

GIVE LOVE GET LOVE



THE INVOLVED FATHER & GENDER EQUALITY PROJECT

Brought to you by The White Ribbon Campaign, in partnership with Dad Central.
Funding provided by the Ontario Women's Directorate



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Involved Father and Gender Equity project was a collaborative effort between the White Ribbon Campaign and Dad Central. The study explored the positive roles that fathers, organizations working with diverse fathers, and the fatherhood sector in Ontario in general can play in promoting gender equality, healthy, equal relationships, and ending violence against women in all its forms.

The data for the study consisted of several modalities including focus groups, surveys of fathers who participated in the focus groups, interviews with stakeholders and professionals working on engaging fathers, and a preliminary environmental scan of the services available to fathers in Ontario.

Fifty-three (53) fathers took part in nine focus groups in communities across Ontario. The information regarding their experiences comprises the majority of the findings in this document. The following are the major findings associated with this research.

- » Involved fatherhood occurs along a continuum that allows fathers to find ways to actively participate in the lives of their children. Entry into fatherhood is described as a transformational journey that positively changes men and their relationship with their children and partners.
- » Fathers in this study spoke about the importance of utilizing parental leave benefits as a way to be active in family life. Some of the benefits of using parental leave including increased attachment between fathers and children and increased empathy towards the child rearing process. In the long-term, increased use of parental leave by fathers may also affect current social norms that limit men from caring and nurturing roles.
- » Fathers in this study suggested that despite the gains that have been made in parental leave policies, engaging in parental leave is an isolating and often frowned upon aspect of their experience. Father-specific programs were described as a way to connect with other fathers, share experiences and build informal support networks regarding their parenting.
- » Involved fatherhood has benefits for children, mothers and fathers. Fathers indicated that they feel more emotionally connected to their children and

- prioritize their children and family over other aspects of their lives. Fathers indicate that their involvement results in greater co-parenting and greater emotional attachment between partners.
- » Many fathers are actively finding ways to counter the traditional gender stereotypes. In their roles as fathers they are providing opportunities to their children and making choices for their children that allow the children to exist outside of the stereotypes that are often associated with boys and girls.
 - » Aboriginal fathers who participated in this study indicated that in addition to the daily lives of their children, their involvement included teaching them about aboriginal culture, history and taking their children to activities designed to educate about aboriginal heritage. Aboriginal fathers indicated that their involvement in the lives of their families includes close connections to their community.
 - » The use of language is an important part of the parenting process and was found to be salient within conversations with Gay/Bi/Transgender fathers. These fathers utilize language to challenge the heteronormative discourse that often exists regarding fathers. Language is utilized in creative ways to describe the parenting experience beyond the traditional gender binary.
 - » Fathers in this study indicate that their involvement with their children promotes gender equality in many ways. Fathers are role modeling gender equality with their children and understand the importance of having conversations about equality with their children. Fathers in this study also suggest that a change is occurring in relationships, where equality is more present within their relationships than ever before.

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This project could not have occurred without the dedication and support of many other individuals. The researcher wishes to acknowledge the support and contribution of the following:

Funding for this project was provided by the Government of Ontario, through the Ontario Women's Directorate.

This project would not have been possible without the assistance of the staff of the White Ribbon Campaign, including Todd Minerson, Humberto Carolo, Jeff Perera and Clay Jones. Humberto and Todd acted as the advisory committee for this project. In particular this included assisting with aspects of project management, community liaising and the development of the research questions for the focus groups. Humberto Carolo was also invaluable as a co-investigator on this project, fielding questions, providing feedback and providing guidance and direction throughout the project. He was a source of support, acted as a mentor and was invaluable in getting this project finished.

Brian Russell of DadCentral.ca for opening doors, making links and connections that allowed me to hear the narratives of the fathers. His ongoing support is incredible and invaluable – you are an impressive resource to say the least.

We are thankful to the following agencies that acted as community partners, assisted in recruiting participants and provided space for the focus groups to occur:

- » St. Mary's Family Learning Centre Ontario Years Centre – Windsor
- » Brighter Futures for Children of Young Parents, Young Father's program – Ottawa
- » Ontario Early Years Centre Nepean Carleton/ Centre De la Petite Enfance de L'Ontario de Nepean Carleton – Ottawa
- » Native Child and Family Services - Toronto
- » LAMP Community Health Centre – Mississauga
- » Boys and Girls Club of Hamilton – Hamilton
- » Thunder Bay Indian Friendship Centre – Thunder Bay
- » The 519 Church Street Community Centre - Toronto

We would like to thank the following individuals for assisting in recruiting and organizing the focus groups:

- » Barb Brown and Linda Edwards - St. Mary's Family Learning Centre Ontario Years Centre – Windsor
- » Brian Desjardins - Brighter Futures for Children of Young Parents, Young Father's program – Ottawa

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- » Jennifer Hudgins - Boys and Girls Club of Hamilton – Hamilton
- » Serena Essex - Thunder Bay Indian Friendship Centre – Thunder Bay
- » Chris Veldhoven - The 519 Church Street Community Centre - Toronto

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There are several other individuals who have been instrumental in assisting with language, providing context to issues facing fathers and inspiration along the way.

Thanks to the following;

Chris Veldhoven – for providing context and commentary regarding the work being done within the Gay/Bi/ Transgender parenting community.

RESEARCHER REFLECTIONS

“When I began this project, I was uncertain about the outcome. I was also unsure what I could add to the discussion regarding fathering. While I am a father of two wonderful girls, I still consider myself a ‘new’ dad (a term that still makes me smile with glee). I had reservations about asking questions that I had not necessarily answered myself. In short, I wondered if ‘I’ might get in the way. What I found along the way was that ‘I’ was more connected and grounded in the material than I could have hoped.”

This project represents a unique opportunity and possibly a ‘tipping point’ in the way that Canadian society considers fathers. Prior to this project I had spent a good deal of time working with fathers who were mostly uninvolved in the lives of their children. These fathers were given different labels; abuser, neglectful, controlling and absent to name a few. There is a considerable body of literature and research that has focused on understanding the negative impact that these men have had on their wives and children and to find ways to heal and repair some of these relationships. The work to understand the impact of neglectful, absent and abusive fathers is important, necessary and represents a commitment to ensuring that future generations live differently.

This study sought to understand the other end of the spectrum. This project focused on the positive aspects of

fathering and set out to tell stories that demonstrate the kinds of difference that fathers can make. We recruited fathers for this project who are dedicated, present, active and involved in the lives of their children and partners. We hoped to provide them with an opportunity to tell their stories, to listen with intent about what they were saying and to give them an opportunity to talk about being an involved father.

The expectations for this project were realistic. It was hoped that 30-40 fathers might participate in focus groups from across the province of Ontario and provide the opportunity to learn about their experiences and the impact that involved fathers have. The final total of 53 fathers is a testament to the interest in this topic. The response from communities across the province was also exciting and indicative of a greater interest

WE ARE FATHERS WHO ARE DIFFERENT THAN OUR FATHERS AND HOPED THAT THEIR CHILDREN WOULD KNOW A DIFFERENT WORLD THAN THE ONE WE CURRENTLY LIVE IN.

in this topic than was initially considered. There were more invitations to host focus groups than this project was able to accommodate. Most communities easily gathered 6-8 fathers together for us. Communities like Ottawa and Thunder Bay provided this project with multiple opportunities to meet fathers. The response by these communities suggested that we were on track with this project and that fathers are eager to discuss their experiences.

It is impossible to say that there is a uniform definition of involved fathering. This was evident in meeting the 53 fathers and service providers from across the province.

Each had their own story, their own reason for being involved in the lives of their children and each of them derived their own benefit from their parenting experience. Despite the diversity in experience of these fathers, their geographic differences, their ages, their educations, they all had something intangible in common.

One group referred to it as a 'brotherhood'. Perhaps this term most aptly describes the experience of conducting this research. I was able to be part of the 'brotherhood' in different communities, at different times all centered on the idea of fathering. We all had something in common, it needed not to be discussed, it needed not to be named, but we honoured it at every focus group.

We are fathers who are different than our fathers and hoped that their children would know a different world than the one we currently live in.

As the study took shape and as I talked to more fathers and listened to their stories, it became increasingly clear that the times are changing. I realized that these fathers represented more than a parental figure and more than a participant in a research project. They are establishing new territory and as a result invoking the potential for change. Change in our families, change in our communities and change in us.

This 'brotherhood' was clearly evident when we brought together participants from the study to launch the project at the 2013 What Makes a Man Conference in Toronto. I watched two fathers, who had never met, easily slide into a discussion regarding the needs of their sons. I saw support and caring between two strangers and a sharing of something that was unexpected; brotherhood. I have no idea if they will ever meet again, but the experience exemplifies the importance of further study on this subject. If two complete strangers can so easily connect, what else might be possible?

I hope that this document holds meaning for the reader. In constructing the narrative of this document I have intentionally set out to tell a story. This is a story that is seldom spoken, yet evident. It is a story of strength, compassion, courage and love. It is also the story of the need to make change in our society about how we think about parenting. It is also the story about relationships and the power of relationships to create change where it was often thought change was not possible.

Ian DeGeer, January 2014

INTRODUCTION

Fatherhood has received considerable attention in the last 30 years. There has been an evolution in the ways in which we have come to conceptualize ideas related to fathering.

The 'classic' father figure has historically been depicted as the breadwinner and disciplinarian and responsible for going to work early in the morning and returning home for dinner.

These classical notions of fathers often resulted in their absence from the lives of their children. Fathering is no longer considered in such simple ways. Being a father has come to have multiple definitions and meanings.

Fathering has also become a distinct area of study within academic settings and there is an increased focus on the involvement of fathers across the social service sector.

As a topic of research, fathering has become a distinct area to explore including the impact of father involvement with children (Ball & Daly, 2012; Day & Lamb, 2004; Miller, 2011); fathering and domestic violence (Bowker, Arbitell & McFerron, 1990), fathering and child welfare (Strega et al, 2009) and fathering within the context of custody/access matters.

There has also been increased interest in understanding the dimensions of fathering (Doucet, 2004) and how fathering influences the developmental process (Palkovitz, 2002).

One of the ways we might conceptualize the interest in understanding the experiences of fathering or the fathering process is its importance in the child rearing process.

Fathers occupy a relatively unique role within the relationship between mothers and fathers and the parenting process. Fathers who are actively involved in the lives of their children have the ability to influence their child(ren) and have an opportunity to role model healthy and respectful relationships. In this way, fathering may offer an opportunity to promote gender equality and to act as a catalyst for ending violence against women.

This document reports on the findings of the Involved Fatherhood and Gender Equity project conducted between May-November 2013. This project was a collaborative effort between the White Ribbon Campaign and Dad Central and sought to research the links between the activities of involved fathers, gender equality and the positive impact of involved fathering on families and communities.

This project explored the experiences of involved fathers from different cultural and geographic communities from across Ontario.

Additionally this project set out to understand how organizations, communities, and those working in the fatherhood sector in Ontario might better understand father involvement as a method for promoting gender equality.

LITERATURE REVIEW

DEFINING INVOLVED FATHER

The notion of an involved father has been evolving over the past thirty years. As researchers and academics have become more interested in understanding involved fathers and the roles that they play in the lives of children and families, there have been many attempts to define and/or categorize what is meant by the term ‘involved father.’

This section explores the recent attempts at defining and quantifying what is meant when discussing the activities associated with fathers who are actively involved in the lives of their children.

The main current debate that exists within the literature involves understanding what ‘actions’ might be considered to define an involved father. Much of the literature suggests that father involvement can simply be defined by the ability to count the things that fathers do with their children.

Others suggest that there are non-tangible aspects of fathering that must be considered. For instance, how often a father thinks about his child, emotional bonding with children and the feelings associated with being a father are all valid indicators of involved fathers, according to some. In addition to this debate, more recent literature has continued to suggest that fatherhood is socially

constructed and that involved fathering must consider the ways that fathers socially construct their roles in the family and with their children.

The simplest way to consider involved fatherhood is to consider the kinds of activities fathers engage in related to their children. Many studies rely upon self-reports by fathers about the things that they do on a daily and weekly basis with or for their children.

These self-reports often result in a wide breadth of ideas of what it means to be an involved father. As such, researchers began to consider ways to categorize the things that fathers reported doing in order to more deeply understand their roles.

The most widely cited work that utilizes categorization is that of Lamb (1981). He identifies three key components to father involvement: accessibility, engagement and responsibility (Lamb, 1981). Accessibility is taken to mean the time that fathers are available to their children. Engagement, or interaction as it is sometimes referred to, refers to the actual time spent with children engaged in activities that promote healthy child development (Lamb, 2004).

Responsibility refers to the father's engagement in helping to arrange activities and resources for the children (Lamb, 1981). Through the use of models developed by Lamb (1981), it is possible to consider the many different aspects of involved fathering across a spectrum of behaviours.

Despite the usefulness of the typology proposed by Lamb (1981), consideration has been given to missing attributes associated with involved fathering. For instance, Palkovitz (2002) identified 15 categories of paternal involvement and has indicated that in order to fully understand the entirety of the experience of involved fathers, it is necessary to consider the cognitive nature of fatherhood.

For example, how often do fathers think about their children? How often do fathers think about some aspect of the lives of their children? Introducing cognition as an aspect of involved fatherhood adds another layer to the complexities associated with truly understanding the experience of fathers. Palkovitz (2002) suggested that involved fatherhood might be considered along a continuum of behaviours such as time invested, degree of involvement, observability, salience and directness. Considering involved fatherhood to exist on a continuum reduces the 'absolute' nature associated with the terminology and allows for a much broader definition to be considered.

In response to the tendency towards negative portrayals of fathers, Snarey (1993) developed a generative fathering framework. This framework emphasizes the kinds of activities and work that fathers do in response to the needs of their children. Snarey (1993) suggests that these activities are accomplished by fathers out of desire to ensure the well-being of the children as opposed to being in response to the prescribed stereotypical roles that are often assigned to men.

LINKING INVOLVED FATHERHOOD TO GENDER EQUITY

There are very few studies that directly link involved fatherhood and gender equality. Often, connections related to involved fatherhood and gender equality are secondary findings or authors speculate about the relationship that exists between them. In an effort to understand the literature more fully, and to begin to tease out the relationship between involved fatherhood and gender equality, this review is divided into naturally occurring sections. It is also apparent that many of these findings overlap and perhaps need to be considered with a greater sense of integration.

HAVING CHILDREN AS TRANSFORMATIONAL

The act of becoming a parent has the potential to have a transformational impact on the individual. The birth of a child is one of the most significant events that might occur in an individual's life and therefore it might provide impetus for change. Several authors and researchers have examined and highlighted the transformational nature of fatherhood and how this might impact gender equality.

Being an involved father influences the personal growth of men. Watching and interacting with children encourages the personal growth and development of fathers (Coltrane, 1996, p.117). It helps men begin to understand their emotionality including their own anger, fears and insecurities. In this way, fathers who are involved are more likely to understand their cues and triggers and are able to develop responses to their emotionality that are more balanced and reinforce gender equality.

Involved fatherhood is often associated with the development of caring and nurturing practices by men towards their children. The more involved a father is in the life of their children, the more likely they are to develop nurturing qualities. For fathers, being involved with their children is seen as an “opportunity to develop the sensitive, vulnerable and caring parts of themselves” (Coltrane, 1996, p.117). Evidence of the presence of nurturing fathering practices is the most consistent predictor of gender equality (Coltrane, 1996). When fathers are more involved in childcare they are less misogynist and women have more social and political power (Coltrane, 1996, p. 191)

Men who invest in their emotional connection to their children often improve their marital relationships as well. Fatherhood is a turning point for men that prompts them to consider changes in lifestyles and priorities, including their relationship with the mother of their children (Carlson & Turner, 2010). Learning how to understand the cues of their children and engaging in nurturing care leads to some fathers paying more attention to the emotional cues of their partners (Coltrane, 1996, p. 78). This increased nurturing behaviour also improves their overall ability to communicate with their partner (Coltrane, 1996).

GENERATIVE FATHERING

As Snarey (1993) noted, one way of examining involved fatherhood is to consider that many men are parenting differently than they experienced their own fathers. Their hope is that through disrupting the traditional notions of fatherhood, their children will have a different experience and in turn a different outlook on the fathering process. This generative model is found frequently within the

literature. Most fathers indicated that they are trying to raise their children differently than they had been raised (Coltrane, 1996). Their childhoods are described in terms of the emotional and physical absences of their own fathers and they actively seek to be different with their own children.

Traditional gender-specific roles are often found to influence the level of involvement by fathers with their children. There is evidence that suggests that how much fathers participate in the lives of their children depends on their own values (Kalmijn, 1999). Fathers with a more traditional orientation toward sex roles are less involved in child rearing than fathers who are more liberal in this respect (Kalmijn, 1999).

When asked to define the ideal father, men have seemed to move away from the traditional breadwinner description as being the primary function of a father (Brandth & Kvande, 1998). Fathers in Brandth and Kvande’s study (1998) suggest that men experienced the absent father in their childhood and do not wish to have their own children go through the same process. Fathers are seeking close and caring relationships with their children. Fathers are constructing their identities in a new manner that incorporates both masculine and feminine qualities.

Erik Erickson originally conceptualized the generative theory espoused by Snarey. Erickson suggested that generative living was a necessary human trait for ensuring that the species advances. Several authors have suggested that the generative process that involved fathers are engaged in also has implications for their relationships with their partners. When fathers are committed to occupying fathering roles, they are likely to experience improvements in the quality of the relationship with

their partners (Knoester, Petts, Eggebeen, 2007). Fathers who recognize that fathering is a reflection of their own character desire for both the child and the mother to be happy. This generative process will influence the decision to improve the relationship with the mother for the benefit of the entire family (Kalmijn, 1999; Palkovitz, 2002)

ECONOMICS

A unique perspective on involved fatherhood involves considering the economic implications of fathers becoming more involved in the care provider role. Economics are often discussed in terms of the relationship between work life and family life. The increased role of fathers is often discussed in terms of the opportunities it creates for the partners, but also the implications that it has for the relationship as well.

Research has noted how involved fatherhood shapes and changes the spousal relationship. Several authors have explored the impact of the employment status of the mother. Coltrane (1996) found that the mother's employment enhances the relationship. This occurs, in part because it makes the lives of men and women increasingly similar.

Fathers who are involved with the caring of their children and who are employed are able to appreciate the effort of their partners to continue working after returning home.

The similarity between men and women's worlds when both have extra-familial employment can promote understanding and solidarity in the relationship. Similarly, when fathers and mothers both perform childcare and domestic work, it has the effect of producing mutual understanding and enhancing the relationship (Coltrane, 1996, p. 78).

Husbands with employed partners were found to do more housework than husbands with non-employed partners (Coltrane, 1996). This is more prominent if the female partner has a lucrative or high-status position.

While women still do far more labour in the home and are still more likely to be subjected to the 'second shift', these changes in the involvement of men in the home are often seen as the emergence of new patterns of gender equality (Coltrane, 1996). When domestic activities are shared, care-giving thinking develops in fathers and mothers and the social meaning of gender begins to change (Coltrane, 1996, p. 83)

However the benefits of father involvement have not been replicated across all of the literature. There are some smaller studies that suggest that education and employment status can be a barrier to father involvement. Couples who are highly educated or where the female partner works have greater equality within the division of childrearing, but these relationships are often less stable (Kalmijn, 1999).

This can be explained in part due to the fact that the female partner may have perceived options outside of the partnership that contributes to the reduction in stability.

Highly involved fathers have more stable relationships, however this appears to be mediated by the increased levels of satisfaction of their partners who do not need to carry the burden of childrearing by themselves (Kalmijn, 1999, p. 26)

In their study (Bretherton, Lambert and Golby, 2005) found that families were creating new ecologies and new ways of caring for children. Highly educated, dual-career

WHEN FATHERS ARE COMMITTED TO OCCUPYING FATHERING ROLES, THEY ARE LIKELY TO EXPERIENCE IMPROVEMENTS IN THE QUALITY OF THE RELATIONSHIP WITH THE BIRTH MOTHER.

parents had greater freedom and resources that meant they had increasing flexibility to create schedules that met the needs of all of the family members. This is seen as a shift towards increased stability within the relationship and towards improved gender equality as both parents can more easily engage in the care providing role.

THE ROLE OF MOTHERS

Despite the emphasis on the examination of the ‘father’ role, several authors have concluded that in order to understand the nature of involved fatherhood it is necessary to examine the role of mothers.

Mothers occupy a unique position and can act as a gatekeeper, mediator of the father’s time with the child and may influence the interaction between the father and children. Certainly there is overlap between the literature on the role of mothers and generative fathering, however given the impact of mothers on the involvement of fathers, highlighting this relationship is important.

The level of father involvement is related to the relationship between the father and mother. Greater father involvement is associated with the father’s perception of the quality of the relationship with the mother (Carlson & Turner, 2010) Father involvement (spending time, engaging in father-child activities and

shared responsibility) are linked to improved relationship quality with the child’s mother (Carlson & Turner, 2010, p. 22) Fathers who are more involved in childcare are in more stable relationships than fathers who are not as involved (Kalmijn, 1999).

For fathers living with mothers, Carlson and Turner (2010) suggest that increased involvement by fathers strengthens the family’s social capital, thereby strengthening the overall relationship.

Greater time involvement and increased shared responsibility improves how fathers perceive their relationship with the child’s mother and mothers are likely to appreciate the willingness of fathers to share the load (Carlson & Turner, 2010, p. 22)

While it would appear that involved fatherhood is related to improved relationship status, other authors suggest that the interaction is much more complex and not linear in nature. Bretherton, Lambert and Golby (2005) suggest that the relationship between relationship satisfaction and father involvement is likely to be bi-directional. That is, that there is a cycle in which good relationships foster greater father involvement and a helpful and involved father fosters good relationships between partners.

THE ROLE OF PARENTAL LEAVE POLICIES

Much of the European literature on involved fatherhood stems from research that examines the impact of the introduction of more inclusive parental leave policies. In many European countries, parental leave for fathers have become very significant policy matters. There is increased interest in understanding how these policies are shaping

the family environment and what impact they might have on gender relations.

Parental leaves are seen as a way to challenge the traditional nature of gender relations. Many of the gender-based interactions are influenced by the presence or absence of women in the workforce and the additional expectations often associated with working mothers. When the daily activities of families are “segregated into separate spheres on the basis of gender, men are able to exploit women’s labour” (Coltrane, 1996, p. 27). Father involvement via parental leaves has the potential to begin to eradicate these separate spheres and to assist in the building of equality in relationships.

The decision to share the parenting responsibility and often the parental leave process is often considered to be an extension of the shared nature of the relationship (Coltrane, 1996). This pattern of shared responsibility existed prior to the arrival of children and many men see this as an important extension of their relationship.

The father almost always negotiates the use of parental leave with his partner and his employer (Almqvist, Sandberg & Dahlgren, 2011). For parents in Sweden, employers were seldom seen as a barrier to parental leave. The father’s presence (taking a leave) was considered important in preparing the father to take on greater responsibility later on in the child’s life. This is seen as a strengthening of child oriented masculinities.

Parental leave tends to “change the gendered division of labour in the family sphere” (Almqvist et al., 2011, p. 203). Fathers who take on parental leave share most tasks equally with the mothers than those who do not take leave.

In addition to the daily domestic tasks, childcare responsibilities are shared much more equally between parents (Brandth and Kvande, 1998) After taking the parental leave, fathers have a greater understanding of the unpaid work completed at home and a greater appreciation for the work their partner does.

Parental leave was seen as a way to promote gender equality (Almqvist et al., 2011). Couples in their study often indicated that gender equality was promoted through the sharing of tasks and helping each other. In some cases the sharing of responsibilities was often split along traditional lines. So despite articulation that they are equal, participants in the study often resorted to traditional gender roles. This might lead to the reproduction of unequal power relations as defined by Connell (2005).

Despite the apparent benefits of parental leaves, there are several challenges noted in the literature. Low utilization of the parental leave by fathers is often associated with a lack of male networks designed to support fathers while off on leave (Almqvist et al., 2011).

Low utilization may also be associated with the fears of men. Men who take parental leave felt isolated and expressed a sense of loneliness (Almqvist et al., 2011; Doucet, 2004).

OTHER THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

The literature exploring the experiences of fathers is vast and the literature examining fatherhood is equally vast. The most prominent aspect of the literature related to involved fatherhood examines the outcomes that exist for children when fathers are involved. There is also

considerable literature related to the involvement of fathers with the child welfare system and in relation to domestic violence. All of these aspects of the literature will be discussed in the larger report. The larger report will not focus on anyone of these in particular, rather they will provide context to the importance of the current study.

Interestingly, literature directly related to involved fatherhood and gender equity is meager and is typically embedded within the larger work on involved fatherhood. Much of the literature being explored for this project examines studies of men or theories related to involved fatherhood (e.g.; Generative fathering).

The literature involves many different aspects of involved fathering. A large portion of the literature on involved fatherhood utilizes parental leaves as a starting point for examination. The policy-based nature of this aspect of the literature seeks to find out why fathers take parental leaves, their experiences while on and how that influences their relationship with their child(ren).

These studies typically allude to the implications associated with the parental leave for the partner who often returns to work early. Linking parental leaves to gender equality is often a minor aspect of these studies and these studies often contend that greater research is required to more completely understand the relationship between involved fatherhood and gender equality.

A major framework with which to examine this issue is through the lens of masculinities as proposed by Connell (2005). In her work, Connell proposed that all men benefit from the subordination of women and the structuring

of society and that hegemonic masculinities can be distinguished from 'subordinated' or 'marginalized' forms.

It is possible to begin to consider involved fatherhood as a response to the hegemonic masculinity discourse that all men encounter. Examining involved fathering from the starting point of masculinities allows for consideration of the ways in which fatherhood and identity are socially constructed. Not only do men have to navigate ideas related to gender identity while in a relationship, fatherhood brings forth new challenges to conceptualizing identity and gender. It is possible to consider involved fathering as one way of 'doing gender' that might run counter to the more traditional 'male as breadwinner' discourse (Coltrane, 1996).

Through the process of involved fathering, men have the opportunity to radically re-make their notion of gender. This often includes their interaction with their partner through the sharing of household responsibilities and through changing the meanings often associated with gender.

The development of fairness and equality within the relationship whether it is the result of sharing domestic responsibilities or through utilization of parental leaves impacts men in many ways and has the potential to profoundly influence men within their relationships.

One of the challenges to the social construction of involved fathering is that it will often (for some men) involve some reliance upon traditional gendered practices. For instance it is possible for a father to be kind, caring and loving and yet retain elements of traditional model (long work hours).

It is possible, given the transformations being considered that the construction of fatherhood is not an either/or process; rather some fathers likely undertake a piecemeal approach to their identity development (Brandth & Kvande, 1998).

Given the natural links between involved fatherhood and parental leaves it is prudent to explore how the use of parental leaves by men may be utilized as an expression of masculinity (Almqvist et al., 2011). Through parental leaves, fathers often engage in activities that counter traditional parental stereotypes. It is possible that when men spend longer periods of time with their children, they will develop a more realistic work-life balance and emotional attachment to their children and their partners (Almqvist et al., 2011).

The analysis of this research will be looking at the ways in which participants talked about 'doing gender' and the ways that this either encompasses traditional notions of masculinities and/or the ways that men break from those traditional ideas to socially construct themselves according to a more modern notion of masculinities often documented as caring masculinities or the de-traditionalization of fatherhood (Miller, 2010).

It is hoped that the analysis will demonstrate that the emergence of caring masculinities and the de-traditionalization of fatherhood will be described by participants and that the links to gender equality will be part of that discussion.

METHODOLOGY

There were several sources of data for this project. The main qualitative sources of data included focus groups conducted in various communities across Ontario and interviews with key stakeholders. This project included two other sources of data including an environmental scan of fathering programs across Ontario and a survey that was completed by every focus group participant prior to the start of the focus group.

RECRUITMENT

Participants for this project were recruited through a series of partnerships with DadCentral.ca and community service agencies in predetermined communities. DadCentral.ca supports programs and agencies working with dads (DadCentral.ca, 2013) and is a well-connected resource for fathering programs in Ontario. At the outset of this project, geographic areas were identified to be of interest. DadCentral.ca provided linkages to community agencies that provide fathering programs or had an interest in the research topic.

Through DadCentral.ca, individual community-based agencies were approached and invited to partner with the researcher. The geographic locations included Windsor, Hamilton, Mississauga, Toronto, Thunder Bay and Ottawa. Within these communities, individual agencies that indicated an interest in the project became responsible for recruiting fathers for a focus group. These agencies included:

AGENCY	LOCATION
St. Mary's Family Learning Centre Ontario Years Centre	Windsor
Brighter Futures for Children of Young Parents, Young Father's program	Ottawa
Ontario Early Years Centre Nepean Carleton / Centre De la Petite Enfance de L'Ontario de Nepean Carleton	Ottawa
Native Child and Family Services	Toronto
LAMP Community Health Centre	Mississauga
Boys and Girls Club of Hamilton	Hamilton
Thunder Bay Indian Friendship Centre	Thunder Bay (2 focus groups)
519 Church Street Community Centre	Toronto

Each agency was provided with a standard flyer that could be altered to include their address and contact information. Each agency took a different approach to recruiting participants. The St. Mary's Family Learning Centre (Windsor), the Young Father's Program (Ottawa), the Boys and Girls Club of Hamilton (Hamilton) and the LAMP Community Health Centre (Mississauga) all had pre-established fathering groups and therefore recruitment took place through asking the fathers who regularly attended the program.

The other programs relied upon word of mouth and advertising via email. In this case recruitment resembled a snowballing procedure. None of the agencies had any difficulty getting 6-8 fathers to attend the focus group. In the case of the Ontario Early Years Centre Nepean Carleton/ Centre De la Petite Enfance de L'Ontario de Nepean Carleton (Ottawa), they utilized their program email list to advertise the focus group and were so inundated with responses that they had to utilize a wait-list

Each of the focus groups took place at the offices of agencies that had completed the recruitment. They were held at a time that was most convenient for the majority of participants or during the time slot that the fathering program typically occupied. Participants were given a light meal and refreshments. The focus groups lasted for approximately two hours in duration. All participants signed an informed consent form (See Appendix A) and received a \$30 honorarium for participation.

In addition to the focus group discussion, participants were asked to complete a survey (see Appendix B). The survey had two parts, a demographic component and a section asking participants about their fathering experience. These surveys were anonymous in nature and returned to the researcher prior to the commencement of the focus group.

DATA ANALYSIS

SURVEY DATA

The survey data was analyzed using SPSS. A very basic analysis of the data was completed which included a basic summary of each question.

FOCUS GROUP DATA

The focus groups were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim. Data analysis was completed utilizing N’Vivo software (www.qsrinternational.com). The data were organized according to themes or codes that organized the text into categories (Creswell, 2009, p. 186).

There were specific aspects of the participant’s experience that were of interest and therefore predetermined themes that were a logical starting point for the analysis (Creswell, 2009). The predetermined codes were based on the literature and focus of the research (semi-structured interview guide, See Appendix C) (Creswell, 2009).

These predetermined codes were very broad and general in nature and included the following:

- » Defining Father Involvement
- » Dimensions of Father Involvement
- » Benefits of being involved for the father

- » Benefits for partner when father is involved
- » How involved fathers promote gender equality
- » Relationship changes due to father involvement

The use of predetermined themes provided an initial structure to begin the data analysis. After organizing the information according to the predefined themes, the researcher looked for other ‘emergent’ themes that were evident across the data set. Other emerging codes included:

- » Decision Making between partners
- » Experience of stay at home fathers
- » Importance of community
- » Impact/Importance of other fathers
- » Experiences accessing services

LIMITATIONS

The following are noted as being limitations associated with the findings of this report.

This study recruited fathers who had regular contact with parenting programs or community service agencies. In some cases, agencies utilized email lists to advertise to potential participants. As such, they may represent a more motivated sample than might be recruited from the general population. Their connection with pre-existing service providers may also mean that they have given more thought to this issue than other fathers within the general population.

This study was largely qualitative in nature and relied upon the experiences of individual fathers. Given the size of the number of participants that were drawn from across the province of Ontario, their experiences are not generalizable to the population. Rather, they provide a picture of the experiences of fathers in this moment in time.

Additionally, this project sought out the involvement of specific cultural groups and members of specific communities. The findings are not representative of all members of these communities.

In conducting qualitative research, the researcher must remain objective and hopefully distanced from the material being researched. Despite the best intentions of the researcher, given his status as male and father, his experiences have likely shaped aspects of this project. The effects of this have been limited through peer consultation.

This study only presents the voices of men, thereby limiting the female or partner voice in this study. As such, it is possible that the experience of the female partner regarding the level of involvement of the father is different than what was actually reported.

FINDINGS

DEMOGRAPHICS

A total of 53 individuals participated in focus groups as part of this research project. Participants were asked to fill out a Demographic Questionnaire at the beginning of each focus group. This provided an opportunity to understand the make-up of the participants. The majority of participants (76%) indicated that they lived in a two-person home. Over 70% of the respondents to the questionnaire indicated that they have at least two children in their home.

There was an equal distribution of ages across the categories with 27 (50%) of the fathers indicating that their age was between 30 and 39. Participants in this study identified a diverse range of educational experiences ranging from not completing high school to university education.

Participants were asked to identify their combined family income. The distribution of incomes was similar across the categories with a slightly higher number indicating that their combined family income was \$75 000 or greater. For charts and graphs detailing the demographic composition of the participants, please refer to Appendix D.

FINDINGS: SURVEY RESULTS

Participants were also asked to complete a one page survey regarding their perceptions of involved fatherhood and their role with their children. (For detail information regarding the statistics see Appendix D) Participants in this study indicated that they felt that they were 'Really Involved' in the lives of their children.

This is not a surprising finding, given that the intention of this study was to speak with fathers who were involved in the lives of their children and that many of the fathers were connected to community resources that promoted involved fatherhood.

Participants also indicated that they believed that it was 'Very Important' for fathers to role model healthy and equal relationships with their children and similarly teach their children about healthy and equal relationships. When asked about their level of satisfaction with their current parenting involvement, 21 (39%) indicated that they were Very Satisfied while 30 (56%) indicated that they were Satisfied with their involvement. For additional details, including a chart of all of the survey answers, please see Appendix D.

QUALITATIVE FINDINGS

The main emphasis of this project was to explore the role that engaged fatherhood can play in promoting healthy, equal relationships. The project provided an opportunity for fathers to talk about their involvement with their children and how they believed their relationships benefitted as a result.

These focus groups provided a unique opportunity to hear many different experiences and the opportunity to find commonalities between the stories of the fathers.

This section presents the qualitative findings associated with the focus groups. This section is structured to provide insight into the ways that fathers defined their involvements; the perceived benefits associated with their involvement (for their children and their partners); the unique experiences of stay-at-home fathers; and highlights linkages between the experiences of being an involved father and gender equality.

In addition, several sections highlight the unique experiences of both aboriginal fathers and fathers from Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgendered, Two-spirited, Queer and Questioning (LGBTQ) communities. Throughout this findings section, there is reliance upon the use of quotations from the fathers themselves.

This is keeping in line with the qualitative method but also is intentionally meant to provide the reader with the most detailed narratives possible. It is hoped that the voices of the fathers conveys to the reader their experiences and sheds further light on the ways that they perceived their involvement with their children as being important in promoting gender equality.

DEFINING INVOLVED FATHERHOOD:

HOW FATHERS TALK ABOUT THEIR INVOLVEMENT & THE THINGS THEY DO WITH THEIR CHILDREN

Participants in this study were asked about their involvement with their children. They were asked at the beginning of the focus group to contribute to defining the notion of an involved father.

There was no universal agreement on what constituted an 'involved' father and some members of the study contested the idea of being involved, opting for words such as 'active' to describe their role in the lives of their children.

As one father noted, the term, involved father is relatively new and not part of the lexicon of all fathers:

I think involved father is kind of a new phrase. To distinguish somebody as being an involved father is kind of a modern concept. Because before, and dads were just dads and they just did fatherly things, and that was just how the society just was able to exist and thrive, is through the handing down of that knowledge. (Participant)

For some participants in this study, ‘involved fatherhood’ was an unfamiliar term, however their talk about the things that they do with their children revealed several distinct themes that sets out a continuum of involvement. Many aspects of their involvement were quite concrete in nature and related to the construction of the parental experience. This section explores the ways in which men in this study talked about their involvement with their children and how they defined involved fatherhood.

QUANTIFYING THE INVOLVEMENT

Many men in this study spoke about their involvement in relation to the amount or percentage of time that they spent with the children in comparison to their partner. Given the abstract nature of the terminology being used, for many men discussing their involvement with their children was easily put into the context of a number. As the following father noted being able to quantify his time with his child was what led him to identify as being interested in the study:

I thought that I am one [involved father], definitely, because I’m with her now more than her mom is with her. So I was like – Well, I think I would qualify for that, being at home with her.

Obviously that’s not all it meant to me, but I definitely felt like I was in that category based on the amount of time I spend with her, of course. (Participant)

For those participants who identified their involvement as a percentage of time, they typically identified 50% as the amount of time they spent with the children. This suggests that they are conceptualizing their involvement with their children in equal terms of their partner. As the following father suggests, the 50/50 split is often related to equality in the relationship:

Mine is probably about 50/50. My wife takes care of my daughter, getting her up and going to school and that type of thing. But pretty well, by the time I get home then I pretty well take it from there until the time she goes to bed. So it is kind of a 50/50 split type of thing, getting them ready for bed or if there are any post-school activities, we do it together. So it’s about 50/50, I would say, in my family. (Participant)

For other fathers, the percentage was greater or less, depending on their own personal circumstances. As these two individuals suggest, their percentage is constructed in relation to their experience as fathers and is impacted by several different aspects of their lives.

I’m doing only 20% - 50% of that, because of my long hours of work and I am the only driver at home. So my wife takes care of the kids when she is alone with them... So yeah, I do my share, even though it is less than 50%, but that is what my time allows. (Participant)

I'm involved with talking with the parents of other children in her class to arrange for birthday parties or play dates. I'm involved. Actually, my wife and I both take our daughter to classes like swimming classes, gymnastic classes. So I'm probably at least 75% if not more. (Participant)

ACTIVE IN THE LIFE OF THE CHILD

Fathers in this study defined involved fatherhood by identifying the kinds of activities that they did with their children. Being active had different meaning, depending on the individual experience of the father.

For some it was simply ensuring that they were present in the lives of their children, while for others, being active meant taking on different roles within the family constellation, some of which might not necessarily be associated with the male role model.

Some of the fathers in this study described their involvement with their children in very practical terms. There are certain very specific necessities that children require and for some fathers it was important to note that being active in their children's lives involved very routine activities such as medical appointments, school appointments or other activities such as buying clothes or groceries:

Health needs, taking care of school needs, taking care of daily necessities, weekly necessities, hourly necessities, which relate to food and stuff. You are involved. You are participating. (Participant)

The cooking and serving of food to children was often emphasized as a way that fathers identified being involved with their children. Mealtimes offered fathers an opportunity to connect with their children, to hear about their day and for the family to gather together. For the following participant, his involvement with his children was exemplified in the preparation of meals.

...I would take the kids to the grocery store and we would plan a meal together there. We would come home and cook it together. Even with chores, we kind of do it as a group together. So you can even make like menial tasks like that a family event, and we do that all the time. And they get to learn all the skills, but they're doing it in a way that I think is a little more fun maybe, because you're doing it as a group. (Participant)

There was also a very physical component to the activities that fathers identified as part of their involvement with their children. Many fathers talked about involving their children in sports or recreation activities and that they felt that one of the ways that they were involved and connected to their children was through taking them to these activities.

These activities were seen as opportunities to bond with their children and spend time doing activities that both father and child enjoy.

As the following fathers suggest, these physical activities are bonding times and provide an opportunity for the fathers to differentiate from their partners:

...but you talk about the playground, the swimming, the biking, the physical kind of stuff, the playing and that type of thing, I end up doing that, and she does a lot of the sit down and read and get her ready and that type of stuff. (Participant)

I want to be in their daily lives and all aspects, as much as they permit me to. So on weekends I go with them to...like we take them to horseback riding, activities, swimming. I do it. I let me wife stay home and take a break. Also, I wake up in the middle of the night...the night shift I call it. I wake up in the night and I clean the kitchen, I prepare their lunches for the next day so that when my wife wakes up she doesn't have to do that so she can spend the morning with them. (Participant)

There were a number of fathers who participated in this study who had babies or younger children. For these men, their experience of being an involved father was different as it involved very specific types of caring and activities.

Fathers who had children of a very young age spoke of their involvement in terms of very concrete activities, often associated with infant care. The following fathers' quotations capture the essence of their involvement with very young children:

Well for me, I have a little baby at home, three months and I am very involved in bathing him, clothing him, changing Pampers...(Participant)

For me it means doing a little bit of everything. So I feed my daughter. I change diapers. I put her to sleep. I play with her. (Participant)

The experiences of the fathers in this study were not necessarily easily compartmentalized as might be suggested. Often, the activities that fathers discussed overlapped with other obligations or even competing obligations.

For most of the fathers, their involvement was often a balancing act between work, personal and home life. This required them to play a variety of roles in the family and often their involvement with their children varied depending on many different factors. As the following father notes, his primary role is the safety and well-being of his children:

That would probably be protection, making sure that they're healthy, that they got their shots, that their teeth are taking care of, that they are fed, they are clothed, that they are bathed. (Participant)

However, he is also able to articulate that his involvement with his children also includes a spiritual and cultural component.

And you know, and I make sure that they've got their Indian names, that they've got their colors and what clan they're from and what are the responsibilities that they can be looking forward to. (Participant)

This father's involvement with his children also includes practical elements:

Teaching them about responsibility. Like, I tell my kids how to wash dishes. I tell my kids how to do laundry. I teach them how to rake the yard after I cut the grass. Small responsibilities like that. (Participant)

GENERATIVE FATHERING

Many of the fathers that took part in this study defined their involvement as a way of distinguishing their parenting from that of their father. Some were very clear that their involvement with their children stemmed from the absence of their own father in their lives. They often discussed that their decision to be involved was directly related to not wanting their children to experience the same things they did growing up. In this way, these fathers considered their involvement as part of a shift away from parenting (or the absence of parenting) that they had been exposed to as a child.

I think for me, before having had any kids I couldn't imagine what kind of dad I would be. Having kids now, in my opinion, I'm trying my best to provide them what I felt was lacking in my life and give them more. (Participant)

My father immigrated to Canada so I didn't see much of him when I was a kid and I saw how much my mom had to do. So I said - If ever I become a father, I want to be there for my kids. I want to help out my wife because it's a lot of work for a mom to raise...and there were five of us, five siblings, and my mom had to take care

of all five of us while my father was in Canada working and sending back money and whatnot. So, we didn't see much of him, so I didn't want, when I had kids, for them to experience not having a father there. Especially, I have two girls. I want to be in their daily lives and all aspects, as much as they permit me to. (Participant)

INVOLVED FATHER AS PROVIDER

Many of the fathers also identified that being involved in the lives of the children included the fact that they worked outside of the home and occupied the role of provider within the family. While this might be construed as replicating gender norms (mother at home/father at work), fathers in this study indicated that that working was only one aspect of their involvement with their children.

But, even you going to work at six o'clock in the morning and working to say, 5:00 in the afternoon, you're still involved, because you being the one that's at work and making the money to bring home, that's your involvement.(Participant)

You know, we're expected to be out making money, the breadwinner, et cetera, and an involved father is what I learned is somebody that actually sits down, listens to their partner, listens to the needs of the family and works with the family, not independently. (Participant)

GENDER EQUALITY

Fathers in this study also discussed their involvement as being connected to gender equality. For some fathers, their involvement in the lives of their children often

included activities or roles that were traditionally considered female in nature.

For these men, these activities, and therefore their involvement, was seen as moving away from the gendered roles that are traditionally identified towards gender equality between themselves and their partners.

Many fathers in this study indicated that the traditional male-female roles were no longer clear. They suggested that it was not enough to be the father figure. Rather they had to be able to fulfill the roles of both parents in order to meet the needs of their children. In this way, these fathers were equating the work done by both genders as being the same and they understood the importance of doing that, as the following fathers suggest:

I think being able to play both roles is a big deal. You know, you're a father, but I think in some instances you need to be mother as well. (Participant)

So, I think that's the biggest thing, is being able to play mommy and daddy. When mommy is not around, daddy is going to do it. When daddy is not around, mommy is going to do it.

Stay-at-home fathers often expressed the relationship between father involvement and gender equality. In these situations, the fathers were often engaged in activities that are traditionally considered 'female' and they suggested that it was a normal part of their daily involvement with their children

We are Mr. Moms. We are doing everything, from that side of the...you know, getting them up, getting them breakfast, getting them washed and dressed and bringing them to appointments. That's just our role at home. (Participant)

Men in this study also discussed that their involvement in the lives of their children was important for their relationship with their partner. These fathers talked about the importance of supporting their partner, building equal relationships and that their involvement with their children was one of the ways that they were enhancing their relationship.

Supporting the other side of the relationship is just as important as being able to assume that role. It's not just a matter of - I can be mom and dad. It's - You know what? I'm dad and you have to listen to your mother. (Participant)

You know, we're expected to be out making money, the breadwinner, et cetera, and an involved father is what I learned is somebody that actually sits down, listens to their partner, listens to the needs of the family and works with the family, not independently. (Participant)

INVOLVED FATHER: A CONTESTED IDEA

Some fathers in this study found the word 'involved' difficult and problematic. They suggested that the term 'involved' did not necessarily fit how they constructed their lives. Although there is a substantive body of academic literature that utilizes the term 'involved,' it is not a term that resonated with all of the men.

At times this caused confusion for the men. As the following fathers noted, the terminology was problematic as a method of capturing their experience:

But, being an involved father, actually being...I think it is a little bit vague for me, even that phrase, involve fathers, because like you are not really giving a distinction of what you are involved in. (Participant)

Well I am hoping I am involved in my family. That's the whole thing with me. Be involved with my family. It's still...even at that phrase still sounds like you're separate and that you are involving yourself in the family and you're not part of the family unit. (Participant)

For others, the notion of involved father (or mother) could easily and more accurately be reflected in the term 'parent':

Me and my wife are both parents. We are the same parents. We don't have individual roles and responsibilities. We're just both parents. (Participant)

Others still considered the term to be not encompassing of their role as a father or parent and suggested that a more accurate way of reflecting their involvement is to consider them as 'active' in the lives of their children:

No, but yeah, being a parent, an "active parent" might be a better way, that I feel like that kind of is more ... or an "active father." (Participant)

Active parent, because father, here again, kind of is putting us into a role that, you know, like why

can't the wife do the same things that the father does and vice versa? (Participant)

STAY AT HOME FATHER: A UNIQUE EXPERIENCE

Over the last 20 years there has been an increasing interest by fathers in exercising their right to take parental leave. In Canada, there is an allocation of one-year employment leave allocated to a family upon the arrival of a child.

Traditionally, this leave has been filled by the mother of the child and typically referred to as the maternity leave. However, fathers are entitled to take a leave but only one parent may access leave benefits at a time.

The time allocation (12 months) is to be used by both parents in some combination that adds up to the twelve months. The use of parental leave by fathers has increased over time. According to Statistics Canada, the proportion of fathers taking time off and receiving paid parental leave benefits has increased sharply, from 3% in 2000 to 20% in 2006 (Marshall, 2008). Similar numbers were found when considering the lives of children age 1-3. According to the 2010 Survey of Young Canadians, 26% of children aged 1-3 living outside of Quebec had a father who took at least two weeks parental leave after the birth or adoption of the child. In Quebec, the number is higher at almost 1/3 of fathers taking parental leave (Findlay & Kohen, 2012).

The increased interest to take some or all of this leave was evidenced by fathers in this study. This study also had a number of fathers who identified as stay-at-home fathers.

The experience of stay-at-home fathers is a unique topic that has been covered in the literature.

The fathers in this study spoke at length about both the reasons for staying at home and their experiences during the time that they remained home. Through their ‘talk’ it is possible to begin to understand the origins of their desire to be an involved father and some of the challenges that they experience as a result.

WHY STAY HOME?

There were many reasons fathers gave for deciding to stay home with their children. Each individual father that identified as staying at home had his own rationale for why it was important for his family that he took dedicated time to be with his children. For some fathers, being home was something that was a function of life circumstances. One of the participants in this study had a partner who he described as being ‘functionally disabled.’ He became a stay-at-home father when child protection services indicated that his partner could no longer ensure the safety of his children.

For other fathers, the needs of their disabled children and their desire to be involved in the care of those disabled children motivated them to remain home and partake in the caring process.

These are individual and personal examples that do not necessarily extend to all of the participants, but they highlight the individual nature and the complexity of the decisions associated with staying at home. For many of the other participants, the decision to stay at home often involved balancing the financial needs of the family and the desire to bond with the child.

For many of the participants in this study, both adults were working prior to the arrival of their children.

Upon arrival of the child, the parents had to make some decision regarding who would take the leave. For many of the participants, financial well being of the family was a large part of the discussion that occurred prior to the leave taking place.

For many of the fathers, ensuring the financial well being of the family was one of the main considerations associated with taking the leave and as these fathers note, there are challenges as a result:

Well, it was like – Well, I really wanted to stay at home. And she’s like – Well, I really want the year. But, why don’t you just do this then. So the tradeoff is now we’ve kind of hit some debt. Like, it was a lot rougher than we thought, financially. You know, it’s just really expensive...My wife makes a good wage, a good salary, it’s tight. But again, we accrued some debt, and we were quite good at staying out of debt before. But that is the trade off. We’re thinking long-term, so we will get out of it eventually and it has all been worth it. (Participant)

It was kind of a snap decision though. I mean, it was actually tougher than I thought it would be, to quit my job, because I did like it and it was kind of...as the guy it was tough, because I’m like – I need to make sure that financially I’m doing as much as I can with the traditional role of breadwinner, which I think most men feel that, even if they...you know what I mean. (Participant)

I LIKED MY JOB BUT I STILL WEIGHED THE PROS AND CONS AND I SAID - YOU ONLY GET THIS CHANCE ONCE AND IT'S SO...THE FORMATIVE YEARS, IT SETS A GOOD FOUNDATION TO BE THAT INVOLVED FOR THE REST OF THEIR LIFE AND IT'S SO WORTH IT.

But, for us it was also financial. My wife also works for the government, but she works for a Crown Corporation, so the rules in terms of parental leave, are different. So she only gets her full benefits for the first 17 weeks she is off, and then after that she is only on EI and when you have a certain level of fixed costs, yeah, we've had to accumulate debt over the last four months just to pay for the basics.

Another important consideration for many fathers (and their partners) was the financial impact of putting their child into a daycare setting after the leave was completed. For many families, returning to work and placing a child in daycare often meant that most of one of the incomes was going towards covering the cost of the daycare expense. As a result, many of the fathers often opted to stay at home in order to avoid spending money on daycare and to spend time with their children. The following quote is quite typical of the kinds of discussions and decision-making that fathers reported in relation to the cost of daycare:

So she got the full year. But she's like - But, you know, daycare is so expensive, and we calculated it and by the end of...you know, the gas and I worked quite far so there was gas and after

daycare costs I was only going to be keeping not very much. (Participant)

Here is how one father explained his decision to stop driving a truck and stay at home so that his daughter would not have to attend daycare:

She was working and I was working. After the first year she had already planned to go back to work and I had a plan to stay in my truck and I didn't see the kid for the first year of her life. So I would say she is happy that I'm home. She was going to put the kid in daycare and I said - No, I can't do that. So she went back to work and I stayed home. (Participant)

Other fathers were more specific in articulating the duality between the financial pressures and the desire to have the opportunity to bond with their child:

I liked my job but I still weighed the pros and cons and I said - You only get this chance once and it's so...the formative years, it sets a good foundation to be that involved for the rest of their life and it's so worth it. (Participant)

AT HOME EXPERIENCES

While fathers were asked about the kinds of things they did with their children that they believed made them an involved father, many of the stay-at-home fathers often spoke about their experiences in this role. For these men, staying at home was often new, they felt unprepared and many of them had not considered staying home as an option when they began to think about becoming parents.

However, as many of them learned and were able to articulate, the job of staying at home with children involves a lot of work. The men often referenced the sheer volume of work that they had to do as part of their responsibilities.

This work often involved child-focused aspects, but also included housework. Several fathers referred to themselves as 'Mr. Mom' citing all of the things they imagined that their partners did when they were home. Here's how two fathers described their experience of staying home:

In my situation, I am the main caregiver in the family, so I have a role-reversal where I'm the one with the children most of the time. So that's the role I play in my children's lives...getting them dressed, getting them off to school, eating, playing, organizing work and all the activities that go along with it, karate, teaching the how to ride a bike. (Participant)

I mean, for me, I leave my work to take care of my children and my wife stayed working and I was the one cooking, doing laundry, teaching them, taking them to school and all that. (Participant)

We are Mr. Moms. We are doing everything, from that side of the...you know, getting them up, getting them breakfast, getting them washed and dressed and bringing them to appointments. That's just our role at home. (Participant)

For many of the stay-at-home fathers, the other dominant experience occurred when they ventured out in their communities with their children or attempted to access service. As noted in other aspects of this report, fathers generally found there to be a lack of support for them in the community.

The absence of services that were father specific often led to increased isolation for these fathers. Some fathers remarked within the focus groups that they often wondered if any other father ever utilized parental leave, because they rarely saw them. Here is how some of the fathers described the experience of interacting with service providers:

I went to this recently, where Public Health didn't have very much set up for somebody in my position. They were looking to my wife, saying - We have services for you. What do you need? And they never looked at me and said - What do you need? (Participant)

As a primary caregiver. They said - We have services for the female. We have nothing for the male. And you can imagine the battle I've been having all these years. There's nothing, right? There's nothing set up, aside from this program and maybe a few small others. (Participant)

My experience, when I was home with my daughter for five weeks, I felt like I was the only guy doing it. I didn't see any guys at any of the groups. I Googled it and I didn't find any groups for dads. (Participant)

These attempts to access service or reduce their own isolation were often conducted amongst a backdrop of uncertainty about how they might be received. Stay-at-home fathers remain a relatively novel idea that may or may not be readily accepted by others. Often men reported either being ignored or being met with surprise by other parents when they revealed that they were home with their children as the following fathers suggested:

I spoke to a lot of the moms in the play groups and they would all be surprised – Oh, you’re staying home with the baby? I’m like – Yeah! I’m staying home for a few weeks. (Participant)

For me, I don’t think so much it was the women who felt uncomfortable, I think it was me. I felt uncomfortable being among them. I felt they were looking at me as being the odd guy out. But, maybe they were not, they were so busy taking care of their kids that they didn’t even notice I was a guy. I was like another mom there. I don’t know. (Participant)

Finally, for the following father, his decision to stay at home was called into question by some of his closest relatives, reinforcing the complexity and challenges associated with these kinds of decisions:

There are some people in my family, of the older generation, that when we decided that I would be a stay-at-home dad, they said – Oh, no! You shouldn’t do that! You won’t like that! Oh, you’re not going to like that! You should really keep my job and just put her in daycare. (Participant)

HAVING CHILDREN CREATES ANOTHER OPPORTUNITY FOR MEN TO FIND WAYS TO JOIN WITH OTHER MEN REGARDING THEIR EXPERIENCE. THE FATHERS WHO TOOK PART IN THIS STUDY TALKED ABOUT THE IMPORTANCE AND/OR THE IMPACT THAT OTHER FATHERS HAD ON SHAPING THEIR EXPERIENCES.

THE ROLE OF OTHER FATHERS

Fatherhood is a time of significant transformation for many men. Becoming a father is often described as being one of the most significant moments in a man's life. As with many other major life experiences, becoming a father changes the way in which men relate to their world and the kinds of experiences that they have as a result. It also changes the relationship that men have with one another.

The socialization process that occurs with men is often conducted in relation to other men. Peer groups are often quite involved in shaping the beliefs and values that men hold. Prior to having children, fathers might have very distinct interests that bond them with other men. Having children creates another opportunity for men to find ways to join with other men regarding their experience.

The fathers who took part in this study talked about the importance and/or the impact that other fathers had on shaping their experiences. Often the impact of other

fathers occurred within the context of the programs that were visited as part of this study.

THE IMPORTANCE OF DEDICATED PROGRAMS

The importance of other fathers was most clearly articulated when men referenced their experiences attending father-specific programming. These were programs where dedicated time was allocated for fathers to bring their children (or fathers on their own) that would provide a forum to gather together and formally and informally discuss various aspects of their lives.

These programs acted like 'hubs' where fathers knew they could count on being supported regardless of how often they attended. Often participants spoke of 'recruiting' other fathers to attend in order to extend the benefits of the programs to others. While services for fathers are discussed elsewhere in this report, here is how one father described the importance of the program that he attended:

The one thing that I take away from this program is the fact that I'm able to come here and if I have a problem, pull one of them aside and say - Listen, this is what I have an issue with. And, they're not one-sided. They're not biased because I'm part of the program. You know, they will look at you and tell you - You know, you're doing this wrong, or you're doing this wrong, or you're doing this right, or you need help. Like, there are so many avenues that they're willing to do, they're willing to take to help you get through whatever you're going through. (Participant)

FATHER TO FATHER

Beyond the support that fathers noted receiving as part of attending the program, they also indicated that it was the connections to other fathers that were truly valuable to them. Many of the fathers who participated in this study had been attending the same program for several years and had made several close friends as a result.

It was not atypical to hear men in the focus groups talk about meeting outside of the program for barbecues, play dates, or other social activities. Many of these friendships began in the fathering groups that they had been a part of. These gatherings often serve to continue to build social bonds, reduce isolation and increase the levels of informal support that fathers have available to them.

As the following father indicates, beyond the fathering group, there is a consistent group of friends and families that get together on a regular basis:

Every weekend we all get together and all of our kids go play with each other and we all get together and have a barbecue and play hockey or football. (Participant)

Beyond the social aspects of the group, other fathers were identified as being valuable sources of support. There was a wide range of ways that fathers felt supported by other fathers. In many regards, every father had a similar experience and this commonality extended quite simply into having someone else to talk to, someone else who understood what it might be like to be a father.

These groups, and the contact with other fathers provides an opportunity to share information and possibly acts as

a reference point for some fathers regarding parenting aspects such as child development:

It also gives us the opportunity to see each other's kids growing. That's a big thing, you know? Way to go [name]! Way to go, whoever. Pat on the shoulder. Little bit of recognition from another male in the same sort of situation. That goes a long way. (Participant)

Other fathers also serve as an opportunity to receive emotional support from fathers. There are many noted challenges for men to express their emotions as a result of socialization, gender and societal pressures. However, other fathers routinely were constructed as individuals that fathers in this study were able to rely upon and express their emotions without fearing judgment.

Nowhere was this more obvious than in one of the focus groups where a father was talking about his son and began to cry. The immediate support and validation of the participant's feelings by other group members seemed not only natural, but genuine as well:

Participant 1: Oh boy! My son made me a card, right? And he came up to me and he goes - Dad, I got you a card. I didn't have any money to buy you anything. But just what he wrote touched me. I guess...he had photos from (inaudible), three. I don't even know why I'm crying. It just made me happy.

Participant 1: So you see the tears of joy, right? Sometimes, because I'm a man and I've got to be a man and not cry, bu...

THERE ARE MANY NOTED CHALLENGES FOR MEN TO EXPRESS THEIR EMOTIONS AS A RESULT OF SOCIALIZATION, GENDER AND SOCIETAL PRESSURES. HOWEVER, OTHER FATHERS ROUTINELY WERE CONSTRUCTED AS INDIVIDUALS THAT FATHERS IN THIS STUDY WERE ABLE TO RELY UPON AND EXPRESS THEIR EMOTIONS WITHOUT FEARING JUDGMENT

Participant 2: Sorry, I gotta cut you off. You are more of a man if you cry, than you are if you don't cry.

This same group of men also received troubling news during the course of their focus group. Initially, one individual stepped out as the matter was his to take care of. When he did not return, other members began to excuse themselves in order to go and check on their friend.

It was very clear that this group of fathers had an emotional bond that required them to ensure the well-being of each other. While other focus groups also demonstrated emotional bonds, this experience stood out as notable regarding the importance of fathers in providing support to one another.

Support from other fathers took varying forms according to participants. For the most part, attending father-specific programs reduced the isolation that many fathers felt. This was evidenced in one community

where the focus group occurred where there were no father specific programs.

The fathers in this group marveled at how important it was to meet other fathers and that even the one evening that they spent together helped them realize that they were not alone.

Another major impact that other fathers had for participants was a general supportive role. For some fathers, knowing that they could reach out to another father at anytime of the day, was extremely important as evidenced by the following quote:

But, it goes beyond this. I mean I know there are times, like I said earlier, like a 3:00 in the morning phone call. He, single dad, he would call me. I had kids before. He thought he had nobody else to talk to. Maybe [name] or whoever would know about this. Calls me at 3:00 in the morning. Do I get mad at him? Absolutely not. It's one father reaching out to another father for help. (Participant)

IT'S NOT THE SAME WITH ALL FATHERS

Despite the positive aspects associated with meeting and interacting with other fathers, some fathers in this study indicated that outside of the structured programming, their ability to connect with other fathers is limited. It is unclear what limits that ability of fathers to interact with each other outside of these programs. It is possible that many of the socialization patterns of men do not change as a result of fatherhood.

Many fathers might not be likely to spontaneously talk with other fathers or seek out assistance or support. It may also be the case that the provision of dedicated programs for fathers and their children reduces any sort of stigma that might exist regarding attending the programs.

However, the experiences of some fathers in this study suggest that it remains difficult to connect with fathers outside of the dedicated programs. For some fathers, in the absence of formal programs, they relied upon their social circles for information:

I just, in my own social groups, you know, my friends that have had kids and that kind of thing. But, I can't say that there's like a meeting of fathers anywhere, or a real sharing of information, other than between friends. (Participant)

As the following father indicated, his search for other fathers often failed to result in a connection:

The weird thing is I'd see the odd guy at the...it wasn't always. I was always the only guy there. But, whenever I did see a guy, I wasn't...I wasn't...I might be like - Hey! Another dad! But like, I didn't really get into it with them as much as I thought I would. I don't know why. I don't know why. I guess part of it was like...I can't really explain it. I can't really explain why. I thought the first time I saw a guy, that was like in my situation, that we would just be buddies right away. But it didn't...(Participant)

This experience was echoed by another father during the course of taking his child to swimming lessons:

And I find that like I've done things with my daughter, like when we go swimming and stuff, you see like the moms, they are all talking to each other so easily. But then the guys are just like - We're going to go on our own and we're going to not talk to each other. (Participant)

GENERATIVE FATHERING

Fathering has changed dramatically over the years. The stereotypes associated with the traditional notions of fathers no longer exist to the extent that they once did. It is no longer the sole responsibility of the father to get up every morning and go to work in the role of the provider. It is quite normal for both parents to be employed in some capacity either inside or outside of the home.

Similarly, the roles within the parenting framework no longer operate within a binary (father as disciplinarian/non-emotive and mother as nurturer). The landscape of parenting has changed and so too have the ways in which fathers consider their roles.

Despite the improvements associated with gender equity, many fathers continue to struggle adapting to their new role. Many fathers grew up without a fathering role model in their lives and this has had great implications on their ability to define their role as a father and to be involved in the lives of their children.

Often, men become fathers in the absence of having their own father or a male role model in their lives as children. This can have a devastating impact on them as they lack norms, values or beliefs about the role of a father. Quite simply, they have no healthy reference point from which to enact their own fathering. This cycle can be insidious, impact generations and influence the ways in which these men interact with their children, their partners and their extended family.

John Snarey's (1993) generative fathering theory anchors this section of the report. It was not the intention of this study to examine generative fathering, however over the course of speaking with fathers it became apparent that Snarey's work remains relevant and continues to provide understanding of the experiences of the fathers in this study. Snarey (1993) defined generative fathers as:

“men who contribute to and renew the ongoing cycle of the generations through the care they provide as birth fathers (biological generativity), childrearing fathers (parental generativity) and cultural fathers (societal generativity)” (p. 1).

Many of the men in this study lacked a generative fathering role model and as a result they have had to construct their own notions of the role of a father. This is often done in a long shadow of their own absent father.

The absence of a father figure has deep implications for an individual's ability to transmit knowledge, compassion and caring to the next generation. The experiences of many fathers in this study highlight the importance of fathers in the lives of children and the implications associated with father absence.

'MY FATHER WAS ABSENT'

While this study focused on the current fathering practices of the participants, many of them were unable to discuss their own parenting style without referencing their own childhood experiences of their father. This makes intuitive sense as often parents serve as role models and reference points and shape the behaviour of their children in both childhood and into adulthood.

The experiences of fathers in this study reinforce the importance of fathers as role models and reference points. However, for many fathers, they simply explained that their father was absent during their childhood. Being absent meant different things to different participants. For some, their father never lived with them and never acted in a parental role as the following participants suggests:

I never had that stability when I was a kid, though. I never actually had a father. I was only raised by my mother. (Participant)

My dad was never there. My dad was never the one that was the breadwinner, the one that was there to say – Hey, good job son! You know, when I graduated college he was never there to see me. He was never there for my wedding. There were a lot of things he was not there for. (Participant)

Other fathers suggested that their fathers were part of their lives, lived with their families and yet somehow remained distant and absent. For these fathers, the absentee nature of their fathers was the result of gender stereotypes, life circumstances or choices made that detracted from the parenting ability of their fathers.

For example, some fathers were absent due to the need to be the provider for the family:

My father was working in the government and was not here often. He would travel. He was involved in the Masonic Order, so he was always having responsibilities, where the family was not primary responsibility. Being a father was not his number-one goal or his responsibility to us. (Participant)

Other fathers were physically absent due to geography. As one father noted, his father immigrated to Canada to fulfill his provider role, resulting in an absence as a parent:

...because being from South America, the macho, the man goes to work and the woman stays home. My father immigrated to Canada so I didn't see much of him when I was a kid and I saw how much my mom had to do. ... and there were five of us, five siblings, and my mom had to take care of all five of us while my father was in Canada working and sending back money and whatnot. So, we didn't see much of him, so I didn't want, when I had kids, for them to experience not having a father there. (Participant)

Similarly, some fathers indicated that their fathers enacted gendered stereotypes associated with traditional notions of fatherhood. As such they often experienced the absence of their father in terms of their use of authority or the absence of an emotional presence in their lives:

He lived in our house as well, but I also feel like, when I think about my relationship with my parents, I was always closer to my mother

than I was to my dad. And, when I think about the early-early years, my dad was more of I guess the authoritative one, where I had a much closer relationship with my mom, more emotional relationship with my mom. (Participant)

...growing up and not having a dad, I made one promise to myself, that if I ever had a kid I wouldn't want them to miss me being there. I mean, my father was there financially, but emotionally he was not there. (Participant)

My parents had very clear, predefined roles, so I grew up in that environment. (Participant)

My dad was an asshole. He beat me up. So I'm going to be the fun dad. (Participant)

I mean, in my situation, my dad is always been the type of person that's been the authority...the authoritative - Can't hug me. I'm too manly for that. Don't cry in front of me. That sort of thing. You know? (Participant)

For all of these fathers the implications of their father being absent were significant. Growing up without the physical or emotional presence of their father meant that many of these men did not have a role model on which to base their parenting style. For some men it meant that they only knew a parenting style that was cold and aloof and had learnt that the role of a man within as parent was as provider and disciplinarian. For many of these men, fatherhood became an opportunity to escape their past and change the future.

FATHERHOOD AS AN OPPORTUNITY FOR CHANGE

The experience of not having their father present in their lives (either emotionally or physically) had an incredible influence on fathers in this study. For some of them, they felt unprepared for fatherhood, unclear as to what exactly would be their parenting style. As the following fathers suggest, in the absence of a father figure, the transition to fatherhood can seem insurmountable:

When I first found out, my first daughter, when I first found out, I was scared. I didn't know what to do. I was lost, and then you've got a wake up and actually try and look forward. (Participant)

As the above-quoted father suggests, there is a need to look forward. Many of the fathers in this study spoke about becoming a father as an opportunity. They understood the importance of their role in shaping and influencing the lives of their children. For some men, becoming a father was an opportunity to 'break the cycle' that they had experienced as children:

...but it's like us, we have lacked something in our lives for so long, that when our wives or girlfriends give birth to our child, it's like it's a fresh start for us, to break the cycle, to continue what we believe is the right way to parent. (Parent)

When I became a parent of my oldest child, I looked at [name of child] after she was born and you've seen that picture, the one you referred to, and I said - I am not going to raise you like I was raised. I am going to give you all of my love, all of my attention, and I'm going to give you

everything that I believe I should have had. I'm going to break the cycle and I'm going to give you something that is the best that I can, and that is my time. (Participant)

Even for the following father, despite his involvement with child welfare and the absence of a father figure, becoming a father again offered him an opportunity to break the cycle that existed in his own life:

Because when I had my first two, when I wasn't with them and they were taken to CAS, when I had to go see them once a week, it hurt me like there was no tomorrow, that I couldn't actually be the one to put them to bed or do this for them, or do that for them. Somebody else had to do it. Because, of the paths that were chosen. But, that's why with my other daughter, I completely reversed it and stopped doing everything that I was doing. Because, I didn't get that when I was a child, so I wanted to do that, so I can see what it feels like. (Participant)

Becoming a father was also seen as an opportunity to examine how they had been raised and consciously make decisions about how they would be as fathers. Many of the fathers indicated that their decision to become an involved father was made, in part, in response to the absentee nature of their own father:

Like I became a dad and I took all the good and the bad and I thought I'm just going to be that good stuff. I'm just going to be just the good stuff and I tried to put that in the forefront of my mind. (Participant)

So, it was the whole – Okay well, this is the way mommy raised me. Do I do it the same way as mommy, or do I try and do it differently? (Participant)

That's one of the things I've always wanted to do is raise my kids. Knowing that I didn't have a dad there for me, makes me want to be a good dad to my own kids, you know? That's one of the main things. (Participant)

THE GENERATIVE FATHER

Many of the fathers who participated in this study and who talked about not having a great father figure in their lives, actively discussed their commitment to ensuring that their children would experience them differently. In earlier sections of this report, fathers talked extensively about the kinds of activities that they did with their children. Some of them alluded to their desire to be different to their father and to provide different, positive experiences for their children. In this manner, the generative fathering framework remains actively engaged by these fathers. As the following fathers note, their involvement is intentional in nature and the result of wanting to change the past in order to influence the future:

And, I've always sort of...that's been the norm for me, and I raised my children out of that norm, to understand that – You know what? Even as I am, I still have feelings and I can still show emotion and there's no wrong in that. (Participant)

So the way I looked at it is that I am not going to do what happened to me. I want to completely change it and try and do the better for it. At first, it was a massive struggle, because of the way I was brought up. I'm still struggling, but I have been able to surpass some of the issues, but now they are slowly starting to kick back in... (Participant)

I feel like parenthood has changed a lot. In my own culture the father figure is the one that goes out all the time and works and brings the food home, right? And the one that controls everything and if he says so, you do it. Right? But in my situation it is a lot different. I mean, for me, I leave my work to take care of my children and my wife stayed working and I was the one cooking, doing laundry, teaching them, taking them to school and all that. The balance changed a lot. So from time-to-time I'm pleased to be a father because I feel proud of it, right? So yeah, it's a lot of changes. (Participant)

I think somewhere deep down in my subconscious they are linked, because I have always...growing up and not having a dad, I made one promise to myself, that if I ever had a kid I wouldn't want them to miss me being there. (Participant)

So being involved in the family role is...in the parent role is what you figure you put into it, and what can you put into the next ones, for the next child, for your nieces and nephews, your grandchildren. You're only going to get better. (Participant)

Finally it should be noted that generative fathering could be fostered within the context of healthy father and child relationships. As noted, many of the fathers in this study did not indicate that they lacked an adequate role model from which to base their parenting on. For some of these fathers, the discussion regarding absent or uninvolved fathers did not resonate. Rather, as the following father suggests, their generative fathering emerged out of healthy relationships and role models that they had with their own father:

I think my dad is one of my best friends and we spend so much time together and I would like to have that relationship with my kids their whole life, and that would be amazing. (Participant)

THE IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNITY

Communities survived for a reason, because everybody put their time in to ensure that it survived and kept surviving for eons. So I think that's what we do as fathers, right? (Participant)

Involved fatherhood does not occur within a vacuum. The fathers in this study were active members of their community, had friends in their neighborhoods and often accessed services from many different service providers. Many of the fathers worked in the cities where the focus groups occurred and were keenly aware of the state of their city.

For example, fathers in Windsor indicated that despite the rhetoric that might suggest the economy is functioning

well, they suggested that it was still difficult to find employment in Windsor. In contrast, some of the fathers in Ottawa talked about their government positions and how coveted they remain. In Toronto, the Loblaws located near the old Maple Leaf Gardens is more than an economic hub; it is a place where fathers take their children to get groceries or to meet with friends.

Beyond the economics of their cities, fathers suggested that they were connected to the cities in which they had chosen to have their family. They were not separate from their communities and, in many ways, relied upon their communities for many aspects of the parenting process. For many of the fathers in this study, the community was intertwined with the parenting process.

The identification of the importance of community is not a surprising finding in this research. Many of the fathers who took part in this study had a pre-existing relationship with a social service agency that assisted in the recruitment of participants.

As such, at minimum, many of the fathers had community linkages that supported their fathering. However beyond their relationship with the program or service, fathers spoke at length about other aspects of their community that they felt supported their involvement as fathers.

The discussion related to the importance of community was most evident within focus groups that involved aboriginal fathers. These fathers discussed both their own individual parenting experiences and linked those experiences to their culture and their community.

Given the prominent nature of these discussions with aboriginal fathers it was prudent to include these experiences within the context of this report to highlight that involved fatherhood does not happen in isolation and that for some cultures, it is part of the fabric of the community.

While this section is not intended to represent all aboriginal communities it is important to acknowledge the important relationship between involved fatherhood and culture.

“AND A LOT OF US HAVE LOST OUR CULTURE. WE’RE REALLY TRYING TO GET IT BACK, RIGHT?”

It is not unexpected that many aboriginal fathers talked about regaining their culture. The experiences of colonization, racism, residential schooling and ongoing layers of oppression have led many aboriginal members away from their culture.

Becoming a father and being an involved father has allowed many of the participants to reconnect with their aboriginal culture. Many of the fathers from aboriginal communities talked about the importance of the community in raising a child:

And traditionally, as aboriginal people, that is how that learning was always taught by the whole community. (Participant)

And that is that holistic balance of the community helping to raise that child, and not just the one parent. Everybody was an auntie or an uncle...

because they were taking the best qualities of themselves, and in that situation with that child at that time, that helped them further along in that community to be a better child. (Participant)

And that’s where that whole part of the community part, with grandparents and aunts and uncles, always refer to that child and coming to them and helping them out, no matter where they are or when they are, like that. (Participant)

For these fathers, community, culture and family are intertwined and the parenting process consists of finding ways to utilize other members of the community to either teach traditions or as a support. One of the topics that were often cited was strawberry moon, the time of a girl’s menarche. For many fathers this was an excellent opportunity to explain how community works within the aboriginal setting as the following father indicated:

You start looking at other people in the community. Because, I don’t think I’d be able to do it. I don’t think I’d probably give it any justice. I’d pray I’d find an auntie, and that goes back to that community of aunties. I’d have to find an auntie. I’d have to find another...either aunties or one of my sisters to explain that, because that’s that role of the women, that role, to teach their daughter that, I think. (Participant)

Aboriginal fathers talked about the kinds of activities that they do with their children. In many respects, these mirrored the kinds of activities and events discussed by other fathers in this study.

Where divergence occurred was when aboriginal fathers discuss the importance of their role as teacher of the aboriginal traditions. For these fathers, part of being an involved father included ensuring that their children understood their culture and their history as the following father indicated:

So, there is also that active extent. And like even going along those lines, being a dad and helping them to understand that there is a whole history around how families function... (Participant)

There were also aboriginal specific activities that these fathers identified as being part of the kinds of things they do with their children. These activities were important in providing learning experiences to the children and opportunities for fathers to connect with their children and their culture at the same time:

. . . with different programs and sometimes they have painting programs and they can go paint or do some culture stuff, like making dream-catchers over whatever. So I guess you try to take the time, spend time with them that way and teach them how to make things and learn about the culture and whatnot. (Participant)

It's just like, the same as taking them to school and making their lunches, going to programs here, going to pow-wows. They were involved in a big play that they put on here and just...you know, we made drums together. (Participant)

Traditionally it comes in...having those traditions, having those men and women roles playing a part

of that child's life, because they're going to learn a little bit of both, as well. As children, they were taught to go...for boys to go with the women and learn how to weave baskets and learn how to pick certain medicines, and vice versa. Have the girls go with the fathers, prior to their moon times to learn how to trap, and so they learn, again, just teaching them how to survive. (Participant)

As the following father also suggested, there is a teaching role associated with being an involved father where fathers teach their children about their heritage and the importance of their culture:

It's the parents' job to teach children, to give them the knowledge of the treaties. In Ontario it's Treaty IX and the Robinson Bay Treaty and I think Treaty III, and to teach them that history and to teach them about the legislation and what it means to be underneath that legislation. (Participant)

But, for the more advanced responsibility to teach them the clan system, the clan, and you've got to get them their Indian name, Indian colors for like pow wow and then Regalia and to preserve the language. The parent would have to take it up on himself or herself to start teaching and speaking that language. (Participant)

One of the most interesting aspects of the focus groups with aboriginal fathers was the connections that they made to their teachings and the future of their culture. While not a dominant theme that emerged from the study, it is worth noting that these fathers directly

connected the work that they were doing with their children, to their future and the future of their culture. For some of these fathers, taking care of their children, meant that when they were older, the children would take care of them. For these fathers, the future is as equally important as today:

That's where you start that traditional healing process again, that harmony of living. So, if you're doing a good job, your children are just going to feel it. Just the way you're living it, showing respect and being truthful and being honest, loving your children. And, your children are just going to grow up naturally with that. (Participant)

So hopefully seven generations down my line that will be back to where that balance of harmony is in place, and everybody can have respect for each other. There's always going to get conflict, but there are always ways of dealing with conflict in a peaceful manner. (Participant)

THE EXPERIENCES OF GAY/BI-SEXUAL/TRANS-GENDERED PARENTS

His [the child] world includes families of one parent, people who identify as men and women and neither, people who have two parents, people who have three and four parents. So, I don't think he has a sense that there is a standard [family] structure like that. (Participant)

One of the objectives of this project was to begin to understand the diverse experiences associated with fathers across the province of Ontario. Fathering and parenting are socially constructed according to the experiences of the individual. Hearing the stories of fathers from across diverse geographic and cultural communities begins to expand the definitions and understandings of what constitutes involved fathering. In order to more fully understand the continuum upon which fathering/parenting exists, this project held a focus group at The 519 Church Street Community Centre (The 519). The 519 provides service to individuals within the LGBTQ communities and runs programs for individuals who are parents or are considering becoming parents.

This focus group was comprised of individuals who were open about their sexual orientation and gender identity and all of them became fathers after their sexual orientation and gender identity were made public. In this focus group there was a single father, individuals who were in a same sex relationship and a Trans-dad, who had given birth to his own child.¹

Beyond the focus group at The 519, much of the dialogue with fathers had been based in heteronormative language, which privileges the male/female binary and can lead to the exclusion of other experiences. Fathering in LGBTQ and some aboriginal communities often exists in ways that look differently than the mother/father dynamic that is the dominant western constellation of parenting.

¹ In this document the following definitions are adopted from The 519 Equity Glossary of Terms; Gay – A person who is romantic and/or sexual attractions primarily to people of the same gender or sex.
Bisexual (Bi) – A person who may have romantic or sexual attractions to people of any gender or sex
Trans – an umbrella term for a person whose gender identity does not match society's expectations of someone with their physical characteristics

Despite the need to highlight these differences and give voice to them, it is necessary to note that there were aspects of the participants' experiences from The 519 that paralleled other fathers in this study and as such their experiences are not only contained in this section, but in other sections as well, where appropriate.

It is important also to note that this section represents a very preliminary exploration of some of the ideas presented within the focus group and through conversations with stakeholders/community leaders at The 519.

The diversity of parenting configurations that exist within LGBTQ communities cannot possibly be captured in one focus group, however this section provides a starting point to begin to understand these experiences.

'INVOLVED' MIGHT BE A REDUNDANT TERM

One of the first things that the participants and stakeholders at The 519 suggested was that the notion of being 'involved' has different meaning than it might with heterosexual fathers. What differentiates the experiences of Gay/Bi/Trans individuals is that their parenting often occurs without female identified co-parents.

For Gay/Bi/Trans individuals, becoming a parent is a decision that requires thought, planning, and dedication. Often Gay/Bi/Trans individuals become parents through forms of adoption or through processes that require the use of donated sperm or eggs, use of their own womb or through the use of a surrogate.

These individuals also then continue parenting in the direct absence of a mother figure within the constellation.

As one could imagine, the process of becoming a parent for Gay/Bi/Trans individuals is filled with intention.

Given the desire and work that is often involved in becoming a parent, involvement is often considered 'de facto' as a result. The process of becoming a parent for Gay/Bi/Trans individuals represents a strong commitment to the parenting process. As such, the idea of 'involved father' does not have the same meaning as it might in other communities.

USE OF LANGUAGE

In other sections of this report, the term father is used almost exclusively to describe "male" parenting and the word dad or daddy is used almost interchangeably for the word father. "Males" are referred to as fathers, "females" are referred to as mothers and the roles that are associated with these genders have been explored to a great degree. The language of this report often represents the heteronormative discourse regarding parenting which can be quite problematic in attempting to create change.

Within Gay/Bi/Trans communities, language is significant and important in shaping the discourse regarding parenting. Within LGBTQ communities the word parent is very important, because it focuses on the individual's talent and ability to care for children as opposed to any stereotypes ascribed to a perceived gender. Within LGBTQ communities terms such as "mother" and "father" are often challenged as limiting due to their socially constructed nature. Much of the current work within these communities is focused on expanding notions of human complexities in relation to sexual orientation and gender identity.

The focus group with Gay/Bi/Trans individuals provided insight into the importance of language and how it can be utilized to create a sense of inclusivity and belonging. This became evident during the course of the discussion regarding how individuals might refer to themselves regarding their parenting role. For some of the individuals, they used the words dad, or daddy to describe themselves and indicated that their children would also use that language. In couples where there are two fathers, there is a need to find other ways of identifying both parents. Often, culturally specific language is utilized to assist in parental identification. As the following dad indicates, he and his partner have found language that assists them in their parental identification:

I would say that I am a father. I am daddy to her. [Other father] is Baba, which is Chinese daddy. Yes, those are the words I would use. (Participant)

Similarly, another individual indicated that his son has two parents, one is called Abba, the Hebrew name for dad, and the other is referred to as Papa.

Language was also utilized in creative ways to help negotiate the complexities of relationships that often exist. As noted above, individuals from the Gay/Bi/Trans communities often have long journeys associated with becoming parents. In order to discuss these journeys with children, language is often used in very creative ways to assist children in understanding their origins. As the following quotations suggests, language is an important part of the narrative of becoming a parent:

So [the child], we talk about he has a spuncle. He has a Spuncle [name of uncle], and Spuncle [name of uncle] brought the sperm and I brought

the egg and papa brought the love and we put it all together and we got a [name of child]. (Participant)

The participant then goes on to discuss the origins of the word spuncle and the ability of the language to provide an identity to other members of the child's family:

So we sort of put sperm and uncle together to get spuncle. Spuncle [name of uncle] lives in [city] and is extended family. We visit. He comes to visit. His parents have come to visit, grand-spuncle and grand-sparkle, and they are sort of like an extra set of grandparents, and they don't have any grandchildren who are directly their grandchildren and they are delighted to have their grand-sparkle... (Participant)

One of the participants talked about using language to challenge some of the bio-centric notion related to parenting. This includes the challenges presented by adoption and defining who is a real dad. In circumventing this dilemma, this participant chose to utilize very simple language:

. . . we shy away from some of the terms like the "forever dad" and that kind of stuff. We've never used it. I mean, he was too little to really get it, so it's just that I'm dad. I am his family. His cousins are family. (Participant)

What these examples demonstrate is the importance of language for some members of Gay/Bi/Trans communities to begin to find ways to communicate their experiences in a way that is safe, inclusive and challenges the gendered nature of the dominant discourse. Through

language, participants are actively challenging the mother/father binary, creating opportunities for dialogue and finding new ways to communicate their experience.

CONFRONTING THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF PARENTING

Much of the work that occurs at The 510 regarding sexual orientation, diversity and LGBTQ parenting is to challenge the dominant discourse regarding gender norms. Gender norms are very powerful social constructs that have the ability to structure individual and societal behaviours and can act as oppressive discourses within society. These gender norms make it very difficult for individuals who exist outside of the norms to find community, let alone acceptance within society.

Much of the work being done by agencies like The 519 is to challenge these norms, assist in the creation of new, more inclusive spaces and to continually articulate the importance for inclusivity and diversity.

Much of the conversation with the focus group of Gay/Bi/Trans parents involved aspects of the gendered nature of parenting. In other focus groups there was discussion about gender and how it influences the parenting process, but at The 519 focus group, this was central to the conversation right from the start.

As noted above, one of the first conversations in the focus group was about the kind of language being used by the fathers to describe themselves. Throughout the focus group, much of the experiences of the participants were often placed in context of their relation to the dominant gender discourse.

In some respects, the participants from Gay/Bi/Trans communities have to grapple with much of the same gender challenges as participants from other communities. Their children exist in a society that expects boys and girls to adhere to certain norms.

Toy companies, clothing companies and other aspects of society target children in very specific ways regardless of their parent's gender identities, let alone the children's own interests or emerging core identity. These participants indicated that this was often something they had to work on counter-acting on a regular basis.

It's interesting though, because we have friends that we met at the dog park whose daughter is one year older, and they just came and dumped clothes, and she has like Hurley onesies and Raccoons and like a lot of either gender-neutral or boyish things, and we love it. It's great. But, we look at the closet of all the gifts that people give us and it's just pink...pink, pink. (Participant)

And we had a conversation about it and it was quite clear that it wasn't that anyone had said anything to him, but it was warm and it was in the way and he didn't like having his hair brushed and he decided he wanted a haircut. And other people talk about the first haircut as being traumatic, and he was quite clear about where he wanted to go. We went into my barbershop person and he said - No, this is not right. I don't want to go here. So we walked out again and we picked a more salon-like place. He just wanted something with more style and flair. (Participant)

For one of the participants, buying children's toys often involves dealing with issues of race and racism. Here is how he described finding a toy that represents his child's heritage:

The other day I saw a Black doll and that's pretty rare. I have looked for them in the past, for my nieces and nephews, and so I bought it because I wanted her [his daughter] to have a non-White doll. (Participant)

And as another participant indicated, his parenting experiences have involved his son dressing in non-gender norm play clothes and the importance of accepting this:

My sister one time, we were in London, and I had gone out with my mom to go do something and I came back and my sister said – I'm not sure you'll be too happy about what went on while we were here. [Name of Child] went down the street. And I was like – Was he naked? She said – No, he was wearing a princess outfit. I was like – Okay. It's like – Fine, as long as he was dressed, I'm happy. (Participant)

The participants were also quite conscious of the need to challenge the gender norms through the clothing choices for their children. As the following father notes, there were implications of dressing his daughter in non-girl clothes:

We put her in tractor bibs and dress her in blue despite the fact that people yell at us all the time. We have to correct people and say - There are female dinosaurs, and it's okay that she wears dinosaurs. (Participant)

These examples could easily be the kinds of issues that might be addressed within other families as well. However, what differentiates this focus group from others is that the need to constantly confront the gender norms exists beyond toys and clothes. There was a consciousness associated with the implications related to gender that was not present in any of the other focus groups.

This may be due to the fact that many individuals from LGBTQ communities have to confront oppressive beliefs regarding their own sexual orientation and gender identities, often for a long time before finding some sort of acceptance. This hyper-awareness of the pervasiveness of the oppressive nature of society may begin to explain why the parents were more apt to deeply explore the implications of gender norms within the context of parenting. For one of the participants, not revealing the gender of the child was one way to escape the gender binary:

We didn't tell people whether we were expecting a boy or girl ahead of time. We had a number of people who were very, very interested in that and we sort of said – We are expecting a baby. And they would say – Well do you know what it's gonna be? A baby. And they were sort of like – What will it be? What will it be? We have said very strongly nothing that sexualizes children, so daddy's little flirt, is an absolute no conversation. (Participant)

This participant also described how they were trying to provide an environment whereby the child has freedom to explore his identity:

Then people would say – Well, is that a boy or girl? And we would ask [child] – Are you a boy or

a girl today? And give [child] room to say – I’m a boy. I’m a girl. I’m a dragon. I’m a purple. And, [child] has a pretty wide range of answers, boy-girl has been the most frequent... people get to figure out whether they are boys or girls and what feels right for them or whether they are both or whether they are neither and your job is to figure out what feels good and fits for you. And it’s okay if that changes, and I think he really lives into that in lots of ways. (Participant)

Another factor that places gender in the forefront is that often the family configurations of LGBTQ individuals do not match the cisgendered,² heteronormative nuclear family narrative. There is a tendency, according to these participants, for their parenting to always be affiliated with a woman, despite their gender identity. The absence of an identified ‘mother’ is often one of the greatest challenges participants identified:

So, [participant] called the [hospital], because there was a prenatal course and they said – Well, what’s your wife’s name? And he said – Well, I don’t have a wife. And she said – Oh, well you know, it’s for moms-to-be. She goes – Is there someone maybe, are there other services for your community? (Participant)

I’m a walking through Saint Lawrence Market [with my baby] and it’s – Hey, Mr. Mom! Or, I was standing in Starbucks [with my baby] and I heard – That must be keeping you out of trouble. And I just ignored it, because I had no idea what

² Cisgender – a person who is not trans; whose identity, behaviours and appearance are in harmony with what their culture expects from a person with their external characteristics.

WITHIN LGBTQ COMMUNITIES THE WORD PARENT IS VERY IMPORTANT, BECAUSE IT FOCUSES ON THE INDIVIDUAL’S TALENT AND ABILITY TO CARE FOR CHILDREN AS OPPOSED TO ANY STEREOTYPES ASCRIBED TO A PERCEIVED GENDER.

this person was talking about. And this older man came over and said – Did your wife tell you [the baby is] yours for the next nine months? And, I didn’t know how to respond. I just turned around and said – I don’t have a wife. (Participant)

I remember being at a conference and I was working the conference, and he would have been, oh, maybe three months old and he needed to have his diaper changed. So, I was taking him to get his diaper changed and literally four women rushed me to change his diaper for me, you know, just in case. It was a cloth diaper and it was going to be very complicated and in case I didn’t know how, and to sort of say – He’s my small person. I have chosen this. I’ve changed his other diapers for three months now. I got it! (Participant)

But again, if you go back to the mom-centric, when I started having to take [the child] to the doctors, like the pediatrician, his pediatrician was never judgmental, I found. But, he had to go to a dermatologist was just like, the look on his face when I said – There is no mom. It’s like – You have to talk to me. (Participant)

Finally the fathers in this focus group were the only participants in this study to acknowledge the duality of their existence as fathers. This group openly identified the privilege that is associated with fatherhood and the implications that it has for gender inequality. Fathers occupy an interesting position in our society.

In many respects they remain idealized as the authoritarian, disciplinarian and provider. They are also in some respects revered by others when in public alone with their children, something that women do all the time. However, when men are seen ‘parenting’ somehow this is perceived as a great accomplishment. These ideas are problematic because it narrows fatherhood into very specific roles and suggests that they are somehow incapable of being caring and loving individuals to children on a full-time basis. As the following participant suggested, one way to challenge these ideas is to consider ideas related to ‘parenting’ as opposed to fathering:

Or, the amount of sort of accolades you get for being a dad out in public with your kid, which I am really aware of as being gendered. So, I don’t want to say that there is something that is particularly fathering. It’s about parenting and the work of parenting and being a parent. But, I also want to acknowledge privileges and barriers around men as parents. (Participant)

But it’s amazing, that if you just exist as a dad in public, you are either a babysitter or superstar. (Participant)

So, I enjoy that I get to be both a dad and talking to other gay dads, is a really nice conversation. And like you had said, dropping into like the drop-

in center, it’s kind of like – Oh, you are a man. What are you doing here? Versus – Oh, my God! You shut up! You are a superstar! (Participant)

The preliminary nature of these findings suggests that the experiences of individuals from Gay/Bi/Trans communities experience parenting in some similar ways to other fathers in this study. In other ways, parenting within this context comes with many different and unique challenges that this study cannot possibly capture in such a short space.

This focus group did provide a glimpse into other ways of considering fathering, and parenting in general, as well as other ways of using language to reinforce the importance of providing children with opportunities to grow without the narrow confines that society often places upon them. This has implications for freeing all of us from the gender binary to move beyond gender equality.

BENEFITS ASSOCIATED WITH INVOLVED FATHERHOOD

As noted in the literature review, there is a growing body of literature that is examining the perceived and actual benefits associated with being an involved father. The benefits noted in the literature often include emotional factors, physical aspects of the parenting process and health-related benefits.

Participants in this study were asked to discuss what they perceived to be the benefits associated with being an involved father. The fathers who participated in this project did not easily answer this question. Many of them

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had not considered the benefits or had never been asked about the benefits associated with their involvement.

In spite of not considering this, many of them were able to discuss the benefits. Fathers indicated that the benefits of being involved included aspects of their health, emotional benefits and the transformative process that occurred as a result of being an involved father.

Consistent with the literature, fathers in this study indicated that one of the benefits of being an involved father is that they have seen an improvement in their health. Their perceived improvements or awareness of their health was often associated with an understanding that their health was now connected to their child. If fathers desired to be involved with their children, then their health took on an increasingly important role in their lives. Here one of the fathers discusses how his health is linked to his entire family:

I think just overall, like the emotional and health and wellbeing, like for the future. For me, it's not just myself. It's encompassing my whole family. (Participant)

Other men indicated that their health had improved since they became a father as well. They suggested that they had, in some way, re-evaluated their health and decided to make it a priority in order to ensure that they were able to be actively involved in the lives of their children.

Fathers in this study also indicated that one of the main benefits associated with their involvement had to do with emotional aspects related to the parenting process. For many of these fathers, becoming a parent was an emotional experience. Through their involvement with their children they experience emotional benefits or emotional experiences that they perceive as one of the benefits associated with fatherhood. For some fathers the emotional benefits associated with being involved with their children were abstract. They were able to relate to their emotions in fairly broad strokes or statements about receiving unconditional love from their children. As the following father indicates there is significant power and benefit to receiving unconditional love from children:

You can't really explain the emotional benefits of having a kid. It was instantly imbuing you with this unconditional love. You can't really fake that. It's like a natural thing that just comes from...I don't know. I can't explain how else you would get it so strongly. The benefits of that are priceless, to feel that and have that in your life. (Participant)

For fathers in this study, being a recipient of unconditional love, was something that many of them had experienced. Often they spoke of the emotional bond or attachment that they had with their children and how that was more powerful than any other experience they had in their life. As the following father

suggests, another emotional benefit to being an involved father is that of joy:

But you know, when I woke up yesterday morning, and all three of my kids jumped on me in bed, and wanted to cuddle with me, and spend time just with me, for that one day, just five minutes, I just sat there and I just realized that everything that I've done, right up to that minute, when they all wanted to come cuddle with me, all culminated to that one feeling, and it was joy.

One emotional benefit that was more easily discerned from the interviews with fathers was that of pride. Fathers in this study indicated that one of the main emotional benefits of being an involved father was having a sense of pride related to their children. The emotional benefits identified with pride suggested two distinct aspects of the fathers' experience. The first is a general notion of pride in relation to their accomplishment as a father. This would include things like a feeling of having raised good children or having a sense of pride that the children are proud to acknowledge them as their father. As the following fathers suggest, pride can be a very general emotion, but carries a great deal of importance in their lives:

Well, for me, I feel good and happy at the end of the day when I go to bed. I know that I've made my kids happy, knowing that I feel accomplished raising my kids. (Participant)

They make me a happier person, so definitely we laugh a lot more since we've have had our child. She's a real joker and that, so she lightens your day, makes you happy, makes you feel proud. Like [participant] was saying, when you do

something, you get that proud feeling and it kind of lifts you right up and everything. (Participant)

Acknowledgement by their children to other children was especially powerful for the following father:

You know, when we're out playing at the park or at the water park, and all their friends are there and they're playing skateboarding or whatever - That's that my dad! You know? The acknowledgment is the biggest thing for me. (Participant)

The fathers in this study also discussed emotional benefits in relation to the pride they felt as a result of the accomplishments of their children. These accomplishments were quite broad in nature.

For some fathers it was the experiences of seeing their child attend school for the first time "Oh, yeah. Oh God, I cried when my daughter went to school the first time." (Participant). Whereas for another father, witnessing his son learning to walk had significant emotional benefits:

I see my little cousins do stuff a million times and it doesn't affect me like when I see my son [name] do things for the first time, like learning his first words, taking steps. It's life changing. (Participant)

Another important benefit that emerged from conversations with fathers was the transformative nature of fatherhood. While fathers in this study struggled to identify concrete benefits associated with being an involved father, talking about their experiences revealed that many of them felt that they had benefitted by

becoming a father as it offered them an opportunity at some sort of different life than the one that they had been living. The life that they currently had was identified as being substantially different than their life before children and they felt that this was truly one of the benefits associated with fatherhood. As the following quotes suggest, fatherhood offered several of the men an opportunity to live their lives differently than they were:

But after having my kids, it took me a bit to come straight-and-narrow back to the normal path, and now it's...if I wouldn't have had my kids I guarantee you, to this day, I'd probably be sitting behind bars...if I didn't have my kids. Or, I'd be gone... (Participant)

See, I wasn't accountable to anybody with my life. I just did whatever I wanted, and as soon as I had my daughter, I became responsible for something. (Participant)

We talked about settling down when you get married. You know what I mean? That's what they call it. I had my child and I settled down immediately. (Participant)

For other fathers their introduction to fatherhood led them to re-evaluate some of the relationships that they had and the impact that these relationships might have on their ability to be present as a father. They also spoke about the shifts that occurred in their own sense of self.

For some of the fathers, having children became an opportunity to evaluate the self-centred nature of their behaviour and to be able to begin to place the needs of

others first. As the follow father suggests involvement with your children includes knowing the importance of putting your children's needs first:

So, it forced me to grow. The main thing, and I'm sure everyone will agree to, is that you immediately have to put yourself ...if you want to be a good, involved father, you have to put yourself second.... (Participant)

Similarly some of the fathers were grateful of the arrival of their children and found that becoming a father transformed their perspective about the importance of work or other activities.

The benefit associated with being an involved father is that they began to see what was truly important in their lives and were able to adjust their lifestyles accordingly. Here a father talks about his re-evaluation of his work life, in light of the arrival of his child:

But, once you have a kid the work problems become so small. Sometimes I catch myself doing work and I'm upset at this stuff, at somebody or something, but then I count to ten and I remember, you know, I have this amazing, amazing baby girl at home waiting for me. (Participant)

While these fathers extended the notion of transformation and re-evaluation to other aspects of their lives:

The priority and the vibe has changed. The order in which they fit, it changes a lot because your kid is so important to you and you want to nourish that and nurture that. Again, it just puts

a whole different perspective on everything. On your work, on your personal life, your relationship with your wife, with your family. So everything changes. Everything rearranges because of that new being that you are in charge of. (Participant)

So, you know, it does change my perspective. You know, maybe I don't go out and play sports as much, or whatnot, because now I come home and I've got to make sure that he's getting what he needs, because he relies so much on other people's help to grow up and be strong. (Participant)

BENEFITS FOR PARTNERS

While the focus of this study was on the experiences of fathers, it became apparent that their involvement with their children had implications for their partners or spouses. Intuitively, it is realistic to expect that increased involvement by fathers will necessarily benefit those around them, including their intimate partner. Fathers in this study were asked how they thought their partners might benefit from their involvement as fathers. According to the fathers in this study, being an involved father has resulted in less stress for their partners, more emotional support and less isolation in raising the children.

Fathers in this study indicated that one of the main benefits for their partners was a reduction in stress. Traditionally, mothers are often left to parent children at home, requiring them to complete both child care responsibilities and household responsibilities. Having a father who is involved with children and within the

home, results in less stress for their partners as the following suggest:

So now that I'm there and I'm active, and not even just with the kids, but I'm active in the household, you know, helping with cleaning and helping with cooking and helping with whatever needs to be done, there's a sense of relief. There's a sense of...there's a lack of tension, you know, in regards to...You know, she doesn't have to sit back and say - Well geez! I'm so tired. (Participant)

My wife does most of it because she stays home the whole day, but when I come back in the evenings I give her a break because she is tired. You know? Our little girl, she wakes up at 6:30-7:00 and by 4:00 or 5:00 when I get home my wife needs a break, and I totally agree with her. (Participant)

Well, she's less stressed. There is less of a load on her. So we share the load. It's less stressful on her and I guess for me. (Participant)

With me being at home, there isn't that stress of - well, this needs to get done or that needs to get done. You know, she comes home and dinner is ready and then she can just relax with the kids after dinner. It's not like - I've got to get home! I've got to make dinner! Or the grocery store! It makes her life much easier going for her. She is not trying to balance everything. You know what I mean? She has to balance work and coming home and spending time with the kids, not trying to shuffle laundry, and going to the grocery store

and cooking dinner and everything else and paying the bills. (Participant)

Fathers also identified that they believed that their partners felt increasingly emotionally supported and that there was a sense of overall emotional connectedness between the parents as a result of being involved.

This emotional support is likely the result of an increased sense of appreciation that fathers had for the work that mothers did while they were at home. Many fathers identified the amount of work that goes into being at home and parenting and it is likely that they are able to more easily appreciate their partners as a result as the following fathers suggest;

Yeah, it's appreciation. That's what they get out of it. They get appreciated. They get...well they should feel appreciated and they should feel taken care of, content and okay...safe. (Participant)

I think for women, like understanding what they go through is a very important part of what happens at home, and your happiness. Because, like if you are an involved father and you go through those problems and the wife can see - Yeah, he understands all this stuff that go through each day. Right? So, having that perspective. And then, she trusts you. She can talk to you a little more. She's more emotionally connected to you. That is really important. (Participant)

Another important benefit for partners of the fathers in this study was that their involvement appears to lead to greater co-parenting moments. For mothers this is likely to translate into less isolation as a parent. While services exist to assist mothers with reducing their isolation, there is a very real and practical aspect associated with involved fathers.

For these fathers, they suggested that they worked together with their partner, discussed the parenting process and through working together suggested that their partners may feel less isolated:

The benefit for my wife, now she has someone to bounce things off of, whether it is ways to discipline or something like that. It's not just all on her. She can talk about it and say - Well, what do you I think about this...(Participant)

I think it provides her with some kind of comfort knowing that she is not alone in raising the kids. (Participant)

The final benefit that fathers identified for their partners was that their involvement provided their partner with self-care time. Self-care time was broadly captured, but consisted of the opportunity for their partners to go outside of the home, reconnect with friends or engage in healthy behaviours such as going to the gym. The following are some examples of these benefits:

Either with me or her girlfriends or a neighbor or somebody who is part of the family, like a very close friend or relative. You know, they can go out and have a girl's night out or have a pajama party or whatever. Whatever girls do. (Participant)

Yeah. I think it's important, as an involved father, for my wife's health and sanity, really. Because, at the end of the day we are all still like individuals. Like, we are one family unit, but we all have like our individual needs. And for her, when I am able to take our daughter, she is able to go out and have like a workout, and she needs that time to get herself straight again. (Participant)

I think it is essential, from the wife, the expectation her own sanity, as he was saying, my wife really values having some personal time to go out with her best friends, to go out to her dance classes twice a week. And if I were totally absent and unavailable, she wouldn't be able to do that and I don't think she could function. (Participant)

She would say the benefits for me being an involved father is just giving her more time for herself. If I wasn't an involved father she would just be tired and when you look at a tired parent, you'll find a parent that's going to make a mistake. So, it's giving her time to relax, type of thing. That's probably like the most important thing. (Participant)

INVOLVED FATHERHOOD AND THE PROMOTION OF GENDER EQUALITY

The role of fathers has become increasingly of interest to academics, clinicians and service providers. Research has

explored the role of fathers with their children, the impact of the presence/absence of fathers on children, largely under the umbrella of the involved fatherhood literature. The importance of fathers has also been considered in terms of their relationship to their spouse or partner as providers and partners in the parenting process. Absent from these discussions is the impact that involved fathers might have on promoting gender equality. It is conceivable that given the significant role that fathers play in shaping the lives of their children and the family setting, their presence or absence might influence or promote gender equality. Central to this study was to explore the ways in which fathers talked about their roles and, more specifically, how they thought their involvement might promote gender equality. This section explores the links that emerged as the fathers in this study were asked to discuss their perceptions and experiences regarding their role and gender equality.

It is important to note that linking involved fatherhood and gender equality was not necessarily an easy task for fathers and at times, the linkages that they suggested were not direct. For some fathers, this was not an area that they had considered prior, while for others, the notion of gender equality seemed naturally linked to their involvement as a father. The diversity in experiences and ability to engage in discussion regarding this aspect of the study might be best described by considering that each father has his own set of experiences, constructed through his own life, values and beliefs. Therefore, it is not possible to say uniformly that the linkages here are indicative of all of the participants, rather they reflect the general consensus from most of the fathers in this study.

HOW DO YOU TEACH THAT ALL CHILDREN ARE EQUAL?

There is an abstract quality associated with asking fathers how they think their involvement promotes gender equality. Instead of attempting to engage fathers in a completely philosophical discussion about their fathering, they were asked about the kinds of things they did with their children that taught equality between genders. This provided a forum for fathers to discuss the kinds of parenting processes that occurred in their homes that they believed taught about equality. This resulted in very concrete examples of the kinds of things that fathers did and allowed the fathers to construct equality as they understood it. It also provided a forum for them to discuss the challenges associated with their attempts at promoting equality.

In all of the focus groups, fathers were asked how they think they taught their children that all children are equal regardless of gender. Many of the fathers were able to provide very concrete examples of the kinds of things that they, or their partner, did with their children that demonstrated gender equality. Many of the fathers indicated that they often actively contradicted gender stereotypes by not placing limits on the kinds of toys that their children played with. While many fathers spoke about being open to providing different experiences for their children, the following quotes indicate that they are keenly aware of the importance of not placing limits on the kinds of toys their children play with. They actively encouraged the deconstruction of gender stereotypes associated with children's toys:

If she wanted to go to the store and she wanted to get a truck, even though she's a girl. It's like - Go ahead, get a truck! You want to wear blue shoes? Go wear blue shoes! (Participant)

And we're like - That's what she wanted, and we're not going to steer her in one direction where you have to have everything pink. You have to have the dolls instead of the trucks or whatever. You show her - You can get whatever you want, whether it is boy or girl. (Participant)

My girl loves Dinky cars and loves trucks, as well as Barbie Dolls as well as the Disney princesses. We let her play with whatever she wants to play with. If she likes cars, I will play cars with her. If she likes the Barbie Dolls, I will play Barbie Dolls with her. (Participant)

I know there was a period in time when she wanted to be a crane operator, simply because she saw cranes all over the place. I told her - If you want to be a crane operator, you can be anything you want. Now she wants to be a veterinarian. She can be anything she wants and she knows that. We don't try to put gender roles on her, like that. (Participant)

And as the following father suggests, often the sharing of toys between siblings is an excellent way to promote ideas related to gender equality:

I tell them like this is...like, when I buy this bike for the girl and this bike for the boy, and then they both have a bike. That's your bike. That's her bike. If he wants to ride her bike for a couple of minutes or she wants to ride his bike for a couple of minutes, it doesn't make a difference. They can do that. But, they know - This is your bike and this is her bike. The same with shoes and the

same like with a dress. I buy them the way that society accepts it, but at the same time, I don't prevent them from using the other's too, unless the other side says – No, this is mine. (Participant)

The openness expressed by fathers regarding the toys their children play with extended also, to a lesser extent, to the kinds of physical activities that their children would play. For fathers of younger children (under age 5), the openness regarding toys seemed easily identified, however with older children, the gendered nature of physical activities created more of a gray area for participants. For some participants, the equality that was espoused for their younger children extended into other physical activities as the following fathers suggest:

So, just I guess teaching, like my daughter, that there's no such thing as a boy's sport and there's no such thing as a girl's sport. You want to play rugby, play rugby. You want to play football, play football. Like whatever you want, like there's no such thing as...(Participant)

My daughter takes gymnastics and she does have some of the gymnastics outfits, the little pink and purple things, and there is a time period now where she just doesn't want to wear them and we don't force them on her. We certainly don't say – You have to dress up like a girl. (Participant)

That's how I don't discourage [between] the sex[s]. I ask the same question of my daughter. Here, you want me to put you in soccer (inaudible)? Do you want ballet? Do you want hockey? What do you want? She's like – Swim Daddy. That's it. She's my little fish. She just wants to swim. (Participant)

MY GIRL LOVES DINKY CARS AND LOVES TRUCKS, AS WELL AS BARBIE DOLLS AS WELL AS THE DISNEY PRINCESSES. WE LET HER PLAY WITH WHATEVER SHE WANTS TO PLAY WITH.

Well, guys mostly played hockey before, but I guess I can teach you how to play hockey, even though you're girls. It's not like that, because that's kind of like pop culture, to a certain extent, I guess, because girls never used to play Lacrosse and now there are girl Lacrosse players. (Participant)

For some other fathers trying to promote gender equality by allowing their children choices seemed to come with a double bind. These fathers understood the importance of giving their children options, however the fathers were always mindful that societal pressures have the potential to constrain the experiences of their children:

But I mean, I think society has opened up that anyways. But as I said, as far as toys and what they play with, that's all free. They're free to do whatever they want, to a point, right? I think I would still steer them, like I said, I wouldn't let one of my boys say – Well, I'm going to wear a dress to school today. I'd be like...(Participant)

I don't try to put my kids against society by making the boy wear pink or the girl blue, because many people will make fun of them and tell stories and they are going to be exposed to a different environment. (Participant)

Sometimes, fathers encountered backlash from older members of their families who held distinct gender stereotypes and believed that there are very specific roles for boys and girls:

Definitely there have been comments from some of our older family members that say, that will tell her – Why don't you go and put a nice dress on. Well, she doesn't want to wear a dress. She wants to wear comfortable soft pants that are loose and just do lots of running and jumping around. (Participants)

And as the following father suggests, something as simple and mundane as a sandwich container can still be used to reinforce gender stereotypes:

I got in big trouble there. I sent him with a pink sandwich container and he wouldn't even go near that sandwich container, because it was pink. (Participant)

INVOLVED FATHERS PROMOTING GENDER EQUALITY

Fatherhood has changed quite dramatically in the past 40 years. Gone are the days where the roles between mother and father were so clearly delineated; father goes to work, mother stays home. Gone also are the days where fathers were seen as having the role of disciplinarian who lacked the ability to emotionally connect with his children and those fathers whose only role was to raise and socialize boys into men. Fathers in this study talked positively about finding new ways to engage with their children in an effort to promote gender equality and expand the notion of parenting beyond traditional stereotypes.

When asked how they thought their involvement with their children promoted gender equality, fathers in this study spoke philosophically and concretely at times about the kinds of things they did that promoted equality. For many fathers the idea of becoming a father led them to ponder the kind of father they were going to be. Some of the participants in this study talked openly about wanting to be a good role model for their children and how role modeling in front of their children will demonstrate gender equality:

I actually try to relate that to my own son, like in a role model capacity, and in particular, to my boy. Like for my daughters, I try to show them how like the role model of the good dad and somebody who is fair to them and good to them and show them how I respect their mom and how I respond to her. (Participant)

So, I just try to talk out loud sometimes, and say – Hey, this is something you guys need to know. There's just something you need to hear. And then, giving that and being able to offer that in that role model capacity. (Participant)

Some of the fathers involved in this study spoke about their parenting philosophy as including gender equality. For these fathers they had thought about the kind of parent they desired to be prior to the arrival of their child(ren). For many of these men, being equally involved in the parenting process reflected their desire to be in a relationship based on equality:

It's kind of weird because, I mean, we got in a relationship as equals, and we have always done stuff equally. We have always shared the load

and the debt and everything. And parenting is the same for us. You know, we both have our strengths, but really, we share, just like we do with everything else in our lives. (Participant)

But myself, growing up as a person, and looking at society, why would I not be involved? Why would I not participate? That doesn't resonate in my head. I want to be involved. I want to participate. I want to change diapers. Not only do I see that as important, I think that's so natural to me.

Because, if I do my fair share, and it's an equal upbringing, I think all the burden isn't on one person. (Participant)

That's the other part too, is worrying about what other people are saying - Oh, that is supposed to be a woman's job! Why are you doing that for? And I just said - That's my job. So I didn't really care what anybody else said. I wanted to take on those roles. (Participant)

But the thing is that I think that in a healthy relationship, that being a good role model and being that good parent is helping to do that [build equality]. (Parenting)

It's not one-sided parenting. It's got to be two-sided. Equality is the biggest thing. That's one of the best words to describe it, is equality, on both sides. (Participant)

Fathers also spoke about the concrete ways that the parenting process is structured in their homes that promote the idea of gender equality. For many fathers,

daily activities with their children were often utilized as reference points or opportunities for them to demonstrate that men and women are equal and that within the parenting relationship, neither parent dominates the other. The tasks that fathers identified as these points of reference varied and encompassed a wide continuum including changing diapers, cleaning floors, bathing, preparing meals and many other caregiving experiences. The following are examples of the ways that fathers talked about their experiences and the activities they associated with promoting gender equality:

And then I looked at it and I'm like what makes sense is for us both to do it exactly equally. I can't really be very specific, right? Like diaper changing. I was like - Well, you'll probably change more diapers, just because that's just how it's going to go. And no! We share it. There is no reason for one person to get more of an easy ride in any sense, really. So, I change all the diapers. There is really nothing, except for breastfeeding that I don't or can't do, and there is no reason for those anymore, and probably with these guys too. (Participant)

We kind of share housework and whatever else. Wake up in the middle of the night for the baby, and take turns. (Participant)

So, I don't treat my kids any differently. I will do what I do with my sons, with my daughters. It doesn't bother me at all. I just don't feel that I need to treat them any differently. I just love them all the same. (Participant)

I'd say like with me doing 90% of the cooking, it is teaching my kids that men can cook as well, and it is something they are going to learn. It is not like the older days, when dad came home from work and mom put dinner on the table. So it's learning that role. (Participant)

I do more of the cooking and the bathing and the general care and everything else. And it's a far cry from like as late as the 1970's when it was the father who went to work and it was the mother who stayed home. (Participant)

I work through the afternoon, so I do my work in the morning, like the breakfast I prepare and the lunch, my wife does. The kids can see that daddy prepared this. The way we teach them how to be equal, they could be seated at the same table, and each one has their own plate and each one is offered the same food and each one can have the same amount, even more if they are hungry. It does not matter if they are a boy or a girl. (Participant)

For example, the mother of my child, she has to go to a law firm, she works there. But me, on the other hand, I get to do contract work so I can stay at home with my son and care for him while I'm at home and I can still do the things that I can, with my son. So, it all depends on what kinds of jobs you do. I think that helps, not reverse it, but eliminate the difference between male and female, showing my child that – Yes, both genders are capable of doing the same things, so there is no magic barrier or something like that, between

them, that stops them from or forbidding them from doing it. (Participant)

I hope she sees me as a completely separate entity than her mother, and I think for the most part she sees us as autonomous from her mother and her mother's household, and the discipline of that household. So I think she doesn't know any different. She knows that mom cooks for her and dad cooks for her and that sometimes she helps dad cook our meals, and that we both bathe her and it's that we do everything the exact same, hopefully the exact same, in the two separate households and I think that she is exposed to that and I think she doesn't know any different. (Participant)

Instead of making them fool me and doing what mommy didn't allow them to do, either I ask them – What did she say? Or – Go and ask her. They ask her to do that. She says – Oh, you can let them. Oh, no! I told them not to. Then this way we give them an example, like there is equality in the decision. (Participant)

AN ABORIGINAL PERSPECTIVE

Fathers who identified as being from an aboriginal culture discussed both their experiences in the mainstream culture as noted above, but were also generous and insightful regarding their experiences with gender equality within their aboriginal communities.

Many of these fathers are involved in cultural practices and many spoke of reclaiming their aboriginal heritage as

adults and wanting to ensure that it gets passed on to their children. They overlapped this desire to ensure that their children learned the cultural practices with knowledge and information regarding the role of women in their communities.

As the following father indicated, many aboriginal cultures place women at the centre of their community and women often occupy leadership roles. The implication for this is that in many aboriginal cultures, gender equality was established as a central part of the structure of the community:

I teach my grandkids and children culture. In our culture, it's a matriarchic culture and the women are equal, not in the physical abilities, but in their thinking... (Participant)

As the following father noted, much of his aboriginal culture involves understanding women as being the center-piece of many traditions:

It influences my parenting because they call the Earth "mother" and...I always tell my children and my daughters and even my mother, that everything is like (inaudible), in our culture. And, even a teepee at the lodge, is modeled after a woman's womb, like the poles are her ribs... And inside that teepee there's a fire, and that's inside your mother. And so, you go to the ceremonial lodge and you go to the sweat lodge, what it is, is it represents being born again, inside your mother. (Participant)

For these fathers, gender equality was not only a product of their involvement with their children, but it was

knowledge to be passed down as part of their traditions and lineages.

The fathers who identified as being from an aboriginal community also spoke about some of the gender roles that are associated with tradition. In contrast to the discussion about shared responsibilities that surfaced in many other communities, the aboriginal fathers in this study articulated the necessity of some gender roles as part of the structure of their culture and their heritage. For example the following father talked about the roles associated with hunting, providing and preparing food:

Hunting, I took my son hunting. We shot a partridge. I helped him shoot it. But I mean, we're in the modern times and traditionally the men would do the hunting. It's the man's job to provide. A woman does all the work. She takes the animal. She guts it. She cleans it. She cooks it. She makes clothing out of the skin. If it's a fish she will gut it, debone it, smoke it or cook it over a fire. (Participant)

This example, and the discussion with other fathers in this study indicate the complex nature of working on the issue of gender equality. Fathers who are attempting to hold on to their aboriginal ancestry need to balance honoring these traditions with the challenges that come with the layers of oppression that are often part of their lived experience.

The most frequent example provided by aboriginal men regarding gender roles was the importance of the mother with the female daughter during the time of menarche. During this time, when a young girl transitions towards womanhood, the men in this study indicated

that there are very specific responsibilities that fall to the women in their community. Here, men from aboriginal communities provide input into the importance of women in the live of girls and the role of passing on knowledge from mother to daughter:

Strawberry Moon, your time of the month teachings. Like, there's actually the practical application of all that stuff, but also there are traditional teachings that go along with that, water-carrier stuff, in particular. Some of the stuff, you know, I kind of find the gray area and I say - Well, I'm going to tell your brother about this story and if you guys want to come listen you can come in here. . . starting to do fire stuff, fire-keeping, because that's generally hereditary and a man's kind of thing. (Participant)

So say with something culturally-based, women's teaching...a woman passing down that knowledge to the next generation and then down to the girls and passing that on, women's teachings taught by women, for womanly things, about women's times of the month or women's ceremonies, that's going to make that teaching more intrinsic and more powerful to them, specifically, the way men's teachings would be more specific and intrinsic. (Participant)

And then again, going back to cultural stuff, I know there's stuff that's more intrinsic and more important that their mom should share with them, as opposed to me. (Participant)

It is important to recognize that in the context of gender equality, the aboriginal perspective might appear in contrast to the discussions with other fathers. However, the cultural necessity associated with the aboriginal perspective presented can be seen as promoting gender equality while honoring tradition.

Understanding the importance of the cultural teachings and the importance of the role of specific genders is consistent with the fact that involved fatherhood is a complex construction of experiences. For these aboriginal fathers, being an involved father meant that they had developed an understanding of their culture and could support their partners in these important discussions and traditions with their daughters.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this report validate the idea that fatherhood is a social construct that differs from individual to individual. Fathers in this study provided a diversity of experiences regarding their levels of involvement, their reasons for being involved, their fathering role models, the benefits of involved fatherhood and the impact on their relationships.

Such diversity, breadth and depth of experiences exemplify many of the challenges associated with understanding the parenting process. Being a parent often begins as an individual effort, builds into the partnership and often involves layers of culture and community. Suggesting that 'all parents are the same' fails to consider the complex factors that often go into parenting. The same might be said in attempting to understand the experiences of involved fathers.

INVOLVEMENT

The fathers in this study suggested that the roles that fathers play within the family setting are changing and that involved fatherhood is more likely to be the norm than it has been in the past. The old saying 'wait until your father gets home' has given way to new configurations, new expectations and redefining of roles within some family environments. It also appears that fathers are actively considering how involved they will be prior to the birth of their children.

The intention related to their involvement indicates that many of the old stereotypes regarding the distant, absent and full-time working fathers may be losing influence with a newer generation of fathers. This shift towards increased involvement with their children appears to be very important. Fathers in this study indicated that they felt that they were 'really involved' in the lives of their children and that many of them were 'very satisfied' with their level of involvement. This suggests that their intention mirrors their lived experience and is congruent with their values regarding parenting.

Fathers in this study often discussed being motivated and intentional regarding their decision to be involved in the lives of their children. Many fathers indicated that they lacked fathering role models as children or that their own fathers were absent from their lives. They often spoke about lacking the opportunities to spend time with their fathers and that when it came time to become a father, they had no positive experiences to draw from.

For these fathers, their fatherhood was motivated, in part, by their desire to provide their children with a different childhood experience than their own. Their involvement was perceived as an opportunity to challenge the

generational nature of absent fathers within their family. Their motivation was to create something different for their children.

There was also a sense among the fathers in this study that their involvement in the lives of their children was 'normal' and something that they expected. Many fathers talked about their involvement as occurring naturally and intentionally.

This often included a desire to remain at home as part of the parental leave and reconfiguring aspects of their work and social life in order to be involved in the lives of their children.

This intention towards involvement is important to consider. Whereas previous generations of fathers might have been more removed from the parenting process, the fathers in this study suggest that involved fathering is a new norm that is readily being adopted.

This might suggest that the traditional masculine stereotypes associated with fatherhood are no longer as relevant or as influential as they once were. Fathers (and men) are now more able to engage with their children without fear of being seen as less masculine.

The shift away from masculine stereotypes, and therefore some fatherhood stereotypes, was evident within the focus groups and interactions with participants. The communication between fathers was respectful in nature and often devoid of any stereotypical gender specific topics. Fathers in these groups openly expressed emotions regarding their children, were vulnerable in the presence of other men and were comforted and supported by other men in the focus groups.

The term ‘involved fatherhood’ was not pre-defined for the focus group participants. The meanings or actions associated with being ‘involved’ were derived at the level of individual fathers and it was only once the focus groups were completed that commonalities between the experiences could be observed. What emerged was a diverse picture that highlights the myriad of activities and experiences of fathers.

The experiences of the participants suggest that parenting is not longer easily divided along the lines of gender or in the case of same-sex couples, specificity regarding who does what. While there remain some aspects of childcare that fathers indicated remained the realm of mothers (ie; breastfeeding), their description of their involvement with their children entailed almost every other aspect of the lives of their children. Fathers in this study provided a numerous examples of the ways in which they were active in the lives of their children.

One of the most interesting findings of this study was the kinds of benefits of being involved identified by the fathers. Fathers in this study indicated that they derived numerous benefits from being involved in the lives of their children.

One of the main benefits was identified as being an emotional connection to their children. This is an important benefit to acknowledge because it suggests that the process of being involved as a father provides fathers with an opportunity to express a variety of positive emotions towards their children.

The expression of emotions by men is often frowned upon as a sign of weakness and vulnerability. Fathers who are involved in the lives of their children are learning the

importance of demonstrating vulnerability and emotions as ways to connect with their children and as a role model to their children as well. It is possible to extrapolate and suggest that this practice of emotional regulation and expression could easily extend to other aspects of men’s lives, including their intimate relationships.

The other benefit that fathers identified was that being an involved father was transformative. While many of the participants did not use the word transformative to discuss their entry into fatherhood or their involvement, their talk suggests that becoming an involved father significantly altered their life trajectory.

The transformative nature of fatherhood depended on the experiences of the individual. For some of these fathers, the journey to fatherhood was an opportunity to make significant change in how they were living their lives. For other fathers, being involved led them to reconsider their priorities at work and within their social circles.

The transformative benefit of being an involved father is also related to countering some of the gender stereotypes that men encounter. For some men, the main messages they receive during socialization include the importance of money and being a provider for the family. Others might encounter messages related to men as independent and disrespecting women.

Being an involved father provides an opportunity for men to evaluate the ways in which they interact with their world. This includes their relationships with others and their priorities. Some of this involves discarding some of their beliefs regarding male privilege and relationships. As some of the fathers in this study indicated, this is difficult

work, however the benefits that exist as a result appear to extend beyond the individual.

CHALLENGES TO INVOLVEMENT AND ENGAGEMENT

The fathers in this study talked at length about their involvement with their children, the kinds of activities they partake in and how important it is for them to be a part of the lives of their children.

Given the sampling procedures and the pre-existing connections that many of the fathers had with community-based agencies, their experiences contained a great deal of information regarding accessing service or finding father-specific services. Additionally, the environmental scan component and the stakeholder consultations provided insight into the services available for fathers.

The experiences of fathers in this study suggest that now, more than ever, fathers are taking on increased roles with their children. This included taking children to doctor's appointments, recreational activities, attending school meetings and social events such as birthday parties. Discussion related to these kinds of activities suggested that all of these activities occurred during the course of normal parenting processes.

Often responsibility for taking the children to activities was shared between partners. Many of the fathers in this study took pride in being involved in many of these activities. Fathers described being challenged when attempting to find father-specific programming and when they decided to attend programs that were over-represented by women.

Most of the fathers in this study were already connected to a father-specific group at the time of the focus group. Many of those fathers indicated that finding the group was very difficult and that there was very little else available that provided an opportunity for fathers to get together with other fathers to discuss parenting. Attending programs that were highly attended primarily by mothers also left many fathers feeling unwanted or awkward. In some ways, the fathers felt that there was nowhere specific for them to attend with their children.

Father-specific programs provide space for fathers to meet other fathers, gain support and talk about the parenting process. These programs are designed to educate fathers about parenting and child development but also offer an opportunity to reduce the isolation that fathers often feel, especially those on parental leave. Many of the participants in this study emphasized the importance of the programs that they attended. Some of the fathers had been attending the same program for over 10 years. For these fathers, these programs were akin to a community. Fathers who lived in communities where there was no father-specific programming often lamented not having dedicated space and time to meet with other fathers.

Many stakeholders highlighted the importance of father-specific programming and the challenges associated with engaging fathers during the environmental scan process. Many service providers indicated that it is incredibly difficult to get fathers to attend programs designed for fathers and children. Some providers indicated that they run programs once or twice a month and others indicated that they no longer run anything father-specific.

It is difficult to understand the diversity of experiences of the service providers. On the one hand it is plausible that

where fathering programs are not successful, it is because fathers are busy being involved with their families. Alternatively, it is possible that stereotypical male help-seeking behaviour continues to be an impediment for many fathers.

The participants in this study still encounter situations where their parenting is judged in relation to the presence or absence of a mother figure. In the public domain, active and involved fathers can still encounter individuals that consider their involvement a 'novelty' or as some exceptional circumstance requiring acknowledgement. Society has yet to equate fathering with nurturing despite the experiences of the participants in this study. Yet much of what the participants revealed about their experiences suggests that involved father can occur in the absence of a mothering model. Several participants, including single fathers and fathers with complex family situations indicated that their involvement occurs without the presence of a mother figure.

In contrast, other fathers suggested that their involvement occurs in concert with a mothering model. Queer dads often recognized the complex relationships that exist between queer fathers and the biological mothers of

THERE ARE TWO WAYS TO CONSIDER HOW INVOLVED FATHERHOOD PROMOTES GENDER EQUITY. THE FIRST IS TO CONSIDER WHAT FATHERS TEACH THEIR CHILDREN AND THE SECOND HOW THE INVOLVED FATHERS ENHANCE THEIR INTIMATE RELATIONSHIP THROUGH BEING ACTIVE WITH THE CHILDREN.

their children. Regardless of the presence or absence of a mother figure, involved fathers found obtaining service and being perceived in a serious manner a challenge in the larger society.

PROMOTING GENDER EQUITY

It is not simply enough to suggest that involved fatherhood leads to gender equity. As noted in the literature section, understanding fatherhood requires understanding the layers and complexities that exist in the lives of the individual and within the context of the society that they live in.

The lives of the individuals that participated in this study exemplify the diversity of experiences that can occur and how they impact one's ability to make decisions regarding parenting. Despite the adversity that some of the participants shared, there were an equal number of individuals who took part in the focus groups who indicated that they had a 'normal' upbringing but also had to make decisions related to parenting. Despite the diversity, almost all of the fathers in this study understood the importance of gender equity. How they achieved it within their world is of significance.

There are two ways to consider how involved fatherhood promotes gender equity. The first is to consider what fathers teach their children and the second how the involved fathers enhance their intimate relationship through being active with the children.

Fathers in this study agreed that part of their role, as a father, was to teach their children about gender equality. Within the focus group setting there was no shortage of answers about the ways that they go about teaching their children

about gender equity. Fathers indicated that they often make conscious decisions to provide their children with experiences that might counter traditional gender norms.

This often entailed providing opposite gender toys and/or experiences for their children. Many of the fathers did not want to limit the experiences they provided for their children and many did not worry about the traditional male/female stereotypes. Often fathers talked about actively contradicting these stereotypes in order to benefit their children. Providing these opportunities was seen as the primary method for promoting gender equity.

In addition to these opportunities, several fathers talked about consciously taking the time to engage in conversation with their children about the importance of gender equity. This was a much more direct route that was less often employed. Overall, fathers indicated that there was a greater acceptance of allowing children to try experiences, toys or activities regardless of the traditional stereotype associated with it.

Instilling gender equity within children is an important starting point that may take longer to realize but has greater opportunity to have a significant impact. Ending gender-based violence has been a slow process where progress is often difficult to observe. However, this study suggests that there is new generation of men who have become fathers and who are positioned to make great strides in ending violence against women.

Many of these men grew up in homes where there was violence and where their family structure embodied many gender-based stereotypes that limited the ability of women to be seen as equals.

These fathers are now consciously making decisions regarding their parenting, based in part on their experiences as children. These fathers are intentionally seeking out opportunities to provide their children with different and increasingly positive experiences. Part of the intentionality that was evident in this study is that these fathers are no longer confined by gender norms and are consciously giving their children opportunities and therefore permission to practice gender equity.

For the children of the fathers in this study, it is possible to imagine a different experience for them growing up. These children will be taught equality for all people and have the potential to have a prolonged time period to establish these core values in their lives. It is not difficult to imagine these children as grown adults who were provided with a positive set of values, living in communities where gender-based violence no longer exists.

The second way that involved fatherhood promotes gender equity is through enhancing the parental relationship. Many of the fathers in this study suggested that there are distinct benefits for their partner as a result of their involvement. Some of the fathers indicated that there were emotional benefits as well as tangible benefits. Involved fathering is really the active embodiment of gender equity.

Through the involvement of fathers, the parental partnership is strengthened and equality is promoted. Fathers who are involved are more likely to understand the needs of the children and more likely to understand how to achieve those needs. Moreover, these fathers are more likely to develop empathy for their partners as they develop a more detailed understanding of what the parenting process entails.

It is possible that this empathy translates into increased communication and interaction between the parents regarding parenting. Secondly, involved fathering works to reduce the isolation that some women feel as mothers. Inherent in the involved fathering ideology is that parents are working cooperatively and finding ways to parent together as a unit. Working together has the potential to build emotional connection between the partners as each is seen as important and providing value to the lives of the children.

Parents who work together share a greater emotional connection, share responsibilities and are less likely to engage in conflict and violence in front of children. For children, these egalitarian partnerships are important models from which they can develop their own social skills.

Beyond working together and acting as a support for each other, involved fatherhood is part of the parenting process of role modeling positive relationships between partners for children. If parents are working together, communicating about parent related issues and seen to be in an equal partnership by children, they are role modeling equality for children.

Children who see fathers doing dishes, vacuuming, attending school appointments and providing nurturing moments are less likely to subscribe to the male/female parenting binary. These children will have active role models from which to draw upon and build their own values that will guide them as they enter into relationships.

Girls who grow up in these environments may grow up to learn and expect equal treatment within their relationships and equal opportunities in society. Boys

reared in these environments will hopefully understand the broader implications associated with gender equality, the importance of healthy, equal relationships and understand the role that men can play in achieving gender equality.

Through having these positive role models it is possible that these children will seek out and promote equality and equity within their own relationships throughout their lives.

LESSONS LEARNED

This project set out to explore how involved fatherhood promotes gender equity. As a preliminary study, this report really begins to paint the landscape related to involved fatherhood, identify major themes and issues facing this field of study and to highlight the experiences of fathers from across the province.

Despite the preliminary nature of this study, it is prudent to consider how some of the lessons from this report might inform future directions of study and service delivery.

EARLY ENGAGEMENT OF FATHERS

Becoming a father is a time of significant transition and transformation for many individuals. Fathers in this study indicated that they often felt removed from pre-natal processes and identified a lack of father-specific services as a possible impediment to engagement for other fathers.

Lesson learned: Many of the fathers in this study indicated that they did not feel included in the pre-natal

aspects of the pregnancy. When safe to do so, and in the absence of violence and inequity in a relationship, early engagement of fathers by health officials may lead to greater involvement of those fathers with their children later on.

Lesson learned: Many of the fathers indicated that during home visits by public health professionals after the birth, they were often uninvolved or not present. Involved fatherhood is easily promoted through the inclusion of fathers in well-baby exams. This would reduce feelings of isolation.

FATHER SPECIFIC SERVICES

Becoming a father can be a transformational process and can also be isolating. Father-specific programs provide an opportunity for fathers to meet one another and act as both formal and informal supports. Despite the benefit of these programs, agencies across the province highlighted the challenges regarding engagement of fathers.

Lesson Learned: Fathers in this study and results from an environment scan conducted as part of this project, suggest that father specific programs are not easily located and do not exist in every community. In order to promote father involvement, communities across Ontario would benefit from undertaking a needs assessment for fathers. This may assist in determining the kinds of services that would promote engagement and service use by fathers.

INVOLVED FATHERHOOD AND VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Throughout this research project the topic of violence was part of the discussion for many men. For some men, their own life experiences included witnessing violence against their own mother, while others had life stories that often

included violent behaviours. Involved fatherhood was one of the ways that many of these fathers indicated that the 'cycle' was broken. Additionally, many of the men clearly suggested that being an involved father has implications and benefits for their relationships.

Lesson learned: Many men live with the guilt, shame and trauma associated with witnessing violence against their mother. Those working with men who commit violence against women are encouraged to explore the personal histories of these men to more holistically understand their perspective. Highlighting their own childhood experiences of witnessing violence against women may help build empathy and reduce their use of violence in family life.

Lesson learned: Involved fatherhood is a transformational opportunity for many men. Those working with fathers who commit violence against women are encouraged to begin to understand the importance of fathering for these men and to build a therapeutic alliance with these fathers as a way of reminding them of their commitment to their children and therefore being non-violent as well.

Lesson learned: Involved fatherhood is part of a strategy to end violence against women. Participants in this study highlighted the impact of involved fatherhood. Those involved in ending violence against women would benefit from including involved fatherhood as part of their communications strategy. This expands the notion of prevention, and also provides an opportunity for other men to enter the discussion regarding the ways that violence against women can be ended.

USE OF PARENTAL LEAVE

Participants in this study that took a parental leave after the birth or adoption of their children indicated that the experience was important in developing attachment and bonding with their children and provided an opportunity to understand the experiences of their partner, thereby creating empathy with their partner. Future work on enhancing the involvement of fathers with their children would benefit from increased promotion of the use of parental leave by fathers.

CHANGING NORMS AND ROLES

This study identified the increasingly changing nature of fatherhood. Fathers in this study suggested that many of the norms commonly considered to be part of the fathering experience are fading in their relevance. This appears to indicate that there is a change occurring within society related to fatherhood. In an effort to continue to promote these new positive roles that are becoming associated with fatherhood, those working within the field are encouraged to incorporate these positive messages within public education campaigns and communications with families. Further, it is important that communities continue these dialogues in an effort to continually support involved fatherhood and promote positive and healthy masculinities.

FUTURE RESEARCH

This study provides a preliminary exploration into the experiences of involved fathers. In conducting this research, the aim was to explore the diversity of experiences that exist within other communities and cultures. In particular, this report highlights

the experiences regarding Gay/Bi/Trans parents and Aboriginal fathers. Both of these sections are preliminary, but do suggest the need for greater exploration regarding the unique nature of these communities and fathering.

Lesson learned: Involved fatherhood is a social construct that differs from father to father and community to community. Future research exploring involved fatherhood should consider more closely the experiences of other communities including, LGBTQ communities, Aboriginal communities, black communities, and newcomer fathers.

CONCLUSION

There are many ways to consider the ideas regarding notions of fatherhood. Traditional conceptualizations of fatherhood placed strict roles upon fathers, led to parental figures who lack emotional connection with their children and whose primary function was often to enforce rules and exact disciplinary measures. While some of these traits and parenting characteristics continue to permeate in our society, this study sought to explore the positive implications associated with involved fathers. In contrast to the emotion-less, disciplinarian that has been stereotypically portrayed as ‘fathering,’ involved fathers take on many different roles in the lives of their children and are more likely to be emotionally available to meet the needs of their children. Fathers in this study suggested that being an involved father was often a conscious decision on their part. They also suggested that being an involved father had been quite beneficial for their own well-being and their relationship with their children.

Beyond the personal and relational benefits with their children, fathers in this study articulated that being an involved father also had implications related to gender equality. Through their involvement with their children, fathers in this study indicated that they are promoting ideas related to gender equality. Their parenting choices, their conversations with their children and their role

modeling were all seen as opportunities for their children to see equality between genders. Moreover, these fathers also indicated that their relationships with their partners also benefitted as a result of their involvement. Often fathers described their relationships as partnerships between equals where traditional gender roles no longer held the influence that they once did. In this manner, involved fatherhood represents an excellent opportunity to promote gender equality.

Fatherhood as a social construct is changing. Many fathers are actively engaged in the parenting process, the benefits of which have been described in this report. While preliminary in nature, the findings of this study suggest the possibility of new ways of considering and promoting gender equality. The ideal of gender equality has been popular for some time but at times has seemed elusive. This study suggests that perhaps the changes and movement towards gender equality has been occurring in ways that have been more subtle than once thought. This study highlighted that involved fathers are active participants in the creation of gender equality, teaching future generations about the need for equality, and role modeling for their children ways that might lead to longer lasting change.

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APPENDIX A:

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Participant ID Number: _____

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Title of Study: **Involved Fatherhood and Gender Equality**

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of the study is to explore the positive roles that fathers, organizations working with diverse fathers, and the fatherhood sector in Ontario in general can play in promoting gender equality, healthy, equal relationships, and ending violence against women in all its forms. We would like to understand the experiences of fathers in many communities from across the province and understand the services that exist to support them as the parent.

We are hoping to conduct between 5-8 focus groups of men (approximately 40 men) from diverse communities across the province. This research will assist us in understand how we might better support fathers in their roles and improve awareness of the positive impacts associated with involved fathering.

PROCEDURES

If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to attend a focus group with other men as coordinated by an agency in your community. This focus group will last approximately 60 to 90 minutes in length. These interviews will be audio and video recorded. During this focus group you will be asked about your experiences fathering, services that assist fathers and the impact that being a father has had on your family.

POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

The risks associated with this study are minimal. During the course of participating in an interview, you may be asked about issues that may be upsetting for you. If this occurs, the Researcher will provide you with the name of a local counselling agency that will be able to offer you assistance.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO PARTICIPANTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY

Your input will help us to understand the role of fathers and organizations that assist fathers play in promoting gender equality and ending violence against women in all forms.

We also hope that this research will assist other communities in the development of a great continuum of services for fathers.

COMPENSATION

For participating in this study you will receive \$30.00 to thank you for your time. If you withdraw from the study prior to its completion, you will still receive this gift for taking the time to answer our questions.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission.

During the writing of the report, the Researcher may use quotations from the focus group members. You will not be identified by your quotation. To ensure your anonymity, the Researcher for the project will assign you a randomly generated ID number. This will be done utilizing an online random number generator (www.random.org).

Only the Researcher will maintain a master list connecting names and ID numbers, and no other member of the research team will have access to this information. This master list will be kept on a secure, password-protected computer at the office of the Researcher. After two years, this list will be deleted. All paper and electronic data will be destroyed five years after the completion of the study.

The Researcher is bound by the obligation to report concerns related to the risk of child abuse. If during the course of the interview with you the Researcher believes that there is a risk of harm to a child he has a legal obligation and will report this to the local child welfare agency.

Results will be shared with participants in the study, the White Ribbon Campaign and the community at large.

PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

You can choose whether to be in this study or not. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind. You may also refuse to answer any questions you don't want to answer and still remain in the study. You may withdraw your data at any point in a one year period following the initial consent to participate by contacting the White Ribbon Campaign.

RIGHTS OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. Participating in the study may be helpful in letting you express your thoughts and feelings. However, if you find any of the questions upsetting and need someone to talk to, you are encouraged to contact (name of local counselling agency).

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE

I have read and understand the above information. I have received a copy of this form.

I agree to participate in this study.

Participant's signature _____ Date _____

Investigator's signature _____ Date _____

CONSENT TO USE OF QUOTATIONS

I agree to the use of quotations I provide, and I understand that I will have the option to refuse the use of my quotation in a particular context. I understand that I can participate in the study without consenting to the use of my quotations.

Participant's signature _____ Date _____

Investigator's signature _____ Date _____

CONSENT FOR FOLLOW-UP CONTACT

Sometimes researchers may wish to contact you to clarify information or to invite you to any knowledge dissemination activities.

I agree that the research intern or principal investigator may contact me at future date.

Participant's signature _____ Date _____

Investigator's signature _____ Date _____

APPENDIX B:

SURVEY AND DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE

The section below asks a few questions to better understand the fathers we are talking with. This information is anonymous, and will only be used for the purposes of this survey. (please circle your answer)

On the following scale please rate your level of involvement with your children.

1	2	3	4	5
Not involved	Minimally involved	Involved	Fairly Involved	Really involved

On the following scale please indicate how important you believe it is for fathers to role model healthy and equal relationships for their children.

1	2	3	4	5
Not very important	Not important	Neither Important or Unimportant	Important	Very Important

On the following scale please indicate how important you believe it is for fathers to teach their children about healthy and equal relationships.

1	2	3	4	5
Not Very Important	Not Important	Neither Important or Unimportant	Important	Very Important

On the following scale please indicate your level of satisfaction with you current parenting involvement.

1	2	3	4	5
Very Unsatisfied	Unsatisfied	Neither Satisfied or Unsatisfied	Satisfied	Very Satisfied

In your community, where would be the most effective place for you to receive information about involved fatherhood and healthy relationships? (Please list)

APPENDIX C:

INTERVIEW GUIDELINE: FOCUS GROUPS

How would you describe ‘involved fathers’?

What are the characteristics that you would associate with an involved father?

How has being a father influenced your life?

What are the positive things about being involved in the lives of your children?

Growing up, what messages did you receive about being a father? Where did these messages come from?

How do you think these messages influenced your parenting style? (involved vs. uninvolved)

What support do you have from other fathers? Do you meet regularly with other fathers? (if so where?)

What other supports could fathers in your community benefit from?

How has being an involved father impacted your children?

How has being an involved father influenced your relationship with your children?

Has being involved in the life of your child(ren) influenced them developmentally?

How do you and your partner discuss parenting your child(ren)?

What has the impact been on your relationship with your partner?

How has your relationship changed as a result of you being involved as a father?

What are the positive things associated with being an involved father?

What would your partner say is the best thing about your being involved in the lives of the children

How do you think your community supports and promotes the idea of involved fathers?

What services exist in your community that support involved fathers?

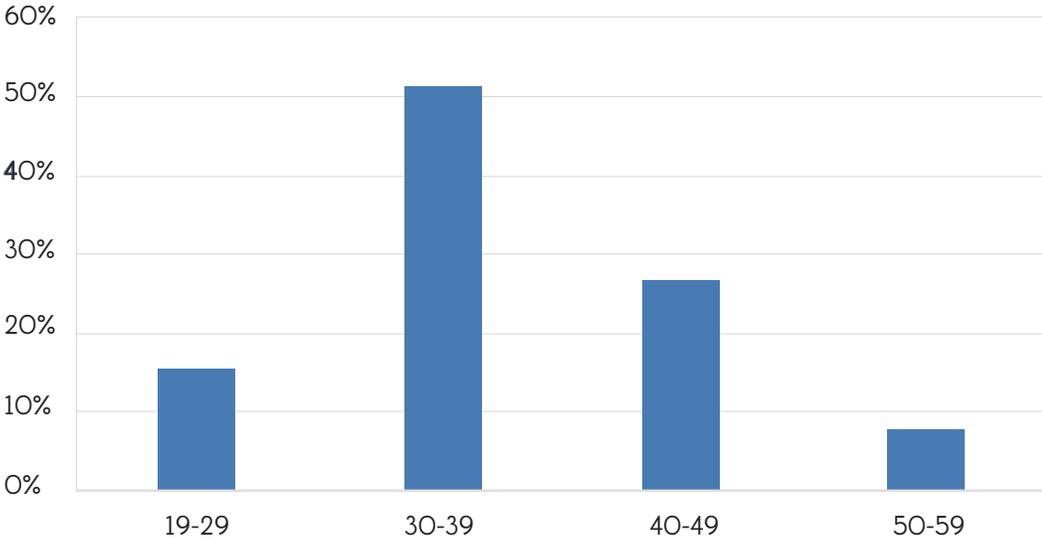
What other services might be useful to help fathers become more involved in the lives of their children?

What advice would you give other fathers?

APPENDIX D:

DETAILED SURVEY FINDINGS

AGE RANGE OF PARTICIPANTS



WHICH AGE CATEGORY DO YOU FIT INTO?

ETHNIC AND RACIAL COMPOSITION OF PARTICIPANTS

Survey Item	Response Options	Number of Responses	Percent of Valid Responses
What ethnic or racial background do you self-identify with?	Caucasian	32	62.7%
	Asian	4	7.8%
	Indigenous	9	17.6%
	Other*	6	11.8%
	Valid N	51	100.0%
	Missing/ no response	2	

*Other ethnic or racial backgrounds identified included Armenian, Black/Caucasian, East Indian, Hispanic, Latin, and Metis

COMBINED FAMILY INCOME DISTRIBUTION

Survey Item	Response Options	Number of Responses	Percent of Valid Responses
Which of the following income categories does your combined family income fall between?	Less than \$25,000	10	19.2%
	\$25,001-\$50,000	11	21.2%
	\$50,001-\$75,000	11	21.2%
	\$75,001+	20	38.5%
	Valid N	52	100.0%
	Missing/ no response	1	

HIGHEST LEVEL OF EDUCATION OF PARTICIPANTS

Survey Item	Response Options	Number of Responses	Percent of Valid Responses
What is your highest level of education?	Some High School	12	22.6%
	High School Graduate	2	3.8%
	Some Post-Secondary (College/University)	13	24.5%
	Post-Secondary Graduate	16	30.2%
	Post-Secondary Graduate Plus Other	10	18.9%
	Valid N	53	100.0%

SURVEY RESULTS

Participants were also asked to complete a one page survey regarding their perceptions of involved fatherhood and their role with their children. The following presents the findings related to the Survey.

Survey Item	Response Options	Number of Responses	Percent of Valid Responses
On the following scale please rate your level of involvement with your children.	1=Not Involved	0	0.0%
	2=Minimally Involved	0	0.0%
	3=Involved	2	3.8%
	4=Fairly Involved	13	24.5%
	5=Really Involved	38	71.7%
	Valid N	53	100.0%
	Missing/ no response	0	
On the following scale please indicate how important you believe it is for fathers to role model healthy and equal relationships for their children.	1=Not very important	0	0.0%
	2=Not important	0	0.0%
	3=Neither important nor unimportant	0	0.0%
	4=Important	7	13.5%
	5=Very important	45	86.5%
	Valid N	52	100.0%
	Missing/ no response	1	
On the following scale please indicate how important you believe it is for fathers to teach their children about healthy and equal relationships.	1=Not very important	0	0.0%
	2=Not important	0	0.0%
	3=Neither important nor unimportant	0	0.0%
	4=Important	4	7.7%
	5=Very important	48	92.3%
	Valid N	52	100.0%
	Missing/ no response	1	
On the following scale please indicate your level of satisfaction with your current parenting involvement.	1=Very Unsatisfied	1	1.9%
	2=Unsatisfied	0	0.0%
	3=Neither satisfied or Unsatisfied	1	1.9%
	4=Satisfied	30	56.6%
	5=Very Satisfied	21	39.6%
	Valid N	53	100.0%
	Missing/ no response	0	

APPENDIX E:

SURVEY ANSWERS REGARDING PREFERENCES FOR INFORMATION

In your community, where would be the most effective place for you to receive information about involved fatherhood and healthy relationships? (Please list)

Run Don Agencies

30 -College St. (Native Child & Families)

Church, community centres, library

Church, Ontario Early Childhood Centres, family doctor, schools, libraries

community centre, Dr's office, child's school

Community Centre, Pediatrician, website for parenting.

Community programs ie. friendship centre, health unit, community groups

Connection Family centre, Ontario Early Years, library, school

Connections, Early Years Centres

Daycare, community centres

Don't know

Drop-in centres, shelters, housing buildings, grocery stores

Early years centre, internet

In your community, where would be the most effective place for you to receive information about involved fatherhood and healthy relationships? (Please list)

Early Years Centres, libraries, community centres, child care centres, schools, community agencies like Children's Aid or Children's First

Early years classes

Family doctors

Friend, OEYC

friends, family, St. Mary's Home

Friendship Centre, ONWA, Musiski, internet, parenting books

Health unit, parent programs

I got inot the Young Fathers program with some help by friends. since joining the group, it has helped myself as well as my children

In an organisation like Connections or possibly in fast food restaurants

internet, municipal/provincial offices, pamphlets

Kiwanis Club, community centres, local YMCA

LAMP

LAMP and other community centres, libraries, daycares

LAMP, Church

LAMP, internet

Local College, University, Friendship Centre, Motive Programs, older friends

Native Child and Families service

NCFST

no response

not really much in my neighbourhood. The 519 would be the chance for me.

not sure, but would search the web

In your community, where would be the most effective place for you to receive information about involved fatherhood and healthy relationships? (Please list)

OEYC?

Ontario Early Years Centre, local community centre, City of Ottawa website

Ontario Early years centres (Ellis Ave, Hamilton, Jennifer Hudes), religious centres, libraries

Ontario Family Learning Centres such as this one are very at involving fathers

peels, books, family centres w/i community.

Quanahs, library, Midwives

St. Mary, Youville, friends and family

St. Mary's Church

supermarkets, coffe shops

The 519 Church St. Community Centre's Queer Parenting Programs.

This Early Years Centre (and others), other playgroups, Daycare centres

Thunder Bay Indian Friendship Centre

Western Ottawa Community Resource Centre



white ribbon