

Running head: FATHER-CHILD RELATIONSHIP CHANGE

Father-Child Relationship Change:
The Lived Experience of Stay-At-Home Fathers

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Abstract

In this qualitative study, four primary caregiving stay-at-home fathers were interviewed regarding their experiences of changes in their relationships with their children. The study utilized a phenomenological methodology which reflected the ability of stay-at-home fathers to describe their lived realities and experience of raising their children. The researcher used semi-structured, in-depth, face-to-face interviews as the method of data collection. Several major themes and subthemes emerged with regard to the changes these fathers perceived in relationships with their children. The fathers experienced direct changes in their father-child relationships, as well as changes outside their father-child relationships, which they linked to being primary caregivers for their children. Fathers became accustomed to being the primary caregiver, learned parenting skills, learned and met their children's needs, got to know children better, became emotionally closer to children, dealt with children's difficult behaviours, met their own personal needs, and perceived changes in their own traits. Participants reported children becoming more accustomed to the presence of their fathers, changing developmentally, and learning. Fathers also reported that their relationships with people outside their families changed. Participants perceived that significant times with their children occurred more often once they had become stay-at-home fathers.

Chapter 1: Introduction

When I had the opportunity to care for my children full-time, I knew that I would need to learn the rhythms of their lives and adjust to the routines of the household. I was surprised to find how much the relationship between us mediated the care I provided on a daily basis. Having spent many daytime hours away from the home while working, it became important for me to understand the new role I was playing in my children's lives. How I interacted with the children became the context, and was at times indistinguishable from the content, of care-giving. I saw how my daughters responded to the tone of my parenting, and I realized that attending to our relationship was part of being a better father for them.

I decided several years ago to alter my career path, and, as a result, I have made a series of changes to my employment, working variously full-time, part-time and in the home. When I needed to draw an income I worked the necessary hours, and when the demands of my studies increased I accommodated them, but I carried with me a sense of how these changes might lessen the time I spent in-relationship with my family. Since my first exposure to the responsibilities and joys of caring for a child, I have paid more attention to the relationship between myself and my family members. I now have the sense that my commitment to other realms of life, such as schooling and employment, is and always will be connected, in ways both positive and negative, to the relationships I have at home.

Assuming primary care-giving responsibilities for a child is not an endeavor for the faint of heart. When fathers assume the responsibilities of caring for their children on a full-time basis, they may expect to encounter a wide range of

messages, both internal and external, regarding the abilities and interests of fathers in relation to their children. Fathers who move into a primary caregiver role in the home after inhabiting the world of work are also likely to face numerous personal, social, cultural and economic hurdles. They may experience social isolation, a lack of community, a deficit in parenting skills, and the expectation of their incompetence from others, perhaps related to the deficit-oriented fatherhood models of the past (Doherty, 1991).

Understanding the relationship changes these fathers experience with their children may allow those who are considering or anticipating becoming stay-at-home dads to do so with greater security and stability. Without role models and the support of others, working fathers who become primary caregivers are likely to be overwhelmed by all the apparent unknowns this change involves. Parents who need to negotiate a father's transition from the workforce to the home may benefit from the perspectives of others who have already done so. New stay-at-home fathers may learn what to expect, and how improved relationships with their children may be a means to other domestic improvements, or an end in itself.

Background

What it means to be a father is a topic rooted in the history of North American families, and a subject of ongoing debate. Concepts of fatherhood have undergone great change over the last century-and-a-half; they have been influenced by numerous social, political and economic realities. During the early 1900s fatherhood was strongly identified with breadwinning, and with the goal of gaining financial security for family members, but the cost of this endeavor was closeness

with children (Griswold, 1993). With the development of parenting education in the 1930s came widespread calls for fathers to better their relationships with their children, yet at the same time their absence from the home and the task of providing middle-class lifestyles for their families kept many father-child relationships from flourishing. At this time, the path to 'new fatherhood' was espoused by new parenting experts who relied on scientific study and taught men how to attend to their children, foster moral virtue, and model masculine ideals (LaRossa, 1997).

Gender roles became strained with the onset of the Great Depression, and traditional labour role assignments between men and women were further institutionalized. At the same time, however, more women entered the workforce, a trend which continued far beyond World War II. When the absence of fathers who had gone overseas to fight became a widespread concern, common ideas of fatherhood expanded beyond breadwinning to include nurturing and sensitivity, the losses of which caused suffering in families when fathers went to war (Griswold, 1993).

In the 1950s expectations grew for men to accept responsibility in the domestic sphere, and middle-class fathers learned to seek out emotional connection with their children, even while strict division of labour along lines of gender remained (Griswold). Since that time, the shift away from traditional nuclear family structure and the heightened participation of women in the workforce have prompted widespread re-negotiation of father roles, responsibilities and relationships.

The latest iteration of 'new fatherhood' emerged in the 1970s, and was widely portrayed in movies, television and magazines of the time. Feminism had challenged the gender-based division of labour, and both mothers and fathers were earning wages outside the home. Someone needed to care for the children, and it became necessary for mothers and fathers to share child-rearing responsibilities out of necessity. This version of the 'new father' developed a close emotional connection to his children and accepted the goal of equal distribution of child-care between parents as part of the task child-rearing. Not all fathers subscribed to the 'new father' ideal, and organizations such as the Promise Keepers continue to condone a Christianity-based conservative family structure.

In Canada, changes in family structure and functioning have given rise to growing numbers of men leaving the workplace, at least temporarily, to assume care-giving responsibilities for children. In Canada the rate of fathers who claimed or planned to claim parental benefits jumped from 3% in 2000 to 10% in 2001 following the extension of parental leave benefits implemented under Bill C-32 (Marshall, 2003). This statistically and socially significant shift marks a possible long-term change in the rate at which fathers claim parental leave. Increasing numbers of men may consider this option as a way of participating in domestic life, and from the statistics reviewed this trend shows no sign of abating. The same statistical survey also noted that roughly one in ten fathers took formal parental leave from their jobs to care for newborns.

Access to parental benefits is being eased now that Canadian fathers have greater access due to revised Employment Insurance (EI) regulations. Recent

changes to the parental benefits available through the EI program have increased the number of fathers eligible to receive benefits, increased leave time and eliminated an unpaid waiting period of two weeks if a spouse has already claimed benefits. Following these revisions the number of actual claimant fathers has risen as well. In 2002 the number of fathers receiving parental benefits climbed to 7 900 from 1 600 just two years earlier (Perussé, 2003).

Institutional change and the creation of state-sponsored parental leave programs, however progressive, have yielded mixed results internationally. Mandated parental leave in Europe has resulted in overall low rates of participation by fathers. Following the European Union's establishment of parental leave in 1996 only a few countries reported take-up rates of paternal leave above 5%. These exceptions occurred in Denmark (10%), Sweden (36%) and Norway (78%), where parental leave was offered on a use-it-or-lose-it basis (OECD, 2001). Further study is required to determine whether low parental leave application numbers are due to fathers' perceptions of employer and societal attitudes, as well as job security concerns.

The Research Question

This project aimed to answer the question: After becoming stay-at-home fathers, what changes do men experience in relationships with their children? The purpose of this phenomenological investigation was to answer this question from the perspective of fathers who were currently primary caregivers.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of fathers who have made the transition to primary caregiver, and to contribute to the literature on father-child relationships as seen through the eyes of fathers themselves. The unique perspectives of at-home fathers are under-represented in the literature, yet they need to be considered in efforts to understand and assess father-child relationships. Contemporary families may exist in such a variety of forms that it becomes vital to understand how each family, whatever its arrangement, can experience success.

The idea that men exist in relationship to others is relatively new, and it makes possible the recognition that relationships contribute to men's development, so that fathers who have cared for children may be changed in fundamental ways (Palkovitz, 2002; Pruett, 2001), just as all human beings are changed by significant experiences in their lives. When assessing the abilities and actions of fathers in the home, it is then crucial to understand that context, learning and choice are factors in how men relate with their children. Recognition of the capacity of fathers to engage in unique nurturing, loving, and supportive relationships with their children while providing full-time care supports the assertion that men who transition into a caregiving domestic role function as something other than just mother-substitutes (Pruett, 2001).

Rationale

Considerable research exists on the topic of fathering, and a large number of books on the subject have been released by the popular press. The focus of this research, however, is fathers' understanding of relationships with their children, and

the perspective of men-in-relationship is under-represented in current research. Although the literature on fathering has evolved to a level of considerable depth and scope, the perspectives of men who undergo the transition explored here are yet to receive full and ongoing attention. There is a limited amount of research that describes the experience of at-home fathers in relationship with their children.

The experience of becoming a care-giving father involves so many changes and so much learning that there remains a tremendous amount of exploration to be done. The value of the current study is that it engaged stay-at-home fathers themselves and recognized their ability to voice their lived experience of fathering, specifically addressing their understanding of father-child relationships. Furthermore, it is significant that this study dealt with those fathers who have made the change from breadwinning to care-giving. The growth in the number of men making this transition makes this study particularly relevant in light of current social trends.

Fathers themselves may benefit from a better understanding of how father-child relationship changes are commonly experienced. Today fathers face expectations and issues that their fathers did not. The line that kept women in the realm of child-rearing and men working outside the home has fallen away. Men need ways to make sense of their experiences and the possibilities available to them. Although men who decide to take on more responsibility within the home may have the goal of being an equal partner, the process of accepting changes to one's identity is often fraught with confusion. With the definition of fathering up for discussion and debate, there is a need for fathers to learn from changes others in similar

situations have experienced, in order for these men to make meaning of what they are experiencing and observing around them.

Gaining insight into the lived experiences of stay-at-home fathers offers health care providers the information they may need in order to understand problems being experienced by stay-at-home fathers and other family members. Counsellors who provide services to families with fathers who care for children in the home need to exercise care in monitoring their assumptions regarding client values, beliefs and choices. Relying on past assumptions about what men do and feel is more likely than ever to alienate male clients who have already taken a risk by assuming a non-traditional gender role. In order to provide responsible care to these clients and their families counsellors need to understand their worldview as fully as possible.

Even men who seem like 'traditional guys' may relate to aspects of the 'new fatherhood' and seek understanding of their desire for improved familial relationships free from the biases imposed by inadequate gender role prescriptions of the past and present. If fathers feel misunderstood or judged for seeking professional help they may hesitate to ask for help, resulting in increased isolation. In this time of great change in the roles of men and women, examinations of what is happening in contemporary family relationships must include as prominent factors the experiences of those who are directly involved.

Given the changing structure of families and the requirement that some spouses change or redefine their parenting roles, the perspectives of at-home fathers have not been adequately represented in the literature. Since progression in the

study of fatherhood has facilitated more thorough investigation of father perspectives and their relevance to understanding fathering as a phenomenon, this study is a timely extension of that effort.

The Current Study

The lived experience of stay-at-home fathers was the primary focus of this research, and the method of inquiry selected facilitated the accurate description of how these men understand their experience. This study implemented a phenomenological research design, since phenomenology focuses directly on the meaning of lived experience. This mode of research acknowledges multiple realities that express numerous truths, and meaning is understood as construction of human beings as they live through the many phenomena of their existence. The duty of the phenomenological researcher is to access the personal and singular experiences of participants, and discover the essence of what they share in common (Cresswell, 2007). The awareness of the participant is a critical and validated component in phenomenological study, and the researcher's task is to communicate the essence of what it is like to experience the phenomenon.

Several limitations apply to the scope of this study. This study does not address substantial questions associated with fathers assuming care for their children in the home. Topics such as the degree to which men perform household chores in comparison to their spouses/partners are not within the scope of this research. Since this study focuses on the father's perspective of the father-child relationship, other views, such as those of the child or spouse/partner, are not included.

This study addresses the experience of men who are part of a growing trend, but it is not certain what changes the emergence of stay-at-home fathers will prompt in the population of fathers in general. Although the domestic involvement of men in intact families has risen, there are also strong indications that large numbers of men continue to assume the role of the family breadwinner (Coltrane, 1995; Warin et al, 1999). In addition, fathers are not a homogenous group, and factors such as race and socio-economic status can have real implications for the options for re-distributing the domestic workload. These considerations may limit the generalizability of the research results, which represent the truth only of those individuals who participated.

Definitions

For the purposes of this study the term ‘father’ was not strictly defined. Given the diverse forms of fatherhood that exist and the changes that many families will continue to experience, this research did not rely on criteria such as biological paternity, marital status or parental cohabitation. In selecting participants for this study, a number of factors contributed to the selective criteria, but the absence of any above factor did not exclude participants outright. The traditional definition would likely fail to include men who fulfill several functions, such as “caregiving, playing, teaching, providing support, or acting as role models or authority figures” (Roggman, Fitzgerald, Bradley, & Raikes, 2002). This study was open to men who were fathers in an extended sense, biological or not, but all were primary caregivers in residence with their children at the time of interviewing, since this was the criteria for the designation ‘stay-at-home dad.’

Overview

This chapter has outlined the introduction, background, purpose, rationale, phenomenological design, and contextual perspective of the study. Chapter 2 contains the literature review. Relevant topics include the study of father-child relationships, father-involvement, father perspectives, fathers as primary caregivers and current fathering discourses.

Chapter 3 presents an outline of the methodology, and describes the sample, data sources and specific data-gathering procedures. An in-depth rationale for the use of phenomenological method is included, as well as its philosophical underpinnings.

Chapter 4 reports the full results of the investigation.

Chapter 5 presents a summary of the research findings, their implications, strengths and weaknesses of the current study, directions for future research, discussion and conclusions.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The study of fatherhood has undergone a marked increase in recent years, and heightened attention to its processes and ends has allowed a variety of scholarly perspectives to emerge. This literature review begins with an overview of several influential theories, each of which provides a means of analyzing and understanding the mechanisms and outcomes of fatherhood. A description of recent investigations into the impact of fatherhood involvement and absence then follows. I then report recent findings in father-child relationship research, research on stay-at-home fathers, and evaluate social policy impacting stay-at-home fathers. Topics requiring further study are then described, and the final section outlines the conceptual framework for the current study as it applies to the research question.

Fatherhood in Theory

No single theory accounts for the incredibly complex and multi-dimensional phenomenon of fatherhood, but several influential paradigms have provided conceptual frameworks for exploration. This section provides an overview of several important theoretical perspectives that have stimulated the research questions in fatherhood research and, to some degree, the results obtained. Each perspective is tied to the socio-cultural history that spawned it, and has a place in understanding the complex experience of fathers.

Psychoanalytic Theory

The hidden drives and symbolic meanings of psychoanalytic theory have been applied to fatherhood for many years since the time of Freud. In a review of psychoanalytic fatherhood conceptions, Liebman and Abell (2000) stated that early

Freudian concepts of the punitive, inhibiting and symbolically castrating father have been challenged in current psychoanalytic discourse, and that there is renewed interest in the positive contributions of fathers to their children, particularly in early childhood. Although topics such as Oedipal conflict remain central in psychoanalytic literature, the emphasis has shifted from acknowledging repression to advocating for nurturance and attentiveness, since early childhood experiences contribute to later life functioning (Herzog, 2001; Kohut, 1977).

Father-child relationships have been studied in a new light, and integration of recent social trends has led to changes in the psychoanalytic discourse. Contemporary psychoanalytic analyses of fatherhood have focused on hostile internal drives than previously, recognizing symbolic paternal contributions to child development and the potential positive impact of father presence (Blos, 1987; Pruett, 1992). Psychoanalytic theorists have also promoted the centrality of fathers as primary objects to children from early infancy and beyond, rather than as secondary to mothers (Liebman & Abell, 2000). Healthful parenting has gained a place in the psychoanalytic literature, alongside the resolution of developmental conflicts.

While nurturing has been recognized as positive for fathers as well as children, symbolic meanings of fatherhood are changing. Psychoanalytic theorists have warned that men, undervaluing aspects of their masculinity, may experience related loss, annihilation, and the associated defences (Minsky, 2000), tracing the impact of modern-day shifts in father-roles back to early childhood experiences.

Structural Functionalism

Structural functionalism analyzes the family as a system of parts that play a role in meeting the needs of the family, to support continued cohesion leading to a state of equilibrium. Structural functionalism emphasizes the social functions of family members and how the structure of the family influences the performance of those functions. Fatherhood is viewed as a specialized role within the family structure. When structural functionalism emerged, contemporary cultural norms suggested that men were to provide financially for the family, and women were to raise children (Collins, Saltzman Chafetz, Lesser Blumberg, Coltrane, & Turner, 1993; Tanfer & Mott, 1997). Responsibilities that have been associated with the father role include breadwinning, moral leadership, skill teaching, and, in the case of stay-at-home fathers, child care.

Although the proliferation of diverse family structures has challenged the original assumptions of structural functionalism, the model is used today to examine how family members assume and change roles, and how families use shared values to achieve stability (Kingsbury & Scanzoni, 1993). Christiansen and Palkovitz (2001) recently defended one role defined by structural functionalists, arguing that, in spite of negative connotations, the role of the male “good provider” is relevant to family structure and functioning today, and should be considered a form of paternal involvement.

Another contention is that the functional concept of father-types (“the good dad,” “bad dad,” “deadbeat dad,” and “paternity-free man”), while culturally dependent and shifting across the lifespan, continues to portray large numbers of

men in society and facilitate the study of role changes over time (Marks & Palkovitz, 2004). Structural functionalists now incorporate post-modernist recognition of multiple perspectives into their work, so that men who change their roles may be studied without the judgement that accompanies the nuclear family ideal. This perspective, while rooted in support for the gender-based division of labour, examines the effects of role functioning changes made by family members on the family structure. Stay-at-home fathers are likely to experience changes in a number of functions, including breadwinning, caregiving, providing recreation for children, educating children, ensuring safety, and providing emotional engagement.

Feminism and Gender Studies

Feminism is concerned with economic, political and cultural practices that discriminate against women. According to the feminist perspective, our society has institutionalized patriarchy, and women have yet to achieve full equality with men, especially in public circles. In spite of great social change over time, gender inequality is still widespread in our society. There is great variation among the goals desired by different schools of feminism, some of which include instituting gender equality, ending male domination, ensuring female economic and political autonomy, and ending sexual objectification. Some feminists believe that gender identity is ultimately socially constructed, and that men and women have no essential gender characteristics. Feminist research consistently focuses on identifying inequality, discovering the roots of female disadvantage, and exploring paths toward women's freedom (Calixte, Johnson, & Motapanyane, 2005).

Silverstein (1996) theorized that fathering is closely connected to inequality of women, and proposed that “unconscious gender ideology pressures all families to become traditional patriarchal families” (p. 3). She stated her belief that, since women are now socialized to function as both the provider and the nurturer, nurturing must be incorporated into the definition of fatherhood so that men perform dual roles as well. Once this happens, men can choose to pressure social institutions to provide sufficient support, such as subsidized child care and flexible work hours, to working parents. When fathers are recognized as potential primary caregivers, this may also contribute to relieving mothers of the pressure of being regarded as essential, while fathers are regarded as peripheral.

Research continues to support the existence of gender-based division of labour in the home for many families. Sanchez and Thomson (1997) analyzed data from the National Survey of Families and Households, and found that, during the early years of child-rearing, mothers and fathers usually differ significantly in how they allocate time to paid work and family work. Upon first-time fatherhood, men who have previously done little housework start doing more, and men who have done comparatively large amounts do less. Sanchez and Thomson concluded that the bulk of responsibility for the household, however, remains with the mother, and women experience major shifts in how they distribute their work when children are born. How gender inequity applies to stay-at-home fathers and domestic labour is not yet known, however, since the research up to this point has not addressed that question.

Conflict Theory

Conflict theory exists in many forms, but generally addresses the struggle for power, especially between men and women. Since conflict theorists propose that men usually have social and economic advantages over women, men are seen as using these resources to keep from occupying positions of lesser power, specifically that of the primary caregiver (Tanfer & Mott, 1997). If men believe there is a loss of power involved in the transition from the workforce to the home, then it is also possible that even men who do so willingly will still experience difficulty adjusting to perceived changes in status. Rather than driving research as a central paradigm, conflict theory is usually thematically integrated into analyses based on other theoretical perspectives, such as feminism.

Social Learning Theory

Social learning theory focuses on how people learn in their social environment by observing role models and imitating behaviours. Learning is theorized to occur through the modelling process, which involves the learner observing a model, attending to information, retaining information, reproducing behaviour, and receiving punishment or reinforcement, which influences motivation to imitate the model (Bandura & Walters, 1963).

In the past, modelling was cited as the justification for custodial parents being assigned custody of their same-sex children. There was a common assumption, recently challenged, that children needed to be in the care of a same-sex parent for healthy gender development (Santrock & Warshak, 1979). However, in their examination of three national data sets, Powell and Downey (1997) found that

children who live with opposite-sex parents develop gender identity normally, and are able to locate same-sex models in their community when gender identification is necessary. Using questionnaires and standardized interviews, Golombok and Tasker (1996) compared families headed by lesbian and single heterosexual mothers to those headed by two heterosexual parents. They found that being raised by gay or lesbian parents has no influence on the sexual orientation of a same-sex child. These studies showed that social learning is not as simple as previously thought, and that, in nontraditional families, a child is not in danger of experiencing sex-role confusion or abnormal sex-role development.

As research into families continues, more advanced applications of this theory are appearing in studies. Simons, Whitbeck, Conger, and Melby (1990) studied the parenting behaviours of mothers and fathers in the socio-ecological context of the family. They found that husband's parenting beliefs are influenced by the values of their wives, and that cognitive factors mediate fathers' constructive parenting. The incorporation of cognitive and relational dimensions was a unique element of this study, and indicates that social learning simultaneously operates alongside and in relation to other contextual processes.

Risch, Jodl, and Eccles (2004) studied how father-adolescent relationships shape adolescents' views on divorce from a social learning perspective. The researchers conducted face-to-face interviews and administered questionnaires to caregivers and their adolescent children. They found that a close father-child relationship contributed to positive attitudes regarding adult intimacy for boys, but not for girls. Often, the girls had already been socialized to have a positive attitude

toward intimacy in adult relationships. Fathers who demonstrate interpersonal skills to boys seem to act as role models in the area of intimacy.

Identity Theory

Identity theory states that people behave in accordance with their identity, that is, who they believe they are, which is influenced by their interactions with others. As a social constructionist paradigm, identity theory examines individuals' actions in relation to the external pressures and encouragements presented by significant others, which push individuals to commit to a given identity (Litton Fox & Bruce, 2001). At the level of the individual, identity theory examines how roles are accepted and learned, and how choices are made in connection with committing to an identity (Stryker & Serpe, 1982). Identity theory researchers divide the self according to the importance of certain identities, using models such as linear hierarchies (Stryker, 1980) and concentric circles (McCall & Simmons, 1978) to illustrate the identities adopted by individuals. The more salient, the more subjectively prominent, a role is, the more likely a person will be to accept the identity associated with that role. Once the identity is assumed, the likelihood a person will stay in that role is influenced by external expectations and internal commitment.

A major focus of identity theorists studying fatherhood is the process of how fathers internalize their identities and commit to performing the responsibilities of parenthood. Men may encounter a wide array of roles: provider, parent, bachelor, lover, worker, and more, of course. Identity theorists measure the subjective centrality of these roles and how they relate to parenting behaviours. McBride and

Rane (1998) found that fathers who assigned a high degree of salience to work were less accessible to and responsible for their children. They also found that fathers who hold the nurturing role central to being a father are more likely to be involved with their children than men who believe parental status to be central, and that centrality in general is more strongly related to involvement than salience (McBride & Rane, 2000). Henley and Pasley (2005) similarly found that father identity investment and satisfaction are related to father involvement, while identity salience is not.

Habib and Lancaster (2006) studied men's father-identity development in relation to paternal bonding that occurs in the first trimester of pregnancy. They sampled Australian men whose partners were expecting their first child. These men completed measures of their identity set, father identity prominence, and paternal bonding. The researchers found that fathers who reported prominent father, caregiver, and emotional supporter identities also displayed greater bonding to their unborn child. Interestingly, these results confirmed that the development of father identity occurs at least as early as the first trimester.

Men taking the role of primary caregiver and reducing their role at work may likewise be influenced by identity theory's core concepts of role salience, role satisfaction, and appraisals of performance. Their involvement in the father-child relationship may fluctuate depending on how central parenting is to their father identity and how invested they are in fatherhood, caregiving, and providing.

Eriksonian Generativity

The Eriksonian concept of “generativity” refers to the process of adults caring for and contributing to the well-being of the next generation (Erikson, 1982). Generativity may be demonstrated biologically (by procreation), through parenthood, or societally (through creativity and productivity), so that men who father by any of these means may be viewed as appropriate subjects for fatherhood research. The generative perspective is proposed as an alternative to deficit-based models of fatherhood, which have for years assumed that fathers at large are unmotivated to improve their parenting and intentionally uninvolved with their children (Doherty, 1991; Hawkins & Dollahite, 1997).

According to the generative perspective, which incorporates development over the lifespan, fathers may not only contribute to the development of their children, but also encounter opportunities to enrich their own development and form connections between generations (Snarey, 1993). This school of thought, while formulated as a correction of past assumptions of fathering inadequacy, has been criticized for failing to acknowledge that father development is not a predetermined process, and that father-child relationships do follow unpredictable paths (Cabrera, Tamis-LeMonda, Bradley, Hofferth, & Lamb, 2000). The generative model, while idealistic and potentially reductionistic, continues to offer a perspective that acknowledges the potential richness of the fatherhood experience.

Self-Determination Theory

Self-determination theory (SDT) is a model of personality development and self-motivated behavioural regulation which has only recently been applied to the

study of fathers. SDT proposes that human beings fundamentally require competence, relatedness, and autonomy, and when these needs are satisfied, individuals are most likely to self-determine their actions (Markland, Ryan, Tobin, & Rollnick, 2005). SDT attributes changes in motivation to an innate human propensity for personal growth, personality integration, and resolution of psychological inconsistency (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Although behaviour change research has incorporated SDT for some time, parenting and fatherhood research have only recently done so. Assor, Roth, and Deci (2004) used questionnaires and assessments of parental conditional regard, self-esteem, coping skills, and parenting attitudes toward autonomy support, to study the emotional toll of parental conditional regard on college-aged daughters. The researchers found that conditional regard on the part of parents toward children and controlling parenting style foster inner conflict and poor well-being. These consequences are in turn associated with anxiety in children, rather than autonomous behaviour regulation. When parents in this study withdrew love, severing relatedness and support for autonomy in order to influence their children's behaviour, the children followed their parents' wishes in a way that was rigid and rule-bound, and their self-esteem suffered.

In a study of fathers' motivation to be involved with their children, Bouchard, Lee, Asgary, and Pelletier (2007) found that the men act with higher levels of self-determination when engaging in activities focused on a child's emotional and educational needs, rather than those focused on physical needs. That is, fathers experience intrinsic motivation to contribute to children's emotional

development and learning, but physical caregiving behaviour is less self-determined. They also found that men's belief in their parenting competence is positively correlated to partner support of their competence, rather than interpersonal support or perceived support for autonomy. This application of SDT to paternal involvement indicated the importance of examining the social environments in which fathers function, and highlighted the potential influence of the co-parental relationship on fathers' perceptions.

Attachment Theory

As a branch of developmental psychology, attachment theory examines how early childhood experiences with caregivers relate to social and emotional development. Bowlby (1958) originated the concept of attachment, which is an evolutionary mechanism by which young animals and infants bond with caregivers. This process ensures survival, since the infant gains protection against predators and nurturing from the caregiver, usually presumed to be the mother. Infants develop internal working models of themselves, their parents, and their relationships with parents. These models, when successfully developed, promote secure bonding with the caregiver.

Ainsworth (1974) conducted further study based on Bowlby's ideas and expanded attachment theory to include different categories of attachment, namely secure, insecure avoidant, and insecure ambivalent forms. Ainsworth also developed means of assessing these attachment styles. She used the Strange Situation assessment to evaluate children's behaviour patterns in response to separations from, and reunions with, their mothers (Ainsworth, Blehall, Waters, & Wall, 1978).

The caregiver's emotional availability, sensitivity to cues from the child, and responsiveness to these cues are key contributors to the development of secure attachment (Biringen, 2000; Seifer, Schiller, Sameroff, Resnick, & Riordan, 1996).

As time has progressed, evidence that fathers can function as a secure attachment figure for their children has received support in the literature (Geiger, 1996; Snarey, 2003). Father-infant behaviours are often similar to mother-infant behaviours (Belsky, 1980), and Lamb (1976) found that either parent could provide the security that inhibits distress over separation from another attachment figure. While the attachment bond can be strong with either parent, mothers seem to verbalize, smile, play socially, and play using objects more than fathers (Belsky, 1980; Pedersen, Anderson, & Cain, 1980). Fathers, on the other hand, appear to engage in more stimulating and physical play (Clarke-Stewart, 1977).

Further research has extended the topic to address children's peer relations and later life romantic relationships. In a review of father-child relationship literature, Lamb and Lewis (2004) found that "father child relationships appear to have a significant impact on later psychosocial development" (p. 280), and criticized the tendency to evaluate fathers according to the criteria of secure attachment. Measures of attachment assessing for caregiver bond characteristics may cast fathers in an unfavourable light in comparison to mothers, and fail to account for other contributions that fathers make to the well-being of their children. Lamb and Lewis called for research into more paternally-oriented themes, such as sensitivity in play, and concluded that there are likely many paternal influences yet to be uncovered.

Attachment theory as it applies to fathering is a topic of some contention, as models of attachment have until recently been formulated based on a mother-child framework (Roggman, 2004), and dimensions of parenting behaviour differ in meaning and operation between mothers and fathers. Paquette (2004) proposed a father-child attachment construct based on the “father-child activation relationship,” which he defined as, “the attachment bond that fosters children’s opening to the world” (p. 202). His model emphasizes the uniqueness of father-child relationships, integrating past research focused on father playfulness. It cites rough-and-tumble play as central to fathering, and proposes that the father activation relationship prepares children to encounter the outside world by developing obedience and competitive skills.

Paquette’s model has attracted criticism, and Roggman (2004) argued that his work goes too far in essentially describing fathers as playmates rather than caregivers. Differences between mothers and fathers may not be as extreme as Paquette suggests, since mothers also offer children opportunities to take chances while in an environment of security. Roggman offered an alternative view, describing attachment processes, those that regulate stress by providing comfort, as behaviourally and neurologically distinctive from activation processes, which regulate arousal through active play. Since neither process is exclusive to men or women in Roggman’s model, the trap of essentialism is avoided and a relation between attachment theory and other conceptual frameworks is possible. Factors such as gender roles, individual choice, system features, culture, and economics

may all exert an influence while attachment and activation systems operate simultaneously.

The processes of father-child emotional bonding are critical to the study of primary caregiving fathers. Given the long-standing tradition of examining fatherhood according to the processes and expectations of motherhood (Lamb & Tamis-LeMonda, 2004), the need for new ways of understanding fathers' relational mechanisms is clear. Fathers' perspectives on their own attachments are rare in the literature, but must be considered if accurate conceptualizations of fathering are to emerge. Attachment theory provides a language for assessing how relationships develop and change, and its modern variations account for the interplay of other influences and contexts.

“Good” and “Bad” Fatherhood

The study of fatherhood has often contrasted the characteristics of effective and ineffective fathering. Pleck (2004) investigated the development of the “good dad-bad dad complex” (p. 32), which describes the evolving and culturally-dependent polarized father depictions originally noted by sociologist Frank F. Furstenberg. Today, good fathers are depicted as those who take on the role of the “new father,” who is nurturant, caring, loving, and enlightened. In contrast, the bad father is commonly known as the deadbeat dad, characterized as reluctant, uninvolved, absent, and dysfunctional. Pleck highlighted that conceptions of good and bad fathers are dependent upon the social reality in which they are formulated, and argued that the study of good fathering has largely involved and developed according to the standards of White middle- to upper-class sections of society. This

underlines the importance of seeing fathering as operating in a social and individual context rather than in absolute terms.

Fathers' Influences on Child Development

Although fathers and families were subjects of study prior to the 1990s, the last 20 years have seen surging interest in the role of the father in particular. There are a number of factors that have contributed to this, including the recognition of gaps in the information available on family and child health, a lack of consistency in what was available, demographic shifts in family structure, the increased participation of women in the workforce, and concern about declining numbers of fathers who maintained a connection to their children (Marsiglio, 1995; Marsiglio, Amato, Day, & Lamb, 2000).

Research into this facet of fatherhood has also been driven by efforts of public policy-makers and social welfare agencies to engage fathers with their children, in order to promote enhanced child outcomes (Featherstone, 2004). The drive to determine the impact of father involvement and presence for children, as well as the impact of noninvolvement, has become a major force in fatherhood research, with numerous studies describing how fathers influence the development of children under many different circumstances.

Father Absence

A large number of studies have explored how resident and non-resident fathers engage with their children and fulfill paternal responsibilities. The tradition of father absence studies grew out of the desire to compare the development of children who grew up without fathers to that of children whose fathers were present.

When these studies began in the 1950s, there was a concern that father absence would detrimentally affect children's development. The father was viewed as a sex-role model, and his presence was assumed to facilitate the child's gender development. As discussed earlier, it has now been shown that children's gender identities may develop in healthy ways regardless of father presence (Powell & Downey, 1997).

The research consensus is that children are at increased risk for poor outcomes when fathers are absent from their lives after divorce or nonmarital birth (Amato, 2000; Laumann-Billings, & Emery, 2000). Carlson and Corcoran (2001) reported that, generally, adolescents with the least father involvement are at the greatest risk for both internalizing and externalizing behaviour problems. Jaffee, Moffitt, Caspi, and Taylor (2003) found that the less time children spend living with their fathers, the more conduct problems they develop, but only when the fathers exhibit low levels of antisocial behaviour. Conversely, the longer children live with fathers who show high levels of antisocial behaviour, the more conduct problems they present. Likewise, children exposed to an abusive father may develop a range of difficulties, including externalizing behaviour problems, socioemotional problems, and interpersonal skill problems (Carlson, 2001). How children experience their fathers when fathers are available mediates the influence of presence alone.

Research has indicated that the loss of income associated with father absence also mediates the impact on children. In their analysis of data from the National Survey of Families and Households, Thomson, Hanson, and McLanahan (1994)

found that the economic disadvantages experienced in single-mother families contribute to problems in academic performance, behaviour difficulties, and difficult temperaments in children. Lack of economic resources introduces significant hardship to the family, and children's development may suffer through lack of educational resources, low parental availability, and increased parental stress.

Noncustodial parenthood after divorce has also been linked with poor outcomes for children and weakening of the father-child relationship. Father absence is correlated with behavioural difficulties for children, including increased risk for incarceration, although there may be other disadvantages and associated circumstances that contribute to this finding (Harper & McLanahan, 2004). Lamb and Tamis-LeMonda (2004) emphasized that father absence studies have not accounted for within-group differences, indicating that some father-absent children prosper, while other father-present children experience poor outcomes. Available data is not sufficient to explain developmental differences between children whose fathers are present and those whose fathers are not. It is helpful to remember Lamb and Tamis-LeMonda's contention that unfilled paternal economic, emotional, and social roles may contribute more to poor child outcomes than father absence per se.

In a meta-analysis of studies concerning nonresident fathers and their children's well-being, Amato and Gilbreth (1999) addressed the mixed positive and negative results of past nonresident father-child frequency of contact studies, and argued that these investigations did not focus enough on father-child relationship factors. They hypothesized that factors other than frequency of interaction led to

variations in child outcomes, such as parenting style, the child's perspective, and feelings of closeness. Amato and Gilbreth did find that authoritative parenting, as opposed to authoritarian parenting, is a consistent predictor of children's academic achievement. Children's feelings of closeness are also related to achievement, but this finding is tentative and requires further investigation

Golombok, Tasker, and Murray (1997) used measures of stress, depression, child social competence and child separation anxiety, as well as mother interviews, to study families with children raised by lesbian couples and single heterosexual women. They found that children living without fathers reported being more securely attached to their mothers, but "perceived themselves to be less cognitively and physically competent than their peers from father-present families" (p. 788). Even though the study reported that the children can experience overall well-being and positive family relationships living without fathers, father presence may often contribute to children's development of self-esteem and feelings of competence. Whether that influence is direct or indirect is unclear, since there are many factors yet to be explored that could contribute to the same result.

Aquilino (2006) found that fathers who are uninvolved with young children are unlikely to have close relationships with those children once they reach adulthood. The long-term father-child relationship is affected by the circumstances that led to the father living apart from the child and the timing of that separation. When men never live in the household as their children, or when they become nonresident fathers when children are very young, it is less likely that they will strengthen their connection to the grown children at a later time. Reestablishing a

connection that has been lost is, thus, an unlikely possibility. Father absence or presence alone does not seem to account for the great variation in child outcomes, but there do appear to be far-reaching implications for father-child relationships when fathers do not involve themselves in their children's pre-adolescent lives.

Father Involvement

Father involvement research aims to describe positive involvement with children, map out the many factors that facilitate and interfere with involvement, and explain the actual processes of involvement. The overall goal is to learn how to support children's optimal development.

The definition of father involvement has changed over time. Lamb, Pleck, Charnov, and Levine (1985) defined the components of father involvement as engagement, accessibility, and responsibility. Palkovitz (1997) later expanded the definition of father involvement to include another 15 categories of behaviour, including, for example, providing, teaching, planning, and doing errands. He also proposed that cognitive activities, such as thinking about children, reflect a form of involvement. Palkovitz recommended that researchers consider other variables in their research as well, such as degree of involvement, observability, salience, and directness.

The degree of change contemporary fathers are making in their involvement with children is a matter of some debate. While fathers in general spend less time with their children than mothers, research in the area of paternal involvement found that fathers' responsibility and involvement is increasing incrementally, though perhaps less than some scholars believe (Lamb & TamisLeMonda, 2004). In spite of

the “new father” ideal, a mix of traditional and liberal fatherhood elements appear in research findings.

Influences on paternal involvement. The variables that act on fathers and families to influence involvement are complex and interrelated. Father involvement with children is influenced by numerous systems over the lifespan, including psychological factors (such as motivation, skills, and confidence), children’s individual characteristics, social support, cultural factors, institutional practices, and supportive parenting policies (Lamb & Tamis-LeMonda, 2004). All of these influences appear in various combinations with the elements of father involvement in the current scholarship.

Bonney, Kelley, and Levant (1999) found that men’s involvement in child care is self-determined to a large extent, and that involvement is facilitated by a liberal gender role ideology. These men are more likely to regard fathers as crucial for healthy child development and think of themselves as performing caregiving tasks as competently as mothers. Work hours, however, may mediate the amount of time fathers who hold these beliefs may actually devote to involvement with children. Fathers who increase their participation in child-care tend to experience reinforcement of their belief in their caregiving competence, and report increasingly liberal views of the paternal role.

Evidence is also emerging to support the idea that fathers’ expectations of involvement predict their actual involvement. Fathers’ belief that they will be involved in affective and instrumental caregiving does predict actual instrumental involvement, and expectations of affective engagement with children also predict

subsequent affective involvement (Cook, Dick, Jones, & Singh, 2005). It could be that these expectations are related to self-perceived competence and flexible gender ideology, but how these factors influence each other is not yet clear.

Further research from the SDT perspective indicated that a father's perception of his partner's confidence in his parenting competence influences his own feelings of competence in parenting, as well as to his motivation (Bouchard, Lee, Asgary, & Pelletier, 2007). In addition, increased motivation to become involved with children is related to a higher degree of involvement and improved self-assessment of parenting performance. It seems that men who perceive that their competence is supported by their partner are more likely to believe themselves competent and determine their own engagement in parenting activities. The support of others, as it contributes to self-perceived competence, adds another dimension to the exploration of involvement.

Hofferth and Anderson (2003) analyzed data from the 1997 Child Development Supplement to the Panel Study of Income Dynamics, and interviewed respondent caregivers and their children. Participants reported that married father figures were more involved with children than fathers who were not married, regardless of whether they were biological parents. Unmarried and nonbiological fathers, however, often still engaged warmly with, performed acts in service of, and spent considerable time with nonbiological children. Fathers were more involved with children with whom they lived longer, as well as with young children. These findings suggest further questions regarding what qualities of coparental relationships and father-child relationships contribute to increased involvement.

Jacobs and Kelley (2006) used measurements of engagement, accessibility, responsibility, and time spent as the child's primary caregiver, to study the predictors of paternal involvement for dual-earner families with young children. They found that fathers who value paternal nurturing, value taking paternal responsibility, and possess a sense of self-efficacy are consistently highly involved parents. In addition, the more of those beliefs a father holds the more time he is likely to spend as primary caregiver. Self-efficacy is correlated to paternal responsibility-taking and time spent as primary caregiver, while men's satisfaction with parenting is not.

Not surprisingly, Jacobs and Kelley found that the more hours men work outside the home, the less responsibility they take for childcare. Furthermore, as mothers increase their work time, fathers increase their accessibility to children, take more responsibility for childcare, and devote more time to acting as primary caregiver. In fact, mothers' work hours predict how much responsibility fathers take for childcare and the percentage of time fathers spend as primary caregiver.

Wood and Repetti (2004) noted increases in father caregiving over a three-year span when the children in the family were primarily boys, and when the mother and father experienced a relatively high number of significant life events, such as changes in employment. The researchers proposed that father-son time spent together performing gender-specific activities as part of socialization may account for gains in fathers' perception of increasing involvement. Sons may express a desire to spend more time with fathers as they grow older and want to participate in more gender-based interactions themselves.

Recent research findings have prompted recognition that father involvement is mediated by indirect sources of influence, especially within the family itself. The co-parental relationship and perceptions of competence are related to fathers' participation levels with children. For example, the relationship between fathers' perceived investment in the paternal role and actual levels of involvement is moderated by the mother's perceptions of the father's investment (McBride, Brown, Bost, Shin, Vaughn, & Korth, 2005). This finding is consistent with the SDT-based father studies that reported increased father efficacy and higher involvement with children when the mother communicates her belief in the father's competence to care for children.

Outcomes of paternal involvement. Given the importance of relational and contextual variables, paternal involvement cannot be viewed as the sole contributor to children's well-being. Several studies have found that paternal involvement is positively correlated with improved outcomes for children.

Father involvement positively influences children's thinking skills and problem-solving (Radin, 1994). Children whose low-income fathers engage positively with them are also likely to experience positive effects on their cognitive development. The father's education and income level are also positively correlated with cognitive development (Tamis-LeMonda, Shannon, Cabrera, & Lamb, 2004). Higher levels of father involvement support social benefits for children. Father participation in childcare positively affects empathy in boys, while father empathy is not correlated with either father caregiving or boys' empathy (Bernadett-Shapiro, Ehrensaft, & Shapiro, 1996).

Mott (1993) concluded that while simply the presence of a resident father in the home makes a positive difference in children's emotional well-being, cognitive development is specifically fostered by a caring and highly interactive home environment. This result demonstrates the importance of measuring not only how often fathers are involved with their children, but also how they interact and involve themselves.

Whether the father-figure is a biological father or stepfather does not make a difference in positive outcomes for children, as biological mothers report fewer child problems when either is highly involved (Amato & Rivera, 1999). These results hold true for Latino, African American, and White populations, although much study remains to be done to assess father effects in non-White families.

Father care, like mother care, appears to protect young children from developing externalizing difficulties and promote well-being. Fathers' greater involvement with difficult-to-raise preschool children is linked to fewer reported behaviour problems when the children are in grade-school (Aldous & Mulligan, 2002). Sons particularly benefit from fathers' attention, and non-problematic preschool-aged boys display fewer behaviour problems later in grade-school when fathers are highly involved in their care.

In high risk families, children who identify a father figure in their lives perform better cognitively, perceive higher competence in themselves, and report greater social acceptance than those who do not (Dubowitz, Black, Cox, Kerr, Litrownik, Radhakrishna, English, Wood Schneider, & Runyan, 2001). Children who describe their father figure as being supportive also registered higher perceived

competence, higher social acceptance, and fewer depressive symptoms. Child perceptions of father figure support, however, are not associated with cognitive scores or externalizing behaviour problems.

The literature strongly suggests that it is beneficial for nonresident fathers to maintain a supportive relational presence in their children's lives. Even though early father figure involvement does not directly predict mental health outcomes for adolescents and adult children, it does play a protective role in preventing psychological problems for adolescents in non-intact families (Flouri & Buchanan, 2003). Aquilino (2006) concluded that, "... when noncustodial fathers invested in their relationships with their sons and daughters during childhood and adolescence, the investment paid off in closer relationships with their biological offspring in early adulthood" (p. 942). Regardless of family structure, positive father involvement, in combination with contextual and relational factors, can yield long-lasting benefits.

Father-Child Relationships

While determinants and outcomes of father involvement quantity have been subjects of much study, the quality and nature of father-child interaction has received less attention, even though it contributes significantly to outcomes for fathers and children (McBride, Brown, Bost, Shin, Vaughn, & Korth, 2005). More studies are now diverging from the discourse of father involvement to explore father-child relationship processes.

Father-Child Relationship Dynamics

Parental socialization is a dynamic process that changes in response to children's developmental levels and characteristics (De Luccie & Davis, 1990b). Fathers of preschool-age children display relatively high levels of nurturance, affection, and support in comparison to fathers of school-age children and adolescents. Factors such as school involvement and children's demands for attention may influence how fathers display nurturance, affection, and support. Still, fathers of adolescents report higher levels of satisfaction in their performance of the parental role than fathers of preschoolers and school-age children. Having more parenting experience and successfully resolving parent-child discord may contribute to fathers' satisfaction.

When fathers increase the amount time they spend caring for their children, they are more likely to engage in supportive interactions, regardless of any reported negative mood on their part (Almeida, Wethington, & McDonald, 2001). However, it also becomes more likely that fathers will experience conflictual interactions when they are more involved and in a negative state of mind. The addition of father mood to the list of influences on father-child relationships makes it clear that involvement alone does not predict healthy interaction.

The quality of the mother-father relationship has been found to play a large role in father-child relationship development. Fathers who have close and confiding relationships with their spouses are more likely to hold positive attitudes regarding their infant children, and their father roles, than those whose marital relationships are not as close (Cox, Tresch Owen, Lewis, & Henderson, 1989). This finding

appears to be an emerging theme in the literature, with current researchers reporting similarly that warm, supportive coparental relationships are associated with eased father-child relationships (Lamb, 2004; Sobolewski, & King, 2005).

Low-income mothers and fathers demonstrate many more positive than negative behaviours when engaged with toddlers, challenging common notions that low-income fathers are harsh disciplinarians, and that low-income parents are likely to engage in authoritarian parenting in general (Tamis-Lemonda, Shannon, Cabrera, & Lamb, 2004). Fathers are not likely to display controlling or negative behaviours, and are as sensitive, positive, and cognitively stimulating as mothers. The positive and negative engagements for fathers are associated with the same engagement behaviours in mothers, suggesting that individual children experience similar levels of parenting from their fathers and mothers. This is an important finding that addresses and refutes common perceptions that fathers are not as skilled at relating to their children as mothers.

There are factors that contribute to less healthy relationships between fathers and children. When men are overworked and overloaded, their relationships with children and adolescents often suffer (Crouter, Bumpus, Head, & McHale, (2001). Adolescents report their fathers to be less accepting and less able to perform perspective-taking when the fathers report working long hours and feeling overloaded. The effects of extended work hours and role overload are mediated by the family relationship, and it should be noted that different aspects of the relationship may be influenced, while others are not. Men's subjective feelings of overload seem to have a greater influence than hours of work alone.

The wide-ranging life concerns fathers face as they are involved in childrearing also have an effect on their style of parenting. Fathers who report increased levels of concern about their adulthood developmental tasks are more likely to engage in negative childrearing practices, such as rejection and inducing guilt, and have less firm control in childrearing (De Luccie & Davis, 1990a). Fathers of older children seem to use fewer accepting childrearing practices than fathers of young children, with less educated fathers reporting higher intensity of life concerns, lower levels of acceptance and higher levels of rejection.

Influence of Father-Child Relationships on Children

According to Lamb and Tamis-LeMonda (2004), father-child relationships that are “secure, supportive, reciprocal, and sensitive” (p. 12) have much greater influence on child outcomes than individual father personality features, such as masculinity, intellect, and warmth. They found that, “students of socialization have consistently found that parental warmth, nurturance, and closeness are associated with positive child outcomes regardless of whether the parent involved is a mother or a father” (p. 10).

The father-child relationship as it interacts with parenting style has a particular influence on adolescent risk-taking behaviours (Bronte-Tinkew, Moore, & Carrano, 2006). In the first place, a positive father-child relationship is linked to lessened risk of delinquency and substance use behaviours of all kinds, especially for male adolescents. When fathers use an authoritative parenting style, as opposed to an authoritarian style, the likelihood that adolescents will engage in risk behaviours decreases. An authoritarian parenting style is linked to increased

adolescent risk behaviours, but its effects on adolescent risk-taking may be mediated by a positive father-child relationship. Neither parenting style nor relationship quality alone account for variations in adolescent risk-taking behaviour.

Father-child relationships appear to have far-reaching impact on children's psychological well-being. According to Videon's (2005) multivariate analysis of data from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, adolescents who reported high levels of satisfaction in relationships with their fathers reported fewer depressive symptoms than those who reported low levels of satisfaction. Changes in adolescents' ratings of their relationship with their father correlated to changes in personal well-being over time. Increased satisfaction with the relationship was associated with decreases in depressive symptoms, while decreased satisfaction was associated with increases in depressive symptoms. The capability of a supportive father-child relationship to positively affect children's future mental health is evidence that creating healthy father-child bonds is strongly advisable.

In young adulthood, closeness to fathers has been associated with positive results on several dimensions of well-being, those of happiness, life satisfaction, and psychological distress (Amato, 1994). Interestingly, after closeness to mothers was taken into consideration, father closeness had no statistically significant effect on adult children's self-esteem. The fact that children develop their self-concept at a young age, and most often in the care of a mother, may account for this. The father-child relationship may also be less salient to grown children. Adult children's self-reports of closeness to stepfathers also are correlated to well-being as manifested in dimensions of global happiness and life satisfaction.

In general, adult children who rate the parenting they received as children highly report better present relationships with parents and intimate partners (Dalton, Frick-Horbury, & Kitzman, 2006). Fathers' parenting behaviours are clearly associated with their young adult children's relationships with romantic partners. Paternal parenting is also more strongly connected than maternal parenting to adult children's belief in their ability to form close and secure relationships.

Gruenert and Galligan (2007) conducted a mail survey with men in Melbourne, Australia and found that adult men who reported having good relationships with their parents growing up, and a high degree of intimacy with their fathers, reported experiencing high levels of closeness with their best friends, low levels of anxiety in romantic relationships, and a low need for the respect of others. These studies provide evidence that positive father-child relationships enhance outcomes for children at many points along the lifespan.

Father Development

Even though fathering in general has become a subject of intense debate, the consequences of fathering for men are still being investigated (Eggebeen & Knoester, 2001). In a summary of the research on adult development, Palkovitz (2002) listed numerous differences between adults with children and those without. Adults with children exhibit more competence, better self-esteem, less gender-typing, fewer discrepancies between competencies and expectations, less disequilibrium and reorganization of thinking, more probabilistic thinking, and improved perspective-taking ability than those without children. Adults with children are also better able to regulate emotion, define their values, expand their

caring, show empathy, experience emotional reactivity, and demonstrate responsibility. Palkovitz clarified, however, that how this happens is unclear, and further investigation is required.

Ericksonian scholars have called for integrating a lifespan developmental perspective into fatherhood studies. Hawkins, Christiansen, Sargent, and Hill (1993) proposed that father development is a means by which men grow and mature, and that a high degree of supportive participation in child care can enhance fathers' experience of generativity. They argued that men who involve themselves in nurturing children not only foster generativity, but also increase the likelihood that their own developmental process will coincide with that of their intimate partner. Although increased involvement can precipitate conflict around domestic responsibilities, husbands and wives also have the opportunity to improve their relationship by negotiating their way into similar developmental trajectories.

In a longitudinal analysis of fathering, Bradford and Hawkins (2006) argued from a developmental perspective that fathering is "... a construct that moves beyond involvement by embracing other important aspects of male parenting, some of which include identity, satisfaction, and generativity" (p. 229). In analyzing fathers' learned behaviours, they found that fathers increase their relationship proficiency over time when they are in a positive and stable couple relationship. Fathers are more likely to develop competent parenting skills as they engage in more interpersonal intimacy. This study provides support for the contention that fathering is a dynamic developmental process which encompasses changes in learning and is linked to relational experiences.

Men who spend time in child care activities, and who report higher levels of psychological involvement in the parenting role, are more likely to engage in societal generativity, contributing to the welfare of their community (McKeering & Pakenham, 2000). This recognition of generativity contributes to enhanced feelings of health among fathers, and parents in general. Parents who assess themselves as possessing generative qualities, feeling obligated to help others and society, and devoting effort to helping others, report increased well-being compared to those who do not (Shin An & Cooney, 2006).

Engelbeen and Knoester (2001) found that fathering can contribute to men's emotional and social well-being in other ways as well. Fathers living with biological or adopted children report experiencing increased social and familial connections, as well as differences in their work lives, in comparison to nonfathers. The more these men engage with their children, the more satisfied they are with their lives, the more socializing they do, the more they involve themselves in their communities, the more connected they are to their families, and the less involved they are with work. These significant benefits support the argument that men do change through fatherhood, and that the positive father-child relationship operates reciprocally.

Stay-At-Home Fathers

Although a great deal of research has focused on outcomes for children, there has been comparatively little research on the men themselves. The bulk of fatherhood research is dedicated to investigating the welfare of children with working fathers, and the minority of stay-at-home fathers has not been studied extensively. Their experiences, circumstances, values, learning, and relationships

offer a source of largely untapped knowledge. These are the men who nurture, care, support, and who generally have the skills that father involvement advocates so desire uninvolved fathers to learn.

Father as Primary Caregiver

There is now strong evidence that primary caregiver fathers can provide their children with high quality care and emotional stability. Geiger (1996) conducted parental interviews and analyzed videotapes of caregivers (both genders) interacting with infants to explore the characteristics and parenting of primary caregiving fathers of infant children. She found that mothers and fathers exhibited similar affiliative behaviours in nonstressful conditions. Fathers engaged in significantly more rough-and-tumble play and were highly affectionate. They also combined rough-and-tumble play with affection and child-care simultaneously. These fathers “expressed satisfaction of being deeply involved with the infant, while playing with them, or simply watching them grow” (p. 91). This satisfaction was greater when fathers reported that employers and significant others had responded positively to their non-traditional child-care arrangement.

Doucet (2004) used in-person and telephone interviews to study 120 Canadian fathers, 70 of whom were at-home parents. She noted that stay-at-home dads balance home and work while under an intensified “social gaze” (p. 295) for being primary caregivers instead of primary breadwinners. Doucet identified three distinct patterns connected to stay-at-home fathering. These fathers maintain close ties to paid work, whether their departure from a career is permanent or not; they often replace employment with masculine “self-provisioning” work which

contributes to the household economy; and, finally, they offer narratives of caring that demonstrate shifts in their acceptance and rejection of various elements of masculinity and femininity. Doucet noted that the form of masculinity in which this small category of men engages has not yet been adequately conceptualized, as it changes according to their need to balance the aspects of their lives for which they are responsible.

Grbich (1997) examined the roles of historical cultural values and the capacity of men to negotiate acceptance of traditionally female responsibilities in Australian families with a primary caregiving father. Men who move into home caregiving need to renegotiate their public and private positioning, and are likely to experience alienation when they encounter signs that society expects women to care for children. Grbich found that stay-at-home fathers take an active role in justifying their choice of parenting style to others initially, but, as time goes on and the children enter different phases of their life, they experience recurring tensions between work, family, and attitudes in society.

In the process, these men have to figure out how to occupy a caregiver role that differs from traditional expectations, while dealing with the monotony of parenting and potentially inflexible work arrangements. Grbich proposed that they do so by negotiating possibilities for themselves from among the intricately linked realms of their lives, and by maintaining an insistent desire to nurture their children. Men who become primary caregivers, rather than simply jumping into the role mothers have traditionally occupied, have been shown to confront societal values and negotiate a role for themselves that did not exist before.

Men Taking Parental Leave

With recent changes in Canadian parental leave policy, fathers may have the option of caring for children at home for a substantial period of time while their jobs remain guaranteed. The advancement of parental leave has added another dimension to studies of fathers caring for children. Research is now focusing on the factors that influence fathers to take the leave to which they are entitled, and what factors contribute to increases in the number of days taken.

Seward, Yeatts, Zottarelli, and Fletcher (2006) found that fathers are more likely to take leave when it is paid, and when they and their partners hold egalitarian gender attitudes, believing that fathers should take leave and that leave should be divided equally between parents. Fathers taking parental leave were likely to be in relationships with mothers who believed women can strongly value careers, rejected male primary breadwinning, and knew men who have taken leave, seem to have

Hyde, Essex, and Horton (1993) researched fathers' leave-taking in Wisconsin using a series of phone surveys and mail-out questionnaires. They found that the length of parental leave men take is influenced by employer policy and individual sex role attitudes. Men who hold egalitarian sex role attitudes and who are highly committed to their families take leaves for the longest times. Although workplace culture is strongly linked to leave-taking, fathers' positive attitudes toward shared parenting are a significant and independent predictor of the number of leave days taken (Haas, Allard, & Hwang, 2002).

In an analysis of paternal leave-taking in the U.S. Hyde, Essex, and Horton (1993) found that employer policy regarding length of parental leave is related to

the actual length of leaves that men take, with longer leaves taken when employers provide job-guaranteed leaves for longer periods. Men's decision to take parental leave is also strongly affected by the needs of children, the needs of an intimate partner, and financial considerations. The longest leaves are taken by fathers who report believing in egalitarian sex role attitudes and the importance of family, although these beliefs are not strong predictors of the amount of leave taken.

Brandth and Kvande (2002) argued that fathers accessing parental leave in Norway are making choices about their fathering based on the increased reflexivity that is a feature of modern society. Four sets of fathering practices characterize men who negotiate their leave while facing the demands and opportunities of work simultaneously. Some fathers give first consideration to spending time with their children, limiting their acceptance of workplace demands. Others devote their time to work first as a result of reflection, and leave-taking is adapted workplace demands. Another set of fathers have their leave reserved automatically, do not need to negotiate, and end up taking leave when they otherwise would not have done so. The final group of men gives little priority to parental leave rights and is influenced by common expectations of male working environments, as well as associated demands for flexibility on their part.

Taking paternal leave of significant length likely contributes to fathers revising their conception of fathering to include caring for children. Studies of how leave-taking influences fathers' caregiving focus mostly on European populations, as these practices have been in place there longer than in North America. In a study of male parental leave-taking in Sweden, Haas and Hwang (2005) surveyed

employees of the country's largest publicly traded companies. They found that fathers who take longer leaves report feeling closer to their children and more satisfaction in their relationships, but the amount of care and responsibility they display does not necessarily increase. However, fathers who take 90 or more days of leave become more involved with child care than those who do not. How this change occurs and what it means to the families involved remains to be seen.

The Need for Further Study

Widespread shifts in how we look at fathers and their potential for caring have prompted the need for research to consider fathers as parents in their own right. As societal beliefs and expectations of what men and women ought to do in families change, it has become necessary to re-evaluate past developmental perspectives that regard women as central to children's lives (Cabrera, Tamis-LeMonda, Bradley, Hofferth, & Lamb, 2000). The emergence of fathers who nurture and support their children, and who foster their long-term emotional health, has made clear the need for reconsideration of how fathering has been assessed in the past. Many of the father-child relationship measures currently in use reflect a maternal-attachment ideal, and as a result, portray fathers poorly in comparison (Lamb & Lewis, 2004). Conceptualizations of fatherhood are in need of further refinement, and research concerning father-child interaction and relationship quality is necessary in order to form a more complete understanding of fathering processes (Marsiglio, 1995).

Further exploration of father-child relationship dynamics is needed in order to understand how better relationships can be achieved, especially in circumstances

involving fathers who do not live with mothers. With the lack of fatherhood models for men in modern nontraditional family relationships, many fathers may not yet know how to continue responsible and generative fathering in a societal climate of deteriorating marital relations (Doherty, 1997). Whether marriage remains the ideal of the majority of adults or not, there is not yet a clear conceptualization of how fathers in a variety of family configurations can ensure that their relationships with their children are as healthy as possible. We need a map to see what is possible for father-child relationships today. For that reason it is vital to understand how men who are highly involved in caregiving conceive their father-child relationships.

Conceptual Framework for the Current Study

Since no specific theory unites all elements of father-child relationships under a common comprehensive framework, this study integrates several of the predominant perspectives and emphasizes those with a direct connection to relational issues. Several key findings form the backbone of the current study:

- The experiences of childhood contribute to the formation of the adult individual, and have a far-reaching impact on adult psychological well-being, as shown through psychoanalytic and attachment research.
- Feminist studies have shown that gender-based father stereotypes and division of labour continue to operate on an individual and social level, and these concerns form some of the context of fathering today.
- The concept of generativity has been validated as a strong influence on how fathers view their parenting.

- Developmentally, the long-term well-being of fathers and children is influenced by the quality of their relationship.
- The centrality of certain identities, such as that of the nurturer, has emerged through identity theory-based research.
- Self-determination theory has contributed understanding that fathers make choices and aim for personality integration in relating to children and providing care.
- While past attachment research has focused on fathers' play behaviours, both attachment and activation processes do appear in father-child relationships and are relevant to contemporary fatherhood. Although fathers' parenting behaviours may differ from those of mothers, they have the ability to regulate stress, regulate arousal, and provide a secure base.

The father-child relationship is conceptualized here as multidimensional. Those dimensions may include closeness, warmth, connection, attachment, play, authoritative parenting, instruction, frequency and patterning of interaction, motivation, ideals and cognitions. Physical caregiving, the intimate partner relationship, and fathers' beliefs about themselves and their families are also closely linked to father-child relationship quality.

Given that research has shown fathers to be more self-determining in their parenting than previously thought, this study proposes that fathers' perceptions indicate an awareness of how they relate to children and an ability to perceive changes in father-child relationships. This study assumes that men are active and

intentional in their relations with others, and that the meaning they make of their experiences can best be known through their communication of it. This study assumes that fathers have the ability to make sense of their relationships with children, and that this understanding informs how fathers relate to children.

Accordingly, the present study is guided by the question: “What changes do stay-at-home fathers experience in relationships with their children?” The next chapter describes the method used to answer this question.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter describes the phenomenological methodology chosen for the current study, beginning with its characteristics and historical background. The methods of phenomenological inquiry are described and their relevance to the current study is elucidated. A description of the procedures for sampling, data collection, analysis, and ensuring trustworthiness of the research follows.

Selection of Phenomenology

A qualitative mode of investigation was chosen since this study aims to access the meanings participants bring to their experience of changes in the father-child relationship. Qualitative research elicits thorough and deep descriptions of phenomena in order to represent them as fully as possible (Mertens, 2005).

Qualitative inquiry may be conducted using numerous strategies. Phenomenological research was selected for this study because it aims “to understand and describe an event from the point of view of the participant” (p. 240). The goal of the current research is to report how stay-at-home fathers understand changes in their father-child relationships.

Phenomenological methodology is also an appropriate choice for this study since it also seeks to empower research participants and include them as “coinvestigator[s]” (Ivey, 1995). The goal of this study is to allow stay-at-home fathers to speak and report their experiences free from meanings imposed by the researcher. As the instrument of study, the phenomenological researcher acknowledges and is obligated to assess the impact of personal biases and assumptions in the process of fully conveying the voices of participants (Mertens,

2005). Preservation of the integrity of participant contributions is of paramount importance in the current study.

Phenomenological Tradition

Phenomenological research is based on a constructivist paradigm, which Ponterotto (2002) defined according to dimensions of ontology (stated nature of reality), epistemology (the researcher and participant in relationship), axiology (the role of values in the research process), rhetorical structure (language and presentation) and method. Constructivism posits that realities are socially constructed and multiple. The researcher and participant interact, adding to one another's lived experiences even as they gain insight into those of the participant. Researcher biases are recognized as inevitable, and need to be illuminated in order to clarify their influence on the study. The language of qualitative research includes first person writing and, as fully as possible, the voices of participants. Qualitative process is also highly interactive and naturalistic (Mertens, 2005), as the researcher actively engages with participants in an effort to access their psychological lives.

Qualitative methods report participants' lived experiences (*erlebnis*) in their own words, as opposed to quantitative methods, which classify information according to pre-existing systems of quantification (Ponterotto, 2002). The term "lived experience" reflects the idea that we encounter the world with immediacy that precedes conscious thought and reflection. Lived experience cannot be communicated in its true form, and can only be represented after a process of reflection. Qualitative inquiry requires that the researcher investigate the chosen

phenomenon in close proximity to participants in order to elicit their perceived worldviews and experiences (Ponteretto).

Edmund Husserl originally articulated the tenets of phenomenology in relation to the study of consciousness and human experience. He argued that researchers should use two particular procedures to free themselves from influences that would prevent their unbiased description of phenomena (Wertz, 2005). The first method researchers may use is to encounter the living world (*lebenswelt*) free from reflection on meanings delivered by scientific preconceptions, so that fresh understanding of phenomena can be gained.

The second method is to attend to the, “lived-through meanings and the subjective performances that subtend human situations” (Wertz, 2005, p. 168). This means that the researcher reflects on how the living world shows itself through “constitutive meanings and subjective performances” (p. 168), such as emotions, thoughts, and expectations. The life-world is composed of physical presence in our bodies, interpersonal relation, feelings about the space around us, and the subjective experience of time passing (Munhall, 2001). Researchers enter the world of participants empathically and reflect in order to comprehend the meanings in their experienced psychological world.

Husserl also formulated the procedure of eidetic reduction, a method by which researchers apprehend the essence of a thing. The researcher “... starts with a concrete example of the phenomenon of which one wishes to grasp the essence and imaginatively varies it in every possible way in order to distinguish essential features from those that are accidental or incidental” (Munhall, 2001, p. 168). In this

way reductionist tendencies may be overcome and psychological phenomena may be accurately distinguished and represented.

This leads to the possibility of analyzing transcended meanings, which are the meanings constructed in and by consciousness. These are formed when consciousness relates to things in the world, in a process called “intentional analysis” (Munhall, 2001, p. 169). Our psychological lives involve relation to things outside of ourselves and those things, in all their various forms, mean something to us. Husserl’s intentional analysis examines phenomena as experienced by participants in order to gain insight into all of the experienced meanings and make clear the related experiential processes.

Critical elements of Husserl’s philosophy of phenomenology are: conceptualization of the shared subjective realm between individuals; recognition of this realm as including feelings and thoughts; openness to researcher intuition even as the focus of disciplined study remains on the subject; and overcoming personal feelings and theoretical assumptions in order to facilitate fullest possible knowing of the phenomenon (Spiegelberg, 1982). The questions posed in phenomenological research are designed to help the researcher learn what is at the core of the participant’s experience of a phenomenon. The researcher reports on commonalities shared between participant descriptions of the same phenomenon, with the goal of explaining the essence of the experience.

Merleau-Ponty furthered the conceptualization of perception as it relates to phenomenology, proposing that consciousness is at all times embodied, and that people interpret perception to elicit meaning through reflection (Racher &

Robinson, 2003). Being in the world is a subjective process and Merleau-Ponty theorized that perception brings the world to our apprehension before reflective process can assign meaning. Although the essence of a thing is real, as human beings we can only know from a subjective embodied position. This stance is an advancement from Husserl's position that we can separate consciousness from the world itself, since Merleau-Ponty asserted that it is impossible for humans to know the world other than through consciousness.

Sample and Recruitment

I recruited participants from August to September of 2007. For the purposes of this study, I defined stay-at-home fathers as men who identified themselves as such. The stay-at-home fathers in this study were primary caregivers for their children, and all participants had been stay-at-home fathers for at least four months. All participants were adults over the age of 18. Participants were drawn from the Calgary area.

I circulated a written announcement seeking participants (see Appendix A). I gave the announcement directly to stay-at-home fathers in the Calgary area. Also, the director of a local parenting agency circulated an electronic version of the announcement to clients who had consented to receive email from her company. I passed out copies of the announcement to friends and acquaintances, and asked them to pass these along to others who might be interested in participating. There were no responses to the written announcement. I used the snowball sampling technique by speaking to individuals knowledgeable about parenting, asking them to verbally disseminate information regarding the study, and invite potential

participants to respond if they wished to participate. Through this process, four men contacted the researcher, indicated an interest in participating, and followed through with the interview and follow-up procedure.

The four men participating in this study came from differing educational backgrounds and maintained various levels of involvement in differing occupations. Participants were white middle to upper-middle class married men whose spouses were working full-time. The fathers ranged in age from 35 to 47 and each was the primary caregiver for between one and four children, aged from one-and-a-half years to ten years. One father had one male child; one father had one female child; one father had a male and female child; and one father had one female and three male children. In order to preserve confidentiality, each participant selected a pseudonym for himself.

Data Collection

I interviewed four fathers who had become stay-at-home fathers, and who were still primary caregivers at the time of interviewing. Data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews with the researcher functioning as the instrument. Interviews were recorded using a digital recording device and all parts of the interviews were audible on the recordings.

My aim in these interviews was to obtain complete and accurate descriptions of changes participants perceived in their relationships with children after transitioning to become stay-at-home fathers. I used guiding questions to provide thematic prompts for interviews, while accepting and following directional cues from participants. The interviews were informal and conversational, lasting between

60 and 90 minutes. During interviews, I invited participants to elaborate on the meanings they communicated. A second interview allowed each participant to reflect on their initial interview and address any other issues that occurred to them. The second interview also allowed the researcher to clarify and expand on information gathered during the previous interview.

I transcribed the interviews and reviewed the contents with participants. Participants were invited to remove, augment, or change any part of their transcript. During the interviewing process of this study I came into close contact with fathers, and elicited their perceptions of their particular fathering experience. Although I did pose questions regarding the phenomena under investigation, I invited participants to respond fully to questions according to their own understanding. I asked participants to read the tentative findings and provide feedback, especially regarding any missing information or inaccuracy in my report of their intended meanings.

The participants' names, pseudonyms, and data were stored on the hard drive of the researcher's personal computer, guarded by a password known only to the researcher. Back-up copies of all data were kept on digital media stored in a locked filing cabinet. Print-based transcripts were also kept in a locked cabinet when not in use. In keeping with the researcher's policy for data retention, data will be kept for a maximum of five years following publication/presentation. The data will be disposed of by shredding all paper documents, destroying all audiotapes and erasing all computer files on the hard drive and digital media.

Analysis of Data

The phenomenological analysis was conducted according to the phenomenological methodology described by Wertz (2005). This analysis was conducted in an attempt to understand the lived experience of the participants free from the influence of my preconceptions, and without reference to any pre-existing values, beliefs, or biases on my part. The analysis of transcripts was conducted individually, as well as across individuals.

I read all transcripts of the participants' responses in order to gain familiarity with their content. I then re-read the transcripts in order to identify blocks of meaning related to the phenomenon and shifts from one unit of meaning to another. I then identified themes related to each individual's experience of the phenomenon. As the researcher in the qualitative mode, I endeavored to set aside my pre-existing ideas regarding at-home fathering in order to report the lived experience of participants (Sciarra, 1999). I then compared the data sets between individuals, eliminating themes limited to single individuals, and extracted the statements that had a clear basis in the data and that appeared in all the transcripts in order to synthesize them. I used Nvivo 7 software to track the units of meaning composing each theme, and to group the themes into categories based on the identified location of change.

Trustworthiness

Qualitative research methods should demonstrate trustworthiness, showing that the quality of the research is sound. Trustworthiness is established when the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability are met.

Credibility

Credibility refers to accurate correspondence between the respondents' perceptions of the phenomenon and the researcher's portrayal of the respondent's viewpoint (Mertens, 2005). I took several actions to ensure the credibility of this study. I engaged with subjects until meanings were repeating rather than expanding, used more than one interview to clarify meanings and elicit detailed descriptions, debriefed my findings, analysis and personal experience with my supervisor, and verified the constructions arising from analysis of the data. I also used triangulation, as defined by Guba and Lincoln (1989) to enhance the credibility of the research. I collected data from multiple participants and referred to more than one person's perspective when analyzing data. I offered participants the opportunity to debrief with me following the completion of interviews as well.

Transferability

The concept of transferability pertains to the generalizability of research results to other situations (Mertens, 2005). The current study incorporated transferability by providing in-depth, rich and rigorous description of data, as well as by clearly stating how sources were selected for participation in the research. My primary goal in this study was to further understanding of the phenomenon and clarify participant meanings, rather than to ensure that findings could be transferred to other situations

Dependability

Dependability in qualitative research corresponds to the consistency of data over time and under changing conditions (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Mertens (2005)

clarified that changes in the focus of investigation may be expected, and researchers should document any such variations. This study addressed dependability by describing methods of inquiry, data analysis, and data presentation in detail. The accuracy of data in this study was ensured by reviewing findings with participants.

Confirmability

Confirmability refers to the objectivity and neutrality of the data (Mertens, 2005). This study demonstrated confirmability by maintaining a trail of research evidence, specifically by retaining records of interview transcripts, field notes, and any drafts of reports.

Overview

This chapter reviewed the phenomenological methodology used for this study, describing its characteristics and providing a brief historical overview. The methods of the current study were described, including the procedures for sampling, data collection, analysis, and ensuring trustworthiness of the research. The next chapter presents the participants' accounts.

Chapter 4: Results

This chapter is divided into two sections. The first part includes descriptions of each man who participated in the study, consisting of biographical information and a summary of his stay-at-home fathering experience. The second portion consists of the themes that emerged from data comparisons between the individual interviews. Each theme is discussed in detail, and the participants' own words are included in order to preserve their intended meanings.

The Participants

Each participant is introduced here in the order he was first interviewed.

Hans

Hans is 44 years old and college-educated. He is the father of a three-and-a-half year old boy. At the time of the interviews his wife was ten months pregnant with their second child. Hans has been a stay-at-home father for three years, ever since his son was six months old and his wife returned to work after six months of parental leave.

Hans operates a home-based business designing heating and air conditioning systems. Prior to becoming a stay-at-home father, Hans' income varied, which was a factor in deciding he should be the primary caregiver. His wife earns a stable income in her employment as a human resources manager, and Hans has reduced the amount of time he devotes to his business. On average he now works two hours per day, but this varies according to deadlines and client demands. When Hans needs to devote time to his business he either works in the evening when his wife is home, or arranges for his son's grandparents to provide childcare.

Once Hans' wife was on maternity leave for a few months, the couple decided their son should have one parent home to care for him. Hans described his preference for becoming the primary caregiver rather than putting his son in daycare:

Personally I have seen kids that have come out of daycare, and I don't like the results, certain daycares, what's happened there. They're wild, no one paying attention to them. I think I'd be more attentive to what he needs, where with a daycare, if he's in with 30 kids, he could get lost in the shuffle.

Hans places a great deal of importance on caring and affection in his family. He stated that his relationship with his wife comes first, but that his relationship with his son comes a close second. Hans values open affection and feels comfortable showing his caring to his son. He described his bond with his son as warm and close right from the time he became a father:

It's always been, first thing in the morning, big hugs and kisses before he even gets out of bed. I probably tell him I love him five times a day, and he reciprocates. And sometimes we'll just sit on the couch, sit there and cuddle and not say a word, and he's just in heaven.

Hans gains tremendous satisfaction from taking his son out for wilderness excursions and teaching him how nature works. As his son grows older, Hans would like to be able to provide moral guidance and maintain a strong emotional bond. He looks forward to maintaining a consistent and warm relationship with his son, and desires to be a father to whom his son can always turn.

Larry

Larry is 36 years old and university educated. He has a son aged three and a daughter aged one-and-a-half. Larry has now been a full-time stay-at-home father for four months. Prior to that he cared for his children four half-days a week over a period of six months.

Before the births of his children, Larry worked full-time in analytics and modelling for the energy industry. His wife works full-time in wind-farm development for a major oil and gas company. She took parental leave during her son's first year, and Larry took parental leave for a month after his son was born. The couple hired a nanny during their son's second year and both worked full-time.

At the birth of their second child, Larry took two months off and his wife took another year of parental leave. Larry then returned to work full-time until his wife returned to her job. This was the point at which he started caring for the children four half-days per week. Since then, his wife's career has demanded that she work full-time, and Larry has shifted into consultancy for his former full-time employer. Larry continues to work part-time, approximately ten hours per week. When he is working, Larry's children are either in bed for the night or looked after by a hired caregiver who works for the family about 14 hours per week.

Larry described reflecting more about his role as a father when his wife became pregnant. At that time he developed his idea of what a father should be and do, "My image of a father is a man who's pretty engaged with his kids, even though he's not always there, so that the time spent together is pretty quality time." Larry

said he would like to provide emotional support for his children and be someone they could “come and talk to.”

Larry stated that he developed his current style of engaging with his children before becoming a stay-at-home father. He felt comfortable being with each child from a young age, and used the time when both he and his wife were on leave to learn how to care for young children. He described already being able to perform physical care responsibilities upon becoming a stay-at-home father, “Changing diapers and feeding, and all that kind of stuff was not new.”

For Larry, the transition to becoming a stay-at-home father involved several challenges. Larry described his biggest challenge as trying to figure out what to do with the children when their behaviour is demanding and difficult to manage, especially when he cannot take a break himself. He is more likely to be present for his children’s “cantankerous” moods as a stay-at-home father, and has had to address his own expectations of how they would behave with him in order continue to relate well to them.

At the level of personal values, Larry did not experience a challenge to his belief of what a man should do for his family when he became a stay-at-home father. Although he did not have a full understanding of what would be required of him in order to parent effectively, the changes he underwent were a matter of gaining awareness, rather than shifting personal values. He described being more concerned with meeting financial needs than with which partner brings income to the household. Larry did recognize that playing the role of the family breadwinner was more important to his own father than to himself. He attributed some of his

acceptance of male caregiving to witnessing his mother give care as he grew up, and also to speaking to her about her caregiving experience when he reached adulthood. Larry's financial stability relative to his parents also made being the at-home caregiver an option for him.

Bruce

Bruce is 44 years old and has a university education in finance and economics. He is the father of an eight year old girl and became the primary caregiver when his daughter was four months old. He has now been a stay-at-home father for seven-and-a-half years. Bruce's wife works as an engineer and, after her maternity leave, her position required that she return to work full-time. Her earning potential was quite strong, and it made financial sense for Bruce to be at home caring for his daughter. Before becoming a stay-at-home father Bruce worked full-time as a food and beverage manager.

Prior to his daughter's birth, Bruce and his wife discussed the possibility of him being involved in the care of a future child. He described this as "mapping out possibilities," with the goal of retaining a healthy relationship with his wife. Once his wife became pregnant, the couple assessed their career paths and decided that Bruce would be the parent in the home, at least temporarily. Now that his daughter is in Grade 2 Bruce and his wife have reassessed how their current arrangement is working. Bruce plans to continue managing the household for the time being, and sees his role as an at-home father extending several years into the future:

I'm happy where I am. There's a balance to our household, having me at home. We like the idea of having a parent in the house, after school, before

school, providing our own childcare for the foreseeable future. Down the road, kids become independent, they don't need mom and dad around so much as teenagers.

Becoming a father has been a powerful experience for Bruce. Part of his transition in becoming a stay-at-home father has been witnessing the development of his daughter. He described his feelings during his daughter's first year:

I was awestruck just by the whole creation of the whole thing. I think I wrote it down in my daughter's baby book. I didn't know the sense of the word, "joy," pure joy, until she was born, and then I got it. You know, the meaning of life type thing, like, why are we here? It's because this is what we do. So I was awestruck by that, when we first had the baby, and then I just gradually got to know the baby and became amazed by her development and how fast she learned, and how responsive she was to our actions.

Although Bruce's father was the breadwinner for his family of origin, Bruce did not grow up believing that he would necessarily be the breadwinner for own family. He credits his acceptance of changing family roles to his strong relationship with and admiration of his mother, as well as his exposure to other family structures, such as single parent families and step-families, growing up.

As a father, Bruce had to become accustomed to providing the nurturing that his daughter requires. He believes that he is becoming more attuned to his daughter's needs and emotions in this process. As a manager, Bruce used to place priority on achieving goals and getting results. Now that he is the primary caregiver

to his daughter, he faces the challenge of becoming more intuitive and receptive to the needs of others.

Carl

Carl is 38 years old and has a college education. He has four children: a ten year old son, an eight year old son, a four year old son, and a three year old daughter. Carl has been a stay-at-home father for nine years, and before coming into the home he worked full-time with adults who had disabilities. Bruce has occasionally worked in the same field part-time while in the role of the primary caregiver, but not within the last four years.

Carl's wife is a teacher, and has worked with the same school board throughout her years as a parent. After each child's birth she took a parental leave, and Carl described these leaves as significantly benefiting their family. He cited her summers off work and ability to make it home by 4:00 each afternoon as factors that make his hectic days with the children easier.

Carl stated that his family life may be very different from "typical" scenarios. His eight year old son was born with a neurological disorder that prevents him from communicating at all, and makes him fully dependent for physical care. Carl believes that living with this reality has changed his life as a parent, "When you have a child with a disability, you're on a different road." The family receives enough funds to hire a full-time caregiver, and Carl describes their family's overall situation as stable, even though it is difficult to find people to fill the position.

On an emotional level, Carl has been deeply impacted by the process of living with his disabled son. His son's condition has been constant throughout his life, and Carl described the sense of loss associated with having a disabled child:

With our second-oldest son, of course, compared to not having kids, that's a big thing. It changes you lots, it's like if you have someone close to you that dies, you know what I mean? It changes you, I like the term, there's a scar on my heart. It makes you stronger, too.

Carl believes he has been strongly bonded to each of his children since their births, and the connection that he feels has remained constant over time. As a father, he strongly values caring and consistency. In the process of taking care of the household, Carl has become familiar with the demands of being an at-home parent in a way that he was not before. For the most part, Carl's concept of his relationship with his children was inseparable from providing care for them and maintaining their home environment. Along with the repetitive tasks of keeping house, Carl also faces the challenge of being a nurturing parent to a daughter who asks for more support than he is accustomed to providing.

Themes

Several major themes and subthemes emerged with regard to the changes these fathers perceived in relationships with their children. The fathers experienced direct changes in their father-child relationships, as well as changes outside the father-child relationship, which they linked to being in an at-home relationship with their children. This section includes detailed descriptions of each theme. Direct

quotations are included in order to preserve the meanings the fathers intended to communicate and the fullness of their experiences.

The theme “The Father Changing” encompassed the fathers’ perceptions of changes in themselves and their actions. This included fathers getting used to being the primary caregiver, learning parenting skills, learning and meeting their children’s needs, getting to know children better, becoming emotionally closer to children, dealing with children’s difficult behaviours, meeting their own personal needs, and perceiving changes in their own traits.

“Children Changing” was a theme that included changes the men observed in their children after becoming stay-at-home fathers. Participants reported children becoming more accustomed to the presence of their fathers, developing personality traits, and learning.

The “Changes in the Fathers Relating to Others” theme represents fathers’ perceptions of their relationships with other people changing after they became primary caregivers for their children.

The theme “Memorable Moments” refers to fathers’ recognition of significant times with their children that occurred more often after the men became at-home parents.

The Father Changing

Each father described experiencing changes within himself and in his behaviour after becoming a stay-at-home father and being with the children in a new way. Relationships with children were experienced in the context of maintaining the household, and daily routines were closely tied to the experience of the father-child

relationship. The changes these fathers experienced were wide-ranging, and often included cognitive and affective shifts as well.

Getting used to being the primary caregiver. The fathers consistently described needing to adjust to taking over caregiving responsibilities in the home. They described periods of adjustment, which related to being with the children, coordinating activities, and maintaining the household.

Hans described a period of about eight months during which he became accustomed to performing the duties of the primary caregiver. He jokingly described his “maternal instinct” “kicking in” over this length of time. Although he had already learned how to give physical care by being at home while his wife was on maternity leave, Hans recalled that the daily routine felt more natural and automatic after an initial period of adjustment:

It’s more natural for me now, where before I’d have to think, OK, what’s my process here? How am I going to do this, or, now I just see something and, up, I go do it and it’s done, and without really thinking about it. It’s just everyday life now. No different than putting my socks on in the morning. Just something I do.

Larry recalled needing to adjust to spending an entire day in the company of his children, a task that was physically and emotionally draining:

It was the sustainability of it. It’s not coming home from work at five and at seven you’re getting the kids ready for bed, and, however tiring or frustrating that might be, it’s mostly a short period of time. Compare that to, OK, it’s 9:30 a.m., we’ve already been up for two hours, I haven’t had a lot of sleep,

the kids are a little cranky and pushing on each other, right? You don't get to say, "Stop," and go to bed now, right. You've still got to push on through for another eight hours until mum gets home, so it's really the endurance aspect of it. It's a big change.

Larry's process of adapting to being in the home all day involved becoming more aware of what he would need to do to take care of the children. Once he was able to anticipate the events of the day and the preparation time involved, he could figure out how he would plan his time:

I got used to being in the routine. I know now, if I'm thinking of going somewhere, OK, get the water bottle and the snack ready first. We've got five minutes to let the kids play, and then say, "OK, it's time to go to the car," as opposed to, "OK, it's time to go to the car, get their shoes on. Oh yeah, I forgot to go get the water bottle, extra diaper," all that kind of stuff, and it gets a lot easier, and, really, I had to do it a number of times, repetitiously.

Bruce noted that he still had a managerial way of thinking when he entered the home full-time. He described his initial months as a challenging time:

It was probably the first year, eight months, that was a real tough time for me, because I'm making that change, I'm staying at home, and all these things I'm supposed to do, in my head. This list is not imposed by my wife or anybody. It's just, you know, I'm in business mode. And it took me about a year to slow down and adjust, not being in the social settings, the workplace, to being at home, by myself with the baby.

Part of Larry's managerial orientation was his expectation that he would be direct the household just as he had directed employees at work. He realized, however, that this expectation would not suit child-rearing. Recognizing that his child's needs were different from his own led him to reconsider his need to do things his way. Larry was accustomed to scheduling his activities in order to accomplish tasks efficiently, but recognized a need to change his way of getting things done:

When I first got home, I was still in work mode. Being a manager, I'm trying to run the house like, OK, this is a business. Everything has a place and time and schedule. Cleaning's on this day, this is on this day, we've got to do this, this, this. The only problem with that is there's a baby in the way that didn't read the same schedule or book. So, there's quite an adjustment period there, where I had to get out of that work pace, and slow down and smell the roses, and say it doesn't have to get done right now, that's OK, I can do this later or tomorrow.

Carl described making the decision to care for his children at home based on practical considerations. When the shift actually occurred, he felt "apprehension," and was "wondering." It also took some time for him to identify himself as a stay-at-home father, partly because he would continue to work outside the home as well. When Carl took on parental responsibilities in the community, he encountered few other primary caregiving fathers:

I was taking my son to a Gymboree class and I'd be the only dad. And, because it wasn't the Saturday morning class, it was Wednesday morning or

afternoon, it was quite different. My wife had had him and she had been doing quite a few activities, so I just picked up on those and kept going for a while. I had some consciousness that I was a stay-at-home dad, and it's still, to this day, a pretty unique thing to be doing.

Assuming the domestic responsibilities associated with being an at-home parent made a big impression on Carl. When describing changes experienced in relationships with his children, a consistent factor was the amount of care required to maintain their environment. When Carl started looking after the household, he was surprised at the amount of work he had to put into maintaining an area he had just cleaned, especially after the children entered it. He remembered the frustration of having to do his work over again and clean up after them:

When you get married and think about having kids, and all that, I don't think that you're necessarily thinking, I might sweep the kitchen floor seven times in one day. Or I'm cleaning, and five minutes later it can be blown apart. I hadn't thought about it in those terms.

Carl stated that he had always respected the amount of work that goes into keeping house and raising children. He attributed his surprise at the effort involved to youthful thinking and the fact that he had never actually been in the role of full-time domestic caregiver before:

My mom was stay-at-home and I knew she worked hard. She still probably did more and worked harder than I do. To me, it was like she was always doing something. It's not like I wasn't aware of it. I think I was just youthfully, blissfully ignorant.

It seems that, for these fathers, a significant part of spending more time with children at home was coming to terms with the unexpected, and developing a smooth routine.

Learning parenting skills. While Hans and Larry did develop important caregiving skills prior to becoming primary caregivers, they also described learning to parent after becoming stay-at-home dads. Feeding, changing diapers, managing sleep, and providing discipline were several tasks that these men learned to perform.

Before learning to give physical care, Hans had some feelings of trepidation about looking after his infant son. One particular question stood out in his mind:

It was a little thing, but, it was one. How much do you feed a little kid? My wife, she probably did 90% of the feedings up until she went back to work, so I was sort of in the dark there on, “Is he hungry now? Is he hungry now? How much do I give him?” So, that was a bit of a learning curve.

Hans described learning parenting skills from his wife, who attended parenting classes and shared her learning with him. She would research topics that concerned the couple, and together they would decide how to implement strategies. This specifically involved setting up a new sleep routine:

First my wife researched it. She took the course, and then, I think the first course she took was the sleeping one, and she said, “That’s it, we’re letting him cry it out.” Two days later, he was sleeping from seven to seven, and I just said, “Wow.” And it’s been like that ever since.

Hans believed that his learning had been of significant benefit to his son, saying, “There’s no question on how much easier it is raising him, and how much

happier he is now.” Hans gained confidence quickly. He explained, “The things I was scared about quickly went away, because, basically, all it is is feeding and changing diapers at that age. That becomes old hat after a while. You can do it in your sleep.”

Larry described learning about children’s developmental stages, and applying that knowledge to his parenting. This was helpful at times that his son would not follow the rules Larry set:

It helped for me to remind myself what stages there are. I remember reading some stuff after we had been to the class, and someone said that even five-year olds only follow rules about fifty percent of the time. I thought, OK, when he’s not listening to me, or not following the rules, that’s part of the developmental stage. Pushing those boundaries is very important for him at this point, so that just helps remind me that’s going to happen. So, we’re being informed and I’m reminding myself what’s appropriate for his age, and what are reasonable expectations at his age.

Larry found that he had to keep up his learning in the area of child development. As his son was growing, Larry needed to alter his own expectations and parenting behaviours according to each developmental stage:

I had to do that constantly. I expect to continue doing that because also at the kids’ age certain techniques don’t work as well with them, certain techniques are not as appropriate with them, so I find I need to keep going back and checking about, OK, now that he’s coming up on four rather than coming up on three, what do I need to be doing a little differently, or what can I

anticipate coming? It helps if I can look ahead and see what developmental stages are coming, and what things I can be watching for.

In contrast to the other men, Bruce did not find it useful to rely on parenting education. Although he and his wife referred to books before the birth of their daughter, they soon found that the information offered often did not apply to their situation:

Kids haven't read those books. My daughter didn't follow those books.

Might as well just throw it in the garbage and say, go with your instincts.

When we first started off, when she was pregnant we had that, and we read it, but then we had this little child there depending on us. She hadn't read the book, she didn't go by any pattern or code.

Bruce did acknowledge, however, that he had to learn to perform physical caregiving tasks early on, such as changing diapers and maintaining the child's schedule, in order to provide adequate care for his daughter.

Learning and meeting their children's needs. Hans stated that after becoming a stay-at-home father he learned to assess his son's physical needs according to signs that the young boy would give, although some were obvious. He commented, "There was signs to look for, when he was hungry, when he was tired, put him down. Well, the eye-rub was a dead giveaway."

With his son reaching the age of three, Hans was seeing other needs arising as well. He explained how he is trying to help his son learn, by encouraging curiosity about their surroundings. Hans described his role as facilitating his son's

exploration of the world. In this process, Hans provided his son with safe guardianship and knowledge about how the natural world works:

I'll just, "What's this?" and if he doesn't know, I'll tell him. And ninety percent of the time he'll remember it, and I can ask him a month later, he'll know it. And, then he'll ask, "Why is that a truck?" for instance. Well, "Why is it a truck?" Then I have to explain that it carries things, and he's always curious on how everything works, and he'll go from trees to grass to dirt to how a tree grows or anything like that.

The time that Hans spent teaching his son how things worked also crossed over into their leisure time. Hans described involving his son in new recreational experiences as an educational process:

We go boating, fishing, camping. Show him how the food chain works, and weather, and staying in the woods. You know, let's go, we can survive in the woods for a week if we have to. Let him experience those things, and be able to understand how these things work. I think, the more he knows about nature, life comes a lot easier.

Larry, too, mentioned his attempts to assist his son by providing safe exposure to the outside world. He viewed this process as offering helpful stimulation, "trying to introduce him to new things, or bring up stuff that I know is going to help with his developmental stage, physically or mentally or emotionally." Larry stated that skiing together was his way of providing this kind of experience to his son.

Larry explained that, once he became a stay-at-home father, he had to re-evaluate his priorities in order to facilitate meeting his son's needs. He changed his focus from preparing for his own workdays to preparing the kids for their days:

The newest part would have been, especially first thing in the morning, no longer focusing on myself, getting myself ready to work, whereas now, it's getting up, it's thinking, OK, what do I need to do for the kids to get their day going, as opposed to doing what I need to get my day going. That comes second.

He linked this process to having a better understanding of his children's rhythms and how they needed a day to go. He reasoned, "Prioritization becomes the key. Yes, I'd like to pick up new eavestroughing from Home Depot, but that's not going to happen tomorrow at 11. It's going to happen next Tuesday when mummy's home."

Larry identified changes he had made in communicating with his child as well. He believed it was necessary to do this so that his son would not feel badly after being disciplined. Larry described learning how to appear approachable, even while addressing undesirable behaviour:

Physically looking him in the eye, not looking him in the eye and staring down, but looking at him horizontally, actually getting down, so we're at the same level, facing each other, and then choosing a tone, that's lower, firmer, for disciplinary or serious things. And it's a more upbeat, higher, positive kind of tone, and sometimes it'll change after, "This is really not good. We

need you to stop that. Do you understand that?” “Yes.” “Now this is really great.” And so I try to leave things on a positive note.

The need to change priorities was also mentioned by Bruce. He commented, “If I’ve got a schedule to meet, that doesn’t mean she has to meet the same schedule. She doesn’t need to be doing all the same routines that I planned, so I have to take into consideration what she needs.” In addition, Bruce had to address his career ambitions and re-assess their importance once he was in charge of caring for his daughter:

I also had plans, you know, the corporate ladder and entrepreneurial endeavors. And, maybe being focused and driven are good qualities, to pursue that, but maybe not the best if I’m going to stay at home and be a parent, a caregiver, because I have to be receptive to those needs. And really, it’s all about the kid, right, about her needs now.

Bruce recognized a shift occurring in what he needed to teach his daughter after she grew out of toddlerhood:

Three and four, she was feeding herself, dressing herself. She was out of diapers, wiping her own bum, but then after that, I had to shift from getting her to a self-sufficient point as a child, to sort of giving her more direction, why isn’t it right to talk to strangers, how do you want to act around your friends? Is it right to grab things? You know, teaching manners, morals, what’s right in our house, the difference between other people’s houses and what we do in our house.

He explained that he was doing more teaching with his daughter now that she was seven years old, since there were things he thought she should know. He found that she needed some assistance understanding her schoolmates and finding ways to handle their behaviour:

As she hits school age, I've got all the issues I need to address, you know, the big ones, boys, friendships, topics that come up. There's always something, but I have to stop and talk to her about it, that these things can happen, and what would you do when the girls are talking about you.

Bruce shared ways in which he was seeing his daughter try to reconcile moral lessons she had learned with some harsh realities of life. He gave the example of his family encountering a homeless person, and his daughter's desire to help her. Bruce believed that the woman was probably addicted to drugs, but his daughter thought that the family should share, since they could afford to do so. He saw that it was becoming his role to temper moral guidance with realistic expectations.

We try to educate her, we donate our money to the food shelters, and all the charities that help these people so they can go and get help, so they can get meals and places to sleep and clothes and medical assistance. But, because they're sick, they won't necessarily use the money you give them to help them. They might use it to get some more drugs that might harm them some more.

Bruce also gave the example of a time it became necessary for him to become more attuned to his daughter's emotional needs. She had been waiting for a playmate's family to come over, and then saw that some other children were playing

outside near her house. Her bike was out there, and Bruce knew that she sometimes felt competitive with a girl who looked like she was going to ride it:

She puts on her helmet and races out there, and I just said, “Wait, stop. Your friend is coming in to play with you. You’re going to be probably playing inside.” And I just saw her. She’s just welling up with anger, something’s going on here. She’s got her helmet on, I’m not letting her go out. I said, “OK, stop. Let’s sit down.” She’s in tears, “What’s wrong?” We sat down, and this other father had just said, “Well, why aren’t you out there with the other kids?” So she was going out to play with the other kids for a bit, and I hadn’t come in yet. There was a communication gap, so she was getting instructions from two different people, and I had to stop and understand, she’s upset about it. What’s going on? There was a conflict of instructions there for her.

Bruce emphasized the importance of being able to recognize his daughter’s emotional state, and discuss about what she was experiencing . He had an ongoing goal of being available for his daughter when she needed to communicate about feeling distraught.

Raising three sons had impressed upon Carl the importance of providing opportunities for them to be physically active. Their need for vigorous play, however, was also something that Carl encouraged. The family would get involved in activities together, Carl said, as soon as the boys were walking. Their need for action and his desire for them to become involved in sports seemed to combine, and the boys continued athletic involvement into later childhood.

Carl also described his efforts to facilitate learning for his children. This also combined with the family's physically active lifestyle. Carl had taught two of his sons to ride bicycles, and he had wanted his younger son to learn more easily than the older son had. He described keeping track of which bicycle his older son first learned to ride, so his younger son could use it later:

The older guy was harder, and he was older when I was teaching him, too. He had the wrong bike. It was too heavy and too awkward, so we kept trying on that and it didn't really work. And then he got on this other bike that we had borrowed from someone, and then he just went off. So that was the bike we saved, I knew this bike was good to learn to ride on, so when the little guy went, he was fine.

Carl described feeling challenged by his daughter's need for more attention and nurturing than he was accustomed to providing. Arranging physical activities for his sons was important when they were her age, and nurturing was something he did less often. Now his daughter was counting on him for emotional support more often. At the time of his interviews, he was still in the process of becoming better at offering her the amount of support she needed, "I'm getting used to it, giving the nurturing, giving the attention."

Knowing their children better. Hans, Larry, and Bruce described getting to know their children better in the process of being stay-at-home fathers. Their experiences brought them into close and sustained contact with their children, and they shared the sense that they were getting to know their children's personalities. Carl, on the other hand, felt that he had always known his children well, and that

their personalities had emerged at early ages. He did, however, get to know his daughter better as he came to understand her need for more emotional support than his other children.

Hans described getting to know his child better as a result of his son's developing communication abilities. When his son was younger, Hans had some difficulty figuring out what he was trying to say. Now that his son was speaking more clearly, their conversations helped Hans to feel like he knew his son better.

Hans characterized his son as "perceptive" and "quick." He described an occasion when his son demonstrated these qualities:

If I go for a drive with him, he'll pick out not only the make of a vehicle, but the model. If he sees a fire engine a mile away, he'll say, "Oh, fire engine," and I'll look, I don't see it. And a minute later, it's coming down the road. He's so observant with everything around him, it blows me away.

Larry described getting to know his children better as a result of consistently being together in the home. He commented:

I know so much more about what their day is like. Spending the whole day with them, regularly, I also get a sense of the nuances, the troubles and the changes that are going on with their day, and how one day is a little bit different from the next, or better, or not, or whatever.

This provided a context for Larry's becoming more familiar with his children, and gave him a fuller exposure to all the different parts of their lives. He said he had developed "a sense of really knowing them and who they are, what their

lives are like, what they're up to." Larry felt he was "really starting to understand their personalities."

Bruce stated that he focused on learning to provide basic physical caregiving before finding out more about his daughter's personality. After getting to know, "sleep schedules and stuff," Bruce gained a strong understanding of how his daughter was feeling on a daily basis. This allowed him to consider her personality and "adapt" his behaviour to meet her needs. He described the results he saw as a result of his increased involvement in her life:

I get involved here, in school, see her in her school and play environment, and actually just stop to see how she's doing and see how well she gets along with other kids, and plays, and how well she's adapting, how well-rounded she appears to be.

Bruce had recently learned to think of his daughter as being very much like himself. He had regarded himself as "opinionated" and "strong-willed," and he was finding similar qualities in his daughter's character. He had also received feedback to this effect:

I was describing a day I had to my wife where we were just, my daughter and I, were just at wit's end, and we were just butting heads all day. And my wife just came home and said, "You know, it's just like looking in the mirror, isn't it?" I thought that that was quite funny. I said, "Point taken," you know, I've got it, OK, I'm dealing with me, so when she responds, she's responding quite often in a way I would.

Larry described learning to anticipate his daughter's reactions to his parenting. By doing this he believed he could then figure out ways to engage with her without "butting heads." He reasoned, "She is her own person. She's got a strong will, and, so, maybe a head-on disagreement isn't the best way, or the authoritative solution, dictated by me, is not necessarily the right way to handle all this."

Feeling closer to their children. Larry and Bruce described feeling emotionally closer to their children after becoming stay-at-home fathers. Although Hans and Carl also spoke of feeling a strong emotional connection to children, they did not recall this changing over time.

In connection with being present for his children's daily routines, Larry described feeling "closer" to them. He explained that the social connections he used to find at work had been replaced by his relationships with his children:

I was worried about being away from work, that social aspect, but I don't find myself needing the social aspect as much. And I think that being with the kids is replacing that social aspect. That feeling of connection with other people, I'm feeling with my kids. It doesn't need to be an intellectual one, it's just more of an emotional one.

Bruce remembered his bond with his daughter strengthening as he spent time caring for her. "I was bathing her, feeding her, you know, bedtime, songs, stories. So, we got that close bond, like buddies." Knowing how his daughter was doing and having honest discussions were things that let Bruce know his bond with his daughter was strong. He said, "So I know what's going on in her life, what her good

things are and what pisses her off, and she knows mine. It's just very, very intertwined."

Larry gauged the change in their closeness by assessing how well they understood and knew one another. He explained, "She knows me and I know her. We do talk, have an open communication daily. Everything. She understands me, and I'm not just the guy who comes home on the weekend or late nights." He used the phrase "warm fuzzy" to describe the feeling that let him know he felt closer to his daughter.

Handling tough times with children. Larry, Bruce, and Carl described experiencing changes associated with times when being with the children was difficult. In these instances they reported feeling surprised, either by their children's behaviour, or by their own internal response to the behaviour. At the very least they perceived a change in their self-awareness, and several times they also reported making changes in how they handled these difficult occasions.

When Larry's children tested limits and exhibited demanding behaviour, he had to find ways of managing the situation, as well as his own feelings:

The most challenging thing for me is, when our oldest especially is pushing those boundaries, and the younger is starting to get in that range now, because she's into the terrible twos. And you can't hand the kids off to mummy and say, "I need a five minute break." You can't say, "It's almost bedtime, or let's move bedtime up ten minutes to get you guys a break." So, the kids are being cantankerous, it's only 9:30 in the morning, and I'm

already, “Arrgh.” OK, alright, so how am I going to shift this so that I’m not yelling at the kids or getting more and more frustrated?

Larry described the challenge of managing his own frustration when his children were uncooperative. He also identified a need to change his expectations of his children’s behaviour, and find appropriate ways of addressing it:

Changing expectations, recognizing my expectations and changing them, was the first step, but there are going to be days when they’re like that. I know that’s also partly the way they’re programmed, to see, “OK, is this really a limit? What can I get Daddy to do? Oh, I can get Daddy to make funny faces by throwing my milk across the room.” So, then I respond appropriately in those situations, “OK, you made a mess. You go clean it up,” rather than shouting or whatever.

Even though Larry perceived that he had changed his way of approaching his children when they were misbehaving, his efforts to remain calm were ongoing. He commented, “I’m probably doing better at responding in a calm manner, which I think is more appropriate than responding in an angry or frustrated manner, so that’s probably what’s changed, but it continues to be the biggest challenge.”

Bruce realized that his daughter’s crying affected him more than he expected. Although he was able to provide adequate care for her, at times she would cry for reasons he did not understand. When this happened, he had to deal with his emotional response:

I had a seven month old baby, she was crying, I couldn’t figure it out. She had her nap, she had a drink. She was crying, pushing my buttons, right. I

didn't even know I had them. I didn't know how I would react. I didn't know that a small child can push, I mean, she wasn't pushing buttons, but I got to a point of frustration. I mean, anger rises.

Bruce found out that he was not in control of his daughter's mood, and that there were factors influencing her behaviour that he had not immediately understood:

You know, I put the baby down, I walked away. Came back. OK, now I figure out what's going on here, and I found that very interesting. It's something I figured I was totally in control of, and then I couldn't control a situation. A small baby has her own mind, or her lack of communication meant I couldn't figure out what she needed.

Bruce came to understand that his daughter's means of communicating would not necessarily match his own:

The difference for her, when she couldn't talk yet, her crying was just communication. She wasn't mad, she was just communicating; she needed something. And I had to try to figure out what that was without getting only frustrated.

For the purposes of describing Carl's perspective on tough times with his children, I am including elements of Carl's interview related to caregiving for his three "typical" children, in accordance with Carl's preference and his understanding of the interview questions. This is also consistent with the depth of information shared by the other fathers in the study.

Like Larry, Carl found it difficult to deal with children crying, and described trying to help them by offering solutions that he thought would make sense. He explained, “You offer what you think are the rational things, but then it’s no good. And sometimes there’s tiredness, and other factors behind that.” Carl had also come to the realization that his children might be distressed for reasons unknown to him. One way he coped was to reframe what he was hearing, “Sometimes I’d say, it’s music to my ears, even though it was kind of grating on me, because sometimes she cries and there’s nothing you can do.”

Carl described the difficulty of caring for the children over the course of a “long day” especially during the winter when the weather kept the family indoors. On days like that he found that the forced time indoors would “make things percolate” and it would become difficult for the children to get along. Carl recognized the difference that extra support in the home would make:

My wife being a teacher, it’s pretty good, because she gets summers off, Christmas, Easter. Usually, she’s never home later than four. There was one point she was never home later than 3:30. And that made quite a difference in how my day would be, as a kind of relief.

Carl also experienced other tough times that were linked to the drudgery of keeping house. He described the “day-to-day grind of some of the monotonous work” as a “big challenge.”

Unlike the other fathers, Hans did not recall having any difficulty being with his son. He described his son as having an easy temperament and being “a pleasure”

to be with. In this regard, he described his experience as consistently positive and did not seem to identify with the experience of having tough times.

Meeting his own needs. All four fathers described becoming accustomed to the impact of caregiving on their personal time and activities. Taking care of the children's needs occupied such a large portion of their days that making time for themselves took deliberate effort.

Hans explained that he did not miss having time on his own per se, since he was able to involve his son in his leisure activities. He did, however, value taking a short break after his wife would come home each day. This independent time was an opportunity for him to take a break from giving care:

I need a time to just say, "Whew, that was a long day." And just ten minutes, whether it be just lying on the couch, or just walking outside for a bit, having a smoke, and coming back, and I'm usually good to go. Just a break. I'm going seven o'clock to five o'clock until my wife gets home.

Larry shared that he had not participated in some of his favourite leisure activities since becoming a stay-at-home father. In addition to caregiving responsibilities, Larry was maintaining a commitment to work as a consultant for his former full-time employer. He commented, "I haven't been golfing in three years. I love to ski. Last year was actually the first time I went skiing for an entire day. Because the work that I'm doing, when is it going to get done?"

Larry described his desire to do more things that he found personally satisfying, and was in the process of "finding things that are fulfilling for me, so that I still have my life, and I'm not giving up all the things I'm interested in and

that I love just to be with the kids.” Although Larry was accepting of the fact that he was now responsible for meeting his children’s needs, he missed doing some of the things he used to enjoy.

Bruce also described noticing a decline in the amount of time he spent following his own pursuits. Men with whom he had socialized, however, did not seem to realize how much time a stay-at-home father would need to devote to childcare and housekeeping:

How many times have I heard, “Oh, you’re home. God, I’d love to be you. I could get some rounds of golf in.” And, golf, I haven’t golfed in, I don’t know, years, really. I’m just using golf as an example, but that’s just changing your priorities, whereas some dads who work, they work, but there’s still “me” time.

Bruce linked the lack of personally satisfying activities to the feeling he was spending a lot of time without the company of other adults. He found himself feeling isolated in his role as a stay-at-home father, and described needing to do something about that:

I was, like, “OK, who am I going to talk to?” It forced me to get out and meet a few people, network. And, for me, I got into running. You know, I met people that way. I used to run, I used to bike ride. I work that into my daily schedule now.

For Carl, maintaining a social network was a way of fulfilling his own need to connect with other adults. He explained, “It can be a bit of a challenge. The way I do it is, staying in contact with some of my friends.” He also described staying

active, and pursuing physical activities together with his wife, as a way of doing himself good.

Even though he had committed himself to participating in his oldest son's sports activities, Carl also saw that as a way of giving himself a break:

I guess, in coaching and even bringing my oldest son to his hockey practice, in a way that's a break for me. Just different ways. It's just, a change of scenery is good for a while. Maybe I go back a little more refreshed and ready to deal with what I have to deal with.

Personal traits changing. Hans, Bruce, and Carl reported that, as stay-at-home fathers, their relationships with their children had affected their own personal characteristics and behaviour. Larry, on the other hand, did not detect a difference in his personal traits, and the behaviour change he described was more related to meeting his children's needs than a change within himself.

Hans described himself as being "more patient" than he was before becoming the primary caregiver. He thought this had carried over into his relationship with his wife, which she noted as well. His brother had also told him that he seemed "more relaxed" than he used to be, even though Hans had always thought of himself as relaxed.

Bruce perceived that being his daughter's primary caregiver played a role in him becoming less competitive, and more nurturing, than he used to be. "Having had a daughter, and being a parent, and having to learn through intuition and perceiving needs and wants, has affected me." Bruce thought that he had gotten better at understanding other people by learning to understand his daughter. He

stated, “Being a stay-at-home dad has helped to influence the way I perceive, or listen, or communicate, hear what’s coming at me.” Bruce explained that he felt more open to hearing what others had to say.

Bruce said he had improved his ability to understand the perspectives of others. Bruce explained, “I apply that to everybody. I have to stop and say, well, what’s really driving this person, instead of, this is what I need out of them. What do they need, instead?”

In relating to others, Bruce also described being able to communicate his feelings more fully:

Having my daughter has helped me to express my emotions more openly.

You’re taught as a guy to, stiff upper lip, take it on the chin. I know, now I know it’s OK to have a moment with my daughter, and hugs and kisses, and that just comes from having her at home.

As he became accustomed to the amount of work involved in being a primary caregiver, Carl reported that he also experienced personal change. He believed he was more knowledgeable about what it took to raise children and offer them the care he wanted to give. He believed he had gained patience through his efforts to keep the household running:

I feel a lot different. Because I just, I got the full picture, the full picture of what, just the household stuff. It’s a lot. To try and maintain it, and the kids’ needs, and the patience, right. Just everything. The patience, and spending that time, it changed me.

Carl also described feeling more “unselfish” since he had to be more giving as a stay-at-home father than he had been before. In fact, he regarded himself as “a different person” when he factored in his long-term efforts to meet the needs of his disabled son. He explained that even as he was giving care to his other children, he had to deal with his feelings about his son “every day, every day.” He noted that the “caring” and “compassion” he developed in caring for his son had also grown through being a stay-at-home father.

Children Changing

The fathers in this study described changes they observed in their children after becoming stay-at-home dads. They reported their children taking time to adjust to father presence, developing personal traits, and learning.

Children adjusting to their father’s presence. Hans, Larry, and Bruce noted that it took some time for their children to get used to being with a father in the home. They noted that their children seemed to experience that period of adjustment at the same time they themselves were becoming accustomed to providing care in the home. In contrast, when Carl recalled his early days as a stay-at-home father, which were longer ago than for the other men, he did not believe that his children took time to adapt to his presence. Instead, he felt that they accepted him in the at-home role seamlessly.

Hans described his son adapting to his presence and taking some time to feel “more comfortable” having Hans take care of his physical needs in particular. Hans thought that his son cooperated more with him than his wife at times, since he had become used to the routines that Hans put in place. He commented, “When my wife

comes home, he becomes a little bit different of a person. He pushes her buttons a little, where he would never do that to me. There's a difference of the way he treats me and how he treats her at the end of the day, but I think a lot of it is that I am with him the whole day."

Larry noticed his children adapting to him "as I was now doing the things they were used to Mummy doing." He sensed that they still regarded their mother as "the best" at doing some tasks, such as telling stories and offering creative activities, but that they would now also say, "Daddy's the best, we want Daddy to do this," when they wanted him to help them dress or do a physical activity with them.

Larry also reported that after he had been home for a time, his children were "less clingy" with his wife when she was leaving the house to go to work. After he established a morning routine of getting the kids ready to go out, he noticed his son showed less "uncomfort and anxiety" during morning transition. Larry thought that his son could now anticipate what his father would need him to do: "Now, he's more used to, OK, it's time to go, so he knows he needs to do these things, put on his shoes, that kind of stuff, to get ready."

Bruce recalled hearing his daughter call "Mummy, Mummy, Mummy!" when he first became the primary caregiver. He believed that she showed she was accustomed to his presence when her automatic response a difficulty was, "Daddy, where are you?" He interpreted it similarly when his daughter would say, "Come and watch me do this," or "I really want you to be there." For Bruce, his daughter

showed that she was getting used to his presence by coming to him with her needs and telling him she wanted him around.

Children's developmental changes. Hans, Bruce, and Carl reported that, as stay-at-home fathers, they noticed shifts in their children's presentation of personality characteristics. Larry, on the other hand, saw the personality traits of his children remaining constant during the time he spent as a stay-at-home dad. Although he noticed his children adjusting to his presence, he did not believe those changes reflected a difference in either child's personal traits.

Hans noticed his son becoming more "tolerant," although he was unsure if this adequately captured his son's experience. He believed his son was becoming more understanding of how things worked, and more "patient" as his son learned that sometimes he would have to wait to get what he wanted. Hans attempted to capture the kind of change his son demonstrated in an example:

This summer we took him out to BC and we were fishing. I thought, this is his first time in a boat, first time fishing, and I thought maybe it'll last an hour. It lasted 45 minutes, no big deal, he got bored, let's go back. Next day it was a little longer. Now I take him out three or four hours, catch him some fish, he's occupied, he understands more what's going on, he'll stick with it, even though there's not a lot happening for a while.

Bruce described his daughter developing "cognitive awareness" which she displayed in interactions with him. He described a time when his daughter wondered what was going on for him when he was curt with her. She thought that he needed to drink some water, since he often told her the importance of being well-hydrated.

Bruce said this was a change from just concerning herself with what she was supposed to do:

She was worried about my good, my well-being. She wasn't very happy with it [his response] and she said so to my wife, 'I thought Daddy was supposed to drink his water, Mom. Tell him to drink two.' She was worried about me not getting enough.

Carl reported that he noticed his children developing "heightened compassion" especially in relation to his disabled son. He felt his children had "more of that sensibility," as a result of seeing, from very young ages, how he and his wife provided care. He noted, "They see how we have to treat him and they treat him that way, and I hear things from other people, too, about something they may have done which showed that, that they have that." Carl added that this quality was of great personal importance, and that he had wanted very much for his children to develop compassion both in a general sense, and with regard to their disabled brother.

Children learning. Hans, Bruce, and Carl referred to children learning in the context of the father-child relationship. Several times this involved the fathers providing learning opportunities for their children. Their interactions formed a context in which the children were exposed to new information and gained knowledge they did not have before.

Hans mentioned that he often noticed his son's learning, and said that his son was especially motivated to learn about trains, and how things work in general. Hans commented, "No matter where we are, he's asking questions on how

everything works. He wants to know how the boat works, what this motor does, and what does this propeller do, how it floats.”

Hans could identify with a passion for learning about this kind of subject, as he remembered wanting to know all about airplanes as a child. Hans not only noticed his son learning, but also found that his son would retain new information for a long time. Hans believed that his son’s enduring curiosity led him to learn quickly and ask many questions.

Bruce described his daughter as getting “better at communicating her own thoughts.” Now that she no longer needed to learn how to meet her “primary needs,” such as changing and toileting herself, she was demonstrating “curiosity,” and seeking answers to her many questions. Bruce explained, “Now she’s asking these questions, ‘So, how come this is this way,’ because she knows, ‘OK, I’m secure here, my world is good.’ She looks out and goes, ‘Oh. How come that’s that way? Why is it that way?’ His daughter’s new learning included moral reasoning and how to apply the rules she has learned in the home to the world outside.

Carl related an instance of his three year old daughter asserting herself in an unexpected way. He had enrolled her in a ballet class and dropped her off with her teacher each week. Carl was accustomed to accompanying her into the classroom and trying to ease her anxiety over joining the rest of the children in the group. One time, she decided to walk ahead of him, having “figured out” what she needed to do. Carl elaborated on the difference, “There was no real hesitation. There were six girls in their little pink tutus, and then, she opened the door and she just walked right in and sat on a mat, was right in there. And, I mean, she’s young.”

Fathers' Relationships with Others

Each father, in his own way, described relationships with people other than their children influencing or being influenced by the father-child relationship. Hans recognized that he became “a little closer” to his brother after becoming a stay-at-home father. He described their relationship as “not that close” prior to assuming the role of the primary caregiver. However, once Hans’ brother started spending time with Hans’ son, Hans saw that, “He’s a great uncle to my son. He just loves him to death, which sort of opened my eyes that he’d be really open to that.” The strong uncle-nephew relationship seemed to facilitate a better relationship between the brothers, given their shared feelings for the child.

Larry described his relationship with his wife having an impact on his relationships with the children. Feelings of frustration might carry over from one relationship to another, and Larry saw a need to address his emotional state at these times:

If things are going well in the relationship, then that’s when my baseline of frustration is low, and I’m able to tolerate more with the kids. I find when things are more frustrating with my wife, that raises the underlying level, and I get into that frustrated state more quickly, and I need to find ways out of that more quickly. And, also, then I also need to find ways of dealing with those frustrations with my wife.

Likewise, Bruce noticed a clear link between the quality of his interactions with his daughter and the quality of those with his wife. He perceived that improved communication with his daughter was also good for “my stress level, my health, my

wife's stress levels." He believed that his learning about how to relate to his daughter had led to improvements in his spousal relationship: "Our communication relationship between us, I learned from having to deal day-to-day with my daughter, it affects my communications with my spouse, you know, hopefully for the good, and it strengthens our relationship and our marriage."

Carl also identified a connection between his spousal relationship and his father-child relationships. He commented, "If my relationship with my wife is going well, which hopefully it is most of the time, but there are stresses, and that really affects how you are with the kids and the whole family dynamic." Carl noted that both positive and negative feelings could transfer from one relationship to another.

Carl described how caring for his children had facilitated him forming relationships with other people in his community. He found that his third son was especially likely to approach neighbors, with whom Carl had never spoken to. After his son started a conversation with someone new, Carl would then become acquainted with that person:

He'll just say hello to somebody who doesn't expect it. They'll just, "Oh, hello, Ray." That's kind of the amazing thing about kids, you know, they open up the world. I've talked to people I'd never spoken to. That's with a few of the neighbors around here for sure.

Carl credited the initiative of his son with positively influencing his social life. When his children and other children were involved in sports, shared interests, or were in similar situations, Carl would develop friendships with the parents he encountered. He elaborated:

It's increased our friendships. One of our best friends has a child with cerebral palsy, so that's how we, kind of, connected. But we know other kids like that. It happens like that. My son started kindergarten with someone I went to high school with, and their son was in kindergarten. Well, they're our best friends now.

Memorable Moments Together

Each of these stay-at-home fathers recalled events with children that provided especially vivid memories. Some of these instances were the most satisfying experiences they could remember with their children, while others seemed to encapsulate the experience of taking responsibility for the care of children.

Hans described a strong memory of taking his son fishing. It was the kind of outdoor activity that Hans valued sharing with his son, and when his son found joy in the experience, it was thrilling for Hans as well. He recalled:

When he caught his first fish, that was such a hoot. We were on holidays. We weren't in the boat, we just went to a friend's dock, and it was just a sucker. He was using some corn off the dock. He caught it, reeled it in. He didn't care if it was a rainbow trout, a salmon, or a sucker. It was a fish! He was just smiling, and then, when mom showed up, running down the dock, "I caught my first fish!" And that was just a hoot, just to see how excited he was.

Being outdoors and teaching his son were elements common to the other experience that Hans identified as showing what it means to be a stay-at-home

father for his son. Another satisfying part of this experience for Hans was simply being together. He described:

Taking him swimming for the first time. We had him in a life jacket out in the lake. He didn't like it at first, but then he just fell asleep, just floated around. And then, this year, taking him swimming again, and he'd actually be trying to swim. We'd swim around the boat for hull inspections every day to see if there's any scratches. And then he, like I said, his memory, "No, that scratch was there yesterday, and this one wasn't," And we'd get them fixed. And just going around with him on the boat all afternoon, with him driving the boat. Fun things like that, I enjoy the most with him.

Larry stated that hearing his children laugh was the most satisfying experience he could remember sharing with them. He described different occasions when he would play physically with them, and they would show their enjoyment:

When I'm tickling them and they're laughing, hearing the kids laugh, for me, it's just the most amazing thing. When I chase them outside or there's certain games or activities that make them laugh, certain things in the swings, my daughter loves that. So she giggles for half an hour as I push her on the swings.

Larry described a fullness to the emotions he experienced when he was experiencing a playful moment with his children. The series of moments that he shared with his children also evoked an image in his mind:

There's times when I have the two kids and we're rolling on the floor, and I'm tickling them, and they scamper off, and they run back, a big smile on

their faces, “Daddy, do it again.” There’s times when I feel the emotions are very strong and very happy, and there’s strong connection on both sides. It’s, sort of seeing, trying to put life together, as a string of pearls. You keep adding more.

Larry did not believe that the experience of being a stay-at-home father automatically lead to more memorable times with his children. He still had to make a choice to spend time with them, rather than becoming preoccupied with all his other responsibilities. He elaborated:

That’s probably the challenge now, is to not get so caught up in a new set of day-to-day activities when I’m driving to things, or trying to get some cleaning up done, or whatever. You get distracted and get caught up with everything being day-to-day routine, and forget, you don’t remember to take time out, time in, with your kids.

Bruce explained his regular routine of walking his daughter to school each day. He described being struck by his daughter turning to him once they arrived at the building, so that she could confirm he would be there at the end of the day:

We get to school, she has to say goodbye a few, several times. I’ll look around and all the other kids have gone in and she’s stopping to say, “Hey, wait, Dad. Goodbye, I’ll meet you here after school? I’ll see you here?”

Bruce inferred that this showed the strength of the bond between him and his daughter, and he valued her wanting to connect with him. Another memorable occasion was when his daughter decided to practice riding her bicycle after learning

to ride a short distance. He derived satisfaction from her joy and sense of accomplishment, and linked this moment directly to being a stay-at-home father:

To see her go ride her bike. I was able to stand outside, and she decided, last Thursday, she tried to ride it. She was trying to ride the bike in the evening, and she got it about ten pedals. Then, the next morning, she totally broke her routine of getting up slowly, got right up, got ready for school, said “I’ve got half an hour, Dad. I’m going to go practice my bike,” and I said, “OK, well, we’re all ready, then. Good.” So I went out and got the camera, and I was able to be there when she actually started riding back and forth. To experience this moment, and see that beaming smile, I’d hate to miss all that stuff.

Carl recalled a moment that stays with him, from when his oldest son was a toddler. Carl had been a stay-at-home father for just a short time. Although he did not remember the context in great detail, he had a picture of the occasion in his mind, and a strong emotional impression from that moment, and a sense of the importance of what he was doing:

I was just starting at home, my kid was one, and I can just remember walking with him to the park. I just have that image in my mind of walking with him to the park, and he just, I don’t know, it was neat. Just that I was the one doing it. And it was the middle of the day, and I was the one looking after him.

When asked to describe moments that exemplify being a stay-at-home father, Carl referred to interactions with his daughter, “There’s many of those a day. It’s

just lots of little moments, you know, help her go to the bathroom, help her get her sweater on, just lots of little things, read a book, cuddle. Just lots of different things.” Instances of providing care were also memorable for Carl.

Carl highlighted the time his daughter entered her ballet class on her own as memorable. He recalled what her actions meant to him and how he felt: “Her being the person she is. It just shows independence, and wanting to experience new things. I just found that really satisfying.” Carl also recalled his son riding his bicycle for the first time, adding, “That was a perfect one.”

Summary of Results

The fathers in this study experienced changes in their father-child relationships that were reflected in themselves, their children, other relationships, and their recollection of important times with their children. The men described their perceptions of changes in themselves and their actions, which were linked to growing awareness of their children’s needs. They described the process of getting used to being the primary caregiver and settling into their role in the home. They also explained how they learned parenting skills and applied those skills to parenting.

As they learned to meet their children’s needs, several participants described how they became to their children’s emotions, and providing nurturing. Participants described getting to know their children better as separate individuals. This involved recognizing that they perceived their world differently from their parents. The fathers in this study described becoming emotionally closer to their children, and changing how they dealt with children’s difficult behaviours. They experienced

greater satisfaction of their own personal needs after becoming caregivers for their children, and described personal transformation as well.

These fathers observed changes in their children's behaviour, feelings, and personalities after assuming caregiving responsibilities. They reported children becoming accustomed to father presence, developing new personality traits, and learning in a variety of areas.

The fathers also perceived changes in their relationships with others after they assumed primary care for their children. They experienced memorable and significant moments with their children. These times were sometimes highly satisfying, and at other times they reflected a father's sense of what being in an at-home relationship with his child was all about.

The next chapter discusses the implications of this study.

Chapter 5: Discussion

This chapter begins with the integration of this study with the current literature. Then the limitations of this study are discussed, and future directions for research are outlined. The chapter ends with recommendations for practice based on the findings.

Integration of Results with the Current Literature

The fathers in this study accepted that they functioned as secure attachment figures to their children, and this possibility is well-supported in the literature (Geiger, 1996; Liebman & Abell, 2000; Snarey, 2003). Participants described providing competent care, exciting play, nurturing, and affectionate companionship, all of which contribute to a secure bond. Larry and Bruce did, however, perceive that their children would look to mothers, either for particular tasks, or in the early stages of their father's transition into the home. Both men described changes occurring in this area and believed that their children came to regard them as the central parenting figure.

Each of the fathers in this study described engaging his child's activation and attachment systems, through playful interactions and comforting behaviours respectively. Although their relationships with children differed somewhat from their spouses' mother-child relationships, the presence of rough-and-tumble play alone is not enough to account for the father-child bond these fathers perceived. Participants described providing the kind of care that would reinforce a secure attachment bond. They offered contact comfort, emotional support, and soothing to their children. The presence of both activation and attachment activities in these

father-child relationships supports the research of Roggman (2004), which proposes that fathers may interact with children in ways that support regulation of both stress and arousal.

Hans and Larry described their efforts to balance their continuing work with their responsibilities in the home. Their experience is similar to that described by men in Doucet's 2004 study, which found that stay-at-home fathers often maintained ties to paid work and continued to contribute to the household economy. Even though Bruce and Carl were not in the workforce at the time of the study, Bruce carried his workplace identity into his early days as a stay-at-home father, and Carl continued to work occasionally for a number of years after coming into the home. The world of work carried over into stay-at-home fatherhood in substantial ways.

Interestingly, institutional practice, and parental leave policies did not play a large role for any of these men as they assumed caregiving responsibilities. Instead, they cited their responsibilities, feelings, beliefs, financial considerations, and spousal relationships as influences on their decision to become stay-at-home fathers. Spousal incomes were also high enough that their families could maintain their standard of living when fathers' incomes were reduced. Although this does not necessarily contradict the research of Hyde, Essex, and Horton (1993), who found that employer policy influences paternal leave-taking, there do seem to be many significant factors that influence men to care for children in the home. Further research remains to be done on whether socio-economic status predicts reliance on paid leave policies.

A couple of the men in this study adhered to roles that have been described as traditionally belonging to fathers (Griswold, 1993). Larry, in particular, identified with the fatherhood role of providing moral guidance, and described his daughter attempting to act in moral ways as she got older. Hans identified more with the father-as-teacher role, as he related his efforts to introduce his son to the outside world, and described changes in his son's learning.

Hans, Larry, and Bruce described learning to how to provide childcare from their wives. Learning from their wives allowed them to gain skills, and feelings of competence followed. Although these fathers did not describe enhanced feelings of competence arising as a direct result of interaction with spouses, the perception that their spouses trusted them and thought them competent, did enhance their own confidence, consistent with the literature (Bouchard, Lee, Asgary, & Pelletier, 2007). In the process of coming into the home, these fathers may also have been influenced by their wives' values (Simons, Whitbeck, Conger, and Melby, 1990), and started to focus more effort on nurturing children.

Limitations of the Study

The men participating in this study were mostly fathers of young children, and only one of them (Carl) was raising children over seven years of age. Since many of the children were young, their need for direct instrumental care was likely quite high compared to older children. These fathers were often providing for needs such as security, an understanding of the world, and the introduction of moral principles. Fathers of older children give care in different ways, such helping with homework and providing transportation, since the children meet their own

instrumental needs in many ways. The attention the fathers in this study devoted to meeting instrumental needs influenced their own ideas of what constituted their father-child relationship. The physical welfare of their children depended upon instrumental caregiving, with the weight and consistency of those responsibilities reflected in participants' responses.

The fathers in this study were members of a fairly homogenous group of men, being White, married, college or university educated, middle-to-upper-middle class males with children between one-and-half to ten years old. The lack of diversity in this sample was unintentional, and participation was open to fathers of any race, age, education, and socio-economic status. Approaching potential participants through community service organizations, such as those providing assistance for recent immigrants and gay men, may be a means of correcting for this kind of bias. Unfortunately, since the field of respondents was of a fairly uniform composition, the results achieved reflect a narrowed range of lived experience.

None of the fathers in this study was taking a parental leave from the workplace, and the experience of fathers on leave may be different from the men in this study. When there is an assurance of returning to paid work after being in the home, fathers on leave may understand their caregiving role differently, since it is part of a temporary arrangement. On one hand, since participants in the current study had been in the home for four months or longer, their experiences reflected the significant amount of time and energy spent caring for their children. On the other hand, the negotiation and taking of leave is not reflected as it relates to father-child relationships. The balancing of work- and home-life is, however, reflected in

the experiences of Hans and Larry, who continue to engage with the world of work regardless of the availability of parental benefits, and integrate their work activities with caring for children.

The interview process itself may have limited this study in specific ways. Each of the men expressed some uncertainty of what it meant to experience change in their relationships with children. I attempted to introduce the subject by asking them to describe their experience of becoming a stay-at-home father in general, gradually moving the interview toward the subject of their relationships with their children. I did not direct the men to speak about relationships as defined by any particular scholar, and each father responded according to his own definition of relationship.

Future Directions for Research

The findings of this study indicate several possible directions for future fatherhood research. Each of the fathers in this study prioritized different fathering tasks. Studying how men develop their self-concept as fathers could shed further light on how men assign importance to different aspects of fathering. It would also be valuable to find out how children and spouses understand father-child relationships, in order to examine similarities and differences in perspective. It would be helpful to fully understand the experiences of all family members who witness the fathering processes.

Fathers in this study were clearly influenced by their fathering experiences. They perceived changes in their attitudes, beliefs, and values, but the mechanisms by which these changes occur bear further investigation. I would be curious to

explore these changes long-term, and document how these fathers experienced their father-child relationships over time, from when they started out as primary caregivers to the present day. Further longitudinal studies of fathers' developmental processes could clarify many processes involved in father development over the lifespan.

These possibilities add to the general need for further investigation and assessment of father-child relationship quality, fatherhood stereotypes and ideals, father role identity salience and commitment, forms of father involvement, and fathers' adult development (Marsiglio, 1995). The amount of research focused on what the fathering experience means to men is fairly slim (Eggebean, 2002), and, given the wide array of possible fathering contexts, further study is necessary to fill in the gaps.

Implications for Practice

The results of this study provide a view of fathers who endeavor to provide their children with loving care, learning opportunities, new experiences, consistency, and security. These men had a sense of what they wished to provide for their children, and when they looked back on their experiences they identified changes in their relationships with their children. Their ability to detect change in themselves; their children; their other relationships; and in their shared significant moments, are intricately linked to their values and beliefs.

For Hans, teaching and exploring were the processes that formed a framework for understanding his activities with his son. Larry's responses related back to the need for a regular routine and shifting priorities according to children's

needs. When Bruce described his relationship with his daughter, the role shift from manager to caregiver was the context in which change occurred, and it framed his personal experience of relationship change. When Carl described changes he noticed between himself and his children, his disabled son's need for continual care and his devotion to compassion as a familial value seemed to be always near. A counsellor interacting with any of these men would need to learn how each understands himself as a father, and how he perceives himself in relation to his children. Counselling for stay-at-home fathers must incorporate their personal caregiving frameworks, and those cannot be known without the input of fathers themselves.

Clearly, fathers are capable of explaining their experience of relationships with their children in ways that enrich our understanding of the fatherhood literature. These stay-at-home fathers have been competent caregivers to their children, and the study of their perspectives offers a window into the workings of father-child relationships. They have integrated fathering into a deeply meaningful place in their lives, as shown by their connection to the children to whom they give care. As research into fatherhood progresses, it is fathers themselves who may provide the knowledge necessary to counsellors who wish to promote healthy father-child relationships. This research offers new knowledge of fathers' implicit definitions of relationship and promotes understanding of how they make sense of changes in relationships with their children.

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Appendix A

You are invited to participate in a study exploring the experience of CHANGES STAY-AT-HOME DADS EXPERIENCE IN RELATIONSHIPS WITH THEIR CHILDREN

I am looking for volunteers to participate in a study of the changes stay-at-home fathers have experienced in relationships with their children since becoming the primary caregiver.

There is a limited amount of research that describes the experience of at-home fathers. The results of this study may benefit participants, counsellors, fathers and other family members by extending their understanding of factors associated with changes in father-child relationships. Participants may benefit by using the interview process to reflect upon their experience of fatherhood. The interview process may provide you with another way to make meaning of your experience of being a father.

As a counsellor-in-training, the study will assist me to understand the experience of fathers, and how they understand their relationships with their children.

What you will be asked to do:

This study will involve participating in two interviews each lasting up to one-and-a-half hours. The interviews will take place at your home, or at an alternative location of your choice. You will be asked to describe changes you have experienced in your relationship with your child(ren) since becoming a stay-at-home dad.

Your Rights:

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary, anonymous & confidential. Throughout the course of the study, all data will be stored under pseudonyms rather than under the participants' names. Only the researcher will know the participants' identities.

You are free to withdraw from the study at any time. I will solicit your views about the research process at various points, and ask for clarification or offer feedback throughout your participation. Should you wish to withdraw, all your data will be immediately destroyed.

Anjan Raymond-Bhatt
Master of Counselling Psychology Student
City University
630, 1300 - 8 Street SW
Calgary, Alberta T2R 1B2
Ph: (403) 245-1813

Appendix B

Consent Form

Title of Study: Father-Child Relationship Change: The Lived Experience of Stay-At-Home Fathers

Researcher: Anjan Raymond-Bhatt
Master of Counselling Psychology Program, City University

Supervisor: Jeff Chang, M.A., R.Psych.
Program Director
School of Arts and Sciences (Canada)
City University
630, 1300 - 8 Street SW
Calgary, Alberta T2R 1B2

This information will provide an overview of the process of informed consent. It will provide a basic description of the research and the nature of your participation. If you would like further elaboration, please feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to explore changes fathers experience in their relationships with children after becoming stay-at-home dads. My primary research question is, "What changes do men who become stay-at-home fathers experience in relationships with their children?" I am interested in fathers' perspectives of their relationships with their children, and what changes they perceive after becoming at-home fathers.

Procedures

This study will involve participating in up to two interviews each lasting up to one-and-a-half hours. The interviews will take place at the participant's home, or at an alternative location of the participant's choice. The researcher may contact participants at a later time to clarify any questions regarding the interviews.

Participants will be men from Calgary who are currently stay-at-home fathers.

Description of Involvement

There will be no financial costs to participants as a result of participating in the study. Participation in the study will involve participating in the interviews. The interviews will be audiotaped or digitally recorded. I will also take notes throughout the interviews. Recordings will be transcribed after the interviews. All recordings,

notes, and transcripts will be handled confidentially according to the methods described below.

Confidentiality

Throughout the course of the study, all participant data will be stored under pseudonyms rather than under the participants' names. The researcher will transcribe all interviews himself, and only the researcher will know the participants' identities.

Individual participants will be referred to by their pseudonyms in the final thesis document. You may choose the pseudonym to be associated with your data. Please indicate the given name you wish to use as your pseudonym:

Participant's Chosen Pseudonym

Potential Influence of Researcher

The role of the researcher brings with it the possibility of influencing research participants. The use of interviews especially can open the research process to the possibility of undue influence. The integrity of this research depends on my accurately representing your experience and your perspective. I will give you the opportunity to review a draft of my thesis before it is finalized. I invite you to tell me at any time if you think that I have misunderstood your perspective or experience.

Protection of Privacy

The participant names, pseudonyms, and data will be stored on the hard drive of the researcher's personal computer, guarded by a password known only to the researcher. Back-up copies of all data will be kept on digital media stored in a locked filing cabinet. Print-based transcripts will also be kept in a locked cabinet when not in use. In keeping with the researcher's policy for data retention, data will be kept for a maximum of five years following publication/presentation. The data will be disposed of by shredding all paper documents, destroying all audiotapes and erasing all computer files on the hard drive and digital media.

Possible Benefits

There is a limited amount of research that describes the experience of at-home fathers. The results of this study may benefit participants, counsellors, fathers and other family members by extending their understanding of factors associated with changes in father-child relationships. Participants may benefit by using the interview process to reflect upon their experience of fatherhood. The interview process may provide you with another way to make meaning of your experience of

being a father. As a counsellor-in-training, the study will be of personal benefit to me by assisting me to understand the experience of other fathers, what they value in relationships with their children, and how they understand those relationships.

Potential Risk

In reviewing your experience of being an at-home father, you may revisit specific life transitions, or personal experiences associated with your family relationships. This may lead to some temporary emotional distress, and if this occurs I will provide referral information for Calgary Family Services. It is very unlikely that such emotional distress will have any long-lasting effects.

Consent & Contact Information

In no way does signing this agreement waive your legal rights nor release the investigator or involved institution from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time. If you do so, all data generated from you participation will be immediately destroyed, and will not be used in the final thesis document. Your continued participation should be as informed as your initial consent. Accordingly, I will solicit your views about the research process at various points. I invite you to ask for clarification or offer feedback throughout your participation.

If you have further questions concerning matters related to this research, please contact:

Investigator: Anjan Raymond-Bhatt (403)245-1813

Supervisor: Jeff Chang, M.A., R.Psych. (403)209-8352

I consent to participate as described above:

Participant's Name (please print)

Participant's Signature

Date

Researcher
Anjan Raymond-Bhatt

Date

Appendix C

Interview Protocol

Please describe how you became a stay-at-home father.

What changes have you experienced in your relationship(s) with your child(ren)?

What influences your relationship with your child(ren)?

How has your father/child relationship influenced aspects of your life?

What are the satisfying parts of your father-child relationship(s)?

What are the challenging parts of your father-child relationship(s)? How have those challenges changed or resolved?

How have you changed over the course of your father-child relationship(s)?