SUPPORTING CARE-GIVING FATHERS: FATHERS’ PERSPECTIVES OF WORK, CARE AND MASCU LINITY

by

Nicola Elischer
BA, University of British Columbia, 2005

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Supervisory Committee

Dr. Jessica Ball, (School of Child and Youth Care)
Supervisor

John Hart, (School of Child and Youth Care)
Departmental Member
Abstract

This study explores fatherhood in contemporary Canadian society by drawing on the experiences of nine full-time care-giving fathers in Vancouver, Canada. Using a social constructionist epistemology, the study explored how fathers who are primary caregivers to their young children construct masculinity, how they enact primary care-giving, and how they can be better supported within communities. Fathers were recruited through posters in community centres and through snowball sampling and volunteered to participate in interviews lasting between one and three hours. Interviews were audio-taped, transcribed and analysed using pragmatic thematic analysis. Three key themes were constructed to represent the fathers’ self-reported experiences: fathers’ enactment of primary care-giving; fathers’ constructions of masculinity within dominant discourses of masculinity and care; and father’s support needs. Findings suggest that for these primary care-giving fathers, care-giving is active and adventurous, and egalitarian beliefs and roles regarding child care and domestic responsibility predominate within their co-parenting relationship. Traditional Euro-western masculine ideology tends to give way to a “hybrid” ideology that emphasizes affection, emotional intelligence, and caring for one’s family as a whole. Fathers indicated a preference for supports that are self-sought such as the internet and support from partners, and informal supports such as community events and time with peers to structured supports provided by community programs. Fathers who reported benefits from formal community programs offered insight into father-friendly practices. Stigma about primary care-giving by fathers was a significant theme constructed from the data. Implications for community programs for families and primary care-giving fathers in particular are discussed.
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In comparison with motherhood, fatherhood has been given limited attention within family research until recently. Policy, economic and social change have reshaped the contexts in which families function and have resulted in the reconstruction of ideas about mothering and fathering over time. Researchers are arguing that traditional perspectives of family life are insufficient in conceptualizing parenthood today (Earl and Letherby, 2003; Dienhart, 1998; Featherstone, 2009), and in particular, mask the complexity of the role of fathers in contemporary North America.

The changing context of the family in North America in the twenty-first century has spurred the need to explore the nature and experience of parenting. Trends including women’s increasing participation in the paid labour force, rising rates of divorce, remarriage and non-marital births, greater visibility of same-sex parents, and changing norms around gender expectations (Brandth and Kvande, 1998; Coltrane, 1989; Doucet, 2004) suggest that families are increasingly migrating away from the prevailing nuclear family model of a generation ago (Wall & Arnold, 2007). This shifting context contributes to the formation of new ideas and ideals of male and female; work and care.

Current interest in men’s roles within family life is located in psychology, sociology, social work and gender studies and is commonly centred on the ways men identify with, are changed by, and benefit from fatherhood (Duindam, 1999; Eggbeen & Knoester, 2001; Rochlen et al., 2008). In particular, research using developmental, psychological and sociological perspectives emphasizes fathers’ contributions to the family, the benefits of father involvement on child developmental outcomes (Lamb,
2004), as well as explores the ways in which men identify as fathers. There are a multitude of opinions surrounding what motherhood and fatherhood entails, its’ “rights and responsibilities, how mothers and fathers should define and conduct themselves” (Lupton & Barclay, 1997, 63), however, primary care-giving fathers remain a grossly underrepresented group within research on family life. It is essential to hear from fathers themselves about the experience of fathering in Canada, given the trend toward changing role expectations for men and women balancing work and family life.

The current study utilizes qualitative data from interviews with nine primary care-giving fathers to explore three central questions: 1. How do fathers “do” care-giving?; 2. How do stay-at-home fathers experience their own masculinity given the feminization of care work and the primacy of paid work to discourses of traditional masculinity?; and 3. How can communities better support fathers who are primary care-givers to children?
Literature Review

The Canadian Social and Economic Landscape: Work and Care

Women’s increased participation in paid labour has been the most significant factor contributing to the changing roles and responsibilities of women and men, and the shifting cultural ideals of who does what within the home (Doucet, 2006). Long considered a masculine domain, women’s economic participation has increased considerably since the 1980s and the responsibility for household work has shifted hands as well, albeit more slowly (Marshall, 2006). While it is largely understood that women’s participation in the workforce has increased, the acceptance of men’s increased responsibilities within the home and the concurrent effects on their work schedules has been slow. Though women’s paid labour participation has increased dramatically, men’s participation in household duties has been more gradual, with some labelling it a “stalled revolution” (Cooke, 2004), resulting in considerable attention afforded to the “second shift” experienced by many women who undertake household labour after returning home from their paid jobs (Hochschild, 1989), and much less attention to men’s roles in Canadian home life.

Although gender differences in the division of labour continue to exist, the gap is closing with women between the ages of 25 and 54 increasing their labour force participation from 70% in 1986 to 81% in 2005, closing the gap between women and men’s participation from 24 percentage points in 1986 to 10 percentage points in 2005 (Marshall, 2006). Data from time-use surveys show a similar convergence with the women’s rate of participation in paid labour rising from 44% in 1986 to 51% in 2001, and men’s decreasing from 68% to 65% (Marshall, 2006). In terms of household labour,
men’s participation has risen from 54% to 69%, while women’s participation remained steady at 90% (Marshall, 2006). However, of note is the increasing participation of men in the core household duties of meal preparation, meal clean-up, indoor cleaning, and laundry, which rose from 40% to 59% for men, and fell from 88% to 85% for women. An explanation for this trend could be the tendency toward a decline in household chores overall, due to the increase in household technology such as dishwashers, the abundance of pre-prepared or packaged food items, and the availability of take-out meals (Marshall, 2006). Additionally, the trend toward a service-oriented economy (be it housecleaning or gardening), and changing time-use priorities have decreased the number of hours spent in household chores.

Economic provision, long considered the responsibility of men and even the central role of fathers now seems to be increasingly shared by women, with a growing number of women with and without children in the paid labour force (Doucet, 2006). The impact of this not only affects household responsibility, but men’s involvement in childcare as well. Though women still undertake the bulk of primary child care, men’s participation in child care activities has increased immensely. Among parents of preschool-aged children, 90% of women reported engaging in their primary care in both 1986 and 2005 (Marshall, 2006). Interestingly, men’s involvement in primary care rose from 57% to 73% respectively. Notably, unlike household chores where women and men’s participation are negatively correlated, responsibility for child care has increased for both men and women (Marshall, 2006; Beaupre et al, 2010). Regardless of an overall increase in time spent in paid work, time spent engaged in childcare has increased for both sexes, though research has indicated differences in the types of activities that women
and men engage in with their children (Doucet, 2006). Though time spent engaged in care has converged for both men and women, it is documented that women still carry the majority of responsibility over child care, including the planning, scheduling, orchestrating and coordination of family activities and associated worry, motivation, and attention continue to fall within the domain of motherhood (O’Brien, 2005; Daly, 2002).

Primary Care-giving Fathers

In Canadian dual-earner couples today, women are the primary earners in almost one-third of them (Sussman & Bonnell, 2006). Women’s increasing economic participation, coupled with high rates of unemployment in many male-dominated fields (Beaupre et al, 2010), and the absence of universal child care in Canada (Doucet, 2006) create ample opportunities for men within the home. In fact, between 1990 and 2000, stay-at-home fathers increased in number by 25% (Doucet, 2002), with stay-at-home mothers decreasing by a similar amount. Similarly, more than one fourth of fathers in Canada take some leave after the birth of a child, and this amount has risen from 3% in 2000 to 33% in 2008 (Doucet, McKay & Tremblay, 2009). In Quebec in particular, the introduction of three to five weeks of government-sponsored non-transferable leave for fathers has led to a significant increase in the number of Canadian fathers taking leave, from 22% to 50% in 2006 (Doucet, McKay & Tremblay, 2009), marking the important influence of government policies on gender equality in the workplace and at home.

Marriage and Cohabitation

In Canada today there is a growing diversity of family forms – in large part due to the increasing incidence of divorce, remarriage, and cohabitation – and the impact on
fatherhood should not be overlooked. Though the majority of families live in intact two-parent households, family histories are complex and have led to the emergence of a variety of family forms (Beaupre et al, 2010). One of the most significant changes in the nature of family life in Canada is that marriage is no longer a prerequisite for parenthood (Featherstone, 2009). There has been an increase in the number of unmarried fathers due to the growing number of common-law partnerships in Canada from 13% in 1995 to 18% in 2006 (Beaupre et al, 2010; Marshall, 2006). Though the majority of Canadian fathers are married, during the time period between 1995 and 2006, the number of married fathers and divorced fathers declined (Beaupre et al, 2010; Marshall, 2006). Further, other family forms have emerged, markedly both the number of male-headed single-parent families, and the number of fathers in stepfamilies have increased, due to the trend toward remarriage after divorce and marriage in later life (Beaupre et al, 2010). Growing rates of separation and divorce have caused the number of male-headed lone parents to increase from 5% in 1995 to 8% in 2006 (Beaupre et al, 2010). This reflects the growing number of fathers who have custody over children, as does the decline in the proportion of fathers not living with children. Given the growing diversity of family forms in Canada, and particularly the increase in male-headed single parent families, it is essential that fathers be given adequate attention in research.

Historical Perspectives of Parenting and Child Care

Psychological Perspectives

The contribution of developmental psychology to the positioning of men and women within family life cannot be ignored. Media and popular culture today still rely on entrenched and gendered assumptions that have roots in early psychological research,
such as the centrality of a woman to child-rearing and related dichotomies of male and female; public and private, that have shaped and continue to shape parenting discourse.

Historically, psychology as an academic discipline has aligned itself with biology and anthropology and effort was given early on to establish it as a scientific discipline (Featherstone, 2009). As such, it is “closely identified with the development of tools of mental measurement, classification of abilities, and the establishment of norms” (Featherstone, 2009, 71). This is significant as the use of a “scientific gaze” set the stage for the development of dichotomies that served to position individuals, groups, and phenomena. The field of developmental psychology has traditionally focussed on child development, and within this context, mothers. Developmental psychology has long positioned mothers as the most significant person in a child’s life, often placing developmental outcomes on her shoulders as well as associated pathology (Featherstone, 2009; Burman, 2008).

Psychology has proved influential to the creation of powerful and constitutive discourses of parenting that continue to pervade parenting literature and media today. Significantly, the positioning of mothers as central to children’s upbringing, emphasizing attachment to the mother as natural, instinctual, and necessary for the normal growth and development of the child, and in it absence, pathology, is significant for both fathers and mothers in that dichotomies of normal/abnormal child development, male/female characteristics and roles, and public/private spheres of work and home, are perpetuated.

“The focus on the uniqueness of and exclusivity of the mother-child relationship has excluded men from having a role in childcare and child-rearing, while also sealing the separation between the world of work and home and the division of roles between breadwinner and child-carer” (Burman, 2008, 135).
Discourse positioning mothers as natural, instinctual, emotional and embodied, has resulted in the polarization of fatherhood discourse, characterizing fathers as “apprentices” (Earle & Letherby, 2003), and fatherhood as unnatural, learned, rational, and distant (Lupton & Barclay, 1997). By constructing parenting discourse according to gender and role binaries, the discourse of fatherhood that is produced is one that is secondary, peripheral, and economic in nature (Lupton & Barclay, 1997).

*Sociological Perspectives*

Historically within sociological research, the study of fatherhood has been dominated by broad overarching discourses: father as a moral teacher, a bread-winner, a sex-role model, and most recently, a nurturer (Williams, 2008; Featherstone, 2009; Dienhart, 1998). Fatherhood in sociological research has typically been classified according to two assumptions: “paternal difference” and “paternal equality” (Earl & Letherby, 2003). The traditional model of fatherhood that encompasses culturally and historically held values of authority, morality, and discipline is rooted in assumptions of “paternal difference” or the recognition of the distinct role of men in family life. The “new model” of fatherhood in contrast, is grounded in assumptions of “parental equality” by emphasizing the similarities between men and women as parents, and their shared abilities to nurture and to care (Earle & Letherby, 2003). The danger that exists within these dichotomous representations is in that they describe only two possibilities of experience for men, giving rise to the generalization that what holds true for some men, must hold true for all men; and limiting the ability of researchers to understand the
complexity and diversity of fatherhood experience (Dienhart, 1998; Earle & Letherby, 2003; Lupton & Barclay, 1997).

Strong messages about the activities that women and men should engage in still pervade discourses of family life and ultimately position family work as women’s work (Dienhart, 1998), accounting for the minimal change in the presence of men in family life, specifically in relation to housework (Doucet, 2006). Feminist writing has critiqued the attention paid by sociologists to the enactment of work and care activities within the family and point out that there may be higher rewards for females who enter into traditionally male domains, than for males moving into traditionally female domains, as a result of the general undervaluing of family work in Euro-western culture (Garbino, 1994; Dienhart, 1998). The “rationality mistake” (Barlow et al, 2002) is one that researchers and policy-makers are apt to fall victim to, in their assumptions that decisions regarding work and care are made by employing rational choice and based solely on economic interests. What is missing is a critical view of work and care decisions that reference “moral and socially negotiated views about what is right and proper, which are deeply inflected by gender, class, and ethnicity” (Featherstone, 2009, p. 63). These are the deeply rooted views of appropriate social behaviour that continue to shape family life in Canada.

Lastly, sociological research examining men’s roles within the home tend to rely on a “deficit” model, focusing on what men do not do, or what they do poorly (Doherty, 1991). The deficit model comes from the tendency of sociological research to compare fathering with mothering:

“Men as fathers are compared to women as mother; it is against women that they come up short in their
participation and contribution. Our ideals and cultural models of motherhood seem to be the template for men as they fashion ways of participating in family life, as if motherhood in itself is a universal experience.” (Dienhart, 1998, 13).

The tendency to compare fathering with mothering both reinforces the assumption that women are more competent/adept/natural caregivers, and limits the ability of researchers to gather authentic data about fathering experience.

Current Research in Fatherhood

Current interest in men’s roles within family life often assesses the amount of time that fathers engage in interacting with, being accessible to, or making plans for, their children (Lewis & Lamb, 2007; Lupton & Barclay, 1997), and it is suggested that positive father involvement is beneficial to child developmental outcomes (Pleck & Masciardelli, 2004). Sociological research on the family typically emphasizes roles and responsibilities and change over time, identifying who does what and how much within the home environment, and commonly uses ecological systems and constraints theories to explain the negotiation of roles and responsibilities within the family. Social policy, including the shift toward support for paternal leave, and ideology of fatherhood and motherhood are common and re-occurring themes within sociological literature, as is the discussion of “maternal gate-keeping” or the role of women in facilitating or constraining their partner’s involvement in care-giving activities (Allen & Hawkins, 1999).

Contemporary sociological ideologies of fatherhood have alluded to an evolution of gender rules and roles within the family, resulting in the construction of the “new” father image (Pleck, 1997; Lewis & O’Brien, 1987). This “new” man is more involved in
the daily care-giving responsibilities of child-rearing, household responsibilities, and the emotional and nurturing aspects of parenting than fathers in previous generations (Finn & Henwood, 2009). This image has been dominant in both parenting literature and academic circles and has important consequences for the construction of parenting ideology (Frank & Livingston, 1999). This focus on the sharing of child care and household responsibilities leads us to view fathers as co-parents, yet many researchers question the authenticity of this experience, questioning whether this exists more in research than in the social world. Several authors assert that fathers are indeed “fathering” differently than they have previously, citing greater involvement in care-giving tasks and greater emotional receptivity to their children (Wall & Arnold, 2007; Eggebeen & Knoester, 2002; Marsiglio et al., 2000; Williams, 2008), however it is widely argued that the vast majority of care-giving tasks still falls predominantly upon women (Doucet, 2006).

Men and Masculinity

Within the field of gender studies there is growing interest in the reproduction of masculinity within fatherhood research, especially within the current context of understanding the “new” or “involved” father that is gaining popularity in research and in media, as well as the trend toward more men remaining home to care for children. Contributions from this field examine hegemonic and subjugated masculinities (Connell, 2000), the centrality of paid work in men’s lives (Dowd, 2000), discourses of fatherhood (Lupton and Barclay, 1997), and the co-constructed processes of “doing gender” by both mothers and fathers (Berk, 1985; Coltrane, 1996).
Hegemonic masculinity is described as a dominant construction of masculinity that is prevalent in western society and is typically associated with paid work and qualities of “being strong, successful, capable, reliable, in control” (Connell, 2000, p.31). However Connell maintains that there are multiple masculine subject positions available in societies that include subordinated masculinities, such as gay masculinities; marginalized masculinities, as in the case of ethnic minorities; and complacent masculinities, which are men who both benefit from and hold the patriarchal dividend in place (Connell, 1995, 2000). Interestingly hegemonic masculinity is often described simply as the “opposite of femininity” (Connell, 2000, p.31). This being the case, what does this mean for men who engage in care work? How is care-giving experienced and constructed by men when masculinity is viewed as the opposite of femininity and care-giving typically seen to be central to feminine discourse? Is fatherhood included in definitions of hegemonic masculinity or does is it represented in a subjugated version of masculine discourse?

According to Lupton and Barclay (1997), the topic of fatherhood is either left out or briefly touched upon in various influential academic works conducted on masculinities, which instead focus on topics such as employment, male sexuality, violence, crime, sport, and race-ethnicity (Lupton & Barclay, 1997). This suggests that fathering is less central to our understanding of men and masculinities than the aforementioned topics. Dermott (2008) agrees that fatherhood is not necessary for the successful achievement or mastery of masculinity and further notes that parenting is far less central to the construction of adulthood for men than for women. Lupton and Barclay (1997) similarly assert that feminine discourse is still securely joined to motherhood in
it’s representation of motherhood as nurturing and instinctive, and fatherhood, in contrast, as learned or practiced:

“Motherhood is still largely seen as an essential part of femininity, not split from womanhood as fathers may sometimes be split from manhood. Men and women, therefore, are negotiating parenting arrangements in a context in which it is still considered that the mother is more important to her child’s welfare than the father and “instinctively” possesses a greater capacity for nurturance.” (Lupton and Barclay, 1997, p.147)

This has important implications for family life and highlights the need to disrupt discourses of masculinity in order to open up the many possibilities for men engaged in care work within families.

Researchers agree that masculinity and fatherhood are constructs that are constantly evolving according to cultural contexts, work and family relationships and are calling for a focus on diversity, for attention to the “multiple masculinities” that exist, and for the development of a “masculine concept of care” (Carrigan, Connell and Lee, 1985; Morgan, 1992; Connell, 1987; Kimmel 1994). In a qualitative study of Stay-at-home fathers conducted by Rochlan et al (2008), the authors found that within their descriptions of the ways in which fatherhood has changed them, the fathers interviewed expressed appreciation for their emotional lives; less fear of shame; and greater recognition of others’ emotions, while maintaining traditionally masculine values such as doing things for themselves, living by a moral code, and valuing strength and independence. This study as well as others, point to a restructuring of masculinity (Levant, 1995) that involves the inclusion of aspects of traditional masculinity that remain relevant and valuable and the rejection of elements that have become irrelevant or dysfunctional.
Hammond and Mattis (2005) have found for example, that many men derive meaning and identity from their sense of responsibility and accountability to their families and communities. It has similarly been suggested that care, intimacy, and connection with children are included in modern definitions of fatherhood and masculinity (Silverstein, 1996), signalling a shift in attitudes and beliefs about what it means to be a father in contemporary Canadian society.

*Primary Care-giving Fathers*

Though some attention has been paid to the changing economic and domestic climate in Canada and to the changing nature of men’s roles within the home, there has been relatively little research conducted exploring the experience of fulltime care-giving fathers. Research typically centers on stay-at-home fathers’ satisfaction with their roles (Rochlen et al, 2008; Robertson & Verscheldon, 1993), reasons for choosing this position (Lutwin & Siperstein, 1985; Radin, 1982), fathers’ care-giving styles (Sabattini & Leaper, 2004; Rochlen et al, 2008), and the social stigma attached to this role (Smith, 1998; Rochlen et al, 2008; Brescoll & Uhlmann, 2005)

*Stigma and stay-at-home fathers.* Given the rising incidence of stay-at-home fathering, one would expect that attitudes towards men and care-giving would be shifting as well, however many researchers have continued to find evidence of stigma toward this fathering role. Within recent research it has been found that prescribed gender roles still predict the behaviour of men and women and also the ways in which people respond to others’ behaviour (Brescoll & Uhlmann, 2005; Martin & Mahoney, 2005). There is evidence that there are negative reactions towards women and men who do not conform to traditional gender roles (Prentice & Carranza, 2002). In a study by Bascoll & Uhlmann
(2005), attitudes toward traditional and non-traditional parenting were explored and it was found that stay-at-home mothers and employed fathers were the preferred parent team compared with stay-at-home fathers and employed mothers. Further, Stay-at-home fathers were perceived to be “the worst parent” by participants (Bascoll & Uhlmann, 2005). The authors speculate that fathers are seen as less competent than mothers in roles that involve nurturing and caring, which may be due largely to the beliefs that child care is an exclusively feminine domain and that men have fewer competencies in this area. Along the same lines, stay-at-home fathers were viewed as having the least amount of social regard: “apparently, employed mothers are disliked but respected, whereas stay-at-home fathers are neither liked nor respected.” (Fiske et al., 2002; 440). Women’s relative status compared with men may be due to the social status gained when taking on a breadwinner role. Interestingly, stigma toward stay-at-home fathers appears to be one of the major reasons that men report not taking paternity leave (Duindam, 1999). This may in turn limit mothers’ opportunities in the workplace and may bar gender equality in both public and private spheres.

Rochlen, Suizzo and McKelley (2008) investigated the stigma experiences of stay-at-home fathers. While very generally the fathers felt positive reactions from others, many of the fathers had experienced conflicting or negative responses, particularly from women and in public spaces such as the playground. These responses included discomfort, surprise, and awkwardness (Rochlen, Suizzo and McKelley (2008). In 1998, Smith investigated the stigma experiences of househusbands to explore how and why they feel isolated or ostracized, and found that both the internalization of traditional masculine gender roles and interactions with others were significant influences on the
men’s perceptions of their roles. In particular, the men in this study reported feeling ostracized in children’s spaces such as at the park or playground mostly by the stay-at-home mothers, and felt isolation due partly to the lack of interaction with other males in similar roles.

Social Support

*Support from Partners and Peers*

Rochlan et al (2008), in a study looking at predictors of relationship satisfaction, psychological well-being and life satisfaction among stay-at-home-fathers, found that stay-at-home fathers who reported having strong social support networks we found to have lower levels of distress and higher levels of life and relationship satisfaction than men who reported low levels of social support. Interestingly, the most significant predictor of men’s relationship satisfaction and life satisfaction was the support provided by a partner (Rochlan et al, 2008). Of further interest is the finding that perceived peer support was the strongest predictor of psychological distress, indicating the importance of social networks to fathers’ well-being.

The importance of mothers’ support cannot be underestimated in discussions about stay-at-home fathers, as fathers’ roles in the family tend to be more contextually dependent than mothers’ roles (Doucet, 2006; Lupton & Barclay, 1997). In a study by Beitel and Parke (1998), mothers’ perceptions of father’s child care skills were highly correlated with father’s involvement with their infants. Other studies have found that specific marital qualities predict involvement in child care and family life, such as positive ratings of marital communication (Belsky, 1984) and higher marital satisfaction (Chih-Yuan & Doherty, 2007). In these studies and others, mothers have been found to
play a vital role in facilitating men’s parenting, with maternal gate-keeping becoming a common phrase in family research. Described as the behaviours and attitudes that facilitate or restrict father’s participation in child care, maternal gate-keeping can consist of managing men’s participation in child care tasks, supervising fathers, setting high standards, and criticizing (Allen and Hawkins, 1999; Gaunt, 2008). Though it is still a controversial subject, many researchers assert that maternal gate-keeping serves many purposes for women, including maintaining power and authority within the home; affirming their gendered selves; and validating maternal identities (Gaunt, 2008):

“Thus, by doing most of the family work and by not allowing the father to take part, a woman demonstrates to herself and to others that she is a competent member of her sex category, with the capacity and desire to perform appropriately gendered behaviours.” (Gaunt, 2008. p. 376)

Parenting arrangements are made within contexts that continue to place mothers at the centre of family life and imply women’s greater capacity for care. The concept of maternal gate-keeping seems to exemplify the ways in which gender ideology can affect care-giving roles and behaviours within the home, regardless of roles and responsibilities outside of the home.

Workplace culture and policy

Gender ideology is largely seen as affecting whether or not men participate in childcare as well, with a prime illustration being the taking up (or not) of workplace leave following the birth of a child. Statistics show that men often do not take allotted time off from work, indicating perhaps that deeply rooted beliefs about men’s primary breadwinning role are still at play in many workplaces (Haas & Hwang, 1995; Brandth &
Gender ideology and social norms affect if and how much leave from work a father will take, and decisions are often tied to the views of family members, coworkers, peers and larger community (Mckay & Doucet, 2000). Seward et al (2006) report that the attitudes and beliefs of employers, supervisors and coworkers are a significant barrier to fathers’ use of leave, demonstrating that paid work and earning the family income is still viewed as primary to masculine identities (Haas & Hwang, 2005; Connell, 2005). Often fathers will take sick leave, vacation time, or informal leave after the birth of a child in order to accommodate the cultural expectation that they participate in family life, while minimizing the impact on workplace demands and their breadwinner role, (Seward et al, 2006).

Gender-neutral policies have done little to persuade men to take leave from work, as they fail to address the pressures of workplace culture and traditional gender norms. In studying policies aimed at fathers in Norway, Brandth and Kvande (2005), assert that:

“The use of the gender-neutral leave scheme, which in principle was and is optional with respect to who takes the leave, is influenced by the encounter with the gendered society and reflects the prevailing gender patterns. Particularly in a field such as care for young children, which is so strongly divided along gender lines, gender-neutral and optional schemes will lead the majority of parents to choose the traditional models.” (Brandth and Kvande 2005, p. 184)

Encouraging fathers to take leave became a national priority in Norway as well as other Nordic countries, to both foster equality between women and men both in the workplace and in the home, and to promote positive father-child relationships (Brandth & Kvande, 2009). Thus, the first “gendered” policy came into effect: the introduction of non-transferable leave for fathers. After the introduction of this policy in 1993, the number of
fathers who took leave jumped from 4% to 85% in 2000 (Brandth & Kvande, 2009). Similar response was found with the introduction of non-transferable leave for fathers in Quebec, mentioned earlier in this chapter. A gendered policy that encourages fathers to take leave from work and participate in child care is successful for a number of reasons. First, as a government policy, the leave takes away the stigma or the novelty of being one of the only fathers to take leave for care in a workplace, moving it from a “minority practice to a majority practice among fathers” (Brandth & Kvande, 2009; p.184). Secondly, by validating the leave as an employee’s right, leave from work is constructed as an appropriate workplace practice and is therefore is in line with traditional masculine values (Brandth & Kvande, 2009). Other sociological factors that have been found to affect the take-up of leave by fathers are wage compensation, and in heterosexual two-parent couples, the women’s labour market status (McKay & Doucet, 2000).

Rationale

An abundance of media attention to the changing context of the North American family and men’s and women’s roles within family life has been a major motivation for this study. Contemporary parenting literature and media images commonly cast the care of children into the female domain which contributes to both the secondary positioning of men within family life, and the construction of masculinity as inherently un-caring. With labels such as “Mr. Mom” assigned to fathers whose domestic responsibilities cross traditional gender boundaries, it is clear that a blurring of gender expectations is occurring in some households. What we are not hearing are the voices of fathers themselves. How do fathers negotiate their own parenting identities in the midst of a
changing economic context? Who are their role models? Whose version of masculinity do they identify with? What is the relationship between fathering and mothering?

This study explores masculinity within the experiences of care-giving fathers in contemporary Canadian society from a social constructionist theoretical perspective that recognizes that discourses of motherhood and fatherhood are deeply entwined and that each is defined culturally, socially, and symbolically within societies. I intend through this thesis to explore how care-giving fathers experience their own masculinity in relation to the social norms of paid work and the feminization of care work, how fathers “do” care work within available masculine discourse, and how communities can better support fathers that take on primary support work in families. The complex and varied experiences of care-giving fathers often go unheard amidst dominant discourses of parenting, and so attention to the day-to-day experience of “doing” fatherhood and the sites of resistance that exist between experience and discourse is necessary. This study seeks to contribute to the growing literature about stay-at-home fathers in Canada and to attend to the social and community-support needs of fathers.

Anticipated Outputs

Contemporary community-based family programs can tend to be mother-focused, exclusionary of fathers, or perpetuate a male/female binary supporting mothers as primary caregivers and fathers as secondary or peripheral participants. The data collected from this study may be used to encourage agencies to create spaces for fathers that recognize their strengths, and offer them room to “speak themselves into existence” (Davies, 2000, 141) by providing services that are both accessible and relevant to their parenting needs.
In addition, given the growing diversity of family forms and the changing nature of family life, the data from this study may have implications for further fatherhood research and for reforms to community programs serving a variety of caregivers and family forms. Further research may utilize social constructionist approaches to the study of fatherhood and alternative subjectivities, including but not limited to blended families, single, co-parenting or same-sex parents. Not only should attention be paid to policy and the changing nature of gender roles within society, but there also is a need to examine how these roles are shaped by unspoken or “common sense” ideologies that construct and reproduce our knowledge of ourselves in relation to others. Exploration of dominant discourses of gender may shed light on potential sites of inquiry and reflection within family support work.

Methodology

Conceptual Framework

This study utilizes a social constructionist epistemological perspective to explore the construction of masculinity and the experience of fatherhood in Canadian two-parent families. Recognizing that families are not uniform and static, but are diverse and ever-changing within dynamic social and economic systems, a social constructionist stance is a fitting conceptual framework as it allows for re-examination of popular discourse and for exploring the complexities, intricacies, and contradictions of social phenomena (Dienhart, 1998). In contrast to an objectivist standpoint used in traditional scientific inquiry where reality is seen as fixed, social constructionists view reality as constructed through social relationships and assert that knowledge “is subject to the same processes that characterize any human interaction (e.g., communication, negotiation, conflict,
(Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p. 127). Constructionist research seeks to understand complex social experiences through the individuals that live it, recognizing that “particular actors, in particular places, at particular times, fashion meaning out of events and phenomena through prolonged, complex processes of social interaction involving history, language and action” (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994, p. 118).

The study reported here explored three questions: (1) How do primary care-giving fathers “do” care work within available discourses of masculinity; (2) How do fathers experience their own masculinity in relation to the social norms of paid work and the feminization of care work; and (3) How can communities better support fathers who take on the primary care of children?; and used semi-structured interviews to explore how fathers construct work and care, the relationship between fathering and mothering, and the connection between home and community. Dominant ideologies or “master narratives” are prominent in Canadian society and parenting literature and are influential in constructing gendered ideas and behaviour. By exploring fatherhood through the eyes of fathers themselves, the current study sought to uncover the diverse experiences of fathers, and potentially give voice to the “counter stories” that are less often expressed within fatherhood research.

Given the social constructionist stance from which the proposed study will be undertaken, it is understood that the findings of this study are not representative of fatherhood in general, but may offer insight into constructions of fatherhood and the multiple experiences of fathers caring for children within the changing landscape of Canadian society.
Methods

The study involves interviews with care-giving fathers because of my interest in how men construct their own parenting identities and experience fathering within discourses of masculinity. Morgan (1992) claimed that “one strategy of studying men and masculinities would be study those situations where masculinity is, as it were, on the line” (Morgan, 1992: 99) and so I decided to interview fathers who identify as primary caregivers of children, an activity traditionally deemed feminine. Since caring practices and identities are more often associated with women and femininity, we need to understand more about the negotiation and construction of parenting roles within families in which men take on primary care of children. Meaning is derived within social contexts including the family and household, society and culture, and so semi-structured interviews were conducted with care-giving men in order to explore how men construct and experience fathering within households and community contexts.

Researcher Reflexivity and Subjectivity

As a researcher using constructivist qualitative methodology, I acknowledge my position within the research process. As one who interviews participants, codes and analyses data, I am aware that my concluding theories are co-constructed by the participants and myself, and are affected by my research process, my representation of data, and the positioning of my analysis (Charmaz, 2000). Further, the themes that are discussed in the following sections did not ‘emerge’ from the data, but were identified by me, the researcher, as prominent themes relevant to my specific research questions.

As a woman working within the fields of child development and family support, my interest in fatherhood has been long-standing. Well-versed in the prominent theories
of child development throughout my undergraduate career, and as a daughter of a working father and primary care-giving mother, I was immersed in the culture of ‘traditional family’ norms. In my work with families in a variety of community settings, I witnessed the occasional unease of fathers in early childhood environments, and the shifting gazes of mothers and became increasingly aware of the ‘mother-centric’ nature of these supposedly family-friendly environments. Through graduate education I was given the opportunity to unravel the biases and the ‘common sense’ beliefs that are inherent within developmental and family theories. It was through this experience that I became interested in the relationships that I was witnessing between parents in parenting spaces and the actions and responses of fathers in those early childhood environments. This is also what led me to seek out the experiences of men who take on the primary care of children.

Ethical Considerations

Before engaging in research, a number of ethical issues were considered. These included maintaining participant confidentiality through the use of pseudonyms throughout this paper as well as the secure storage of data, identification and communication of all risks and benefits to participation, and obtaining written consent before commencing interviews. Ethical approval was sought from the Human Research Ethics Board at the University of Victoria prior to beginning this study. Following ethical review, amendments were made to address the concerns of convenience to participants and the potential risk of stigmatization. Due to the primary care-giving status of the men participating in the study, I acknowledged that participation in an interview may pose an inconvenience to many of the participants. In order to counteract this negative effect I
offered monetary reimbursement for the care of children if it was required. Further, given the focus of this study and due to the subjugated positioning of men within domestic roles, there was a fear that the men may reflect on their roles and feel stigmatized during their participation in this study. In response to this potential risk, I had available information about support services for fathers during the interviews in case they were required by a participant.

**Participant Recruitment**

Participants were recruited through a combination of researcher-driven recruitment and snowball sampling (Patton, 2002). Posters and flyers were posted within coffee shops, libraries and community centres that had existing community-based programs for families, and fathers specifically, such as Family Drop-in Programs and Man on the Moon programs organized by the Vancouver Public Library, the Association of Neighbourhood houses and local community centres. Further, fathers who participated in interviews also told friends and acquaintances about the study and two additional participants joined in this way. Criteria for inclusion in this study were that fathers must be part of a two-parent partnership in British Columbia and must self-identify as a primary care-giver to a child or children. In this study primary care-giving was conceptualized as the fulltime care of a child or children. Parents who shared parenting tasks equally were not included in this study. Fathers in both heterosexual and same-sex partnerships were sought, as well as fathers who were primary caregivers to children temporarily, as in the case of those who took parental leave.

Participant recruitment took place in the urban context of Vancouver, British Columbia, with most participants living in central Vancouver. Initially the study
anticipated a diverse group of participants in order to explore the ways in which culture, economics and social expectations of fatherhood influence its experience and construction within families and to ensure that the study is as in-depth an exploration of fatherhood in an urban Canadian context as possible. However, the respondents to recruitment flyers and eventual participants in the study represented a small range of socio-economic, geographic, and cultural diversity.

**Participant Demographics**

All of the fathers that participated in this study were married and in heterosexual relationships. Their ages ranged from 28 to 48 years. All participants lived in the Lower Mainland, with four fathers living on the west side of Vancouver, four fathers in central or east Vancouver, and one father in a suburb of Vancouver. Two fathers engaged in primary care of children through the taking up of temporary parental leave ranging in duration from 9-12 months and cared for a child younger than 1 year of age. Seven fathers were fulltime caregivers to their children who ranged from infancy to six years old. Fathers cared for a minimum of one child to a maximum of four children at one time, and one father was a primary care-giver to his children beginning in their early childhood through to adulthood.

**Data Collection**

Data collection involved semi-structured interviews with nine primary care-giving fathers in Vancouver who are part of a two-parent partnership, as fatherhood is intimately connected to motherhood and meaning constructed within relationships (Gergen, 2004). Interviews lasting approximately forty-five minutes to three hours were conducted and recorded for transcription and sought to explore how men’s everyday caring practices
maintain or challenge dominant ideas of masculinity, given the primacy of paid work to men’s gender identities (Dowd, 2000); how men “do” care work; and how communities can best support the needs of fathers who engage in care work.

Interview questions were piloted with two primary care-giving fathers in Vancouver prior to the commencement of this study in order to refine the questions according to the research questions being addressed. The process of piloting the interview questions and reflecting upon the interview process yielded some changes to the initial interview guide. The number of open-ended questions and questions that elicited specific memories or stories was increased in order to encourage the men to speak at length about fathering experiences. Additionally through the pilot interview process I was able to practice and refine my interviewing skills, to ensure that my questioning was not leading and to practice language and active listening skills that encouraged the interviewees to share their stories with me.

Interviews were conducted by me, the researcher, in public places such as coffee shops and community centre spaces. Questions including those below were used within semi-structured interviews with fathers:

1. Tell me about your current childcare arrangement. How long have you had this arrangement?
2. What issues did you consider when making the decision about who would work and who would care for children?
3. Is this your ideal childcare and work arrangement? / What is your ideal childcare and work arrangement?
4. How did you experience the transition from paid work to care work?
5. What are the best parts / advantages, in your opinion, of your arrangement?
6. What are the worst parts / disadvantages, in your opinion, of your arrangement?
7. Is being a care-giving dad what you expected it to be? Is there a gap between what you expected and what you actually experienced? Was there anything that was surprising to you in taking on this role?
8. As a primary caregiver, how do people respond to you at the playground? / At programs that your child attends? / At community programs for parents and children?
9. How is your caregiver status received by your family? / Your in-laws? / Other men? / Your employer? / Your co-workers?
10. Can you tell me a story that describes what it is like being a primary care-giving father?
11. How would you describe yourself as a father?
12. What is most important to you in your role of father?
13. Describe to me the relationship you have with your children. Is there a story you could tell me that would illustrate your relationship with your children?
14. Who do you look to as a role model for your parenting?
15. Do you think men and women care for children differently? / Is fathering the same as mothering?
16. Has being a care-giving father changed the way that you view yourself as a man?
17. Do you access community resources for parents? What kinds? Why? / Why not?
18. What changes would you make to the resources available in your community to make them more accessible/enjoyable/relevant to you?
19. When you have a question or concern about parenting your children, what resources do you access? / Who do you ask?
20. Can you tell me about a time when you needed support and sought help as a father?
21. If you were designing an ideal program for fathers, what would it look and feel like?
22. What would you want to tell a new father? What would be your advice to other fathers who plan to be primary caregivers in their families?

Refer to Appendix C for a complete list of interview questions. During the interviews, fathers were informed that the transcripts of their interviews would be returned to them for review. They were free to clarify, change, delete, and add data, according to how they saw fit. Following interview transcription, participants were sent their data transcripts by email which provided them with the opportunity to clarify and expand upon the data that was given and to ensure that the data collected represented their experiences as they were shared with me, the researcher (Patton, 2002). I received the revised transcripts from all but three of the fathers who deemed the data given in their interview sufficient. The six remaining fathers added to their transcripts after reflecting upon the interview questions
and provided additional insights into their experiences. These were added to the data set for coding and analysis.

Data Analysis

Data gleaned from interviews was transcribed and analyzed according to pragmatic thematic analysis. Pragmatic thematic analysis is a flexible methodology that is not tied to a specific theoretical framework; however it is frequently used within constructionist research to examine discourses, meanings and experiences within societies. This method allows for the identification of patterns and themes and a detailed analysis of data (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

The stages of thematic analysis according to Braun and Clarke (2006) are outlined in Figure 1.2.

**Table 1 Phases of thematic analysis**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>Description of the process</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Familiarizing yourself with your data:</td>
<td>Transcribing data (if necessary), reading and re-reading the data, noting down initial ideas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Generating initial codes:</td>
<td>Coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Searching for themes:</td>
<td>Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Reviewing themes:</td>
<td>Checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts (Level 1) and the entire data set (Level 2), generating a thematic ‘map’ of the analysis.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Defining and naming themes:</td>
<td>Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells,</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
6. Producing the report:

- generating clear definitions and names for each theme.
- The final opportunity for analysis. Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating back of the analysis to the research question and literature, producing a scholarly report of the analysis.


Following the transcription of interviews, I became familiar with the data through re-reading and searching for meanings and patterns with the intention to create a preliminary list of interesting data items and relationships between items that eventually became initial codes (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The second stage of data analysis involved the identification of key words and phrases within the data set, the organization of data into clusters, and the development of initial codes (Patton, 2002). Codes are “the most basic segment, or element, of the raw data or information that can be assessed in a meaningful way regarding the phenomenon” (Boyatzis, 1998: 63).

In contrast to an inductive thematic analysis in which the goal of the analysis is a rich description of data, I conducted a theoretical thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) which offers a more detailed analysis on one aspect of the data and is driven by my focus on how fathers enact care-giving, care-giving men’s constructions and experiences of masculinity, and father’s support needs. This approach to analysis is one that is more ‘top-down’ (Boyatzis, 1998) and therefore the process of coding was deliberate to my specific research questions. Figure 1.3 illustrates the initial codes developed from the transcripts in relation to the broader thesis questions.
Table 2 Initial codes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Doing Fatherhood</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Focus on adventure/exploration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Child-focused/child-led</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Safety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Affection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Trial and error</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Few expectations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• High desire to do it/ feeling thankful and lucky</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Masculinity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Gender-neutral language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Differentiation from “old” notions of fathering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Predisposition for care-giving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Self described as “whole”, “balanced”, “complete”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Involvement in family life held in high value</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Association with traditional masculinity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Exclusion of traditional gender roles such as domestic chores</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Primary care-giving fathers as novel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• “Women’s spaces”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Support</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Formal community support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Informal community support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Isolation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Internet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Observation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Decision-making with partner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Workplace culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Support of family</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Once initial codes were developed, it became important to revisit the data in order to gather all data pieces relevant to the codes and to develop themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Throughout the process of data analysis, coding was continually refined and revisited.

Following the development of codes, the next phase of analysis involved the interpretation of data and the organization of data codes into themes (Braun & Clarke,
At this phase, I began to analyse the data and consider the relationships between the initial codes. Mind maps and tables were used during this stage to assist in visualizing the relationships between codes and themes and to develop different levels of themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The culmination of this stage produced a collection of potential themes and sub-themes and data items that were coded in relation to them (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3 Development of themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Themes</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 1. “Doing” care-giving | a) Parenting without a template | - Making it up  
- Few expectations  
- Contrast with motherhood discourse |
|                       | b) Descriptions of Self | - Values informing actions  
- Emphasis on action and exploration  
- Play-based and child-led |
|                       | c) Gender and Parenting | - Differentiated style from female partner  
- Primacy of mother role |
| 2. Masculinity | a) Disassociation from traditional gender roles | - Use gender-neutral language  
- Differentiate from “old” notions of fathering  
- Becoming a central parenting figure |
|                       | b) Re-conceptualizing masculinity | - Predisposition for care-giving  
- Balance and wholeness  
- Aligning with traditional masculinity  
- Involvement in family life is a central value |
|                       | c) Fathers in “women’s spaces” | - Primary care-giving as novel  
- Women’s spaces |
### 3. Support

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>a) Community Support</th>
<th></th>
<th>b) Informational Support</th>
<th></th>
<th>c) Role of the workplace</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Preference for informal supports</td>
<td>- Isolation</td>
<td>- Preference for informal community supports</td>
<td>- Individualistic help-seeking</td>
<td>- Responding to demands</td>
<td>- Workplace culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Role of formal supports</td>
<td>- Having a destination</td>
<td>- Socialization</td>
<td>- Availability of resources</td>
<td>- Consulting the internet</td>
<td>- Flexible benefits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Promoting “open minds”</td>
<td>- Normalizing father presence</td>
<td>- Modelling</td>
<td>- Observation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Supportive relationships</td>
<td>- Decision-making with partner</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The final stages of data analysis involved reviewing and refining themes, both at the levels of the coded data items and at the macro-level of the entire data set in order to ensure that the themes reflected the data set as a whole (Braun & Clarke, 2006). When the thematic map ‘worked’ then my analysis moved into the next phase, which was the naming and defining of themes. When they didn’t work, codes and themes were revisited and further refined. This process involved the identification of new themes or the refinement of existing themes to include data that may not have been coded for before. Defining and naming themes required identifying what was interesting about each theme and how it ‘fit’ into the overall story about the data, through the specific research questions. Braun and Clarke (2006) assert that at this phase it is important to be able to
identify clearly what your themes are and what they are not, and be able to explain each theme in a few sentences to ensure that they provide a “coherent and internally consistent account” of data (p. 92).

Finally, I concluded the final analysis and write-up of the thesis report. The purpose of this stage was to “provide a concise, coherent, logical, non-repetitive and interesting account of the story the data tell within and across themes” (Braun and Clarke, 2006: 93). Following is a description of the main findings of this study and includes an analytical narrative of data in relation to my research questions, and to the broader body of fatherhood research and theory (Patton, 2002).

Reliability and Validity

Qualitative research is exploratory and descriptive in nature. Using a social constructionist paradigm, I am not searching for “truth” rather I am seeking to accurately represent the experiences and ideas of the participants interviewed in this study in relation to my specific research questions. Reliability and validity were sought by assuring that participants’ voices were accurately represented, by having participants review and revise their interview transcripts, as described previously.
Results

Doing Fatherhood

Central to this study is the question of how fathers do primary care-giving within current discourses of masculinity in Canada. With the changing economic landscape and social norms regarding work and care arrangements, I was curious about how fathers would define their relationships with their children and describe their working lives as fulltime care-givers of children. Through their descriptions of themselves as fathers, stories of daily life, and the values that influence their fathering styles, fathers point to the ways in which they construct their own parenting roles without a “template”, and communicate their parenting styles with rich descriptions of their values and actions both individually and in relation to motherhood.

Parenting without a Template

A theme that could readily be constructed with support from the data was that fathers’ parenting styles tend to be individualistic. Evidence supporting this interpretation includes reports by more than half of fathers interviewed that at times they “make it up” as they go. For example, one father reflected on the lack of a template for men who take on the primary care of children, as compared with mothers. In particular, he points out that discourses about mothering often include expectations around nurturing, domestic upkeep, socializing, satisfaction, and a conception of “looking good while doing it”, that are absent from discourses of fathering:

“I think that also motherhood implies, not only looking after kids, but taking care of the domestic realm and also yourself. And I think that being a male parent is more that
sort of the dad that takes you to do fun stuff. I think there’s very little expectation that a man can even do the nurturing component. But I think for me, I’ve been able to conceptualize being a parent without that domestic side or without the “looking good while doing it” side which I can’t say for certain, but I think that for women those things are more inextricably linked or bound together. Like, I’m not sure if my wife could even separate them if she wanted.”

“…I would imagine for females that the nurturing and the domestic realm tend to be more closely connected than for males. …I think being a father to me says more about interacting with the kids whereas being a mother says, I interact with the kids, but also manage to clean the house and chat with other moms, and take them to soccer practice and do all the “mom things” like a lot of people talk about. …For me, those things don’t even come to play at all. For me, it’s I’m having adventures with my kids and I guess that makes me a stereotypical male in that sense.”

Further, this father’s perception of motherhood discourse informed his own observations of the social gaze of women and men in parenting roles. He notices that the standards for male caregivers differ from those of females.

“Sort of more a social observation than anything, but the standards for male caregivers tends to be, whether you want to use the term lower or wider, but especially for men, it’s like as long as the child isn’t bleeding, you’re doing a great job. …Maybe there’s more a sense of a certain standard that mothers have to adhere to, like you wouldn’t take your child out wearing pyjamas, or you would make sure that your hair was washed, those sorts of things.”

There was evidence in the transcripts that many of the other fathers interviewed similarly did not adhere to a specific parenting doctrine and often created routines, boundaries, and roles that reflected their own needs and those of their children and families.
Descriptions of Self

When asked to describe themselves as fathers and their relationships with their children, the participants provided rich insight into their parenting styles and roles. Their answers yielded a number of key adjectives (affectionate, sympathetic, adventurous, safe) that both describe their parenting styles, and inform us of their key values as parents, which will be discussed in detail in the following paragraphs. Here, these descriptions can be read to understand the fathers’ portrayals of themselves and their roles in their families.

“I think [my daughter] might think that I’m sympathetic. I try and often see the situation the way at least the way I think she sees it, and other than that, probably firm in that I set boundaries and I tend to be more strict on the boundary too, which is something she doesn’t always quite appreciate. But, I think, loving.”

“I think that [our relationship] is playful. I also think that I do play a role in introducing them to experience… I think that my daughter sees me as a gateway to experience and also sees me as fun and loving.”

“I am pretty affectionate, for sure. I will hug and kiss him until he doesn’t need it anymore. I’m kind of adventurous. I want to take him on adventures and have him learn new things.”

“I think I am patient, I’ll give in to them at times where I think it’s appropriate, but at the same time you have to take a hard line on them on certain other things. So I try not to be a “no” kind of parent.”

“I think they would say that I’m affectionate; thorough; safe.”

Fathers’ descriptions of themselves provide insight into their individual parenting values and styles, and include hints as to their approaches to play, discipline and daily life. Further exploration of father’s values, and in particular, questioning what is most
important to them in their role as father, provided more of an in-depth look at their relationships and their fathering role, which in turn supplied valuable insights as to how fathers “do” caring.

*Values Informing Action*

Values that were common to the majority of the fathers included health and safety, instilling values, and being a loving and involved presence in their children’s lives. Together with their descriptions of self and their portrayals of daily life, the result is a rich description of fatherhood that demonstrates that fathers’ values and actions are strongly linked. Specifically, there was a clear focus on experience and enrichment and subsequently active play, exploration, and adventure were highly rated; as was care-giving that was child-led and/or play-based. Below are some excerpts from participants’ answers when asked what is most important to them in their role of father:

“Just really being able to work on different things and provide a safe home and that.”

“For me, I think being with them is most important for me, instilling values and certain morals kinds of, beliefs that you have as a parent, you want to instil those things in your kids. And spirituality too, that’s important for me. I mean, everyone has their own sense of spirituality so it’s very specific too. You want to teach your kids to think about those kinds of things for themselves.”

“I think that the most important thing for me is that my kids feel secure, safe and loved in my relationship with them. I think that’s the single-most important thing for me. I mean there are so many other really important things like how they interact with others, and being socially responsible, the list goes on and on. But the most important is that they feel safe and loved and with that comes respect and the desire to behave well for the other person.”
“I would say, just being there. Just having that contact with my kids and giving them a moral compass maybe. Not that they’ve all behaved all that well, but showing them just responsibility and reliability and commitment and that sort of thing: decency.”

These values match well with the self-descriptions of the fathers mentioned previously, that include affection, involvement and patience. However, what stood out the most was a strong value emphasis on exploration and enrichment, and the subsequent action of “going on adventures” that many of the fathers shared. For example, here are a sample of fathers’ answers that included components of exploration and adventure:

“So first of all, being a consistently positive and good element in their life, and then giving them enough variety and dynamic experience that their development is enriched as opposed to the other way.”

“I guess this is where the adventure comes in: experience and enrichment. I definitely want to keep exposing him to things which will help him learn and will give him something new to see in the world. So you know I’m always looking to look both ways when we cross the street, and hold my hand when we’re crossing the street, eat your fruits and vegetables, and encouraging a sense of wonder. I talk to him a lot about what he sees and what’s going on and I ask him what he thinks about things all the time, try to engage him in his world, because he clearly needs to be. And I suspect that’s true with all kids.”

“I would say that it is offering opportunities for her to grow and giving her as many opportunities and experiences for her to grow her mind and her body, and her confidence in her own abilities. Just basically giving her all the things she needs to be the person she maybe wants to be.”

“She’s at that spongy stage and she likes to do all of these things so I think that’s what we feel is the most important - continue to offer her all of these wonderful options.”
“I’m really conscious of giving them really strong developmental experiences...Being outside all of the time, making sure that they have very open horizons.”

Consequently, these fathers provided descriptions of their daily life and parenting style that strongly encompassed these values and included elements of exploration and adventure:

“Every day we just had a destination and I would change it up, but we would always go to some destination, wherever it was, and we’d play for a little while and sometimes we’d bring a little picnic. …I thought it was really good to go out and do things, but maybe that was for me, maybe that’s a total dad thing, I wasn’t comfortable, I would get really bored if I just stayed in the house and played.”

“When the spring came he was just two and we got to do more adventurous things, go on nature walks, hang out on the beach, and those sorts of things, so there was a lot of real enjoyment that I wasn’t able to take advantage of quite as much before, because of his age.”

“I want to make sure that we have an adventure every day and I’ve found that doing those things helps me as much as it helps them.”

“We just kind of explored. If it was sunny again we would go out, and maybe this is the time that we’d go for a walk or a run, I would quite frequently take him for long walks in the stroller or the backpack…and we’d go to the park and explore the grass and over the winter there was quite a bit of rain, but it was okay, you throw on the muddy-buddy or whatever and then go out.”

The emphasis on enrichment and adventure was common among five of the nine fathers participating in this study, and particularly among those who had taken temporary leave to care for a child or children. However, among fathers with longer-term primary care arrangements (i.e. more than three years), fathers more often emphasized the
importance of ordinary parenting tasks such as engaging in daily routines, facilitating children’s long term growth and developmental needs, and tasks that are more crisis-driven:

“I have a good relationship with the kids. It’s very close. I’m very involved in the things that they do. We have a lot of fun together, but we also work through the things we need to work through, it’s not all just fun and doing whatever they want, it’s also getting through your life really, day by day, and so it’s being involved in those little things that is sometimes the most important.”

“I’d say I’m okay at it. I do rise to the issues, like crisis-driven. If there’s a problem, whatever it is, it’s like done.”

Additionally, all of the fathers in the study provided descriptions of their daily activities which recounted daily tasks of feeding, bathing, dressing, and caring for children’s needs; going on outings, visiting community spaces such as the library or community centre; and household tasks such as shopping for groceries, cooking and tidying up after children.

Interestingly, the amount of domestic chores the fathers engaged in seemed to vary considerably, and while household duties were not the focus of this study, the wide range of domestic responsibilities is notable and is discussed in detail later.

Lastly, three fathers in this study reported that their parenting style is one that is unstructured and child-led. These fathers communicated the values of play, independence and flexibility.

“I was loving. I cared about the kids. I was happy to be doing what I was doing, provided I had the breaks and could reload. I was generous and caring. I got the kids outside a bit. I would garden in a vegetable garden and they’d kick around or play in the sprinkler, or fight, or play games and it was pretty loose, because they were children
and because I deliberately was happy to have it a little bit like that.”

“It’s been one of the most interesting things for me to be able to let them do that, to let them organize things. Because it fulfills them and makes them happy, there’s no harm in that and it makes it interesting. …I’m not letting go to the point where we just stay home, but how long they want to stay, what they want to do, that is up to them. In a sense it’s like I am facilitating their exploration of the world, rather than me guiding them through things that I think they should be doing.”

These fathers described their style of parenting as one that is focused on children’s needs to explore and “be children” and were influenced by their own upbringings as well as their beliefs about children’s needs and their role as parents.

**Gender and parenting**

While appearing individualistic in nature, there still remains the question of how fathers’ parenting practices are influenced by current masculine discourse. In describing the ways in which they enact care-giving, fathers often compared themselves with their female partners, and gave examples of their differing parenting styles. Additionally fathers were asked about their beliefs about how women and men parent. Their answers provide further insight into how these fathers enact parenting in primary care-giving contexts:

“I think that the play that I do with them might be a little bit more play and introducing them to new things, whereas the play that my wife does might be a little bit more basic education-based.”

“[My wife] is much more delicate and stuff with her nurturing, while I’m more rough, I don’t know how to say it, and playful. She doesn’t really play; she is more loving
and soft with them while I am play, play, play, all the time.”

“She is very structured and likes things to be on a schedule, while I am kind of like, we don’t really have a schedule so there’s no point in stressing ourselves out over nothing. It will get done eventually.”

“I’m more of the harder one that enforces things. I’m not Mr. Playful all the time, like, our oldest listens to me when I, not get mad at him, but you know, when he needs to. [My wife] is more like, you know, a mom more than a dad. When I was a kid my mom would always say ‘Wait till your dad gets home’ – it’s the same kind of thing, like the dad is like the hammer, if something needs to be done.”

Play, a lack of structure, and discipline seemed to take center stage in many of the fathers’ dialogues about mothering and fathering. Additionally, three fathers shared beliefs about the unique role of mothers within the family unit. When asked if mothering and fathering is the same, these fathers shared these thoughts:

“For instance when they are little babies and they cry in the night, I definitely know that I have a lower threshold for anger and irritation, you get woken up and you think damn it, I have a long day tomorrow or you just get irritated, whereas [my wife], she just gets up and she’ll just feed her and doesn’t seem to have that emotional component. …One thing that I think in these kinds of situations that are totally nonverbal, I think that women have a better sense for, and a better tolerance for dealing with this behaviour and also reacting to the behaviour, knowing what to do and being patient.”

“I don’t think a dad could manufacture the type of close relationship that a child has with its’ mother. I don’t think you can do it. You can get really close, but you’ll always be the father and the mother will always be the mother and it’s just different.”
“...I don’t know if it’s just biological? I don’t know. I think they just have some sort of connection with their mother. They end up having a close relationship with me too, but I think that it’s different. I think it’s based more on my experiences with them, rather than some sort of maternal connection. Yeah. It’s really hard to quantify but there’s something there, at least I think so. I don’t think a father could completely replace the mother. I don’t think a child could come to see their father as their mother in terms of the needs they have of their parents. They have different needs of their mother and their father. There’s a lot of stuff that they can get from both of them, and they do, and I’m able to give that to them, but there is some sort of core set of needs that I think only the mother can give them.”

These dialogues portray these fathers’ beliefs about motherhood as different and unique compared with fatherhood.

Masculinity

The second question guiding this study addresses how men conceptualize masculinity in relation to the social norms of paid work for men and the feminization of care work. The accounts from fathers participating in this study provided evidence for salient themes that will be documented below. The construction of themes based on the interview data were: dissociating from traditional gender roles; redefining masculinity; and experiencing parenting as “outsiders”.

Disassociation from Traditional Gender Roles

The interpretation of data gathered through interviews with the primary care-giving fathers yielded a recurring theme of dissociation from traditional ideas regarding masculinity, work and care. Fathers differentiated themselves from traditionally gendered
norms and “old” notions of fathering through their use of language regarding parenting, through descriptions of themselves in relation to fathers of the past, and through sharing their unique experiences of fathering now.

Gender-neutral language. Throughout the interviews, all but two of the fathers used language that was gender-neutral, and referred to themselves as caregivers and parents as opposed to fathers. For some participants this language was used to highlight the congruency between the experiences of women and men who are primary care-givers and to blur the boundaries of separate gendered experiences, such as within these examples:

“I don’t know about the care-giving father part, but as a care-giver…”

“I don’t know if it’s specific to being a care-giving dad or just a caregiver in general…”

“You know, I wouldn’t even describe myself as a father, I think I would just say that I’m a parent. And I think that’s partly to do with our circumstances, like I said, right from the beginning with the twins we were just two parents watching them. I think that if my wife was able to breastfeed then it would be a different thing altogether… whereas because they were bottle-fed… it saved us in a sense because I could do everything that she could do and it wasn’t that there was a mother and there was the father, we were just two parents watching these two children and trying to get them through.”

For others, this language appeared to assist fathers in re-conceptualizing fatherhood through language. This deliberate use of language seemed to serve to differentiate their roles from historical notions of fatherhood.

Fathering then and now. It was clear that the fathers interviewed were indeed “doing” fathering differently than popular conceptualizations of fathering in the past, and
when describing their experiences of fulltime fathering, many pointed to the ways in which they differ from previous generations in order to describe their current roles, perhaps in an effort to redefine what fathering is to them, now. One father described his unease at using the term “father”:

“We all have that conception of the “good” father and the “bad” father and that conception for a long time didn’t include being a primary care-giving father. So I would say if you could incorporate and happily have the term father and the primary caregiver coexist, then I would keep that term. If not, don’t be shy about throwing it out and using a term that works for you. For me, “parent” is more neutral and is de-gendered to some extent.”

Comparing fathering experiences with those of the past seemed to assist these fathers in defining what fatherhood means now. By and large, discourses and images of fathers as uninvolved in family life were used by many of the fathers to contrast their own descriptions and stories of family life. Below are some examples of participants’ language surrounding their experiences of fathering in relation to social norms of the past:

“I’m not a ‘macho’ father, I guess. I’m very affectionate”

“They [my children] know that I’m here and that I’m not perfect and it’s good to know that they know who I am. I’m not just this guy they see on the weekend; that they see a bit at night.”

“I don’t think I’ve ever described myself as a father because for me in conjures up too many impressions of the dad who takes the kid to T-ball but never does anything else, or the father that only does the fun things like, I want to play with my kids but I don’t want to change their diapers. I think “father” for me just has too much historical baggage and maybe I should have worked harder to
decouple the term from what it actually implies, but it has always been easier for me to just say, these are the kids and I am the parent”.

While these three fathers disassociated from the past within their descriptions of their experiences of fathering fulltime, almost all of the fathers expressed an association with strong new discourses of fatherhood through expressing the ways in which they relate with their children and for the four fathers quoted below, how they were repositioned within their families. One father of two young children described at length the relationship he has with his children. This father took the majority of leave after the birth of his second child and reflected on the differences he experienced as a fulltime caregiver:

“With the baby quite frankly, I think a lot of fathers have this experience where you feel quite peripheral, especially in the first year, and in this case with [my second child], it seemed like she saw me differently. Obviously that’s projecting a lot, because there is not a lot to go on, but it just seemed like, spending so much time and I was her sole adult in the picture, it seemed like it really changed that dynamic that I was just a larger figure in her eyes than before. Because before, I would come home at 6:30pm or 7pm and see [my first child] for half an hour or forty-five minutes and it was pretty meagre contact. I mean there’s the weekends and stuff, and the good thing about my job is that there is a lot of vacation, but still it’s nothing like, it’s totally transformed that relationship, like they really viewed me as more of a central figure, I mean I could feel it, it’s intangible, I cant really describe or say exactly how that came to be, but you could just feel it, it’s different. That felt great. …I think that it’s so tremendously valuable in terms of changing your relationship with your kids, especially in this very young age. I know that fathers tend to take more of a role when their kids get older, but in these very young ages, like when [my second child] was a baby, now she is equally oriented to both of us, and that wasn’t the case at all for at first, if she entered a room she would just
automatically look for mama and would automatically seek her out. And now it’s like it doesn’t matter, she’ll seek us both out. It’s a game-changer. And obviously as a father then it’s like a self-reinforcing circle. You feel more wanted so you participate more and stay more involved. Whereas before, with our first, especially in that first year when he was so orientated towards mama, I don’t feel wanted, I don’t participate as much, and I feel like it’s not that important and you just, you do all these other cognitive rationalizations about how she’s just more skilled, has more intuition about this, you kind of make up all these defensive arguments, and then you realize that it’s not at all true.”

This father clearly indicated the difference in experience he felt as a working parent, and then as a care-giving parent. It is significant that in his words, fulltime care-giving is described as a “game-changer” for him, and describes how his role within his family had been repositioned from one that was peripheral, to one that is central. Other fathers described similar experiences:

“We have a bond now. We’ve always had a strong bond from the day he was born. It was a C-section so my wife was kind of out of it for a couple weeks and I had to take on a lot of duties. And I don’t regret it, I loved it, I loved all of it, it was wonderful. …And I know that the way he responds to me, I know he gets it, because we have a great relationship, a wonderful relationship and it’s great. I’m so happy about that.”

“Her trust level in me in situations has sort of grown over time, because when she spent her first year with her mom it was kind of all about her mom, and it still pretty much is when her mom’s around. But at other times she’s come to trust me and rely on me in situations. …it’s just how she looks at me and calls to me in situations that previously would be her mom.”

“When you spend that much time with them, you see them from when they wake up until they go to bed, apart from when they are in school. But you know what they’re doing, you know how they’re feeling, you know what they need,
what they want, the things they like and don’t like; things
that are bothering them. I don’t think I would truly
appreciate it if I wasn’t home with them, but I can totally
appreciate it because I am at home with them. I can see
how if you were someone who was getting up and leaving
before they go to school and come back home around
dinnertime and when they’re tired and stuff, it would be
really difficult to know what was going on in their lives, so
there’s that. Just knowing what’s going on with them – just
knowing that they’re okay because you’re with them.”

These fathers’ stories about fulltime care-giving and their relationships with their
children convey a strong sense of connection and care and illustrate the central role of
fathering within these families.

Re-conceptualizing Masculinity

The salient image of hegemonic masculinity is one of stoicism, rationalism, and
material success in the public realm, and is contrasted greatly with ideas of care,
affection, and the domestic arena. To answer the key question of how men experience
masculinity as primary caregivers of children, attention was given to the stories that both
identified and conflicted with dominant discourses of masculinity. What resulted was an
exploration of the ways in which the men in this study are reconceptualising ideas of
masculinity through their definitions of self, their values, and their associations with
traditional aspects of masculinity.

Predisposition for care-giving. Stories from many of the men interviewed often
included definitions of themselves as caring, emotional, and intuitive, with a natural
predisposition to care-giving that precluded their fulltime care-giving arrangements. A far
cry from traditional images of hegemonic masculinity, these fathers’ definitions of self
contradicted the assumptions that masculinity and fathering are unemotional and learned,
and instead asserted that qualities such as caring, affection and parenting intuition are
indeed natural and further, inherently masculine. These fathers spoke of their
predisposition toward care-giving:

“I think being a homemaker was similar to what I wanted
to do in my personal life when I had time and similar to my
role I had in my nuclear family originally. Also, in
boarding school I was head boy and did a lot of
organizational things and so it was not unusual for me to
take responsibility and organize peoples’ lives and kind of
help in a larger group rather than dance in my own personal
goals”

“It was never something that I thought couldn’t happen for
me. As long as I can remember, I’ve always known that at
some point in my life if I would have kids than I would be
at home with them. Basically as far back as I can remember
thinking about being a husband or father, I knew that I
would be home with my kids for a period of time. So this is
more of a fulfillment of, not a dream, but a vision of where
I thought I would be at some point in my life.”

For many of the fathers interviewed, fulltime fathering was not only a matter of rational
choice and the weighing of financial options, but for two fathers in particular it was
solely a matter of natural propensity and personal fit. However when each of the fathers
were asked if being a fulltime care-giver to their children had changed the ways in which
they view themselves, the answers were overwhelmingly “no”. Instead, the majority of
fathers expressed their strong desire to be fulltime caregivers, their propensity towards
care-giving, and their natural take-up of the role.

“It (being a care-giving father) has perhaps amplified or
solidified some of the ideas that I had about myself, more
than changed. It’s like its assured me of some of the things
that I thought about myself, especially in terms of affection
and care. I always knew that I would be able to fulfill those
roles as a parent well and be able to rise to the task of being
a fulltime caregiver, and to largely achieve that has been reassuring.”

“Mostly it has amplified my sense of self and my capacity for care”

“It was a smooth transition because I had cared for my mother for years and my father, they both passed, and they needed quite a bit of care. …Care-giving came easy, a lot easier for me than for some men if they are forced into it I guess.”

I’ve always been, since my earliest memories going back to when I was 6 years old, but even then, I was always a sensitive kid and always sensitive to peoples’ relationships and to how people were feeling and so I had a lot of women as friends and I’ve always been more of a nurturing person. I wasn’t really a “macho” guy so I didn’t really have any moulds to break there - any barriers to kind of break down.

While the decision about who would work and who would care for children within these families was complex, six participants stated that their eagerness for the role, and/or their personal characteristics were major factors in the decision-making process. An exception existed for one father who was a primary caregiver for his children temporarily due to unemployment.

*Finding a balance.* Fathers reported that decisions about work and care were based on a number of factors, and generally expressed happiness and gratitude for the opportunity to either temporarily or permanently spend their fulltime hours caring for their children. Three of the fathers’ stories about the benefits of the decision to care fulltime for children brought to light a number of values such as `balance’, `wholeness’, and `completeness’:

“Maybe I do think of myself more as a complete human being. In terms of being more, like you can handle things that you didn’t think you could.”
“I guess that was also an opportunity to find greater life balance and do things to take care of the rest of my family as well, which was also a pleasure.”

“Maybe I see myself as being more whole actually. Yeah, I mean there’s nothing that has been more important in my entire life than my kids. So I see myself I guess as more whole.”

“Just watching her joy and amazement at things we just take for granted, or the stuff we just walk right by without noticing as adults. …I think that my having sort of reconnected with the simple things, simple joys is probably my number one.”

Their words seem to describe a holistic sense of well-being for these men. Further, seven of the nine fathers participating in this study described family life as a central value for them through their accounts of the advantages of being a fulltime care-giver and their reflections upon their experiences. For example:

“It has certainly changed my perspective on things; priorities, and what I think is important. When I go back to work, I will be refusing to get a Blackberry, things like that. …When I go back to work, work will be important but it’s just work. And family stuff, I think is way more important. I mean, they only grow up once, right?”

“The benefit of it for me comes from getting to spend a lot of time with my children that I think a lot of fathers don’t get.”

“The main bonus for me was to really experience family. I just knew for me the value of family was more important than the value of money at that point, so I was willing to take the risk.”

The focus on family life and holistic well-being that includes both work-related goals and a strong emphasis on participation in family life were consistent among fathers in this study.
Aligning with traditional aspects of masculinity. Curious about fathers’ perceptions of care-giving and masculinity, I asked: Is care-giving manly? One father explains:

“To me it is. It is also likely more for my generation than previous generations. The way I look at it, it’s not so much that care-giving men are assuming feminine roles, it’s just that the obligations of fatherhood are evolving to include care-giving. I think you could argue that the obligations of motherhood are also changing, and now include things that were once the exclusive domain of fathers.”

This father’s description emphasized an evolution of fatherhood and motherhood that incorporates additional responsibilities over time. A second father agrees:

“I think it’s more a geographic and cultural phenomenon where men are allowed more to do those things and even expected more to do it, and we also want to step up and be more engaged. So maybe there is sort of a new masculinity developing that can incorporate child care to some extent”

While many men in this study view fulltime care-giving as an extension or evolution of the fathering role, some men conceptualized their role as created ‘from scratch’, keeping aspects of traditional masculinity that fit for them, and discarding duties that may be traditionally feminine, or that don’t ‘fit’.

It can be concluded that many men participating in this study are creating their care-giving role as they go along. Part of the process of creation has involved remaining aligned with traditional aspects of masculinity that fit, and shedding others that do not. Most commonly, traditionally masculine affective traits have been shed in favour of traits like emotional sensitivity, affection, gentleness and patience that play a part in the day to day care of children. Yet some fathers remain attached to traditional sources of
masculinity such as paid work, home repair, and sex. In terms of work life, one father, who cares for two young children and works part time, shared:

“I love being with the kids and I think we’re really fortunate that we get to spend so much time with them, especially all together when [my wife] is on her days off, but I don’t know, I feel like I should be working more. …Like, if we could reverse it in a sense, then I’d rather be out working and leave the care-giving to her, because there’s the whole view of it. Even if people are smiling and happy to your face, it doesn’t matter. Even if I was making a million dollars it wouldn’t matter. Me staying home and [my wife] working, people look down at it.”

A fulltime father for two years reflects on the provider role:

“I miss earning, I earn some money now, I get to out occasionally on evenings and weekends to do some shifts but it’s not a lot of money, it’s basically just a little spending money. But I do miss being able to provide more, I miss being able to provide more for the house.”

A third father speaks of the additional fulfillment that working outside the home can provide:

“I have had the opportunity to teach a second course, but I’ve been waffling a bit because I think at some point if all you do is watch children…for me anyways, I enjoyed the first year I had but I did want to have some adult contact and so this one course is sufficient to allow those sort of higher level cognitive processes to go on and I can talk to people about things other than children”.

These fathers expressed mixed feelings toward the social pressure and their own desires to engage in paid work, an activity that is highly supported and praised in males. Other fathers reported fulfillment through engaging in home repairs, hobbies and projects, and the sexual relationship with their spouse, reflecting typically masculine associations.
Furthermore, fulltime fathering was often described in ways that inferred masculine traits, such as adventure and bravery, which perhaps served to position the primary care-giving role within current definitions of masculinity.

“I’m kind of adventurous. I want to take him on adventures and have him learn new things.”

“Many men have commented that they are/were jealous, or they expressed pride for me taking it on. This may have also been a compliment – thinking that I was brave to grab hold of the opportunity to parent in this way.”

“I think my daughter also thinks that I am an adventurer and she’s always like “what are we going to do?!?” and even if the adventure is like, “we’ve got to go to Home Depot to pick up parts for this!”, I try to make it into an adventure so I think she’s sees me as access to adventure as well.”

“I’ve done a lot of strange things like I travelled in Pakistan and India and all those places, and I saw this as another adventure.”

These comments portray fulltime care-giving as an opportunity to engage in typical masculine behaviour, repositioning care-giving as not a feminine role, but a masculine one.

By the same token, stereotypically domestic responsibilities such as household chores were in some cases excluded from men’s roles as primary caregivers.

“I think [my wife] wishes that I got more stuff done around the house… but I just want to spend all my time with them! I guess it’s kind of a dad thing. But I just feel like if I was vacuuming or something I would feel like I was ignoring them.”

“My wife and I came to the decision quite quickly that I would look after the kids, I would do that, but she wouldn’t expect me to have dinner on the table when she came home or the laundry.”
“I would try as much as I could to keep things organized, but she would come home and the house would be a mess and they’d be running around and there’d be diapers in the corner and I would be like, look, this is all I can manage. I can’t do the domestic stuff as well, and perhaps that was me as well engaging in some sort of negotiation about it saying, I can’t be a perfect mom, as in my goal is to have fun with the kids and do things and all that stuff can just wait.”

_Fathers in “Women’s Spaces”_

All of the men that were interviewed for this study reported feeling as though they were moving within a “women’s world” at some point in their care-giving experience, either through noticing they were the only male parent present, hearing comments from others, or feeling uncomfortable in certain female-dominated areas. Five of the men expressed that their experiences were on account of the fact that fulltime care-giving by a father is still considered novel, especially to older generations, who are often the ones commenting. Following are some of the fathers’ comments:

“Every time I take them out of the house I always have old people staring at me. A lady came up to me in the mall and said “wow, you really have your hands full” She was really surprised that a man has two babies.”

“Sometimes when people see me with the children, there is a presumption that I am not the primary caregiver, i.e. that I must have the day off or am giving my wife a break from caring for the kids. I get this presumption mainly from older people, who say things like “those three boys must be a handful for your wife”. They’re not being judgemental they just have a different perception of parental norms based on their experiences.”
“It was no dads, just moms and me, and I was constantly and repeatedly asked “Where’s mom?” It was a lot of nannies actually that asked that.

Many of the men reported that these comments did not affect them personally, and that they were coming from people with little experience with fathers as fulltime caregivers. All of the fathers expressed comfort with their own role, and though they noticed others’ reactions, they expressed that they were more or less unaffected. However, one father shared an interesting story about the response he attracts at a local café that he visits regularly with his children:

“We sit there and then we have a sandwich and the woman in the café – I think they lose money on us – because she just loads up this sandwich, because I think she thinks you know, like “this may be the only thing that they’re eating, who knows?” you know? And kind of like, she brings them extra snacks and things and I don’t know what the, I’m sort of speculating about her motives, but I swear that’s an $8 sandwich that costs me $5 kind of thing, that maybe she’s embedded saying, you know, this guy, he seems to be doing a decent job – I go there probably 4 times a week – but every time I go she makes sure that they’re eating enough and they have their little juices and snacks and I think that’s her way of inject[ing] some maternal instincts into the equation which maybe to an outside seems kind of devoid of those characteristics.”

Reflecting on this story, this father wondered if the attention he received from the woman at the café may be on account of his parenting being questioned, maybe even unconsciously, by the woman. Very generally, there is a sense that the men in this study feel a certain “social gaze” (Doucet, 2004) with varying ideas about possible motives. But nonetheless this gaze is a very noticeable part of the fathers’ experiences as fulltime care-givers of their children.
Each of the fathers articulated experienced feeling like an “outsider” at some point and often in specific situations, including being the “token father” in a parenting group, or the only father at the playground. Two fathers shared stories about how their physical presence as a father affected a group of parents:

“We went to the beach, all of us together, and hung out, and it’s not something I thought about beforehand, but in the moment I realized that I was the only parent who brought my bathing suit. And I wondered if it was because I was a male and in attendance that they may have chosen not to.”

“I went to one program that my wife had been in at our local library, and it was maybe ten or twelve women with kids there and anyway, at the end of that class, the woman that was facilitating it came up to me and suggested that there might be other programs that are geared toward male caregivers. It kind of caught me by surprise because it wasn’t a mommy-and-kid class; it was just a generic child program or something like that. I think I was too stunned at the time, I didn’t know how to respond. I was so taken aback. Like I say, I tend to be pretty sensitive to people’s feelings and I didn’t feel like I was disturbing anybody.”

Specific physical environments appear to affect the ways in which male and female parents respond to one another in groups. Some of the fathers shared that early childhood environments such as infant groups or daycare centres were the most uncomfortable, and as children grew, the fathers’ presence became more normalized.

“When the children are very young, the moms are nursing and whatever and it’s hard to be in there, but later on I got involved in elementary school and a little bit in high school, coaching sports and being involved in a lot of things. So the worst thing I guess was the beginning, getting accepted.”

“It would be fair to say it was a little more awkward when the boys were infants because that it is very rare to see a father looking after a 6-9 month old full time. There is still
a lot of special infant-mother bonding going on during that age – something that a father doesn’t have – which makes you feel a little more like an outsider.”

“It’s just inherent maybe, and there’s a sense that maybe men are invading women’s space, or women’s entitlement to raise children in a women-centered environment around a playground or daycare or elementary school. I mean, it changes in high school because the women are starting to want to live their own lives and drop the kids and do something on their own, but they’re very into child-rearing in the early days and that’s great.”

Furthermore, one father admitted that he felt generally more comfortable and accepted by other parents when his children were in high school or when he was involved in sport, a stereotypically masculine domain in which he could be viewed as acceptable.

“If I was around sport, then dads would come around more often or women are now talking to you as a person who is knowledgeable about sport, so it is a better setting than to be talking about... I mean, you might have children 5, 3 and 1 and the person is nursing and you know you don’t have that in common with them so maybe they have to excuse themselves and it’s just touchy. But if you’re out there watching their 8 year old play baseball then you’re on totally safe territory.”

Overall, these fathers shared many experiences of feeling like “outsiders” as primary caregivers to their children, by both noticing the novelty of their role, and perceiving the reactions of others. Environments deemed inherently feminine such as infancy and early childhood spaces were often uncomfortable for men, which improved when fathers felt appropriated either within environments with older children, or through sport.
Community Support

The third major focus of this thesis is how can we better support fathers who are primary caregivers of children? Community Support can be defined as support that is more formal in nature and provided by volunteer or professional groups in order to serve a community. Participants were asked about their parenting needs and also about community services that they access in order to understand how stay-at-home fathers can be supported within their communities.

Isolation was mentioned by the majority of fathers to be a downside to being a fulltime stay-at-home father at times. As mentioned previously, many fathers found that being the sole father among a group of women or within "women’s spaces" was sometimes a hindrance to meeting social support needs. A number of fathers also found that isolation occurred often on account of a lack of access and due to logistical constraints, especially among fathers who were in long-term stay-at-home care arrangements – those who have had primary care of children for more than one year and who continue to be committed to fulltime care-giving into the future, and those with multiple children in their care. One father, who shared parenting with his wife for the first year and then became a fulltime caregiver when his wife returned to work over one and a half years ago, said:

“I miss socializing with other people even in a work environment, you know? It’s not entirely casual social reality, but there’s it least someone with another idea out there, something different to say. I miss that for sure right
now and it would be really good to find more opportunities to get that back.”

Another father, who was a fulltime stay-at-home father to four children also cited isolation as a negative to fulltime care-giving, and acknowledged the logistical and practical challenges to the role.

“Being isolated, not so much for lack of opportunity, but just because you can’t leave the house. We shared one car and sometimes my wife would take it to work and sometimes I would keep it, but it might be three days in a row without a car in a rainy period of time and you needed social support in the neighbourhood and maybe you had it, maybe you didn’t. …So it was difficult getting social needs met and you know. Not so much just because I was a man, just because there were 4 children under the age of 10, it was demanding and I would always look forward to my wife walking through the door at 6:00pm because I would get a break and have someone to talk to and that kind of thing.”

Among fathers who took temporary leave from work to care for children, isolation was a fear, but not necessarily a reality.

Preference for informal supports. Though five of the participants spoke of experiencing isolation in their role at one time or another, and three of the fathers reported attending community programming for parents and children, interestingly, formal community supports specifically for men such as fathers groups, were almost unanimously discounted as unnecessary. The majority of men in this study reported a preference for informal community supports. It was further indicated that although both male and female primary care-givers have similar needs in terms of community support, there may be differences in the ways in which women and men seek support.
It was often reported within the interviews that fathers recognized that the everyday stressors that are encountered by them are common to the job of parenting, and further, that father’s needs are not different from those of mothers’. When asked about creating an ideal program for fathers, one father commented:

“Part of me says that it should include moms. I don’t honestly think that dads need anything different from what moms need. …There may be a benefit in doing the same things that moms do but just having it for dads only, from time to time, but not as an exclusionary thing”.

However, while many of the participants echoed this view, there was also a strong acknowledgement by the fathers that to some extent women and men differ in their help-seeking styles. This perceived difference between women and men was communicated in many of the interview transcripts. Specifically, it was suggested that women who are parents can and do form relationships with each other through caring for their children and benefit from social and informational support in groups, while men tend to focus on their parenting tasks at hand, and receive social and community support in informal settings, and mainly outside of their role of stay-at-home father:

“It’s a little more difficult to establish relationships with the adults that I’m around with during the day because, you know, they’re mostly nannies or moms and it’s not like I can’t talk to them – I do – but I’m not going to go for coffee with them. The moms kind of group up and establish relationships with each other and might do things together outside of looking after their kids and stuff like that. But I’m not part of that; it just doesn’t work out that way. It’s not that there aren’t people I talk to, but it’s different. …When you do occasionally run into guys that are looking after their kids as well it’s, I don’t know if it’s a guy thing, but I don’t think we naturally gravitate toward each other. It’s not like “Hey, I’m a stay-at-home dad”, and “I’m a stay-at-home dad too, let’s …” I don’t know if moms are
more likely to do that, as opposed to guys, and just because we’re guys and we’re different? Or maybe that’s just me.”

“Some women would drop the kids, go and do an aerobics class at the community centre and then come here to the coffee shop and visit. They got what they needed during the day and I think men are a little less inclined to reach out and make those kinds of arrangements.”

Seven of the nine participants cited preference for informal community and social supports to meet their need for social and community interaction. Everyday events such as watching at the sidelines of sports events, riding the bus with young children, visiting neighbourhood shops, having time alone with a wife or partner, and interacting in community spaces and religious institutions were all acknowledged by men to be helpful in staving off isolation and providing for social needs and community support. A preference for informal supports was evident in much of the data. One father, the primary care-giver to his two children for more than five years, gave the example of the community he experiences at his local pool: “I am very thankful to have the pool here so close by. I go regularly and see other men there and say hello. It’s very sort of superficial hellos, but I’ve been going there for over 5 years”. This father indicated that his daily routine and familiarity within his neighbourhood pool community created a sense of belonging and helped to meet his need for social interaction. Similarly, when asked about formal supports for fathers, participants shared the following views on their preferences:

“I’m just more of an introverted person, and I spend a lot of time by myself and with my kids. I’d rather just hang out with my kids than have some kind of group. …Like a dad’s group or something, I would never do! No matter what it was, it’s just not my cup of tea. Just as I wouldn’t go and hang out with strangers, it’s just not my thing.”
“These playgroups have been really great, but discussing parenting stuff to the extent that ladies do is not something that I would probably do. Friendship is a good thing, but getting together with other men who are caring for kids is not a big thing for me.”

A preference for unstructured or informal community and social support was overwhelmingly portrayed within participant interviews. One participant, a “home dad” for more than 10 years explains:

“You need to fill your stroke bucket. You need to have contact with people so that you can continue to deal with your kids. For mental health, emotional health, you need community support. But whether you need it institutionally or whether you need it through a change of mind…? You need to have openness to it. Maybe there needs to be something for parents, not just men, but parents, a place where you know you can just drop in and good people will be there that you know. So it’s not a set time, it’s not organized, it’s just that you can go out – like in England there’s pubs and in warmers cultures you’re on the street corner, or wherever – but here, because of the weather and because it’s a busy city and people have obligations and such, I think you need a place to hang out where people know you and where you can just go. That’s why parents end up at the sidelines of the soccer game – because they can find people they know there that are at the same stage of life. You need to have informal places that you can be where it’s safe and people know you and unfortunately when it’s raining and dark and stuff, those places aren’t available as much. But there are moms I know that would take their kids to a soccer practice and would stay. And why do you stay and watch a practice? Because you want to commune with someone, you know? And so I think there just needs to be enough activities that are communal in the neighbourhood where people can do that.”

Informal spaces were highlighted as integral for social interaction and adult contact for the fathers interviewed.
Role of formal community support. Many of the fathers interviewed had attended some form of formal community programming for parents and children at some point. The programs attended by the fathers in this group were primarily children’s recreational programs with parental participation, and unstructured drop-in playtime or gym activities that required parent supervision, although three fathers had attended registered programs specifically for fathers and children such as the Man on the Moon Program. Three fathers reported attending drop-in activity programs at community centres, neighbourhood houses or family centres regularly in order to engage with their children in a different environment, or have a short break while program staff briefly watched the children. These fathers expressed that they attend these programs because they provide a “destination” for them and their children, they can provide a short break, and are a platform in the community for finding out about other community and family-friendly events. Additionally, many fathers identified “getting out” and “having a place to go” as important parts of their day, both for the benefit of their children, and for themselves. These fathers communicated the importance of exposing their children to a variety of play materials and experiences and socialization with other children, as well as the opportunity for fathers to engage with other adults and enjoy the benefits of a parenting community. For these three fathers, formal social spaces made connecting with other parents and children easier and more natural:

“The play groups that we have around this place, quite a number of them across Vancouver we have visited, are just so helpful for me because being a male, you don’t have the same sort of connection with other mothers that might be around and so to have something a little more formal like that, then I’m able to get them socialized a bit and so their life seems quite rounded in many respects.”
When prompted to speak of the community programs that they attended and their impact on fulltime fathers, the most prominent responses were that formal programs play a large role in normalizing families with stay-at-home fathers, due to the inclusive nature of the settings as well as through promoting “open minds”. “Open minds” was mentioned by a number of fathers, regarding the necessity for women who dominate early childhood spaces (both mothers and female caregivers) to adapt to the changing norms of increasing father presence:

“There were things for women because women were the only ones doing it. So now that men are doing it, do they need to be segregated? They have the same issues as women, mostly, I mean, there may be physical differences, there may be some kind of genetic differences between men and women, but basically the process is the same so I just think that maybe women have to open up and say, well, there’s men in this group.”

According to the fathers that had attended community programs, formal programs support open mindedness in two ways: by providing spaces for fathers, and through modelling attitudes of inclusion and acceptance. The provision of inclusive family spaces, and specifically a visible male presence was important to fathers, with many men citing discomfort at being the “token father”. According to the fathers in this study that attended formal programs for families, these programs helped to normalize the increasing presence of stay-at-home fathers.

“Programming was very accepting of dads and there were more dads there. I mean, on the playground it was mostly moms and nannies, but at programs that I was able to attend...there were many more dads there. The people that were running the programs were more than welcoming:
“it’s so nice to have you here, how can we support you?”
lots and lots of stuff.”

“The neighbourhood house has a Man on the Moon program, and we did that a couple of times when he was wee. I think that having programs that invite specifically fathers is good, even if they’re not primary caregivers, it’s really good for fathers. And the more the fathers are around, the easier it is for the people there to see them as equal parents and not as something different or precious or special.”

In terms of encouraging open-mindedness toward fathers, one father points to the subtle ways in which the staff at the family centre he attends models an open attitude toward care-giving fathers:

“The staff at the family center see me as a parent, just like they would any other parent, and they encourage others who come in to do the same. I am frequently introduced to newcomers as “one of the volunteers” and also as “one of our dads that comes”. Simply, I think, throwing that out there, making that obvious and not making a point beyond that helps people go “oh, it’s that simple”. So the more that places can voice that, simply, for others who come in, and to say that this is the standard of how we view this, this is the standard of acceptability, the easier it is for everyone simply to take the next step forward and you know, walk that walk.”

Though the men interviewed are divided in terms of how much they access formal community supports, a sample of stay-at-home fathers stated benefits. Community resources for families were reported to have an impact on supporting fathers in their roles as primary care-givers, by both providing room for fathers in traditionally female-dominated spaces, and by supporting acceptance and inclusion in the broader parenting community.
**Informational Support**

Informational support includes advice, suggestions, directives, and any information source that assists a person to respond to situational demands. As children move through different developmental stages, parents often seek out information to help them parent through particular stages. As a researcher, I was curious where fathers receive informational support about parenting and how they make parenting decisions, in order to draw conclusion about how to best support fathers and their informational needs in the community. The broad overarching theme of individualistic help-seeking was constructed from the data, within which four main patterns of gathering informational support were identified: 1. Figuring it out “on the fly”; 2. Consulting the internet; and 3. Observing peers and role models; and 4. Decision-making with a partner. Each of these patterns will be discussed in detail below.

**Help-seeking.** Fathers participating in this study reported that they use a variety of self-driven strategies to seek out parenting information, including responding to situations as they arise, using resources on the internet, observing friends or family members, discussing with a partner, and reading parenting books. In a very general sense, the impression given is that these fathers tend to use individualized and self-sought strategies over communal parenting resources such as parenting courses or seeking ‘expert’ advice. The exception here is when a child or children had medical needs, in which case advice from medical professionals was required, sought and appreciated.

1. Responding to situational demands

Not exactly help-seeking in an official sense, three of the fathers interviewed answered that they do not tend to seek out help at all, and rather, they would respond to
the varied demands of parenthood as they arose. Similar to the fathers’ tendencies to “make it up as they go”, discussed in detail in the section about “doing” fatherhood, these fathers did not seek external sources of information and preferred to handle the various demands of parenting as they came up. When asked about parenting role models, one father of multiples commented on the lack of available role models for him:

“I haven’t found anyone who could act as a role model for me and I think because my experience is so unique, I don’t expect to or I’m not looking for it. I’m not needing to find the care-giving father of twins that is a few years down the line that I can look up to. But it does mean that you’re making up things as you go along, which is true for me and my circumstances, and also other men to some degree, because it depends on the whims of your children and whether they’re happy or one is happy and one is sad or this and that. Sometimes there is just no rational basis for choosing one thing over the other, and I’m so used to having to make up those decisions on the spot that I’m not seeking out someone to give me that guidance because sometimes it’s just so absurd. There’s no moral superiority between one or the other, so you just have to throw yourself into one or the other! I do that every day.”

This father acknowledged that his primary care-giving status with young twins is unique, and he does not “recognize anyone else like him” in the parenting spaces that he attends. A lack of available role models seems to influence this father in a way that encourages him to “do” parenting in his own unique way. Another father spoke further about his tendency to deal with parenting issues as they come up and in his own way:

“Very rarely will I ask people for advice. I might ask my wife sometimes about something but I’ve never phoned my mom or anything like that. I’ve just kind of muddled my way through it. I’ve never sought advice on the internet or gone to any classes or things like that. It doesn’t mean that I don’t need to, I mean maybe sometimes I do; maybe it’d
be easier if I did. But I don’t. …I have a tendency to try to deal with things by myself. That’s just in my nature.”

Whether it is on account of a lack of need, in their nature, or in order to blaze a trail, many fathers stated their preference to not consult external resources for parenting advice.

2. Consulting the Internet

While a percentage of fathers felt similarly about figuring things out as they went, others with parenting questions would consult the internet for answers, which had the advantages of being convenient, anonymous, and able to provide a large amount of information in a short amount of time: “I would Google questions I had about things and usually it was mothers that had blogs that I would find”; “I’d talk to friends, I’d talk to my parents, and sometimes I would just look on the internet, and Google it; just reading peoples’ anecdotal experience with things”; “I have not been beyond posting it to my facebook profile and I get interesting types of responses there”.

When asked about where he gets information about specific parenting questions, one father answered:

“Probably the internet. I Google a lot of things. I do a lot of internet searching. Even potty-training, I found a lot of different resources online. You can sign up online for things; there are tons of resources online. If you don’t know when you can feed him strawberries, or whatever, just Google it and the majority answer will be the right one.”

The internet seemed to be a common go-to resource more than half of fathers seeking information about common parenting issues, with the advantages of convenience and
anonymity being strong rationale. One father affirmed that the development of internet resources for parents would be a positive support for stay-at-home parents:

“When you’re home all day you spend a lot of time on the internet, and so maybe a good chat room or things like that – bulletin boards, that kind of thing. That is actually something that I would have used. Just to read other peoples’ experiences…and how things worked for them”

The internet gave these parents a platform to pose questions, share ideas, and gain answers and was a common source of informational support for many of the fathers interviewed.

3. Learning through observation and reflecting on role models

Another form of individualistic help-seeking that fathers reported was observing other parents, including taking cues from their own parents or role models. Eight of the fathers in this study mentioned having parenting role models, many of which included their wives. A few fathers reflected on additional influences:

“I think my biggest role model though is my grandmother. I know that she loved all of her grandchildren, I know that, but I particularly appreciate the level of care and understanding and love that she showed me. So I guess if anything I try to live up to that standard.”

“When I was growing up in Vancouver in my late elementary years, there was a family across the street with six kids and they had a totally opposite kind of vibe than my own family. We were more, dinner is at 6pm and you have a well-balanced meal and everybody sits down and that kind of thing. Christmas is very orderly. And in this house, shit hit the fan all the time and there were kids running around and they ate hot dogs at 5:30pm and they just went back to playing kick the can or whatever. It wasn’t so much the homemaker there but the style that I learned from.”
Observations of the qualities and child-rearing styles of friends and family members from their own childhoods were taken into consideration by some of the fathers in terms of how they fashioned their own family life. Fathers frequently mentioned that they adopted some of the remembered qualities and values of their parents, such as stability, traditions, affection, and care, and incorporated them into their styles as parents. Along the same lines, three fathers also reported that they look to their peers for both information and validation:

“My wife’s sisters, I witness how one parents and I see it as similar to what I am doing. We are kind of peers so I more see it as confirming that what I am doing is right. It’s right for them, and I watch them and I appreciate that that’s very similar to how I’m parenting.”

“I’ll admire lots of people if I see them doing a good job as a parent, and I’ll try to adopt that approach.”

“To tell you the truth, I look at what people do and recognize that as what I don’t want to do.”

Observing peers and role models, both male and female, was significant for many of the men interviewed and allowed fathers to learn, adopt, or omit parenting practices.

4. Role of partners

By and large, the majority of fathers (eight of nine) reported that all major parenting decisions were made together with their partner, and that much of their informational support is gained from their female partners. When asked about where he finds information about child-rearing or child development, this father of two says:

“Most of that comes from my wife. For stuff that was pregnancy-related, I did a lot of research, finding out what
she could eat, what happens, those kinds of things, but as far as child development goes and most of that, I ask my wife and she knows. And in terms of discipline, we always talk about that. Like if something happens for the first time and we don’t know what to do, whoever punishes, then we decide if that was the right thing and we talk about what we’re going to do so that we’re on the same page. We like to be consistent.”

Instead of looking to external sources, many of the fathers interviewed stated that they turned to their wives for informational support, either because female partners had previously been the primary caregiver to a child, or because they had done more of the “research”, often accessing informational resources in the community themselves. When asked about where he acquires information about parenting when he has a question, one father explained:

“Probably my wife because my mother wasn’t around. I mean, I read books about parenting a bit, she read them more extensively… but probably my wife was the only person I talked to.”

Another father answered:

“My wife, definitely my wife. Also my mother to some degree but mostly my wife. I just think she’s a fantastic mother and she’s the expert so when I had any questions, she is the one that I’d ask.”

Female partners were seen by many of the fathers to be a strong source of information about parenting, and though female partners mainly worked fulltime outside of the home, it was reported that they carry a portion of parenting responsibility, most often including research and information gathering, and organization and planning. Says one father:

“I let my wife to all of the reading because I’m a very slow reader and so I kind of “do” with my kids and she does all
the reading behind the doing. And a lot of the planning, while I’m more of spur of the moment.”

A partner was most often cited as one of the fathers’ main role models for parenting.

*Role of formal informational support.* Though some fathers showed a preference for obtaining individualized and self-driven informational support in a variety of ways, other fathers received information about parenting through formal sources such as parenting classes, and through staff in various family centres and community spaces. When asked about where they look to find information about parenting, fathers shared these comments:

“I think the ladies down at the family place have been very good, very helpful for me.”

“Well, the angels down there at family place. And I’ve gone to a couple of courses and gotten my wife to come too. You know, the different courses: Nobody’s Perfect, an Adlerian course, a few like that.”

“The staff there are just so great to talk to and they go out of their way to answer any questions I have.”

The staff that these three fathers refer to supervise various family drop-in programs at family centres across Vancouver. Families with children under 5 years can attend during drop-in hours and use the playroom and kitchen facilities in an unstructured way. The fathers’ accounts support a view of community programs such as community centres, family places and neighbourhood houses as helpful in meeting fathers’ informational needs through answering questions and/or suggesting outside resources. As mentioned previously, the family drop-in programs specifically attracted many of the fathers participating in this study as it gives them a “destination” and allows for the children to
experience different toys and a social environment. According to these three fathers, the staff at family centres were professional and well-informed and were a main source of information about parenting and child development, due in large part to the development of trusting relationships, the informal atmosphere created by programs such as drop-in programs, and the wealth of information and resources on hand. A father of one explains:

“I did the Nobody’s Perfect program with them [family centre staff] about two years ago and that was very beneficial because we were in the room with not only two childcare professionals, but with other parents too so we were all sharing our experiences, our trials, our hardships, our successes, and then about 3 or 4 months ago, my son was about two and a half and I was feeling a new sense of I don’t feel equipped to deal with these new challenges, and I don’t want to make too many missteps at this point and so I tried to re-initiate that kind of process. And one of the ladies said “here, take this DVD home and watch this.”

“…There’s one lady at the family centre who will not even use the language of misbehaviour. She won’t even say “misbehaviour” she wont say “bad boy”, even the worst little terror will be called a “good kid”, you know, “having some challenges”, but “a good kid”. So there’s always that support there to encourage the direction that we all need our children to grow into. I’ve gotten a lot from that centre.”

Family spaces such as community centres, family places and neighbourhood houses appear to provide informational support in the form of classes, programs and resources for parents who seek information through formal means, and through informal conversations, modelling, and relationship-building for other parents.
The Role of the Workplace

Though finances, desire, and personal fit were significant reasons for the men in these families to take on fulltime care-giving, workplace support also proved to be influential to families making the decision about who would work and who would care for children. Access to parental leave and extended benefits and an encouraging workplace culture contributed to the decision of the majority of the men (six out of nine) to be stay-at-home fathers. The role of finances was cited by each participant as a partial factor in the decision to take on the role of primary caregiver, but a workplace that was conducive to taking leave was a significant factor as well.

“We did it, for one reason is that I didn’t get the chance to do it before, I was curious about the experience and then also pragmatically where I work at the college, as with many public sector employment settings, I was able to get most of my salary while I was on leave. Whereas for [my wife], working in a private sector firm, she only got the EI, the standard leave. It wasn’t a huge thing but it made it sort of a no-brainer as they say, because I wanted to do it anyway, plus I was able to get my full salary. It worked really well.”

“I think that part of it is because I work for the federal government which is just all over that kind of thing. They really encourage and have things in place to allow you to do that. If it was a private workplace it might be a different story, particularly if I was in a legal profession as a guy. Very different.”

Many fathers spoke of the benefits afforded by public sector positions that are encouraging of employees to take leave. These were compared with the perceived barriers of private sector roles:

“…A couple years ago, [my wife] was working in a private law firm that frankly wasn’t very mother-friendly so she
couldn’t just get up and leave and expect to be welcomed back, so she had to stay in it. Whereas I had the benefit of being able to go back if I took time off.”

“[my wife] said if anyone did this, it would – if not formally, but maybe informally – it would be thought of as very unusual, and you know, not good for your career, whereas in my work setting nobody bats an eye. I wouldn’t say that it was common, but it is not uncommon either for fathers to take at least some of that time.”

For the men that worked in settings that were supportive of employees taking leave, the ability to be a stay-at-home father was an accessible option.
Discussion

This study provides an account of the experiences and opinions of nine stay-at-home fathers in British Columbia and offers a rich canvas for further exploration of fathering in Canada. The results of this study shed some light on the ways in which these fathers enact primary care-giving, their experiences and conceptualizations of masculinity, and their social and informational support needs. Each of these areas will be discussed below with particular emphasis on salient findings, connection with existing research, and implications for further research and practice with primary care-giving fathers.

Doing Fatherhood

Fathers’ accounts of their daily lives, values, and actions led to the construction of noteworthy themes regarding how these fathers engage in primary care-giving within their homes and communities. The fathers communicated parenting values such as love, connection, health, safety, affection, adventure, patience, and enrichment; and in particular, emphasized exploration and adventure. Many fathers pointed to the ways in which they enact this in their everyday lives with their children through daily outings, an active style of play, and the encouragement of curiosity and discovery. This is consistent with research on fatherhood that has repeatedly documented the nature of fathers’ care-giving as playful, “rough-and-tumble”, and active (Coltrane, 1996; Parke, 1996). Doucet (2006) in her research on primary care-giving fathers finds the ways in which stay-at-home fathers describe their parenting as significant as these stories illustrate the embodied nature of parenting. According to Doucet (2006) men often emphasize actions
and behaviours that support notions of masculine embodiment as strong and physical, through their emphasis on being outdoors, going on adventures, and engaging in physical activities with their children. Doucet (2006) who was influenced by the work of Goffman (1987), asserts that embodiment is significant because it influences how one practically “moves through spaces in ways that are acceptable, normal, and in concert with public expectation” (p.699) and it has a moral dimension in terms of the ways in which people interact together and form judgements about interactions. Utilizing this perspective, fathers may emphasize the physical and adventurous nature of fathering in order to act and define themselves as “normal” men (Doucet, 2006).

Within the current study, more often than not, the fathers who described their parenting in this way were temporary primary caregivers, as in those who had taken a portion of parental leave to care for a child or children fulltime. Men who were permanent or long-term primary caregivers were more likely to emphasize daily caring tasks and routines. This is an interesting finding as it implies that fathers who are merely taking a “break” from fulltime employment may feel a stronger need to act and be seen as an appropriate masculine actor, as compared with fathers who are or have been primary care-givers in long-term or permanent arrangements. It is possible that fathers taking temporary leave from work may identify more strongly with their work identities and therefore gravitate to more masculine conceptions of fatherhood while on leave. Research in the future could examine how fathers differ in their fathering experiences depending on the nature of their care-giving arrangement and shed light on the differences between men who take temporary work leave to care for children, and men who commit to longer term care.
Secondly, primary care-giving fathers pointed to ways in which fathering fulltime differed from mothering, most significantly through the lack of a “template”. Fathers appeared to approach parenting in a way that was not defined by motherhood discourse with its associated standards of childcare, household work, and social expectations, and was more in line with an individualized approach based on the needs of themselves and their children. In this sense, the men participating in this study did not appear to be bound by social prescriptions about what a primary care-giving father does, but seemed to have a sense of freedom to create their role for themselves. This freedom sometimes involved the flexibility to include or exclude responsibilities traditionally assigned to the care-giving role, such as domestic chores. Their comments may be an indication of the processes in which men’s roles in the home are created: without indelible prescriptions as to how it is done, and with some negotiations in terms of which roles are adopted and which are excluded. This may be indicative of the strong discourses of motherhood that are prevalent in North American culture and the subsequent lack of discourse informing the daily lives of primary care-giving fathers.

Further, fathers’ dialogues about how they enact parenting were often contrasted with their descriptions of mother’s actions. A focus on an unstructured schedule and play-based and child-led activities were central. Their dialogues provided further insight into how these fathers enact parenting in primary care-giving contexts, and may reflect gendered expectations that endure in contemporary Canadian family culture. Play, a lack of structure, and discipline seemed to take center stage in many of the fathers’ dialogues and may reflect traditional expectations of fathers’ roles within the family.
Along the same lines, some fathers expressed a view of motherhood as unique and central within the family, which is a consistent finding in family research with both mothers and fathers (Doucet, 2006). The attention paid to the exclusivity of the mother-child bond and “maternal instinct” lead many to assume women’s “natural” tendency to mother, leaving little room for fathers. Often women are believed to be better caregivers on account of their being female, and this gender essentialism is being highly contested in contemporary sociological research (Campbell & Carroll, 2007). Beliefs about the centrality of the mother-child bond are also largely based on women’s embodied experiences of pregnancy, birth and breast-feeding (Featherstone, Holloway, 2006; Doucet, 2009), experiences that men do not share. Because of this, fathers of young infants tend to focus on the care of the mother, or of older children (Doucet, 2006).

However at the same time, many of the fathers in this study expressed that their role within their families changed significantly from peripheral to central once they had taken on the primary care of their child/children. Their stories about being a central figure in their children’s eyes, having their children respond to them with trust and call to them for comfort painted a very different picture of fatherhood: one that is equally attuned to children and as significant a relationship as that of mothers. One participant referred to this as a “game-changer”. Two others had the experience of feeling “equal” to their female partners who could not breast-feed and were therefore very involved in the feeding and daily care of their infants. Research suggests that fathers who engage in the embodied tasks of child care such as feeding, bathing, and soothing feel greater connection with their children (Doucet, 2006). It is curious then that men in this study simultaneously expressed essentialist ideas about gender, while describing their own
abilities and predispositions that contest these very ideas. This provides some evidence that primary care-giving fathers are involved in a negotiation between discourses of mothering and fathering and their everyday experiences that both conform to and contest these norms.

*Masculinity*

Exploring fathers’ dialogues about care-giving provided insight as to how masculinity is conceptualized and experienced by these fathers. The language used by fathers to refer to their roles as primary care-giving men in their families was highlighted in this study. The deliberate use of gender-neutral language, and a disassociation from traditional notions or stories of fatherhood in many of the men’s reports seemed to differentiate fathers’ current roles from historical notions of fatherhood that do not seem to “fit” the experiences of fathers now and may assist these fathers in re-conceptualizing fatherhood. By and large, discourses and images of fathers as uninvolved in family life were used by many of the fathers to contrast their own descriptions and stories of family life. It is possible that without a shared or consistent ideology of fatherhood in the present, comparing fathering experiences with those of the past may be the most straightforward route toward defining what fatherhood means now. Finn and Henwood (2009) assert that looking into the past at examples of one’s own father, together with social constructions of “good” fatherhood, and other factors such as social class and family history is, “an important and inevitable reference point for imagining oneself as a father” (p. 552). Finn and Henwood (2009) concluded in their own study that the disassociation from the patriarchal traditional father offered men greater possibilities for engagement with their own children.
As previously mentioned, some of the fathers in the current study pointed to the ways in which their role as a primary care-giver helped to re-position themselves in a central role within their relationships with their children. These fathers’ stories conveyed a strong sense of connection and care that are less prominent in traditional stories of fathering that portray a rational and emotionally distant parent, and provided new references that may serve to fit their current experiences as primary and fulltime parents into current discourses of fathering. These stories are significant to redefining the many possibilities of what fathering means today.

Fathers conceptualized masculinity in several ways that contrasted greatly with traditional notions of hegemonic masculinity that implies that both tension and negotiation are occurring. In their study on male caregivers to elderly parents, Campbell and Carroll (2007) found that men had developed conceptualizations of masculinity that de-emphasize certain elements of hegemonic masculinity, such as not revealing emotions, and emphasizing others, such as taking charge. Similarly, some of the fathers in the current study de-emphasized aspects of hegemonic masculinity by describing a predisposition to care-giving that preceded their decision to become a primary care-giver to children, and by incorporating qualities such as empathy, patience, organization, and emotional receptivity into their descriptions of fatherhood. Moreover, the men in this study often emphasized holistic ideals of success which included qualities such as balance, wholeness and completeness, along with a focus on the importance of family life. The emphasis on balance and wholeness suggests that the men in this study are including wider definitions of success within their conceptualizations of masculinity than in previous generations. In this way, caring for children is also included within current
definitions of masculinity as it is seen as a means to attaining happiness, balance, and completeness. The values described by these fathers may be more in line with current social attitudes toward family life and work life than the views of previous generations.

Fathers participating in this study do not appear to position themselves within feminine discourse, but in many ways incorporate care-giving into masculine discourse. This is evidenced through dialogues that identify an “evolution” of masculinity and fatherhood that incorporate responsibilities such as domestic chores and child care, and through ties to typically masculine associations such as paid work, home repair, hobbies, being involved in their children’s sports activities, sex, and personal qualities such as bravery and adventurousness. At the same time, some fathers reject certain aspects of femininity that are associated with a care-giving role such as domestic chores. Studies on gender and the family have concluded that husbands will actively disassociate from housework as a way of doing gender when their own masculinity is threatened (Brine, 1994; Greenstein, 2000). A rejection of both femininity and also of associations with hegemonic masculinity, together with the incorporation of both feminine and masculine traits and values illustrates the ways in which these men are reconceptualising common constructions of fatherhood and masculinity. Connell, in his recent work states, “Masculinities are created in specific historical circumstances and, as those circumstances change, the gender practices can be contested and reconstructed” (Connell, 2000, p. 13-14). The taking up of traits and characteristics typically labelled feminine, combined with the association with work and other masculine activities and values, provides evidence that conceptualizations of masculinity and fatherhood are indeed
changing and may require a move beyond discussions of masculinity as a uniform construct and instead towards new theoretical understandings.

A social gaze is also evident in the dialogues describing father’s feelings of being an “outsider” in a “woman’s world”, and as previously mentioned is rooted in the societal attitudes that govern the appropriate and moral ways in which individuals move through public spaces (Goffman, 1987). Fathers’ accounts of feeling like the only man at the playground, or like an outsider within a group of mothers illustrate the existence of a social gaze that imparts a moral dimension to caring that “links being a good mother to caring, and being a good father to earning” (Doucet, 2004; p.295). One participant shared his story about how a woman working in a neighbourhood café routinely checked on him and his two young children to make sure the children had plenty to eat and drink, the assumption being that a man may not have the same capacity as a parent as a woman. Others recognized their influence as a physical body at the beach, or in a class for parents and children, or in early childhood spaces where women are breast-feeding, which illustrate another way in which embodiment matters (Doucet, 2006). As men are involved more in sporting activities or when their children are older, acceptance becomes possible as these are environments in which men are deemed appropriate.

Support

Among men who had taken on the primary care of children in a long-term arrangement (over one year) and men who cared for more than one child, isolation was cited as a downside to being a fulltime stay-at-home father, and an increase in social support was desired by many of the fathers. In one study identifying the predictors of relationship satisfaction, psychological well-being and life satisfaction among stay-at-
home fathers, Rochlen, Suizzo, and McKelley (2008) noted that support provided by a partner, and perceived support from friends were the highest predictors of relationship satisfaction and psychological distress, indicating that these types of perceived support are significant to fathers’ well-being. Social support was approached by the fathers in this study in a variety of ways that most often included time with a spouse, and informal community spaces such as sporting events, neighbourhoods, and religious institutions. A few fathers also looked to formal sources such as community centres and neighbourhood houses to meet the need for socializing with other parents, though fathers noted difficulties in forming social relationships with mothers, which is a common finding in research on stay-at-home fathers (Rochlen, Suizzo & McKelley, 2008).

In contrast, men who took temporary leave to care for a child or children reported a fear of isolation prior to taking on a primary care role, but cited that their fears did not become a reality. Instead, these fathers viewed their temporary status as “an adventure”, expressed appreciation for the time they were able to spend with their children, and often experienced surprise that they did not feel the isolation that they expected to in the role. It may be that these men with temporary fulltime care arrangements remained connected with their social networks regardless of their formal employment status and thus retained the relationships and activities that allowed them to feel supported. Over time, fathers in more permanent fulltime care arrangements may have become isolated from their traditional sources of social support such as the workplace, and experienced difficulty creating new relationships within their new role, particularly with women in care-giving environments. Research in the future could address the differences between these groups of fathers and explore how fathers experience social support while on temporary work
leave versus those fathers who take on primary care-giving for a substantial period of time.

Informal social supports such as friendships, conversations with peers, and community spaces “where people know you” appeared to be the most desired means of gaining social support, with some fathers reporting that formal family services such as Family Places or Neighbourhood houses facilitated this by providing a “place to go” or a destination for socialization for both their children and themselves. Further, a small portion of fathers in this study identified specific ways in which formal family services can benefit fathers: through normalizing and promoting the acceptance of father presence in otherwise female-dominated spaces. According to a few study participants, the actions and communication styles of staff members were pivotal to fathers’ feelings of comfort and acceptance within these spaces. These findings have significant implications for family support services that seek to serve fathers. From this small sample it can be hypothesized that family services have the potential to be beneficial to fathers by providing inclusive social spaces for parents and children, and attitudes that respect and promote the wider social acceptance of fathers as primary care-givers.

In terms of informational support, fathers largely described self-driven help-seeking styles that included “figuring it out”, searching the internet, observing peers, and decision-making with a partner. The attitude of adjusting to situational demands as they arise and “making it up” as one goes, has been observed in a number of studies on male care-giving (Campbell & Carroll, 2007; Russell, 2001). Some have hypothesized that this take-charge attitude is a stereotypically masculine value within North American culture and so the men utilizing this approach would be exercising an interpretation of
masculinity ("take charge") within a role that does not appear entirely masculine (care-giving) (Thompson, 2002). Further, research on men’s help-seeking attitudes indicates that men often privilege values of rationality, solitary thinking and problem-solving when facing difficult situations (Williams, 2009). Addressing gender-based norms or attitudes may be useful in addressing men’s needs for parenting information.

Observing peers and decision-making with a partner were also reported by many fathers in this study. As mentioned previously, the importance of a supportive spouse cannot be underplayed, as it has been cited to be a significant influence on father behaviours and also life satisfaction. With the majority of fathers citing their spouse as a main source of parenting information, this has significant implications for family services. In particular this implies that information sources aimed at both women and men are equally important, even when women work outside of the home fulltime. Data from fathers suggests that even when women are not the primary care-givers to children, they remain a major source of information for fathers and retain their position as decision makers and organizers within their families. This may be due to their prior experience as a primary care-giver to a child, as well as the cultural expectation of women to maintain a responsibility over children and parenting (Doucet, 2006).

In addition to individualized information gathering strategies, three fathers in this study turned to formal sources of support such as the staff members at family drop-in programs, or other professionals. Fathers point to a variety of parenting programs as well as informal relationships with staff as being helpful when they needed information about parenting and child development. Though fathers who sought information from formal sources were a minority among this sample, formal means of information-seeking should
not be overlooked. According to the three fathers who utilized formal sources of information, the sources were helpful due to the establishment of trusting relationships with staff, the provision of a safe environment to discuss issues with other parents, staff were open and non-judgemental, and because these sources were often linked to additional informational or community resources.

Role of the Workplace

Fathers who had taken leave from their employment to care for children fulltime described workplace policies that were highly supportive of leave. The majority of these men had been employed in public sector roles and described workplaces that were accepting of both temporary and long-term leave. It has been well documented that many barriers exist for men taking employment leave to stay home with children, such as gender ideology, social norms, and views of peers, coworkers and communities (McKay & Doucet, 2000; Seward et al, 2006). The fathers in this study support the notion that supportive a workplace culture and family-friendly policies play a strong role in enabling fathers to make choices regarding work and care that work for their families.

Workplace culture and government-sponsored policies have come a long way in supporting men’s involved roles within the home. With policies that address the wage gap between women and men and the ideological divide, governments can provide men and women with an increasingly egalitarian platform from which to make economic and domestic decisions affecting the care of children in Canada.
Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

A major limitation to this study is the relative homogeneity of the participant group. All of the participants were Caucasian, married and heterosexual, with the majority living in an urban Vancouver context. Future research would benefit from greater diversity in the participant sample in order to measure the relative impact of demographic factors on experiences of masculinity, enactment of parenting, and support needs. Furthermore, this study points to subtle differences in the experiences of fathers who take temporary employment leave to care for a child or children and fathers who take a more permanent primary care-giving role. Future research exploring these two groups of fathers in greater detail would likely yield insight into the reasons fathers take on primary care of children, perceptions of masculinity and employment, and the different support needs of temporary versus permanent primary caregivers.

This study utilized a small participant sample. The findings outlined in this study therefore represent the voices of a small group of fathers and cannot be generalized to a larger population. Research with a larger sample of fathers is therefore recommended in order to glean a greater collection of participant experiences and opinions.

Lastly, research on stay-at-home fathers has found evidence of social stigma that was mirrored by fathers in this sample. Critical research that attends to societal views of gender and family roles may be useful in order to explore stigma experiences of stay-at-home fathers as well as other individuals and groups that challenge prescriptive gender roles. Research attending to changing notions of gender discourse would also be recommended as this study points to evolving ideologies of masculinity and fatherhood.
In particular, an exploration of the impact of socioeconomic factors, geography, and other demographic factors on perceptions of masculinity is needed.

**Recommendations for Family Support Providers**

Findings from this study support previous research on fatherhood that identifies stigma or a “social gaze” (Doucet, 2004) upon men who undertake care work in predominantly women’s spaces. Fathers in this participant group identified that family service providers can support men in primary care-giving roles by normalizing father presence in community spaces and family programs, and by modelling inclusivity and acceptance within family spaces in which women predominate. Fathers reported benefitting from informal community spaces as sources of social support, and in particular, point to family services that provide informal child and family-friendly spaces for social interaction. Although it was noted that programs specifically aimed at fathers were helpful for normalizing fathers’ presence, the majority of fathers reported that programs serving parents more generally were more attractive and relevant to fathers.

In terms of informational support, findings from this study point to a preference for self-identified help-seeking strategies such as observing peers and searching the internet. Family service agencies that provide information about common parenting issues, child development, and community resources for families could benefit primary care-giving fathers by increasing the accessibility of information and providing it online. Further, informal family spaces can provide opportunities for modelling positive parenting skills and offer parents opportunities to engage with and learn from each other.

Lastly, research has identified that mothers often remain responsible for child-rearing, regardless of workforce participation (Doucet, 2006), with mothers involved in a
great deal of information-seeking and reading of parenting literature. Fathers in this study support this finding, indicating that information aimed at mothers through a variety of community sources is likely to reach fathers who stay at home.

In terms of workplace support for stay-at-home fathers, fathers in this study confirmed that policies that support employment leave were pivotal in fathers’ decisions to care for children both temporarily and long-term. Father-friendly policies such as those found in Norway (Brandth and Kvande, 2009) are significant as they reduce the social and ideological barriers that keep men from taking leave and allow families to make choices about work and child care.

Conclusion

Taken together, the findings from this study highlight the important contributions of care-giving fathers. Primary care-giving fathers participating in this study provided a range of ideas about their experiences of fathering, perceptions of masculinity, and parenting support needs. Their stories about enacting parenthood emphasized exploration and adventure, flexibility to create their own care-giving role, and distinctions between mothering and fathering. Perceptions of masculinity were communicated through gender-neutral language and by differentiating current experiences from traditional discourses of fatherhood. Though assumptions of “paternal difference” and “parental equality” (Earl & Letherby, 2003) were embedded in fathers’ dialogues, it was also evident through their powerful and unique stories, that men are reconceptualising traditional notions of masculinity and the father role, and thus opening up multiple possibilities for men. Men in this study rejected both hegemonic ideals of masculinity and also those deemed traditionally feminine, supporting the idea that men are navigating through gender
discourses, and their own values and roles to redefine what it means to be a man and father in contemporary Canadian society.

Participants identified multiple sources of support including partners, peers, community networks, and both formal and informal family support. Fathers overwhelmingly preferred informal community networks for social support, and individualized strategies for obtaining parenting information. Family support providers can benefit from the recommendations gleaned from their accounts.
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Appendix A: Recruitment poster

Are you a primary care-giving father in BC?

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by a graduate student in the School of Child and Youth Care at the University of Victoria that is taking place in Vancouver, BC

“Supporting care-giving fathers: Father’s perspectives on work and care”

The purpose of this study is to explore fatherhood through the eyes of care-giving fathers in BC in order to hear about the diverse experiences of fathers, and to inform community programs about father’s support needs and father-friendly practices. This research is important given the trend toward changing role expectations for men and women balancing work and family life in Canada.

To participate in this study, we are looking for fathers who are or have been:

- the primary care-giver to a child or children who are under the age of 10
- part of a two-parent partnership
- currently living in BC

Participation in this study is voluntary and involves a one to two hour interview at a time and location of convenience to you. Interviews will take place between December 10th, 2010 and January 5th, 2011 Participant’s anonymity and confidentiality will be strictly protected.

If you would like to participate in this exciting study, please contact Nicki Elischer at nicola.elischer@gmail.com
Appendix B: Participant Consent Form

Participant Consent Form

You are invited to participate in a study entitled “Supporting care-giving fathers: Fathers’ perspectives on work and care”, that is being conducted by Nicki Elischer, who is a graduate student in the School of Child and Youth Care within department of Human and Social Development at the University of Victoria. You may contact her if you have any further questions by email at nicola.elischer@gmail.com, or by phone 604-710-7559.

As a graduate student, I am required to conduct research as part of the requirements for a Masters degree in Child and Youth Care. It is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Jessica Ball. You may contact my supervisor at jball@uvic.ca

Purpose and Objectives
The purpose of this study is to explore fatherhood through the eyes of care-giving fathers in BC in order to hear the diverse experiences of fathers, and to inform community programs about father’s support needs and father-friendly practices. This research is important given the trend toward changing role expectations for men and women balancing work and family life in Canada. Hearing from primary care-giving fathers will give voice to a group that is somewhat underrepresented within research and will allow us to gain important and relevant insight into fathers’ parenting support needs.

What is Involved
Fathers who are part of a two-parent partnership and self-identify as primary caregivers to a child or children in BC are invited to participate in this study. If you agree to voluntarily participate in this research, your participation will include an interview of approximately one to two hours in length at a time and location that is convenient to you. The interview will be audio-recorded and a transcription will be made. The transcript will be sent to you by email at a later date for you to look over and amend if you choose.

Inconvenience
Participation in this study may cause some inconvenience to you due to the time commitment of participating in a research interview. Participation may also pose an inconvenience to you regarding childcare. If formal childcare is required for you to participate in this study, compensation for two hours of childcare will be provided to you by the researcher, to a maximum of $20.

Risks
There are no known or anticipated risks to you by participating in this research.

Benefits
The potential benefits of your participation in this research are that you will provide experience and insight into the development of father-friendly resources and services for communities in BC.

Compensation
As a way to compensate you for any inconvenience related to your participation, you will be given a small token of appreciation in the form of a book for your child. If you agree to participate in this study, this form of compensation to you must not be coercive. It is unethical to provide undue compensation or inducements to research participants. If you would not participate if the compensation was not offered, then you should decline.

**Voluntary Participation**
Your participation in this research must be completely voluntary. If you do decide to participate, you may withdraw at any time without any consequences or any explanation, even after having given consent or having participated in the interview. If you do withdraw from the study your data will only be used if you give full permission, and will otherwise be destroyed.

**On-going Consent**
To ensure that you continue to consent to participate in this study in the form of your interview and in your review of your transcript, the researcher will review consent forms with you prior to sending you your transcript for review.

**Anonymity and Confidentiality**
In terms of protecting your anonymity, your contact information will be kept in a locked and password protected computer file. Data in the form of interview transcripts will be assigned a code name in order to protect your identity and will be similarly stored. This way, data will not be able to be traced to you. Confidentiality will be protected by the secure storage of information in locked and password protected files and will not be shared with anyone other than the primary researcher.

**Dissemination of Results**
The results of this study will be shared with others in the form of a graduate Thesis. It is also possible that this research Thesis will be presented at research conferences or scholarly meetings, or will be published or shared within other media.

**Disposal of Data**
Data from this study will be disposed of once the Thesis is complete. Electronic data will be erased, and hard copies of data will be shredded.

**Contacts**
You may verify the ethical approval of this study, or raise any concerns you might have, by contacting the Human Research Ethics Office at the University of Victoria at 250-472-4545 or ethics@uvic.ca.

Your signature below indicates that you understand the above conditions of participation in this study and that you have had the opportunity to have your questions answered by the researchers.

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**Name of Participant**  
**Signature**  
**Date**

* A copy of this consent will be left with you, and a copy will be taken by the researcher
Appendix C: Interview Questions

1. Tell me about your current childcare arrangement. How long have you had this arrangement?

2. What issues did you consider when making the decision about who would work and who would care for children?

3. Is this your ideal childcare and work arrangement? / What is your ideal childcare and work arrangement?

4. How did you experience the transition from paid work to care work?

5. What are the best parts / advantages, in your opinion, of being a care-giving dad?

6. What are the worst parts / disadvantages, in your opinion, of being a care-giving dad?

7. Is being a care-giving dad what you expected it to be? Is there a gap between what you expected and what you actually experienced? Was there anything that was surprising to you in taking on this role?

8. Can you tell me a story that describes what it is like being a primary care-giving father?

9. How would you describe yourself as a father? What would your child/children say about you?

10. What is most important to you in your role of father?

11. Describe to me the relationship you have with your children. Is there a story you could tell me that would illustrate your relationship with your children?

12. Has being a care-giving father changed the way that you view yourself as a man?

13. Who do you look to as a role model for your parenting?

14. Do you think men and women care for children differently? / Is fathering the same as mothering?

15. As a primary caregiver, how do people respond to you at the playground? / At programs that your child attends? / At community programs for parents and children?
16. How is your caregiver status received by your family? / Your in-laws? / Other men? / Your employer? / Your co-workers?

17. Do you access community resources for parents? What kinds? Why? / Why not?

18. What changes would you make to the resources available in your community to make them more accessible/enjoyable/relevant to you?

19. When you have a question or concern about parenting your children, what resources do you access? / Who do you ask?

20. Can you tell me about a time when you needed support and sought help as a father? To whom did you turn? What type of help were you seeking/hoping for? Did you get help that was truly helpful to you? What kind of help did you receive?

21. If you were designing an ideal program for fathers, what would it look like? Feel like?

22. What would you want to tell a new father? What would be your advice to other fathers who plan to be primary caregivers in their families?