that says stop right here and then right here it says go and whatever one lights up, that means you can go or stop.

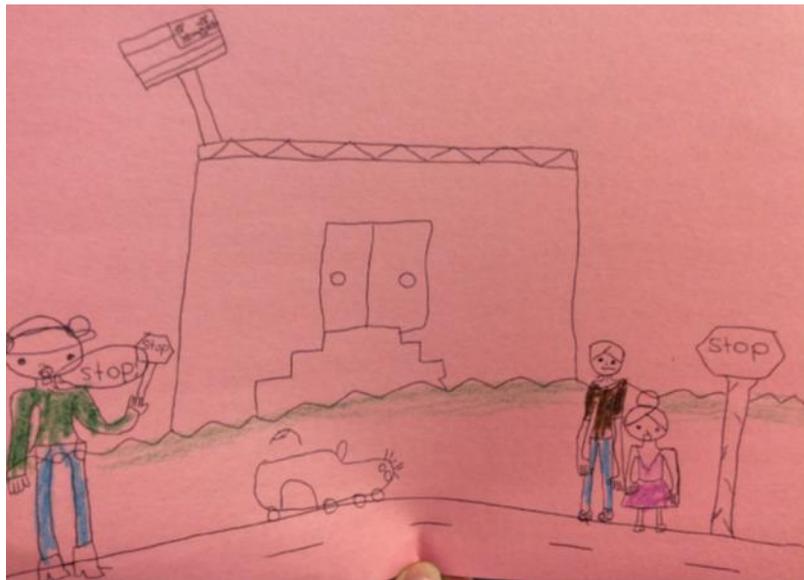


Figure 1. Crossing the street by Gabriela

The researcher took note at the size of her parents as relative to the other figures in the picture, which seemed to resonate with the watchful, hovering and 'on top of' theme that arose through the tentative manifestation, *always checking*. Gabriela's older sister, Evelyn, also drew a picture

about crossing the school, included as Figure 2. In her picture, Evelyn includes a little girl and a father, as well as the crossing guard, stop signs and the school. Evelyn describes the picture this way,

It's a crossing guard that is saying stop and the dad is holding the little girl's hand cause they don't want them to get hit by a car, yeah, because there is a street by our building, and it doesn't have a crossing guard, so we have to wait for mommy so she can cross and then she's like, the coast is clear, you can go and then on the other streets, there are two crossing guards, one right there, and then over there by the school.



*Figure 2. Holding hands by Evelyn*

The drawings done by two of the other children in the collaborating families as a response to the prompt, show what it looks like when you feel safe, demonstrated their own strategies for safety.

AJ, 5 year old son of the Colon family drew what he likes to eat at McDonalds, as shown in Figure 3. This included exchange between AJ and his parents, Lillian and Adrian, explain why AJ uses the symbol of McDonalds as a description of his sense of safety,

**Adrian:** Yeah because with the experiences that we've had, that he tends to panic and gets nervous

**Lillian:** Yeah

**Adrian:** Like when he gets a shot at the doctor, he's like no, no, no, no, you know

**Lillian:** But he know that, like, we are there, because we tell him we're here, and it's going to be OK

**Adrian:** Yeah, and he knows afterwards, afterwards, we take him to McDonalds

**Lillian:** Yeah, and he knows that his little toy is coming with his happy meal [strong nod and smile]

**AJ:** And, mommy surprised me with an awesome toy!

**Adrian:** Yeah, we got him like surprise, little toys and everything, so he's getting rewarded for being such a good boy

**AJ:** Yup!

**Adrian:** It's not easy



*Figure 3.* McDonald's burgers and fries by AJ

The 4 year old daughter of the Garcia family, Natalia, drew the picture included as Figure 4 to communicate her sense of safety through objects, with a friend, a teddy bear, and sunshine. As Natalia explained,

I'm going to draw me and my friend at the park outside, with teddy and my Barbie, and I have my jacket on and we have hats on and it's sunny



*Figure 4.* Me and my friend, my Barbie, and my teddy at the park by Natalia

Interestingly, after the researcher took the picture of Natalia's drawing, she took it back and drew slashing blue streaks all over the paper, saying, "Now it's raining". The researcher wondered whether this was a way of Natalia communicating the fleeting reality of a sense of safety that emerged from the collaborating adults.

As Natalia demonstrated, the children's awareness of the possible threat to safety coupled with their ability to have protective strategies were all met with pride from their parents. For example, Evelyn and Gabriela were met with pride from their mother and grandmother, as they continued to punctuate the girls' knowing with "good" or "good girl" or "that's right". Similarly, the children communicated feelings of pride by sitting up taller, raising their hands with more energy, and continuing to ask for the researcher's attention so that they could share more of what they know. For example, this exchange below was one of many of the Williams' girls sharing their strategies to keep safe, and their mother, Jayden, encouraging their knowing. This exchange happened quickly, and also demonstrated family roles of Evelyn at 9 years old as the eldest child, already beginning to embed the intergenerational cycle of protection from family, taking care of both of her sisters, as well as the family's knowing about protection. As she says, "We learned it from my dad and mom". In the exchange selected below, one can also recognize Jayden's encouragement and reinforcement of this role. In the reading of the exchange, one can feel the way the family tossed around these strategies for protection, almost sharing the responsibility for holding them up together, which brought about pride for the family.

**Evelyn:** Um, during rainstorms, we always have to be quiet and we can't put the TV on and we don't scream so none of us get struck. And, I always have to watch after my baby sister

**Jayden:** That's her responsibility

**Evelyn:** And then when she's crying and she doesn't want her pacifier, I always tell my mom that's she's hungry or she needs a diaper change.

**Gabriela:** You pick up sharp things

**Jayden:** And where do you put them, when you have sharp things?

**Evelyn:** We tell my mom, like, when there's a sewing needle that's just on the floor, we just tell our mom, so none of us will step on it. And she tells us not to be too friendly to strangers

**Jayden:** I always tell them stranger danger

**Gabriela:** And she tells us when a stranger talks to them, don't talk back to them. Just go run and tell

**Evelyn:** And then, every time we go trick or treating, my mom checks the candy, because on Facebook, she told us that someone found a needle in a gummy. You have to check all that candy and don't take candy from strangers.

**Jayden:** Good girl

**Evelyn:** and plus, we don't play any texting games because then you don't know who's texting you from the other side and then when they figure out where you live and everything, they'll going wind up coming and then kidnapping you, but they can't because, as I said, the police are right there and they can't break through the window, and they can't and then when somebody knocks on the door and then we lift it up and we don't know the person, we're just going to be quiet and run and then we can just call 911 right away

For the children, there was a quickness to their bodies when talking, like an urgency, but one that was overlaid with exuberance rather than anxiousness. For Jayden, her body communicated pride with her head nodding vertically and her facial gestures in a smile that she shared openly with her children. She also demonstrated pride when the children named other adults that are helpful to their safety besides family members, including the police and school personnel.

**Evelyn:** And plus, during lockdowns in the school, our teacher, we have to hide like by the desks in case there is someone in the school with a gun and then the police have to come in an investigate

**Jayden:** Good girl

**Evelyn:** if someone has a gun in the school, and if you are like in the hallways in school like at the water foundation and they say, "[name of school] is on a lockdown", you have to run to the nearest classroom and you have to tell the teacher your name and what room you are from

**Gabriela:** And during fire drills, we have to practice when there is a real fire in our school, so we practice fires even though there is not a real fire. That's why, my teacher, we got our coat before the fire drill started so that we don't be cold outside.

This same pride was echoed by Mariana in the Garcia family, when she talked of her daughter's confident knowing of what to do at times of threat.

And she knows, like, she randomly tells- she's like, "So when you see a bad person and that bad person does something bad, I have to call 911." I'm like, "When you see that person trying to touch you, you yell. Now, if that person doesn't leave you alone, you kick them, and then you run, and you call 911." And she's like, "Okay," so she knows.

So she says, like “Can I kick them in the butt too and then I run?” And I’m like, “You just need to go find yourself for safety.”

For Mariana and for Jayden, it was almost as if they felt as though they had done their job as parents because their children knew what to do. As Mariana stated, “I talk to her a lot”, which she feels is helpful. For the children, there was also a quickness, but a surety to their ability to list so many things that kept them safe. From these stories, the following found poem was constructed.

*Windows,  
Doors and rooms  
Locks, notepads and money,  
Shoes, coats, blankets, food and water  
Mom, Dad, teacher, police, sister, and you, just  
Yell, kick, run, tell, call 911, and go find yourself for safety*

The movement to this includes all parts of the body moving in staccato posing. The movement is clean, clear, pointed, and quick. It uses the vertical plane with body up straight, in movements that look like the body is lining things up confidently. The space is moving slightly transverse from one side to the other. The Laban effort is Dab – direct, light, quick and bound, communicating surety, but urgency.

### **Got Your Back**

The next manifestation follows this same feeling that was communicated by Jayden and Mariana, when hearing their children list strategies of protection. All families felt rooted in the chaos of the multiple threats to safety because of what they gave each other. They were all clear that they supported one another even within the surrounding threats, leading to the manifestation, *got your back*. It was almost as though the action of having someone’s back operationalized the implicit sense of safety and gave it weight, or provided the evidence needed to bring the sense of safety from implicit to explicit. As explained by the Garcia family,

**Mariana:** So if something happens at the moment to one of us, well, we have each other’s back at the moment. And it’s like that in general, like, if one of us needs something, we have each other, you know, we tell each other and they’ll be like, “Oh

okay like, I'll do it," or, "Ahh, are you okay, do you need something?" So it's like, there's not really a moment I feel like, unsafe, because I know I have, you know, my family I can count on so... And we like make time, you know like cause I know we're like very like, the time is very like limited that we have but it's like, when we *need* something, we have each other, so it's like, I've never felt, like, I'm not safe.

**Paula:** You know, "*One* is gonna respond." It's like uh- my- my daughter, she was living at Texas at some point. So she always, she's very distracted, so she's always- she always lose her keys. So she left her keys, inside of the car, so she say, "Mom, you know I love so much, my siblings." She say, "They never left me. I never feel like." Even she was in Texas. She knows, you know- they *know*, that they gonna get help.

A similar idea of getting help from siblings was mirrored by the members of the Fernandez family,

**Alma:** And I know like growing up, her and I, uh my mom always had like the buddy system. So wherever my sister was going, I had to come whether she wanted me there or not, whether I was supposed to be there, so we always knew to go in pairs everywhere we went so safety was always...

**Maria:** And we still do that now!

**Alma:** And we still do that...

Adrian, father of the Colon family, explained how he and his family think about the sense of safety,

I think that it's family...that we depend on each other for safety. That's what I think. We rely on each other. She relies on me, she depends on me, I depend on her. Just like the kids, they depend on us for safety. Like I tell him all the time, mommy and daddy got your back. [AJ nods and smiles]. Like JJ (youngest son), I think JJ's the one that's going to be the one who protects us all when he gets older because he's so strong. Yeah, so they know, I mean, even grandpa may not be in tip top shape, but they know grandpa will get up from that chair to protect the grandkids no matter what. The kids know we have their back and you know, the safety is here for them.

In Adrian's example, even their grandfather, John, who has been diagnosed as legally blind due to cataracts, will "get up from that chair" to protect the children of the family. This demonstrates the 'come hell or high water' sense that the researcher felt from these families regarding the protection that they would give to their family, if needed, and the comradery and the connection imparted by this family way of being. Paula also communicates the confidence in her family's way of being there for each other in everyday life,

You know it's like, uh, we have uhm, uh a group, a chat, so for example, okay. Today uhm, "Somebody can do this for me?" And uhm, and "Oh, I can do at this time!" "Oh,

you want it now?” or, “What time you need it?” So everybody’s there. One or two make the time. You know, it’s always, for for us, it’s like somebody’s always there.

The found poem for this tentative manifestation, *got your back*, is offered below,

*We have each other’s backs,  
Somebody’s always there,  
Buddies, pairs,  
We rely on each other,  
And know someone will respond,  
We depend on each other,  
For safety.*

The movement for this poem is choreographed with two bodies, always connected, always touching one another in at least two locations. Many times, full bodies are completely against each other, back to back, pushing and pressing, sharing each other’s weight. There is a lot of bend in the legs with weight directed to the floor, grounded. The movement shifts from side to side, sharing the weight of support and release. The movement moves in the horizontal plane through the transverse spatial pathway. The Laban effort for this movement is Press - direct, heavy, sustained, and bound – communicating the weight and importance of the shifting and sharing of supporting and being supported.

### **Family All Around**

This same experience of support was communicated by all the families in the seventh tentative manifestation, *family all around*. Although this was a clear and universal response to how the families experienced a sense of safety in their families, this manifestation also came through as tentative and implicit, just as in the first tentative manifestation reviewed, *it’s just like so*. This manifestation of, *family all around*, was also echoed in, *how we get raised*, as many of the stories of origin shared by the adult collaborators discussed that family being around was how they understood a sense of safety as “always” within their families. We can see evidence of all three manifestations, *it’s just like so*, *how we get raised*, and *family all around*, in portions of

the information provided by the Colon family. For example, mother, Lillian, described her experience as,

Growing up, everyone was always in the kitchen. If you weren't in the kitchen, you were at the table talking. Family was everywhere [sweeps head back and forth as if she's seeing everywhere]. It's family. It was all family, Cousins, aunts, uncles, grandparents, everybody.

Her father, John, explained his agreement by adding,

We were always surrounded by family. I mean, you couldn't walk two blocks at one time and not run into family

Lillian continued,

You couldn't walk two feet without seeing somebody you knew. If something was wrong, and if you were getting bothered by someone, they would step in...Like on where my mom lived, on Adams Street, within the three houses, that was family. Around the block, there was more family. Up the street, you know, wherever, wherever you went.

Lillian's husband, Adrian, also expanded his sense of family all around by including neighbors and friends. Adrian explained that in the "Hispanic culture" where he was raised, all of the neighborhood were considered family.

When I grew up, the neighborhood, everybody knew each other. So I was able to go outside and stay out as long as I wanted, hang out on my porch, everybody used to go on the porch and hang out. And go to the corner store, they knew my family, around the corner, everybody knew each other, so it was safe to go outside. And I'm actually very good friends, very, very good friends, close friends, with people that I grew up with, still.

Adrian's father-in-law, John, similarly expanded his sense of safety of family all around to include extended family and a neighborhood made up of those of his same culture,

Yes, my grandmother and grandfather lived right next store, we lived on the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor in the house and my aunt and uncle lived on the first floor, and I had cousins, *paizans*, all around the whole neighborhood. As a matter of fact, the whole neighborhood was all Italian, all Italian.

In contrast, the Alma and Maria of the Fernandez family explained that they were separated from extended family or neighborhood support, so instead consider their immediate family as their sense of safety,

**Alma:** Like, she never left us alone in the house. Like, we were old enough. You know at that legal age we were just never left alone. We were not a latchkey kid. Like, she was always, like, front and center.

**Maria:** We're a very small family. The rest of the family is in Florida, so...uh...we're as good as it gets....so, that's why our family is so close.

This idea of the family being close and gathering together as a way of experiencing safety was repeated in the sharing from Paula, grandmother of the Garcia family,

So when we gather, we all- we always- we gather frequently, so we are very close, okay? Very very family oriented, so. This is my house you know, all my kids come here, my sister, my brother, so we're always sitting, laugh, and talk, so it's always so much love, and I think that, that help to feel... safe together. Yes. We always help each other, you know, uhm, when we need, you know, just like uhh, and sometimes some emergency, whatever, we're always... there. Everybody's there. It's...it's how our family is.

Paula's daughter, Mariana agreed with this, stating, "We were always, like, grouped...very like united".

The families also described the surround of family as a way that they impart safety for the children. The Fernandez family consistently talked about being all together for 3 year old Zoe, as she is the only current grandchild. Elena, mother of the Fernandez family described the surround of family as a way of instilling a sense of safety for Zoe,

I just feel like she feels comfort in knowing that I'm there, or her father's there, or that they're there, you know...

This is also the case for first and only grandchild, Natalia, in the Garcia family. As stated by her mother, Mariana,

You know so... she...she has a lot of people. And I'm very like active when it comes to the school, like, uhm, well we all go. We have my mom, my dad, the great grandfather, my sister, my niece, we all go - it's a huge family

The Fernandez family provided an example of how they utilize their family to bring about an experience a sense of safety because they attend many events together,

**Elena:** Like all the events. Yeah, Like every holiday, like, even though like she (references her sister, Alma), you know, has her own boyfriend and I have, you know, my own family we all still always wanna come together as this family. We always make sure to spend time with each other.

**Maria:** Like she (Zoe) had a little Christmas show the other day which is, her age is very small, you know, and we all took off from work. And we were all there. So, we're there

**Elena:** Even the grandfather, and my sis, my other sister,

**Alma:** It's like even today, I showed up here. You know, like I wasn't supposed to be here, but to go all together, my mom's like let's go, let's all of us go, you know?

Lillian and Adrian of the Colon family also named their family as bringing about a sense of safety for AJ, although for this family, there was a sense that they were lacking “a lot of people”, as highlighted in the previous manifestation of, *lost our safety net*. AJ's parents spoke about their attempts to use their family to keep him safe from the fear and worry that arises from his medical appointments,

**Adrian:** That's the whole thing – we don't let him go through, we protect him from it

**Lillian:** We try to, as much as we can. There's some things that he just has to do.

The Colon family continued to explain how they try to “protect him” through activities that they do together as a family that convey a sense of safety,

**Lillian:** Yeah. Um...we encourage him a lot to draw, like we'll sit down together and draw with him. Or, we'll do stupid dance with him, or play a game, board game, he likes to play games

**Adrian:** and his brother too – they dance together

An example of how their family activities bring about a sense of safety for AJ is depicted in Figure 5, AJ's drawing of a Connect Four board, done in response to the prompt about what it looks like when he feels safe,



Figure 5. Connect Four by AJ

The children of the other families also brought forth the manifestation of, *family all around*, as a way that they experience a sense of safety in their families. In response to the question about who keeps them safe, all children mentioned their parents and family members. Notably, they

did so with a surety and confidence in stark contrast to the adult collaborators often tentative and hesitant responses to these prompts about safety. The children in the Williams family were experienced as answering with the most facility and confidence. The eldest in the family, 9 year old Evelyn, reflectively but effortlessly responded to the prompt of how she experiences safety in her family with, “We spend a lot of time together”. Like the Fernandez and Colon family, Evelyn also mentioned joint activities, entering into this short exchange with her mother, Jayden, and her 7 year old sister, Gabriela, about the family’s Thanksgiving,

**Evelyn:** Yeah, because we all have traditions in our family, because like on Thanksgiving, we eat potato salad like every year, and turkey, and then, Grandma, she gives us some of her food, like her stuffing...

**Jayden:** Some of that famous good food...

**Gabriela:** and her sweet potato pie!

Interestingly, this bit about food was also mentioned throughout all the other families’ conversations about a sense of safety for both the adults and the children. For example, when talking about safety, AJ mentioned food as providing safety (see Figure 3), and his mother named food and being in the kitchen with family as what keeps her safe. Zoe, of the Fernandez family, was playing in the pretend kitchen with pretend food during the entire conversation with her family, and continued to bring meals to her family members while we were all talking. Zoe did not choose to draw during the conversation, but one may consider her choice of the play activity of cooking and providing nurturance to her family as depicting a way that she feels safe. Natalia, 4-year-old daughter of the Garcia family, chose to position her family in her high chair when asked to begin the Family Sculpture activity, a place where she presumably was nurtured through food as a baby. For their family sculpture, Natalia placed her mother, Mariana, in her high chair with Natalia on her lap, with Paula giving them both a hug, which Natalia and Mariana returned. When asked how it felt in that position, Natalia and Mariana said, “good”, and Paula exclaimed, “great!”. The Garcia family sculpture is included as Figure 6.

The two other sculptures that emerged from the Family Sculpting exercise also directly demonstrated this manifestation of *family all around*. Three of the four families immediately moved their bodies into circular shapes of closeness, physical touch, and togetherness with remarkably similar structures. The Colon family had mother, Lillian, and sons, AJ and JJ already sitting down, so father Adrian went over to them and from a standing position, enveloped them all in a hug. All members were smiling. The Fernandez family got together in a circle and placed their hands in the center of the circle as if they were doing a team cheer. When in these sculptures, all family members mentioned that they felt “good” or “nice”. Their affect seemed positive, hopeful, and joyful, with many of the collaborating families laughing and sharing affection with one another after the sculpture was completed. This feeling of the tentative manifestation of *family all around*, inspired the following co-constructed found poem:

*To be safe at all times.  
We are here.  
We gather,  
We have traditions,  
We encourage him, we sit down together,  
We play, and we dance,  
Together,  
We spend time together,  
Always with each other,  
She feels comfort in knowing I'm there, she feels safe knowing I'm close.  
A group, a unit, unified, so close  
Family everywhere,  
Spending time, not otherwise occupied in the moment,  
We have each other,  
Surrounded,  
for safety.*

The movement choreography to this poem encompasses body shapes of the arms in arcs and carving, like in gathering motions, both clockwise and counterclockwise. The legs are mostly bent in pli , sometimes with pressure only on one foot with the heel popped up and the weight on the ball of the foot. The weight of the body is grounded, but moves, is not stuck to the spot, and instead moves between spreading and enclosing. The movement happens within the horizontal

and vertical plane, mostly within the kinesphere, but entering slightly into the space around the body. The tension is from the body, out, in central spatial pathways. The Laban effort quality is Glide, or direct, heavy, sustained, and free. The movement seems to communicate groundedness, shelter, protection, and a hope that this is 'everywhere'.

It is interesting to note that this movement effort of Glide is the direct opposite of the movement effort, Slash, which is the movement effort elicited in the manifestation, *our safety net is gone*. The movement analysis demonstrates the threat to safety as pervasive, quick, surprising and tense, and the protection of safety as sustained, contained, grounded and free flowing. These opposite movement qualities reflect the different emotional states that may be experienced from the opposite tentative manifestations of a sense of safety. The movement efforts also provide insight of the experience of the bilateral definition of safety, protection from harm and freedom from harm.

### **Provocations**

From these seven tentative manifestations arose four post-intentional provocations. Provocations in post-intentional phenomenology are the bits of phenomenological material that ignite the elicitation of the phenomenon (Vagle, 2018). For this study, the four provocations that emerged from these seven tentative manifestations were: implicit, intergenerational, vigilant, and proximal. These four provocations can be considered summary statements of the tentative manifestations, and suggest a beginning understanding of the phenomenon of a sense of safety in three-generation families reporting incomes at a maximum of 150% of the federal poverty level.

### **Implicit, Intergenerational, Vigilant, Proximal**

Once the seven tentative manifestations were considered individually, the researcher combined all seven found poems into one construction. This poem was then transformed again to reduce duplication, and reorganize for cadence, rhythm and meaning. The reorganization of

the combined poem revealed four stanzas, which identified and represented the four provocations of the study. First, a sense of safety is experienced as implicit for these families, and somewhat out of awareness until explicitly discussed. Second, a sense of safety is experienced across generations and passed down from one generation to the next, maintaining an experience of ‘always’ being there within the family. Third, sense of safety is experienced through vigilance, characterized by careful and watchful protective behaviors that are also passed down through the generations as a way of experiencing a sense of safety. Fourth, a sense of safety is experienced through proximity and physical closeness to other family members. The combined found poem is below, with the seven tentative manifestations are highlighted in bold font within each stanza that represents each of the four provocations.

*How do we feel safe together?  
Well...**it's just...like...so...***

*It's **how we get raised,**  
like that, through the years.  
Brought up, grew us up like that.  
It's the way how we live.  
Learning from fear - afraid of everything.  
Yet, my mother trusted me.  
She made sure, set the tone,  
Taught me about safetyness.  
And, sometimes, my father's freakin' fist,  
installed protection.*

*Watching,  
**Always checking,**  
Looking - the whole time,  
We always are on top of her,  
Always on high alert.  
We don't like to make her feel fear.  
We don't let him go through it,  
We protect him from it.  
Well - we try to, as much as we can.  
But it's too complicated now.  
**Our safety net is gone.**  
Leaking stoves, school shootings, bullying, kidnapping, fire...  
God forbid...  
childhood trauma, molestation, bad neighborhoods, mental illness,  
drugs, shooting at the building,*

*accidents...point blank...accidents, all around.*  
*It could be your situation, it could be your children's situation, it could be health related...*  
*it just bothers*  
*the more you think about it.*  
*Then your nerves and your stomach starts to act up – like worms - twisting and turning.*  
*We live in such a crazy world, you almost have to be thinking ahead.*  
*We don't have the people that we know anymore.*  
*We don't keep her with anybody.*  
*You never know.*  
*You have to be prepared, just in case,*  
*We always make sure, everything is open, everything is locked.*  
*Windows,*  
*Doors and rooms,*  
*Locks, notepads and money,*  
*Shoes, coats, blankets, food and water.*  
*Just yell, kick, run, tell, call 911, and go find yourself for safety.*  
*She knows what she's going to expect, she **knows what to do.***

*We talk to her a lot, we give her security in herself,*  
***We have each other's backs,***  
*She feels comfort in knowing we are there, she feels safe knowing we are close,*  
*Mother, father, grandmother, grandfather, aunt, sister, teacher, police...*  
*She has a lot of people.*  
*A group, a unit, unified,*  
*Always with each other,*  
***Family, all around,***  
*We gather, we sit down together,*  
*We play, and we dance, and we encourage.*  
*Spending time,*  
*not otherwise occupied in the moment,*  
*Surrounded,*  
*for safety.*

### **Production**

The post-intentional analysis plan of this study transformed the collection of the phenomenological material into seven tentative manifestations, then into four provocations, and ultimately brought forth the emerging post-intentional production, or the particular way the phenomenon may be taking shape within temporal and social context of the population of study (Vagle, 2018). The production for this study is, for three-generation families with reported incomes at 150% of the federal poverty level, a sense of safety may be experienced across generations as implicit, imparted through vigilance and physical proximity. The implications and

applications of this post-intentional production of the phenomenon of a sense of safety will be further discussed in Chapter 5.

### **Summary**

In this chapter, the analysis of the phenomenological material from the four collaborating families was reviewed. This analysis brought forth seven tentative manifestations and four provocations from the material which suggest an understanding of the phenomenon of a sense of safety in three-generation families reporting incomes at a maximum of 150% of the federal poverty level. In the final chapter that follows, the implications and applications of these findings are discussed.

## CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION

Despite evidence that posits a sense of safety as evolutionarily necessary (Fosha, Siegel & Solomon, 2009; Porges, 2011) and developmentally critical to healthy individual development (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978; Best & Lambie, 2016; Marvin, Cooper, Hoffman & Powell, 2002; Tronick, 2007), there is a paucity of research that looks at the experience of a sense of safety within family systems. This study begins to fill this gap by extending the literature to the family level of analysis. Also noteworthy, this study adds to the growing body of strengths-based research (Kelly & Gates, 2010; McCashen, 2005; Saleeby, 2009) by using a strengths-based approach with a post-intentional phenomenological methodology. Findings from this study suggest that the phenomenon of a sense of safety is at a foundational level of the human experience, and therefore, may be experienced universally across all families. Findings also suggest that for three-generation families with reported incomes at or below 150% of the federal poverty level, a sense of safety may be experienced as implicit, transmitted across generations of family life, and imparted through vigilance and physical proximity. This chapter discusses the findings of the study as they relate to previous multidisciplinary literatures, reviews the limitations of this study, and offers suggestions for future research and applications to practice.

### **Innovation and Implications**

To the researcher's knowledge, this study was the first to explicitly explore the phenomenon of a sense of safety in families from a strengths-based perspective. This study also specifically sought to collect family-level data, ironically, a rare methodological choice in the family science literature (Eggenberger & Nelms, 2007; Gorlin, McAlpine, Garwick & Wieling, 2016). The researcher also believes that this was the first study to combine a strengths-based research methodology with post-intentional phenomenology, as well as the first study to combine

the arts-based analytic strategies of found poetry, choreography, and Laban Movement Analysis in a post-intentional design. In post-intentional phenomenology, results are considered tentative, momentary, fleeting and specific to the population of study within the temporal and societal context (Vagle, 2014; 2018). While true for this study as well, the innovative blend of topic, methodology and analytic strategies used in the study provide a level of rigor that suggests a high level of trustworthiness such that the findings are well positioned to make a contribution to the extant literature, and provide a solid foundation on which to build a future research agenda.

### **A Sense of Safety as Universal**

Throughout the encounters with the four collaborating families, this researcher consistently reflected on the remarkable similarities in the experiences of a sense of safety being shared. Each conversation seemed to journey down a like-treaded path, with even the veers and wanderings, or, in post-intentional terminology, lines of flight, seeming to reverberate across families in similar ways. Vagle (2018) cautions researchers to be aware of and include that which seemingly does not fit the developing way of making meaning of the phenomenon. However, in this study, there was almost no data collected from one family that did not easily synch with data collected from another. Instead, the tentative manifestations of the phenomenon of a sense of safety appeared with an unexpected consistency and uniformity. This occurred to such frequency that the researcher intentionally used the reflective journaling process to attempt to bridle (Vagle, 2014), so as to remain open to listening for information rather than oppressively guiding the conversation towards these emerging similarities and away from any potential variation. This may be because of previous conceptualizations of the universality of the experience of safety in human psychology. For example, psychoanalyst, Joseph Sandler (1949/1960), placed a safety principle alongside Freud's (1920) pleasure principle, suggesting that the drive towards safety was a universal and inborn motivation (Holder, 2005). Similarly,

Abraham Maslow (1943) posited safety as foundational to the human psyche, and explained that the basic need for safety must be met before all other subsequent abilities can be actualized.

Recent studies have demonstrated that without a sense of safety, we cannot learn, develop, or form relationships (Katz, McLeigh, & El szwec, 2017). Taken together, these studies posit a sense of safety as foundational to individual human experience. This study suggests that a sense of safety may be similarly foundational at the family level.

### **A Sense of Safety as Implicit**

The universality of the experience of a sense of safety across all families in this study was demonstrated in the commonality of the phenomenon experienced as implicit, or inceptual. Although every adult collaborator knew that the focus of the study was a sense of safety in families, and all collaborators agreed to participate in such a study, all found it difficult to bring their experience of a sense of safety to words. All families in this study described a sense of safety as just that - a sense. Although they appeared to have a knowing about the phenomenon of a sense of safety, it appeared difficult for the families to bring this sense to verbal description, and similarly difficult to describe its origin in their lives. In fact, they could communicate a sense of safety with more facility by explaining its opposite experience of fear/anxiety (Porges, 2015). Most times when asked to locate a place in their bodies where safety was felt or sensed, family members answered where they felt fear, and then agreed or assumed that they felt safety there as well. It is almost as though a sense of safety was understood ‘in abstenia’, rather than ‘because of’. This finding follows previous research that helps explain a sense of safety as an implicit, visceral experience. For instance, the concept of neuroception from Polyvagal Theory (Porges, 2001, 2003; 2007; 2015) explains the implicit, subconscious, out of awareness, visceral evaluation of safety or threat in the environment (Geller & Porges, 2014; Porges, 2007; Porges, 2015). According to Porges (2015), the subconscious nature of neuroception causes an

experience of safety to be out of our conscious awareness, creating disconnect between a sensorial knowing and a cognitive knowing.

Similarly, the families seemed to have a felt knowing that safety existed in their families, despite being challenged to articulate how, why, or where it existed. It was as if their experience of a sense of safety in their families was so obvious, or implicit, that it actually was odd to be asked to talk about it. Because this is the first known study to explore a sense of safety in families, previous research cannot be applied directly to this finding. However, it is possible that the concept of neuroception discussed by Porges may extend from an individual, neurobiological experience to a collective experience. In fact, according to Polyvagal Theory (Porges, 2001; 2007; 2015), the human nervous system evolved to notice explicit cues of safety in the immediate social environment, imparted through vocal prosody and facial gestures. This means that humans have evolved to find safety in relationships. As written by Porges (2015),

Through the process of evolution, connectedness evolved as the primary biological imperative for mammals in their quest for survival. Functionally, social connectedness enables proximity and co-regulation of the physiological state between conspecifics (members of the same species), beginning with the mother-infant relationship and extended through the lifespan to other significant partnerships (p. 116).

Interpersonal neurobiology (Tronick, 2007; Fosha, Siegel, & Solomon, 2009) and attachment research (Bowlby, 1969, 1988; Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978; Best & Lambie, 2016) provide a parallel partner to the research on Polyvagal Theory, which asserts that the capacity for neuroception begins with the infant-caregiver relationship (Porges, 2015). The theory posits that infants neuroceptively respond to cues of safety through face-to-face reciprocal interactions with caregivers. When infant neuroception perceives safety, the infant is more likely to stay engaged with the caregiver. Research from interpersonal neurobiology has found that infant neurobiology

as well as attachment security are built through engaged, dyadic, reciprocal interactions between infant and caregiver (Shonkoff, 2016; Tronick, 2007). As the caregiver uses their own regulatory capacity to meet the infant's needs, an internalized sense of security develops (Tronick, 2007), which can be posited as a sense of safety. Following, adult attachment research has demonstrated that early attachment relationships have remarkable longevity to influence patterns of adult dyadic relationships (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2011; Holmes & Murray, 2007; Murray, Holmes, & Collins, 2006). It is possible that these early dyadic relationships repeat and reiterate over and over again to not only repeat in dyadic adult relationships, but also extend to systemic familial relationships.

Of note, the children did not seem to have as much difficulty bringing a sense of safety to verbal awareness, and instead spoke to their sense of safety with a surety and confidence in stark contrast to the adult collaborators who were instead often tentative and hesitant in their responses. For children, learning about safety was still as fresh and new, so much so that they often enthusiastically raised their hands or made their voices heard during the flow of the conversation to express all that they knew about safety in their families. The children appeared to have immediate knowing about who keeps them safe and what keeps them safe. It may be that children are still developmentally readied to internalize a sense of safety from their caregivers, so are also able to notice and experience the phenomenon as more explicit, whereas later in development, a sense of safety in the family becomes further embedded and inceptual, much like the often mentioned metaphor of riding a bicycle because of the use of procedural memory (Suchan, 2018).

### **A Sense of Safety as Intergenerational**

Not only does this finding suggest that children are developmentally closer to an explicit understanding of the phenomenon of a sense of safety, it also suggests that a sense of safety may be transmitted intergenerationally. For example, the adult caregivers in this study consistently

mentioned that how they were parented around a sense of safety influenced how they parented their children. Previous research in attachment (Cassibba, Coppola, Sette, Curci, & Costantini, 2017; Moreira, Gouveia, Carona, Silva, & Canavarro, 2015; Verhage, 2016) and parenting styles (Belsky, 1984; Belsky, Conger, & Capaldi, 2009; O'Brien, 2010; Yan, Han, & Li, 2016) has found that parent-child relationship patterns are transmitted through generations. Adults with high felt security, who likely had secure attachment relationships in infancy, are more likely to create secure attachment relationships with their children (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). There is also a wide body of deficit-based literature that discusses the intergenerational transmission of trauma as it relates to parent-child interactions (Bachem, Levin, Zhou, Zerach, & Solomon, 2018; Berthelot, et. al, 2015; Fenerci & DePrince, 2018), and suggests that parental trauma, and subsequent symptomatology, may impact the well-being of the next generation. A smaller body of strengths-based literature has looked at intergenerational transmission of resilience (Berckmoes, de Jong, & Reis, 2017; Lehrner & Yehuda, 2018; Schofield, Conger & Neppl, 2014). These studies have not looked at a sense of safety specifically, and instead have found a sense of parental efficacy, positive parenting styles, and parental coping strategies as factors towards resilience being passed from generation to generation. To date, there are no published studies on the intergenerational transmission of a sense of safety. This study suggests that a familial sense of safety may also be passed down through generations as a potential strength or factor that enhances a family's capacity for resilience, and, thus, necessitates further research.

### **A Sense of Safety as Vigilance**

Actions of vigilance were also mentioned across all families as a way that safety was experienced in the family system. All families spent significant time in our conversation discussing the multiple categories of threats to safety. Watching out for each other and having strategies that are meant to protect from injury or harm characterized the vigilant behaviors shared by the families of this study. For example, all families felt rooted in the chaos of the

multiple threats to safety because the reliance that they had in one another. The families felt confident in their interdependence on each other to watch out for one another and provide support when necessary. Similar findings about families living in harsh economic circumstances has found that social support, both informal support (Radey, 2018) and social networks (Brisson & Usher, 2005) provide a buffer from economic stress. Other studies have found that social support for adults serves as a protective factor for children (McConnell, Breikreuz & Savage, 2011; Reynolds & Crea, 2016), suggesting an intergenerational benefit to social support. Yet, other studies have also found that families living in economic hardship are often less likely to rely on community-based social networks for assistance (Balaji, Clauseen, Smith, Visser, Morales & Perou, 2007), and instead rely on kin or family members (Ray, 2016), a finding that was repeated in this study. The collaborators were more likely to discuss their sense of safety as being because of their reliance on family to be there as a support, rather than other community members.

The adult caregivers in the study appeared to share support with their children through the teaching of strategies of protection. It was as if they were meeting their own standards for good parenting by arming their children with shields of protection to guard against the many threats of the world. Previous literature has found that families living in conditions of threat, whether because of violence, possibility for injury, poverty, racism, xenophobia, etc., will teach their children about the threats surrounding them so as to have awareness itself be protective (Anderson & Stevenson, 2019; Benner, & Yeong, 2009; Bruner, 2017; Burton, Bonilla-Silva, Ray, Buckelew, & Hordge, 2010; Harbin Burt, Simons & Gibbon, 2012; Lesane-Brown, 2006; Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, 2003; Morrongiello, Corbett, & Bellissimo, 2008). Similarly, the children in this study were encouraged to balance the awareness of possible threat with their ability to have protective strategies to combat these threats. This balance was well demonstrated

in this study by Natalia taking back her picture filled with her safe strategies such as a teddy bear, doll, friend and the sun (see Figure 4), to then slash dark blue streaks on the paper, indicating rain, and possibly the reality of the elusive and fragile sense of safety.

Additionally, the findings of this study also suggest that by being told what to do when safety is threatened, feelings of safety arise. The style of parenting that is characterized by the strategy to control children's behavior is known as authoritarian parenting (Baumrind, 1971), or the overprotection (also known as control) parenting style (Parker, Tupling, & Brown, 1979). Previous research on the types of parenting styles used for families living in poverty has demonstrated that parents with economic stress tend to use more authoritarian parenting (Carlson, et al, 2002; Conger & Conger, 2002; Friedson, 2016), due to a lack of education or because of feelings of stress (La Placa & Corlyon, 2014; La Placa & Corlyon, 2016). Authoritarian parenting is also often considered negative and leading to poor child developmental outcomes (e.g. Pinquart, 2017). However, findings from this study may help explain an authoritarian parenting strategy as protective to the significant reality of threat impacting families living in harsh economic circumstances. Previous research has demonstrated that authoritarian parenting can be a protective factor specifically to African-American families (Greening, Stoppelbein, & Luebbe, 2008; Valentino, Nuttall, Comas, Borkowski, & Akai, 2012), and a recent study by Brandt, Henry, & Wetherell (2015) found that authoritarianism in general, which is more common among stigmatized groups such as families experiencing harsh economic realities, may act as a psychological buffer to the threat of their social worth. It was clear from the perspective of the children of the families, as well as the 2<sup>nd</sup> generation adult caregivers, that following the direction of their parents were aspects of how they experienced a sense of safety. This finding may be further evidence of the psychological buffer to existential threat. It is possible that authoritarian styles of parenting may be motivated by the vigilance that is needed to provide children with strategies for protection, and ultimately impart a sense of safety. This

process of teaching protective strategies may lend itself to another aspect of the implicit, intergenerational experience of a sense of safety. It may be that, over time, this learning does become patterned in such a way that it becomes implicit, as if it was always there in their family way.

### **A Sense of Safety as Physical Proximity**

The families in this study also illuminated the importance of physical proximity to one another as a way that they experienced a sense of safety. These families offered an idea that the activity of spending time together in shared activities and shared meals with the nurturance of food and family all around brings about a sense of safety for their families. By gathering together, spending time together, and participating in shared child care, the families in this study found safety. Again, Polyvagal Theory provides an understanding of this finding. According to the theory, to survive as a species, we needed to be in close proximity with each other (Cortino & Liotti, 2010; Porges, 2015). Anthropological research tells us that humans evolved in cooperative groups (Boehm, 1999) that supported each other in finding resources and raising the next generation (Cortino & Liotti, 2010). From the findings of this study, it appears that the same evolutionary need for proximity continues to provide a sense of safety to families. This finding also resonates with previous studies from the felt security literature that have shown that when someone has a strong sense of felt security, they are more likely to experience relationship satisfaction because of the propensity for proximity-seeking behaviors (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2011; Holmes & Murray, 2007; Murray, Holmes, & Collins, 2006). Similarly, previous research on family resilience and family strengths point to constructs similar to proximity, such as emotional warmth, spending leisure time with children, and commitment to the family as providing stability (Becvar, 2013; Masten, 2001; Orthner, Jones-Sanpei, & Williamson, 2004; Stinnett & DeFrain 1985; Wilson-Simmons, Jiang, & Artani, 2017). This finding also follows the caring parenting style asserted by Parker, Tupling, & Brown (1979), which includes family

behaviors such as spending time together and talking to one another. Yet, this study is the first to specifically find that physical proximity serves to bring about a sense of safety in families.

Further research is needed to determine whether physical proximity emerges a factor towards a familial sense of safety in other kinds and types of families. This is an especially interesting route for future research given the current influence of virtual technology that allows us to talk to one another, and possibly even spend time with one another, (Baldassar, Nedelcu, Merla, & Wilding, 2016), but may not allow for the physical proximity that this study seems to make particularly salient.

### **Limitations**

There are a number of limitations to this study that should be considered, including limitations associated with the invitation of participants, duration of the study, methodology, and overall paradigm of strengths-based research. First, the topic itself was difficult for the researcher to explain during the invitation phase, especially because the researcher used key informants to invite collaborators, rather than personally explaining the study directly to potentially interested families. Correctly communicating how the researcher was conceptualizing the topic of a sense of safety was difficult due to the multiple ways that the public understands the experience of safety. Invitation to the study moved slowly as the researcher continually helped key informants understand a familial sense of safety from a strengths perspective. Unfortunately, safety as a strength is not often considered, but instead the absence of safety or the need to restore safety is a focus (Porges, 2015), as would be the case families who have participated in preventive or protective services. This study shifted the focus of safety from deficit to strength, and to make this known to key informants did take some time. Compounding the challenges to the invitation process was the researcher's inability to converse in a language other than English, which unfortunately presented a barrier to many families interested in

participate. Regarding those families who did participate, the results of the study may have been impacted by their self-selection into the study. In qualitative studies where participation occurs through self-selection, transferability or generalization is questioned (Costigan & Cox, 2001). Therefore, it is advisable that this study is replicated with many different families across the full spectrum of humanity, and a sense of safety explored through multiple methodologies in the future.

Given the long nature of the invitation phase, the short remaining duration of time to complete this study may have impeded its findings. Due to the sensitive nature of the topic of safety, the researcher would have preferred to have multiple visits with the families in order to build trust and rapport so as to delve more deeply into the topic. It is possible that with more time for forming a relational foundation, as well as providing the collaborators more time to reflect on that which is otherwise implicit or out of consciousness more fully, different experiences about a sense of safety would have been unearthed (Raheim, et. al, 2016). This may have been particularly true with regards to the lack of conversation about race, socioeconomic status, religious/spiritual beliefs and/or ethnicity. The researcher made good faith, transparent efforts to use culturally responsive practices in conducting the study with a multiracial, multiethnic group of collaborating families (Al-Bannay, Jarus, Jongbloed, Yazigi, & Dean, 2014) (see Table 1). However, as always, the researcher's unconscious or implicit bias or use of power and privilege may have impeded our conversations in a way that did not allow the families to feel comfortable bringing forth considerations of safety that intersected with topics of race, class, gender, religion or ethnicity, especially in a new relationship. Funding and time restraints prevented this researcher from making multiple visits with the families.

Additionally, there are methodological limitations to this study. For example, the researcher's decision to commit to the Open View format caused her to bridle her own propensity to direct the conversation towards topics such as race and ethnicity. This may have

also served to reinforce the myth of race-blindness perpetuated by many White practitioners and researchers, and therefore did not provide space for the families to be heard in the fullness of their experience. This is particularly relevant with the self-identified ethnicity of twelve of the fifteen collaborating adults identifying as Hispanic. The researcher did not intend to conduct this study with families who identify as Hispanic, yet, the self-selected group predominantly identified as Hispanic. It is possible that findings of this study were influenced by ethnic/cultural values that were not explicitly addressed because of the Open View format, and because of the intersection between the researcher's perceived ethnic differences. Also, a phenomenological design, as compared to ethnography or participatory action research, has been critiqued as less rigorous due to duration of time in material collection (Scotland, 2012). There are also only a small number of studies that have use post-intentional phenomenology as a methodological design, and even fewer that have demonstrated the use of arts-based research methods within a post-intentional design (Vagle, Clements, & Coffee, 2017; Vagle & Hofsess, 2016), causing the methods used in this study to be exploratory. Last, critics of strengths-based research highlight the concern that the framework can disrespect the family experience of struggle by ignoring or denying that problems exist, or by incompletely understanding the gestalt of a family experience by making an a-priori decision to only address that which is going well for a family (Epstein, 2008; Taylor, 2006). Also, the scientific precision is also questioned, as the strengths-based perspective can be said to be incompletely or incorrectly applied (Green, McAllister, & Tarte, 2004; Oliver & Charles, 2015) and have a significant interpretation bias throughout the research process (Fenton, Walsh, Wong, & Cumming, 2015; Kana'iaupuni, 2005). However, these methodological limitations were buffered by the rigorous use of a strengths-based design, collection of multiple sources of phenomenological materials, engagement in member checking, peer review, and reflexivity, and co-construction of a rich description of the phenomenon

because of the utilization of verbal and non-verbal data and analysis (Baillie, 2015; Trainor, & Graue, 2014) .

### **Suggestions for Further Research**

Because these findings are tentative, time limited, and contextual, this study provides a launching point towards further understanding of a sense of safety in family units. Future research should expand on this study with a larger and more diverse group of collaborators working with researchers who represent multiple and varied positionalities (Al-Bannay, Jarus, Jongbloed, Yazigi, & Dean, 2014). Advocacy for a broad inclusion of all the various ways that families come together is suggested due to both the potential universality of the experience of a sense of safety, and the possibility that it may be experienced differently depending on the social location of the family. It is also suggested that research is conducted by diverse researchers who represent the full spectrum of socio-cultural contextual groupings of humanity so as to ensure that the data is safeguarded from any potential mistrust that may arise from the relational intersection of the family experience and the researcher's perceived positionality. This is true for most topics of inquiry, but particularly true when researching a sense of safety, as a sense of safety itself may need to be present within the researcher-participant relationship in order to be fully explored. Also, in future studies, researchers should be thoughtful in research design and methodology. To fully explore the phenomenon of a sense of safety, multiple visits that build relationship between researcher and participant may be necessary. Additionally, due to the often non-verbal experiencing of a sense of safety, data collection methods that privilege non-discursive communication may be necessary to include in future designs. Conducting this research with various age groups of people, and in both individual conversations and family groups is also necessary to determine how a sense of safety is experienced based on developmental age/stage, and on family roles and interactions. Last, given the highly individualized interpretation of a sense of safety, methods that have the families themselves

capture their experiences of a sense of safety in their families over time, such as the use of photovoice (Wang, Cash & Powers, 2000), may make an interesting contribution to this beginning course of inquiry.

### **Applications**

This study has demonstrated that a sense of safety may be a phenomenon out of awareness for families, but still central to families' everyday lives. Practitioners may benefit from conceptualizing a familial sense of safety as foundational to all relationships and learning, yet distinct from that found at the individual level. With this awareness, practitioners should intentionally make the experience of safety explicit in family work. This could happen in a few ways.

First, practitioners may benefit from talking explicitly with families about a sense of safety, being sure to address both individual experiences of sense of safety and how a sense of safety is known within family systems. Practitioners may also listen for themes of safety in actions such as physical proximity and vigilance, as were offered by the families of this study. This is particularly true if actions of physical proximity and/or vigilance are assessed as maladaptive. It is possible that evaluating these kinds of behaviors through the lens of familial safety may provide alternative strengths-based understandings of the behavior of the family.

Second, practitioners may benefit from investigating operating theories and techniques to determine whether the influence of a sense of safety is operational to the theory, but not made explicit. When explored, many theories seem to include the experience of safety as implicit, but do not speak directly to the influence of a sense of safety to the theory, or resultant programs or practices. Relooking at that which we follow through the lens of a sense of safety can help bring the phenomenon to the surface. This is also the case with therapeutic technique and interventions. Practitioners may consider centering safety within their family genograms by not

only asking about relational patterns, but also of the impart of safety, doing Family Sculpting exercises that demonstrate a sense of safety in the family, using play materials to symbolize how a sense of safety is experienced in their family, or assessing how a familial sense of safety might intersect with the family's perception of safety or vulnerability external to their family system. Practitioners would also benefit from honoring the subcortical nature of a sense of safety, and employ creative, sensory and body-based techniques when exploring a sense of safety in families.

Third, considering the potential influence of proximity as a way families experience safety, practitioners may benefit from forming relationships with families who may be isolated from family or other social connections, or who experience chronic, contextual threat. This also includes stepping outside the confines of the traditional clinical space to connect families to resources in their communities that decrease social isolation. It is also essential that practitioners learn about the contextual and existential safety of the family's environment, and make professional relationships that share the provision of the safety net for isolated families.

Finally, practitioners may benefit from advocating for legislation and policies that maintain and enhance a sense of safety in families. This is particularly relevant in consideration of recent cultural, political and societal experiences that have demonstrated the significant threat to family safety due to forced family separation and emboldened discrimination of immigrant families and families of color. For many communities, a sense of safety has been threatened due to divisive political rhetoric and policies that are meant to incite fear of other, and to create conditions where a sense of safety is only offered to a select group. According to Porges (2015), "Powerful changes are possible if social behavior has the opportunity to promote a sense of safety (p. 115). It is imperative that practitioners consider themselves as agents of powerful change by working to increase social connection for families, to advocate for social policies that

will provide vigilant protection to all families' health and well-being, and to make the experience of a sense of safety explicit in theory and practice.

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**Appendix A: Recruitment Flyer**

Are you a three-generation family?  
We want to learn from you!



Photo credit: R. Leiva (Flickr, by blaster\_po)

We are interested in how three-generation families experience a sense of safety in their families. We know that safety is important for well-being, but we don't know how families create a sense of safety together. We need to learn from you!

- This study will take 60-90 minutes, during one session, at a location of your family's choice.
- Families will receive a \$75 gift card for participation.

Kaitlin Mulcahy, Doctoral Student in the Family Science and Human Development at Montclair State University is conducting this study. If you are interested in participating or have more questions, please contact Kaitlin at (973) 655-6692 or [mulcahyk@montclair.edu](mailto:mulcahyk@montclair.edu)

This study has been approved by the Montclair State University Institutional Review Board, MSU IRB #FY17-18-1073

### Appendix B: Key Informant Agreement

I agree to serve as a Key Informant to study MSU IRB #FY17-18-1073 with doctoral student, Kaitlin Mulcahy from the Department of Family Science and Human Development at Montclair State University. Kaitlin is interested in learning more about how three-generation families with incomes below the federal poverty line experience a sense of safety in their family. As a Key Informant, I agree to identify families who consider themselves a three-generation family and share the invitation to the study with them, as explained below.

I know that in the study, the families will be asked to participate in an initial 15 minute phone call with Kaitlin where they will be told more about the study and will be asked to share basic demographic information. After, I know that Kaitlin will meet with the family in a location of their choice for a face-to-face conversation. I know that at this conversation should be at least one grandparent, one adult and one child, but that the family is able to invite as many members of their family as are important to telling their story about the sense of safety in their family. During that conversation, Kaitlin will first ask the families to consent to participate in the study. She will then offer the family a \$75 gift card for their participation. Kaitlin will then talk with the family about how they experience a sense of safety together. Kaitlin will also invite the children in the family to share their experience of a sense of safety in the family through a drawing exercise. Then, all members of the family will be invited to do an activity called Family Sculpting. During the Family Sculpting exercise, Kaitlin will invite the family to be a team of sculptors and to ‘sculpt’ or ‘mold’ their bodies into a picture or sculpture of what a sense of safety looks like in their family. Kaitlin will take a picture of the sculpture and the children’s drawings, and she will audio record the conversation. At the end of the project, Kaitlin will share what she learned with the families and they can tell her if she’s captured their experience well, or if she missed something or left something out.

As a Key Informant, I agree to the following:

- To place the recruitment flyer for this study in view of families at my program,
- To actively identify three-generation families who may fit criteria for the study,
- To provide curious families with information about the study,
- To provide interested families with the Study Invitation which contains Kaitlin’s contact information and more details about the study,
- To allow Kaitlin to meet with families at our program if the families asks to do so.

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Signature

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Date

**Appendix C: Demographic Form**

Child's Name \_\_\_\_\_ Age \_\_\_\_\_

Child's Name \_\_\_\_\_ Age \_\_\_\_\_

2<sup>nd</sup> Generation Caregiver's Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Age \_\_\_\_\_

2<sup>nd</sup> Generation Caregiver's Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Age \_\_\_\_\_

1st Generation Caregiver's Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Age \_\_\_\_\_

1st Generation Caregiver's Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Age \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ Neighborhood \_\_\_\_\_

Do all three-generations of your family live together?      Yes      No

If no, other residency location of other family members: \_\_\_\_\_

Preferred Telephone \_\_\_\_\_ Secondary Telephone \_\_\_\_\_

Email address \_\_\_\_\_

Preferred mode of communication:    Telephone                      Email                      Mail

Can we leave a voice message on your preferred phone:    Yes      No

Can we leave a voice message on your secondary phone:    Yes      No

What are the best days and times in your schedule for a 60-90 minute meeting? \_\_\_\_\_

What is your occupation? \_\_\_\_\_

Employment of other adults in the family: \_\_\_\_\_

What would you consider your religious affiliation to be? \_\_\_\_\_

What would you consider other members of your family's ethnicity to be? \_\_\_\_\_

What would you consider your ethnicity to be? \_\_\_\_\_

What would you consider other members of your family's ethnicity to be? \_\_\_\_\_

What would you consider your race to be? \_\_\_\_\_

What would you consider other members of your family's race to be? \_\_\_\_\_

In what range is your income annually?

\$0 - \$5,000    \$5,001-\$10,000    \$10,001-\$15,000    \$15,001-\$20,000    \$20,001-\$25,000

## Appendix D: Screening Protocol

1. Introductions
  - a. Researcher introduces herself and thanks the family representative for being interested in this study.
  - b. Researcher makes a connection between herself and the Key Informant that helped to recruit the family.
  - c. Researcher invites the family member to introduce themselves
2. Description of the study
  - a. Researcher explains the purpose of the study:
    - i. Researcher says: “In this research, I am interested in finding out more from families about how you create safety together as a family. I’m interested in how a sense of safety is experienced by your family. This idea came out of an experience I had with my own son when he was three years old which got me interested in learning more about how families create safety together.
  - b. Researcher explains the commitment of the study
    - i. Researcher says: “This study will last for about 60-90 minutes and will invite you and your family to join a conversation about the experience of a sense of safety in your family. During our conversation, your child(ren) will be invited to draw a picture about their experience of a sense of safety in your family. Then, your family will be invited to do an activity called Family Sculpting. In this activity, your family will work together like sculptors to create a picture or sculpture of what a sense of safety looks like in your family.”
    - ii. Researcher says: “Your participation is voluntary and you can chose to opt out or discontinue your involvement at any time. Your family will be compensated for your time participating in this study. Your family will receive a \$75 gift card for your participation.”
    - iii. Researcher says: “The information that you share with me, any reference to your family, what you share in the face-to-face conversation, and what you show in the Family Sculpting or drawing exercises will be kept confidential.”
  - c. Researcher asks for verbal confirmation of participation
    - i. Researcher says: “Now that we have reviewed the study, are you still interested in participating?”
    - ii. Family responds.
      1. If the family is no longer interested in participating, they are thanked for their time.
3. Screening
  - a. Researcher asks family representative to complete demographic form over the phone. Family representative may have the demographic form in front of them, if given to them by the key informant. The researcher will also read each portion of the demographic form over the phone and fill out the answers as relayed by the family.
  - b. Researcher verifies that the family meets criteria for the study (i.e. income below federal poverty level; three-generation family living in close proximity, at least one child over the age of 4 years)

- i. If the family does not meet criteria for the study, they are thanked for their time.
  - c. Researcher confirms with family representative that other generations of the family have agreed to participate. Researcher asks for an email or phone conversation with at least one other adult from the remaining generation to confirm interest.
    - i. Researcher schedules a time to speak with other adult family members, and/or receives an email from the other adult participants over email with their agreement to participate.
4. Scheduling
  - a. Researcher asks the family for their preferred location to meet and availability in scheduling. The researcher tells the family that she can meet them in their home, or another place in the community. If neither of these options are preferable to the family, the researcher offers her place of business.
  - b. Family and researcher schedule time and location for appointment

### Appendix E: Adult Consent Form

Please read below with care. You can ask questions at any time, now or later. You can talk to other people before you sign this form.

**Title:** An exploration of a sense of safety in families

**Study Number:** MSU IRB #FY17-18-1073

**Why is this study being done?** This study is interested in learning about how families create safety together. We know that feeling safe is so important for relationships and for learning, but we don't know much about how families create safety together. In this study, I am hoping to learn from families about how you experience safety in your family, and how a sense of safety is created within your family.

**What will happen while you are in the study?** I will meet with your family for a face-to-face conversation about how your family experiences a sense of safety together. At this conversation should be at least one grandparent, one adult and one child, but you are free to invite as many members of your family as are important to telling your story about the sense of safety in your family. During that conversation, I will invite the children in your family to share their experience of a sense of safety in your family through a drawing exercise. Also, all members of the family will be invited to do an activity called Family Sculpting. During the Family Sculpting exercise, I will invite your family to be a team of sculptors and to 'sculpt' or 'mold' your bodies into a picture or sculpture of what a sense of safety looks like in your family. I will take a picture of your sculpture, our conversation will be audiotaped and the children's drawings will be photographed as well. At the end of the project, I will share with you what I learned from you and other families, and you can let me know if I've captured your experience well, or if I missed something or left something out.

**Time:** This study will take about 60-90 minutes.

**Risks:** Talking and thinking about safety with your family members may bring up all kinds of feelings including excitement, happiness, calm, sadness, worry, stress, and other feelings. Doing the physical activity of the Family Sculpting exercise may also be something different and new, which can sometimes bring up feelings of discomfort.

**Benefits:** There are no real benefits from your participation in this study, but we do hope that what we learn from you will be shared with other families.

**Compensation**

To compensate you for the time you spend in this study, your family will receive a \$75 gift card, which you will receive after consenting to the study at the face-to-face conversation.

**Who will know that you are in this study?** We will keep who you are confidential. In fact, your real names will never be used or attached to the information you share with me. You should know that New Jersey requires that any person having reasonable cause to believe that a child has been subjected to child abuse or acts of child abuse shall report the same immediately to the Division of Youth and Family Services.

**Do you have to be in the study?**

You do not have to be in this study. You are a volunteer! It is okay if you want to stop at any time and not be included in the study. You do not have to answer any questions you do not want to answer or take part in any activities that you do not want to.

**Do you have any questions about this study?** Phone or email Kaitlin Mulcahy at [mulcahyk@montclair.edu](mailto:mulcahyk@montclair.edu) and/or 973-655-6692. You can also contact the researchers' faculty sponsor, Dr. Bradley van Eeden-Moorefield at [vaneedenmobr@montclair.edu](mailto:vaneedenmobr@montclair.edu) and/or 973-655-4440

**Do you have any questions about your rights as a research participant?** Phone or email the IRB Chair, Dr. Katrina Bulkley, at 973-655-5189 or [reviewboard@montclair.edu](mailto:reviewboard@montclair.edu).

**Future Studies** It is okay to use my data in other studies:

Please initial: \_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No

As part of this study, it is okay to audiotape me:

Please initial: \_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No

As part of this study, it is okay to photograph me:

Please initial: \_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No

**One copy of this consent form is for you to keep.**

**Statement of Consent**

I have read this form and decided that I will participate in the project described above. Its general purposes, the particulars of involvement, and possible risks and inconveniences have been explained to my satisfaction. I understand that I can withdraw at any time. My signature also indicates that I am 18 years of age or older and have received a copy of this consent form.

Print your name here	Sign your name here	Date
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Name of Principal Investigator	Signature	Date
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## **Appendix F: Parent/Guardian Consent Form**

Please read below with care. You can ask questions at any time, now or later. You can talk to other people before you fill in this form.

**Title:** An exploration of a sense of safety in families

**Study Number:** MSU IRB #FY17-18-1073

**Why is this study being done?** This study is interested in learning about how families create safety together. We know that feeling safe is so important for relationships and for learning, but we don't know much about how families create safety together. In this study, I am hoping to learn from families about how you experience safety in your family, and how a sense of safety is created within your family.

**What will happen while your child or dependent is in the study?**

I will meet with your family for a face-to-face conversation about how your family experiences a sense of safety together. At this conversation should be at least one grandparent, one adult and one child, but you are free to invite as many members of your family as are important to telling your story about the sense of safety in your family. During that conversation, I will invite the children in your family to share their experience of a sense of safety in your family through a drawing exercise. Also, all members of the family will be invited to do an activity called Family Sculpting. During the Family Sculpting exercise, I will invite your family to be a team of sculptors and to 'sculpt' or 'mold' your bodies into a picture or sculpture of what a sense of safety looks like in your family. I will take a picture of your sculpture, our conversation will be audiotaped and the children's drawings will be photographed as well. At the end of the project, I will share with you what I learned from you and other families, and you can let me know if I've captured your experience well, or if I missed something or left something out.

**Time:** 60-90 minutes

**Risks:** Talking and thinking about safety with your family members may bring up all kinds of feelings including excitement, happiness, calm, sadness, worry, stress, and other feelings. Doing the physical activity of the Family Sculpting exercise may also be something different and new, which can sometimes bring up feelings of discomfort.

**Benefits:** There are no real benefits from your participation in this study, but we do hope that what we learn from you will be shared with other families.

**Compensation**

To compensate you for the time you spend in this study, your family will receive a \$75 gift card

**Who will know that your child or dependent is in this study?**

We will keep your child(ren)'s identity confidential

You should know that New Jersey requires that any person having reasonable cause to believe that a child has been subjected to child abuse or acts of child abuse shall report the same immediately to the Division of Youth and Family Services.

**Does your child or dependent have to be in the study?**

Your child or dependent does not have to be in this study. She/he is a volunteer! It is okay if she/he wants to stop at any time and not be in the study. She/he does not have to answer any questions that she/he does not want to answer. Nothing will happen to your child or dependent. She/he will still get the things that were promised.

**Do you have any questions about this study?** Phone or email Kaitlin Mulcahy at [mulcahyk@montclair.edu](mailto:mulcahyk@montclair.edu) and/or 973-655-6692. You can also contact the researchers' faculty sponsor, Dr. Bradley van Eeden-Moorefield at [vaneedenmobr@montclair.edu](mailto:vaneedenmobr@montclair.edu) and/or 973-655-4440

**Do you have any questions about your rights as a research participant?** Phone or email the IRB Chair, Dr. Katrina Bulkley, at 973-655-5189 or [reviewboard@montclair.edu](mailto:reviewboard@montclair.edu).

**Future Studies** It is okay to use his/her data in other studies:

Please initial: \_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No

As part of this study, it is okay to audiotape me:

Please initial: \_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No

As part of this study, it is okay to photograph me:

Please initial: \_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No

**One copy of this consent form is for you to keep.**

**Statement of Consent**

I have read this form and decided that I agree to my child’s participation in the project described above. Its general purposes, the particulars of involvement, and possible risks and inconveniences have been explained to my satisfaction. I understand that my child can withdraw at any time. My signature also indicates that I have received a copy of this consent form.

If you choose to have your child or dependent in this study, please fill in the lines below.

Child’s Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Parent/Guardian	Signature	Date

Name of Parent/Guardian	Signature	Date

Name of Principal Investigator	Signature	Date

**Appendix G: Assent Form**

Please read below with care. You can ask questions at any time, now or later. You can talk to other people before you fill in this form.

**Who am I?** I am Kaitlin Mulcahy. I am a doctoral study at Montclair State University in the Family Science and Human Development department.

**Why is this study being done?** I am interested in learning about how a family feels safe together.

**What will happen while you are in the study?** I will meet with you and your family to have a conversation about how a sense of safety is experienced in your family. I will also invite you to draw a picture about the sense of safety in your family. We will then have all members of your family do a game called Family Sculpting. In this game, your family will be like a team of sculptors and will create a picture or sculpture that shows what a sense of safety looks like in your family.

**Time:** This study will take about 60-90 minutes.

**Risks:** You may have lots of feelings during our time together. It might be weird or strange to talk about safety with all of your family members. Also, doing the Family Sculpture exercise might be different, which could bring up lots of different kinds of feelings.

**Benefits:** There are no real benefits for being a part of this study, but you will help us to know more about your family, and you can help us share what your family does to make you feel safe with other families.

**Compensation**

Your family will receive a \$75 gift card for taking part in this study.

**Who will know that you might be in this study?** You and your caregiver(s) will know that you are in this study. I will know that you are here, but we won't tell anyone else.

**Do you have to be in the study?**

You do not have to be in this study. We won't get mad with you if you say no. It is okay if you change your mind at any time and leave the study. You do not have to answer any questions you do not want to answer. Nothing will happen to you. You will still get the things that you were promised.

**Do you have any questions about this study?** You can ask your caregiver(s) to call or email me at: Kaitlin Mulcahy at [mulcahyk@montclair.edu](mailto:mulcahyk@montclair.edu) and/or 973-655-6692, or my teacher, Dr. Bradley van Eeden-Moorefield, at [vaneedenmobr@montclair.edu](mailto:vaneedenmobr@montclair.edu) and/or 973-655-4440

**Do you have any questions about your rights as a research participant?** Phone or email the IRB Chair, Dr. Katrina Bulkley, at 973-655-5189 or [reviewboard@mail.montclair.edu](mailto:reviewboard@mail.montclair.edu).

It is okay to use my data in other studies:

Please initial: \_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No

It is okay to audiotape me while I am in this study:

Please initial: \_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No

It is okay to photograph me while I am in this study:

Please initial: \_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Research Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date



### Appendix H: Open View Protocol

This study will use an Open View protocol, which begins with an invitation to a conversation similar to a grand tour question. The Open View protocol will proceed as follows:

1. Introductions
  - a. Researcher introduces herself and thanks the family for agreeing to collaborate on this study
  - b. All family members introduce themselves
  - c. Researcher asks if anyone is missing from the family at the meeting; family responds
2. Researcher introduces the study
  - a. Researcher provides the purpose of the study
  - b. Researcher outlines what to expect in this conversation
    - i. Researcher will ask one question to get the conversation started; family members can choose to discuss the question verbally or have the option of coloring or drawing their responses
    - ii. Researcher will engage in the conversation to learn more about the family's experience
    - iii. When it feels appropriate, the researcher will shift the conversation to the Family Sculpting exercise (described more in detail below).
    - iv. The researcher will keep mindful of time, and will end the conversation after approximately 60-90 minutes
    - v. Researcher explains that the audiotape will be on consistently throughout the conversation and that she will take digital photographs of the family sculptures once they are completed.
3. Researcher asks family to consent or assent to study
  - a. Researcher provides each member of the family with the consent documents
  - b. Researcher reviews documents and provides space for questions from family members
  - c. Family members consent to study
    - i. If any family member does not want to participate at this point, they are thanked for their time.
    - ii. If one family member's absence means that the family no longer has representation from three-generations, the family will be screened out from participating
  - d. Researcher offers family members gift card for their participation.
4. Open View
  - a. Initial prompt: "How is a sense of safety experienced by your family?"
    - i. Sub-prompt (to use if family needs more clarification about a sense of safety): "For example, a sense of safety is the feeling that you have that your family is a safe place to be and grow. A sense of safety is like an inside knowing that you are safe." Can you tell me about this felt sense experience for you and how you think you all have felt this together?
    - ii. Sub-prompt: "I hear you talking about safety in \_\_\_\_\_ (specific activities), tell me more about how you know these activities keep your family safe"?
    - iii. Sub-prompt: "You mentioned that you feel safe when \_\_\_\_\_, where do you feel that safety in your body"?
    - iv. Sub-prompt: "How do you know that safety is here in your family"?

- v. Sub-prompt: “What tells you that a sense of safety is experienced by your family”?
  - vi. Sub-prompt: “There are three-generations of your family here today, a grandperson, an adult, and children. Talk about how a sense of safety has been passed down through your family over time
  - b. Drawing prompt for the children: “As your other family members are talking, you can draw a picture about your experience of a sense of safety in your family
    - i. Sub-prompt after drawing is completed: “Tell me more about this drawing...tell me about this part here...tell me about that part there”
5. Family Sculpting exercise:
- a. Researcher introduces the Family Sculpting exercise
    - i. “Now we are going to play a game called Family Sculpting. We are going to do a practice run to begin. I will give a prompt, like “Show me what it looks like in your house when everyone is doing something that they like to do”, and then the youngest one of you will use the bodies of your other family members like clay to show me what that looks like. This will get us used to this game called Family Sculpting. The sculptor can move the family members’ body in any position that they like, so family members can be sitting or standing, with their legs out like this or their arms high in the air – they are like your clay and you can move them anyway you want. You can also put the family members in various positions around the room as you like. Once the sculpture is finished, I will ask each part of the sculpture how it feels to be in that position, and ask the sculptor about their experience making the sculpture”.
    - ii. “Now we are going to do that game again, but this time, you all are a team of sculptors, and you are all going to create a sculpture together about what a sense of safety looks like in your family.
  - b. Family Sculpting prompt is given: “Show what a sense of safety looks like in your family”
  - c. Family moves their bodies into a collaborative sculpture. Researcher checks in to be sure that they all agree on a completed sculpture
  - d. Researcher asks each piece of the sculpture about what it feels like to be in their position and spot: “Tell us what it feels like to be in this position”
  - e. Researcher asks the entire family to share: “Tell us how a sense of safety in your family is demonstrated through this sculpture”
  - f. Researcher will take photographs of each of the completed sculptures.
6. Thank you and close
- a. Researcher explains the next steps of the process including meeting with other families to learn from them and beginning to put the stories together
  - b. Researcher invites family members to read through a portion of the transcript of the interview to ensure that she captured their stories accurately; family responds
  - c. Researcher invites family to witness the findings of the study and provide feedback; family responds
  - d. Researcher thanks the family for their time

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