

UNDERSTANDING THE ROOTS OF MOTHERS' EXPECTATIONS FOR FATHERS.

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By

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ABSTRACT

UNDERSTANDING THE ROOTS OF MOTHERS' EXPECTATIONS FOR FATHERS.

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Current research exploring barriers to responsible fathering highlights the important role that mothers have in promoting father involvement. Despite these findings, there is little research looking at the origins of mothers' expectations for fathers. This study begins to develop a model for understanding maternal expectations. The model identifies two forms of mothers' expectations. Expressed Expectations are verbal statements that mothers make indicating what they expect done. Enacted Expectations are more subtle ways of acting and reacting to fathers ,providing information about mothers' expectations. The findings suggest that expressed expectations are influenced by socio-cultural influences, while enacted expectations are closer to family of origin influences. This model explains why women express one expectation and then react in contradictory ways when fathers act on those expressions. The model also indicates that migration and acculturation can alter mothers' enacted expectations, aligning them with socio-cultural influences rather than their family of origin.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Pages
Introduction	1
Literature Review	3
Transition to Parenthood	3
Father Involvement	7
Mother Factors influencing Father involvement	11
Maternal Gate-keeping Behaviours	13
Socio-cultural Influences	15
Family of Origin Influences	17
Limitations of Current Research	18
Research Questions	19
Methods	20
Procedures	21
Sample characteristics	23
analysis	23
Analysis and Results	25
Expectations	28
Expressed Expectations	28
Enacted Expectations	32
Influences	36
Socio-cultural Influences	37
Family of Origin Influences	42
Migration and Acculturation	47
Discussion and Conclusion	48
What messages do mothers receive about fatherhood	49
Where do mothers get messages about fatherhood from?	54
What impact do the messages about fatherhood have on mothers' expectations for the fathers of their children?	54

Implications for father involvement Promotion., Parental support Programs and Future Research	56
Limitations	58
References	61
Appendix A: Participant Demographics at Point of Interview.	71
Appendix B: Outline of Base Questions for Interviews	73

Introduction

In the last thirty years, there has been an increasing realization of the importance of the fathering role. A number of research studies have shown how involved fathers add value to the lives of their families, and that the process of being an involved father has benefits for the man himself, in terms of emotional and physical well being (Allen & Daly, 2007; De Luccie, 1996; Pleck, 1997). Research indicates that positive father involvement is associated with increases in positive cognitive and emotional development, social development and reductions in delinquent behaviours in adolescence (Allen & Daly, 2007; Flouri & Buchanan, 2004; National Center for Education Statistics, 1997). Positive father involvement also leads to increases in positive outcomes for all family members, especially children (Pleck & Masciadrelli, 2004). Fathers' responsiveness is even shown to be important to infants' social and communicative behaviours (Shannon, Tamis-LeMonda, & Cabrera, 2006). In fact, regardless of the family unit type, the age of the children or the demographics of the family, Allen and Daly (2007) provide an extensive literature review showing increased positive social, emotional and physical outcomes when fathers are involved in the day to day family life. Father involvement research has also been shown to have positive outcomes for both adult partners in the family including a greater sense of well being in both partners. Individually, men have more connectedness to their families and higher marital satisfaction in midlife. While for women, the numerous positive outcomes include better postpartum mental health, enjoy a greater sense of well being, and greater marital satisfaction during the transition to parenthood (Allen & Daly, 2007; Amato, 1998; Eggebean & Knoester, 2001; Pleck & Pleck, 1997).

At the same time, research aimed at understanding the factors that influence father involvement is providing strong evidence of the importance of mothers' perceptions and beliefs about the fathering role and the subsequent impact these beliefs have on the fathers of their children (Allen & Daly, 2007). In fact, McBride and colleagues (2005) found that mothers' beliefs about the role of the father moderated both fathers' perceived investments in their parental

roles and fathers' actual levels of paternal involvement. Thus, mothers become 'gatekeepers' to the father-child relationship (Allen & Hawkins, 1999). But despite the critical role of mothers' beliefs and expectations on father involvement, there appears to be limited research on how mothers understand the fathering role.

This current study explores women's beliefs about the fathering role in order to understand what messages mothers receive about the role of a father and how these messages influence their expectations for the fathers of their children during their transition to parenthood. The study is informed by literature exploring transition to parenthood, father involvement, and maternal gate-keeping. It is underscored by literature about socio-cultural influences on gender, family of origin and immigration and acculturation processes. This study was initially guided by the eco-systemic framework put forward by Doherty, Kouneski and Erickson (1998) exploring the multi-systemic factors that influence responsible fathering.

Doherty, Kouneski and Erickson's (1998) model of responsible fathering looks at factors that influence father involvement with the goal of identifying potential barriers to father involvement and identifying new ways to increase father involvement and all its many benefits. Their model illustrates the multitude of influences on fatherhood and clearly shows the multi-systemic approach that must be used to understand fathers and fathering practices. The model highlights the importance of looking at more than just the individual dyads of father/child, mother/child and mother/father (Doherty, Kouneski & Erickson, 1998). The model illustrates that the father/child relationship is influenced by the relationships between the mother and father, and the mother and child. Each individual, mother, father and child also impacts the father/child relationship. Finally there are external factors, or contextual factors, including timing of the transition to parenthood, the expectations within society and intergenerational and family of origin impacts. All of these difference influences can be either a positive or negative factor in responsible fathering.

The child factors include the child's attitude to the father, temperament, developmental status, gender and any other kind of behavioural challenges or special needs. Through these factors, the child affects the father/child relationship, while the child's relationship with the mother is also impacted and this relationship in turn also impacts the father/child relationship (Doherty, Kouneski & Erickson, 1998). The contextual factors such as institutional Practices, Employment opportunities, economic factors and even race, ethnicity and cultural expectations can have a profound impact on how involved and responsible a father may feel towards his child. Father factors include role identification, knowledge, skills, psychological well being and relations with his own father and mother. These father factors and the contextual factors interact with the coparental relationship factors, looking at marriage status, who is working, marital satisfaction, cooperation and conflict.

The final set of factors included in the model are the mother factors, these may include her attitude towards the father, her expectations of him, her support, and her employment characteristics. A mother's attitudes towards the child and her view of herself as a mother will also impact responsible fathering practices. Looking at this model, one can see that the father may have some influence over all of the factors except for these mother factors. He may even influence his child's attitude or behaviour, but he would struggle to alter the mother factors. For this reason, this study examines some of the mother factors, mother's expectations for fathers and her attitude towards him. To understand why mother factors are so critical to the responsible fathering model, the literature review will focus on literature about the transition to parenthood, father involvement and Maternal Gatekeeping.

Literature Review

Transition to Parenthood

When looking at fathering it seems prudent to begin with research from the point when biological fathering begins, during pregnancy and the birth of the first child. Belsky and Kelly (1994) define transition to parenthood as "the period that runs from the start of the third trimester

of the pregnancy to the child's third birthday [and] is a time of profound and swift change in a marriage" (p. 5). Research into the transition to parenthood looks primarily at what changes occur in a marriage during this challenging time period. For example, how do partners differ in the changes in beliefs and expectations that occur during the transition and what factors provide resilience for couples during this transition?

Generally, research seems to indicate that almost all couples experience declines in their feelings of love towards each other and in marital satisfaction (Cowan & Cowan, 2006; Johns & Belsky, 2007; MacDermid, Huston & Hale, 1990). In contrast, the Penn State Child and Family Development Project (PSCFDP) found that while about 50% of the couples did experience declines, 30% experienced no change to the quality of their relationship and 19% of the couples had actually become closer due to the transition to parenthood (Belsky & Kelly, 1994). The resiliency capacities that helped couples become closer, frames a starting point to the exploration of mothers' beliefs about fatherhood.

Belsky and Kelly (1994) and Johns and Belsky (2007) point out that traditional values in the 1950's of father as breadwinner and mother as homemaker and nurturer, while seemingly inequitable by today's standards, had one value for transition to parenthood: parents had almost universally clear expectations of gender roles. Today's parents have less clarity on how the division of labour in the household should be. Cowan and Cowan (1992) and Coltrane (2007) agree that contemporary parents find themselves in unknown territory with little to no guidance regarding the division of labour within a family, and they conclude that being a parent is more difficult than it used to be in more traditional times.

The six domains created out of the PSCFDP are self (the ability for couples to merge individual selves into larger 'us'), gender ideology, emotionality (vulnerability to stress), expectations (how did husband and wife think their marriage would change), communication skills and conflict management (Belsky & Kelly, 1994). Based on the father involvement research findings of McBride and colleagues (2005), these six domains relate to the barriers to father

involvement through maternal gate-keeping because paternal identity and mother's beliefs about father involvement appear to moderate the amount of father involvement in families. Allen and Hawkins' (1999) three dimensions of maternal gate-keeping- mothers' hesitance to hand over responsibility for family matters by setting rigid standards, external validation of mothering identity, and differentiated concepts of family roles- appear similar to concepts of self, gender ideology, expectations, communication and conflict management. With these similarities, it is easy to see why father involvement, maternal gate-keeping and transition to parenthood would all be well informed with more exploration on women's beliefs and the origins of their beliefs regarding fatherhood (DeLuccie, 2001).

Greenstein (1996) found that in order for men to take on a more than the average share of household labour and childcare, their wives must have egalitarian gendered beliefs. So, spouses' beliefs interact in that men married to egalitarian women will decrease their contributions as their partners' gendered beliefs become more traditional. This indicates that the beliefs of the wife are more important than those of the husband because men married to traditional women show little relationship between their gendered beliefs and their share of domestic labour (Greenstein, 1996). Barnett and Baruch (1987) also found that women with more liberal attitudes about the father's role in parenting tended to have husbands or partners who participated more in childcare. More recently, the Schultz, Cowan and Cowan (2006) looked at the most effective interventions to increasing responsible fathering, finding that interventions during transition to parenthood may help to improve marital satisfaction during the formative family years. In preliminary findings, couples' groups yielded more positive impacts on father involvement, parental stress and marital satisfaction than fathers-only groups (Cowan, Cowan, Pruett & Pruett, 2007). These findings indicate the important role that mothers' gendered beliefs and expectations may have for responsible fathering and for increasing father involvement.

Greenstein's (1996) findings that unless both partners are egalitarian, then the division of labour will not be equal, suggest that the traditional beliefs seem to be more powerful than

egalitarian beliefs especially when assessing the gendered beliefs of the mother. While men may believe that they are pro-equality or liberal in their beliefs regarding gender roles, often the powerful traditional socialization overrides this liberalism and fathers and mothers tend to act more in line with societal gender stereotypes rather than their personal gender role beliefs. Coltrane (2007) and Cowan and Cowan (1992) attribute this trend to the lack of support from organisations and government for egalitarian family structures, lack of childcare and ill-conceived parental leave policies leaving parents with little choice but to fit with traditional ideals. Other scholars have shown similar trends in their research where most people, despite differences in their attitudes about gender, experienced similar behavioural transformations during certain gendered transitions, such as becoming a mother or a father (Coltrane, 2007; Cowan and Cowan, 1992; McMahon, 1995; Walzer, 1998).

It seems that certain situations induce participants to display gender in similar ways, regardless of different gendered beliefs. For example, mothers are more likely to cut back on work hours after their baby is born while men are more likely to increase work hours (Coltrane, 2007). One wonders if perhaps there may be an aspect of social acceptance in play. It is possible that mothers may say that they want fathers involved in childcare because they believe that that is what society wants them to say. These mothers may want to appear to be egalitarian, but in reality, they may want to be traditional, have underlying traditional beliefs or be “doing gender” (West and Zimmerman, 1987). Social acceptance of motherhood has also played a prominent role in mothers’ feeling that they must behave in certain ways, for example, the ongoing debates in feminist literature of ‘stay at home mothers’ versus ‘working mothers’ also known as “the mommy wars” (Hiller, 2005; Young, 2006a; Young, 2006b).

In summary, the transition to parenthood literature looks at the changes that occur within and between couples as they adjust to their new roles as parents. Research indicates that changes occur in the perceived quality of the marital relationship and cites the importance of gendered beliefs and expectations of possible changes as factors that can mitigate negative effects of the

transition (Belsky & Kelly, 1994; Cowan, Cowan, Pruett & Pruett, 2007; DeLuccie, 2001; Johns & Belsky, 2007; McBride et al., 2005; Schultz, Cowan & Cowan, 2006).

Father Involvement

LaRossa (1988) describes fatherhood as having two components stating: “Fatherhood is different today than it was in prior times but, for the most part, the changes that have occurred are centered in the culture rather than in the conduct of fatherhood.” (p. 456). The first component is “culture” which includes the commonly shared norms, values and beliefs about men’s parenting role; and the second is “conduct” or the actual paternal behaviours and tasks fathers engage in. LaRossa’s dichotomy of culture and conduct parallels Greenstein’s (1996) definitions of gender ideology and gender identity. Gender ideology, as opposed to gender identity, is how a person identifies herself or himself with regard to marital and family roles that are traditionally linked to gender or personal gendered beliefs. An example is where two men both identify as being fathers (gender identity) but disagree on how a father behaves or what it means to be a father (gendered beliefs). One man may feel that as a father, his role is to be a breadwinner while the other man may feel that as a father, his role is to share equally in the childcare tasks.

Using the concepts of identity theory, “father” is just one of the many role identities that a man assumes as part of his “self” and these roles are placed in a hierarchy based on salience and centrality (Marsiglio, 1995; Marsiglio & Cohan, 2000). This means that a man will perform the role of father when he is in a situation where that role would be valued or assist in achieving a goal. So performing the role of father at home would be valued over other possible roles, provided that other family members, such as his spouse, value the tasks performed as ‘father’. Thus, the role a man selects is defined not only by its usefulness in a particular situation, but also by the perceived expectations of the people around him. The importance of others’ perceived expectations highlights once again the reason why mothers’ beliefs and expectations about fatherhood are so critical to the level of involvement that fathers’ display. More traditional views that include the worker role as part of the father role, i.e. father as breadwinner, could explain the

consistent salience of the worker identity which remains quite large even after the first child is born and may increase if men feel it is their role to be the breadwinner.

Canadian parental leave policy allows for parents to between them, take the first year of their infant's life to be at home with their child. If the mother stays home, then the importance of the worker role for the father is highlighted within the first year of the child's life due to the increase in financial strain and the fact that he may be the only one working in the family. In addition, with many Canadian public health organisations pushing the World Health Organisation's position to promote breast feeding in all cases, mothers may feel that they have to stay home during the Parental Leave Period, further pushing fathers into the worker role.

West and Zimmerman's (1987) concept of "doing gender" could also help to explain why gender identity and gender role may vary between individuals. They describe gender as fundamental to social interactions and relationships, saying that it is embedded in the everyday interactions in which people engage. Society is structured around gender dichotomies of male/female, and as such, every action that is performed must be appropriate to one's sex category in order to be accountable to the individual. According to West and Zimmerman (1987), gender is the master role in society that cuts across all situations, thus the role that an individual chooses to play in any given situation is defined not only by the situation, but also by their gender. The concepts of fatherhood and motherhood are also gender defined, so 'being a father' is strongly tied to 'being a man'. In this way, 'doing gender' not only makes actions accountable but also produces, reproduces, sustains and legitimizes the hegemonic gender roles within society.

Recently, Nentwich (2008) has explored the possibility of new 'actively involved' fathers as 'gender trouble makers'. Nentwich (2008) finds that gender trouble will only change the dominant binary discourse in some situations, while in other contexts gender trouble may confirm dominant discourses. Furthermore, in situations where gender is troubled, there is always the danger of normalization along binary lines such as those described by Sunderland (2000) in which an engaged father is considered the mother's 'bumbling assistant' and slotted effectively

back into the previous traditional gendered role of not being the primary caregiver. The literature on 'doing or undoing gender' and 'gender trouble' leads to questions about how society can move away from the gender dichotomy towards true egalitarianism and if it is even possible to not divide childcare and parenting tasks along the gendered lines of mother/father. Lorber (1996) and Nentwich (2008) argue that in order to achieve true egalitarianism, society would need to do away with all gendered categories and reorganise our society beyond the gender binary. Doucet (1995) also talks of a need to rethink how father involvement is viewed calling for "the need to rethink not only who-does-what within households but also how we define, interpret, and understand various types of caring work within households with children." (p. 281). Later in 2004, Doucet found that even stay-at-home fathers felt pressured to maintain the dominant discourse and reinforce their own masculinity by participating in sports or physical labour. Many of these men felt that they had to justify their choices to stay at home to peers, colleagues and family members. She calls for a wider definition of domestic labour to ensure that men's current contributions are not overlooked or undervalued (Doucet, 2004).

The concepts of fathering culture and gendered beliefs and binary discourses support Doherty, Kouneski and Erickson (1998) statement that sociological and historical analyses indicate that "fathering cannot be defined in isolation" and, in fact, must be viewed in relation to mothering, mother's expectation and social expectations (p. 278). With the importance of father involvement becoming more recognised and assimilated into mainstream thinking, the roles and expectations of fatherhood seem to be more fluid than ever before (Coltrane, 2007; Doherty, Kouneski & Erickson, 1998). Fathers are now expected to be more than the breadwinner/provider; they also seem to be expected to take on equal portions of childcare, yet when they do, the dominant binary discourses do not recognize increased contributions. In a recent keynote address, Doucet (2008) raised the question of which lens society and researchers view father involvement through. She cautioned against using a maternal lens to view current father involvement, citing the danger of missing crucial aspects of fathering that are valuable to

children's growth and development. An example would be the role that fathers play in promoting independence in children, which may be at odds with the maternal role of nurturing.

Despite the challenges to complete egalitarianism, the changing expectations of the role of fatherhood have research and social policy now focusing on the changeable barriers to increasing father involvement. Father involvement research and policy groups are becoming more prolific with the development of groups such as the Father Involvement Initiative (<http://www.cfii.ca/fiion>) and the Father Involvement Research Alliance (<http://www.fira.ca>) here in Canada and National Center of Fathers and Families (NCOFF) (<http://www.ncoff.gse.upenn.edu/>) and US Department of Health and Human Services: Administration for Children and Families: Head Start (<http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/hsb>) in the United States. National policies are now focused on increasing father involvement in families, through exploration of the experiences of fathers and the perceived barriers to increase involvement. Doherty, Kouneski and Erickson's (1998) model highlights some of these challenges through contextual factors such as societal expectations. Economic impacts (for example: paternity leave, workplace policies and priorities like companies with no family friendly policies) will also make the role of fatherhood more challenging to enact (Beitel & Parke, 1998; Marsiglio, 1993).

Society's increased expectations for fathers to be more involved with their families have focused on the direct and indirect father-child interactions (Lamb, Pleck, Charnov, & Levine, 1987; Marsiglio & Cohan, 2000). The concept of quality versus quantity of the involvement is also an important research topic, and the results here seem to indicate that the quality of the involvement is more important than the quantity (Parke, 1996). The overall consensus seems to be that the more quality involvement a father has with his children and family, both directly and indirectly, the more positive outcomes the children and family will have. One of the challenges for fathers is that direct involvement is valued over indirect involvement so they are often not credited with being involved if their role is primarily as a financial provider. The fight between

stay-at-home mothers and working mothers has altered the value placed on breadwinners leaving only time spent directly with the children as valued childrearing time (Hiller, 2005; Young, 2006b).

In summary, father involvement has been defined across two levels, the culture of fatherhood and the conduct of fatherhood (LaRossa, 1988) and in terms of gendered identity versus gendered beliefs (Greenstein, 1996). Research on identity theory and gendered beliefs highlights the importance of others' perceptions on the salience of the fathering role for fathers in different situations (Marsiglio, 1995; Marsiglio & Cohan, 2000). West and Zimmerman's (1987) work on "doing gender" and Doucet's (2004) research with primary caregiver fathers shows the challenges that men may have in the fathering role. There is a call amongst researchers to redefine how fatherhood is viewed within dominant discourses (Doucet, 2008; Lorber, 1996; Nentwich, 2008). There is also a great interest in research focusing on barriers to increased father involvement and understanding the experiences of fathers in society today. One such barrier to father involvement is mothers. Mothers' beliefs, expectations and actions directly and indirectly impact father involvement.

Mother Factors Influencing Father Involvement

In Doherty, Kouneski and Erickson's (1998) model of responsible fathering, the factors outside of the father's control, more specifically, the mother factors are of particular interest. The mother factors should be highlighted because while a father may have some direct influence on the co-parenting relationship, the contextual factors and the father factors and possibly the child factors, he may struggle to alter the mother factors. There is growing evidence indicating that women's attitudes, about gendered beliefs and the role of men in parenting and household tasks, has a strong impact on the actual amount of work men do in these areas of childcare and housework (Barnett & Baruch; 1987; Greenstein, 1996).

Kroska (1997) confirmed the importance of understanding what mainstream messages women receive from society at large and how this knowledge will help to shed light on some of

the origins of women's beliefs about fatherhood. Traditional roles for spouses in parenting seem to be more powerful than non-traditional ones and there is evidence of common behavioural transformations during certain gendered transitions, such as becoming a mother or a father (Cowan and Cowan, 1992; McMahon 1995; Waltzer 1998). There also seems to be a strong link to social acceptance of roles by society, emphasising once again the role that cultural and societal expectations and beliefs can have on the transition to parenthood and how division of labour occurs within families (Gorman & Fritzsche, 2002; Young, 2006a; Waltzer, 1998). Understanding the messages that women received regarding the role of men in families and the division of labour in childcare is crucial because of the important role that women play in getting men involved with their children in more than a financial provider role.

Beitel and Parke (1998) found that a mother's attitudes about the father role are important predictors of father involvement, even after accounting for her assessment of her husband's childcare skills and interests in participating in childcare. Other research has confirmed that mothers seem to play a pivotal role in facilitating and increasing father involvement (Deutsch, Lussier & Servis, 1993). Even after divorce or separation, it appears that the mother's support is crucial to the level of participation that fathers have in co-parenting interactions (Madden-Derdich & Leonard, 2000). Maternal expectations and beliefs are so crucial that research now shows that fathers' perceived investments in their parental roles and actual levels of paternal involvement are moderated by mothers' beliefs about the role of the father (McBride et al., 2005). Arendell (1996) also agrees that women's gender ideology about the role of fathers may have an impact on paternal involvement with children. These findings regarding the influence of mother factors fit with the conceptual framework of fathering developed by Doherty, Kouneski & Erickson (1988).

To sum up, in terms of the influences on father involvement, the overall consensus seems to be that the more quality involvement a father has with his children and family, both directly and indirectly, the more positive outcomes the children and family will have. Doherty, Kouneski

and Erickson's (1988) conceptual model of the influences on fathering illustrates multiple influences on fatherhood from a multi-systemic approach. The model shows the importance of 'mother factors' in influencing father involvement. Thus, mothers can be a barrier to father involvement. Mothers' attitudes about the father role are important predictors of father involvement and mothers seem to play a pivotal role in facilitating and increasing father involvement (Beitel & Parke, 1998; Deutsch, Lussier & Servis, 1993; Madden-Derdich & Leonard, 2000; McBride et al., 2005). All of these findings highlight the importance of understanding the origins of women's beliefs about fatherhood.

Maternal Gate-keeping Behaviour

While general opinion today seems to be that men resist involvement with their children, some researchers believe that wives as well as husbands resist more collaborative arrangements of family work (Coltrane, 1996; Coltrane, 2007; Thompson & Walker, 1989; Walker et al., 2000). One of the ways that women resist increased men's involvement in family work is by "gate-keeping" the domain of home and family. In fact it appears in some families that mothers influence father involvement through the use of conscious or unconscious maternal gate-keeping behaviors.

Unfortunately, the term 'Maternal Gate Keeping' has become synonymous with 'Mother Blaming', and as such generates many negative reactions. In fact, Walker and McGraw (2000) argue that Doherty, Kouneski and Erickson's Model of Responsible Fathering (1998) places too much emphasis on 'mother factors' and not enough on the role that fathers must play in increasing their own involvement as responsible fathers.

Maternal gate-keeping behaviors are defined by Fagan and Barnett as "mothers' preferences and attempts to restrict and exclude fathers from childcare and involvement with children" (2003, p. 1021). While Fagan and Barnett may not have been the first to use the term 'maternal gate-keeping' their definition seems to be frequently cited in other literature. These

behaviors have become one of the most recognized barriers to father involvement (Beitel & Parke, 1998).

Initially, 'Maternal Gate-keeping' was a term used to describe restrictive actions of mothers in situations such as divorce or when the father is in prison and mothers are granted custody of their children (Ihinger-Talman, Pasley, & Buehler, 1993). Today the term has been broadened to include behaviours also seen in married couples (Allen & Hawkins, 1999). Allen and Hawkins' (1999) conceptualization of maternal gate-keeping defines three dimensions in a social constructionist framework: looking at mothers' hesitance to hand over responsibility for family matters by setting rigid standards, external validation of mothering identity, and differentiated concepts of family roles. Dienhart (2001) interviewed couples who felt that they truly worked as a team, but even within her study she states that these parents are unusual in their ability to share tasks equally or to be satisfied with the ways the division of labour is shared.

Maternal gate-keeping is also related to how competent the father is perceived to be with the tasks or children, which in turn will impact how much time the mother encourages the father to be involved (Fagan and Barnett, 2003). This may appear to contradict the literature which states that maternal gate-keeping is related to mothers' beliefs about the importance of fathers because Fagan and Barnett (2003) found that while mothers may feel strongly that fathers should play an important role in the lives of children, they may continue to restrict fathers from being involved if they perceive the fathers to be incompetent. It is important to realize that it is mothers' perceptions that are the critical aspect and perceptions may be unrelated to reality. In fact, the father may be competent but the mother may believe he is not, simply because he does tasks differently or with a different attitude to her own.

In summary, researchers are finding that wives as well as husbands resist more collaborative arrangements of family work through the use of conscious or unconscious maternal gate-keeping behaviors, behaviors that mothers engage in that may prevent or restrict father involvement (Coltrane, 1996; Doherty, Kouneski & Erickson, 1998; Thompson & Walker, 1989;

Walker et al., 2000). These behaviors have become one of the most recognized barriers to father involvement (Beitel & Parke, 1998). Maternal gate-keeping is also related to how competent the father is perceived to be with the tasks or children, highlighting the importance of understanding mothers' perceptions about fatherhood and the origins of those perceptions. Despite the controversial implications of the term, the literature on this topic highlights the fact that mothers do play a role in increasing responsible fathering and the importance of understanding mothers' perceptions about fatherhood and the origins of those perceptions. If mothers are getting messages about fathers being incompetent from the media for example, then it is possible that they begin to assume that all fathers are incompetent.

Socio-cultural Influences

The media and society often provide contradictory messages about fathers to the feminist views presented above; fathers are eight times more likely than mothers to be portrayed negatively on television, where they are shown to be involved with their children, but incompetent (Schreiber, 1999). LaRossa, Jaret, Gadgil and Wynn (2001) found that media such as comic strips and television have changed over time in how they portray families, but the change is slow. Even parenting experts provide strong messages about fathering; a random sample of 23 child-rearing books was scanned and coded revealing that fathers were referenced in only about 4.2% of the paragraphs and their roles were predominately ancillary to the mother and often portrayed as voluntary or negotiable (Fleming & Tobin, 2005). Del-Teso-Cravioottee (2003) found that even the words chosen in popular magazines to describe fathers can affect gendered beliefs. For example, in the magazines examined, the word 'feel' refers to emotions in only 29.4% of the occurrences in men's magazines, while in women's magazines 'feel' refers to emotions in 63.2% of occurrences. Sunderland (2006) found that despite the universal term of 'parent' that is now being incorporated by professionals and authors of parenting literature to replace the previous use of 'mother', fathering topics and fathers, themselves, are still not being addressed or engaged in the literature. So despite the efforts to make fathers feel included in the parenting process, the

literature that most men and women are exposed to still provides clear messages about the traditional hegemonic gendered roles.

Another important aspect of mothers' perceptions and beliefs related to gate-keeping is the messages women receive about the importance of fathers in their children's lives. While women often say that they understand that children need their fathers, this importance may be undermined by not really understanding the ways that fathers are important for children's development. If women do not truly understand why and how fathers are important in the lives of children, then the 'gate-keeping' type of behaviours may be more salient causing a disconnect between perception and reality, and gendered beliefs and gendered actions. The conflict between knowing fathers are important but not knowing why and seeing literature such as that mentioned by Sunderland (2006), can create a perception in woman that might cause them to say fathers should be involved but to act in such a way as to exclude them.

In summary, messages about the role of fathers can be found in many places. Society provides multiple understandings of fathers, from the traditional breadwinner and disciplinarian father, who is essentially uninvolved in the day to day care of children and family to the new age nurturing father and Mr. MOM, where the father is actively involved in all areas of childcare (Coltrane, 2007; Lamb, 2000; Pleck & Pleck, 1997). On the surface, these societal views seem to be strongly influenced by feminist ideals that demand equal shares of parenting tasks for both parents and express negative views of women who choose to remain in traditional parenting roles (Hiller, 2005; Young, 2006a; Young, 2006b), but upon closer examination, fathers have yet to be fully included in the parenting arena (Fleming & Tobin, 2005; Sunderland, 2006; Schreiber, 1999). The struggle to identify fathers and their role is quite prevalent in many western societies. Even in Finland, Satu Perala-Luttunen, (2007) found that when asked to describe mothers and fathers, Finnish respondents tended to describe the mother only or to use the mothers as models against which fathers could be understood.

Family of Origin Influences

Family of Origin influences are evident in many aspects of family life, for example, women who spend part of their childhood in one parent families are more likely to have children outside of marriage, marry early in life and have their own marriages dissolve then those from two parent families (McLanahan and Bumpass, 1988). Studies by Beaton, Doherty and Rueter indicate that fathers' closeness to their own family of origin and, more specifically, their own fathers, impacts their attitudes towards responsible fathering (Beaton & Doherty, 2007; Beaton, Doherty & Rueter, 2003). Barber (2000) also found that for both males and females, their own mothers' preferences about families influenced their decisions on what age they had their own children and age at marriage. Gupta (2006) found that men whose own mothers had been employed outside the home during their childhood, were likely to do more house work than men whose mothers had stayed home. Men often talk of using their fathers as examples of what not to do with their own children (Daly, 1993). Research has shown that fathers seem to play a more prominent role in female children's sex role development than mothers (Johnson, 1963) indicating that intergenerational influences on parenting cannot be discounted.

Finally, the impacts from culture, immigration and acculturation must also be considered. Canadian research from settlement and immigration agencies has indicated that culture plays an important role in the decisions that parents make about the values and beliefs that they instil in their children, and how they choose to parent their children based on those beliefs (Anisef, Killbride, Ochacka & Janzen, 2001; Cheah & Chirkov, 2008). Similar findings show that parents' own acculturation plays a crucial role in their children's well-being and that parenting patterns differ by place of birth (Driscoll, Russell & Crocket, 2008). Gender attitudes to family arrangements are also different across cultural and ethnic groups (Adams, Coltrane & Parke, 2007). Zadeh, Geva and Rogers (2008) found that as parents acculturated to a new country after immigration, their beliefs about their children's school achievement changed, moving away from the beliefs held by their previous culture towards the dominant culture in which they now lived.

This shift disrupted family relations. Also, the resulting inability to follow certain rituals, especially those related to women having their own mothers' support after the birth of their child, were important for women both as mothers and in terms of their expectations for their partners (Zadeh, Geva & Rogers, 2008).

In terms of how parenthood is impacted by culture and immigration, Marrow and her colleagues (2008) found that some of the women appeared to be more vulnerable than others to the social expectations of motherhood, resulting in unrealistic expectations of themselves and a tendency toward perfectionism. These expectations also spilled over into women's perceptions of the support they were receiving; these women perceived their support as less than what it was especially when they did not have the emotional support from their husbands that they would have had from other females in their own country (Marrow, Smith, Lai & Jaswell, 2008).

To sum up, the media and society often contradict feminist ideals about fatherhood, portraying fathers negatively or incompetent, or even unnecessary or secondary to mothers in children's lives (Del-Teso-Cravioottee, 2003; Fleming & Tobin, 2005; Schreiber, 1999). Societal views seem to be strongly influenced by feminist ideals that demand equal shares of parenting tasks for both parents and express negative views of women who choose to remain in traditional parenting roles (Hiller, 2005; Young, 2006a; Young, 2006b). Finally, family of origin influences from one's own family are evident in both fathers and mothers (Barber, 2000; Daly, 1993; Gupta, 2006; McLanahan & Bumpass, 1988) as are the impacts of culture, immigration and acculturation (Adams, Coltrane & Parke, 2007; Anisef, Killbride, Ochacka & Janzen, 2001; Cheah & Chirkov, 2008; Zadeh, Geva & Rogers, 2008). Understanding the beliefs that underlie potential maternal gate-keeping behaviours and the origins of such beliefs will be critical steps towards increasing father involvement.

Limitations of current research

With evidence of the importance of mother's beliefs about the role of the father, it is surprising that there is little research looking at the origins of gendered beliefs in mothers. What

is required is more than a simple understanding women's beliefs, instead it is crucial to understand the socialization messages that are most salient for women, because if mothers' gendered beliefs about the fathering culture are strong enough to impact men's involvement in the household, then in order to increase father involvement in families, we must begin by changing maternal beliefs about fatherhood.

In light of the fact that current socio-cultural beliefs can prove to be more powerful than any individual's gendered beliefs (Koska, 2002), research needs to look more closely at societal influences on gendered beliefs for women in order to understand where the beliefs that influence maternal gate-keeping and restrict father involvement originate. Where do mothers get their understanding about what a "good" father is and what activities he should be involved with, and how do these messages result in expectations for the fathers of their children?

Research Questions

Research has shown the importance of maternal beliefs about fathering in increasing father involvement, however the review of the literature highlights the lack of research exploring mothers' beliefs. This study was designed to create a starting point for understanding mothers' expectations for fathers and identifying some of the potential sources of their expectations. Bearing in mind the many sources of maternal beliefs about fathers and fatherhood, research on this topic is best begun by asking women themselves to think about and identify the sources that they feel are most salient in their own lives. This would help to shed light on how women come to understand the role of fathers in their families, the expectations they have for the fathers of their children and the changes in these expectations during the transition to parenthood phase. Thus, the primary objective of this research is to understand how messages received by mothers about the fathering role impact their beliefs and expectations for the fathers of their children. The interview process, the analysis and the findings will be guided by three main research questions.

1. *What messages do women receive about the fathering role?*
2. *Where do women feel they get most of these messages from?*

3. *What impacts do women feel such messages have on their own expectations for the fathers of their children and what are their specific expectations?*

These questions will shed light on women's gendered beliefs about fatherhood and any gender specific ideals they may have. They will begin to identify what mothers see as the 'ideal' father role and what their expectations might be for the fathers of their children in an 'ideal' situation. These questions will investigate the conscious sources of information about the fathering role that mothers have received, focusing on family of origin experiences and messages from society. The interviews will explore how beliefs develop and play out within the family. One of the goals of these questions will be to see if women are aware of how their own belief systems are playing out in their homes. Finally, these three questions together will help to shed light on the actual implications of women's beliefs, their perception of the amount of father involvement in their own homes, potential gate-keeping behaviors, and areas of conflict within their families.

Method

Peterson and Steinmetz (2000) describe fatherhood as "not a static phenomenon, but more like a moving target, only some of which has constant meaning" (p. 315). This description implies that the concept of fatherhood is different for different people based on the meanings they attach to their experiences. Thus, in order to understand mothers' expectations of fathers, a social constructionist framework, in which there is no absolute reality, rather one constructed through meaning and subjective understanding of events (Lincoln & Guba, 1985a), would be the logical choice to use when approaching such a dynamic concept.

The goal of social constructionist research is to explore the individual and specific experience of each participant and to understand the shared elements and common differences to create a more sophisticated and informed understanding of the topic that is more insightful than any individual experience alone. Participant realities will be varied and often in conflict but none is more or less true than another and incorporates hermeneutical and dialectic methodology (Guba

& Lincoln, 1984). This framework approaches knowledge from a more naturalist paradigm, believing that multiple realities exist and are constructed by each individual and constantly change with each new experience. The naturalist methodology uses a natural setting and a human instrument to capture data as it is believed that only a human instrument can adapt to the shifting nature of reality and capture it as it emerges (Lincoln & Guba, 1985b). Naturalistic paradigms often utilise grounded theory methodology to generate new theory by utilizing an open minded approach when gathering data allowing the researcher to follow the reality as it unfolds rather than shape it to fit the study.

Grounded Theory Methodology (Charmez, 2003; Glaser & Strauss, 1967) provides a method for generating new theories about unknown and unexplored concepts. With the minimal research currently available about the origins of women's expectations about fatherhood, the theory generated here will be integrated into wider knowledge bases regarding the origins of parenting ideologies. While research into fatherhood to date has included both objective and subjective approaches and in depth discussions with fathers, research into understanding women's beliefs and perceptions of fatherhood has largely been ignored. This study will begin to rectify this issue, using a modified grounded theory methodology, opening the dialogue with mothers about their expectations and beginning to identify the sources most closely linked to their expectations and perceptions of the fathers of their children during their transition to parenthood.

Procedures

The participants in this study were recruited by distributing flyers to childcare centers and social service agencies such as Ontario Early Years Centers, across Guelph and the Greater Toronto Area. Participants were also asked to recommend friends or acquaintances through word of mouth recruitment. A mass recruitment email of the flyer was also sent out via the University of Guelph graduate list serve. In order to be eligible, participants had to be:

- Mothers over the age of 21 years old.

- Have only one child and that child is younger than 4 years old.
- Live with the father of the child.

Although 24 people responded to the postings, only 16 were eligible to participate. These 16 eligible participants completed semi-structured interviews approximately one hour in length. No one refused to complete the interview and no one refused to answer any of the questions posed. After the first 10 interviews had been completed, the following six participants were selected based on demographic specific information in accordance with purposive sampling techniques (Daly, 2007), which involves purposely recruiting participants that fit the criteria. The total number of interviews was determined by principles of theoretical saturation in that “the range of observations is justified by having reached theoretical saturation of the key categories in the theory” (Daly, 2007, p. 106). Zyzanski, McWhinney, Blake, Crabtree and Miller (1992) also agree that 16 subjects would fall within the recommended range (12-20) of subjects for maximum variation in qualitative research.

During the interviews, participants were asked to discuss their beliefs about fatherhood, their experiences with fathers throughout their lives and their expectations for the father of their children. The interviews were semi-structured around eight base questions (Appendix B). Over the course of the interviews, these questions evolved and expanded to include further questions about emerging themes and to enable the researcher to explore each participant’s individual story as it unfolded. Interviews began with discussions about the concept of fatherhood in general and explored participants’ ideas about what a ‘good’ father was. As the interview progressed, participants spoke of their expectations for their spouses and how they perceived the division of tasks within their own families. Finally, the interview moved into the third phase which looked at potential sources of information that they had experienced in their lives, including the media, society, friends, and family of origin and a description of how involved they felt their own fathers had been. Interviews were taped and later transcribed verbatim for analysis.

Sample Characteristics

All of the women in this study were first time parents with one child under the age of four years old (although one participant had twins). The women ranged in age from 26-39 years old which is consistent with the statistics of first time parents in Canada, the average age of this sample at the birth of their first child was 29 years old as compared to Statistics Canada's 2003 average age among women who gave birth for the first time of 28 years old (Statistics Canada, 2006a).

The participants came from a variety of life situations and geographical locations within Southern Ontario (Appendix A). Prior to having their first child, all of the women worked full time. All of them had taken most if not all of the parental leave and two were still on maternity leave when the interview occurred. Two of the women were homemakers while another one worked from home and a fourth worked three evenings per week. Four had immigrated to Canada shortly before the birth of their child, one had twins and two were in multicultural/multiracial relationships. The ratio of sons and daughters was evenly split, with eight participants having a daughter and the other eight, a son.

Analysis

Across the lifespan, roles within a family are constantly changing and shifting, making research challenging. Daly (2007) claims that grounded theory methodology is particularly well suited to developing an understanding in family research. Grounded theory analysis employs an emergent design in which the researcher suspends his or her own preconceived ideas and begins with broad observations of the subject allowing participants' individual experiences to guide the exploration. By focusing on the individual experiences of the participants, the process of open coding, identifying sensitizing concepts and constant comparative analysis of these concepts allows the researcher to develop substantive theories about the phenomenon being studied (Daly, 2007).

Constructivist grounded theory allows the researcher to play an “active and deliberate role in organising and assigning meaning to the data as a way of constructing higher order categories and theory” (Daly, 2007, p. 107). Within the interview process itself, participants were provided with the researcher’s interpretation of what they were saying, allowing them in turn to provide correctives to these interpretations. This process enabled the analysis to begin within the interview itself, creating a collaborative analysis in which the participants were urged to think more deeply about their own understanding of their situations and bringing the theory generation to a new level by allowing active participation from the individual participants (Daly, 2007).

After each interview was transcribed, the first stage of analysis began with line by line coding, a process in which segments of data are assigned simple codes and meanings. By identifying similarities and differences, these codes and meanings soon develop into sensitizing concepts (Daly, 2007) and through these concepts, categories develop.

The second stage of analysis is the formation of categories, this occurs through a higher level of abstraction, identifying both similar concepts and those that may be dissimilar, but are nonetheless linked to each other (Daly, 2007). The process of creating and deepening categories concludes when theoretical saturation is achieved when the data no longer provides new concepts or adds to the depth of the categories or concepts already developed (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The third stage of making linkages in the data or axial coding, although already occurring comes to the forefront of the analysis. Axial coding is the process of reassembling the fractured data produced by the line by line coding and in this way the theory begins to form (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

In the final stage, the theoretical storyline emerges, and the data fits together to form a new theoretical whole. Abduction is key in this stage to ensure that the generated theory not only incorporates important concepts but that these concepts and categories are emergent from the data (Daly, 2007). Ultimately the goal in this analysis was to create a theory about what expectations mothers have for the fathers of their own children and where those expectations may have

developed from within their own lives. The model produced through this process was checked and rechecked against the data to ensure that it was plausible, saturated, linked to the data, integrated, delimited and not overly simplified (Daly, 2007). Most importantly, as this research serves as a starting point for understanding mothers' expectations of fathers, the model in its own way is generative and raises new questions, opening new areas of research for further exploration.

One additional component of qualitative research that played a crucial role in this project was theoretical sensitivity. Strauss and Corbin (1990) claim that theoretical sensitivity is developed in the researcher through reviewing relevant literature, engaging in the analytic process and through personal and professional experiences. Daly (2007) describes the purpose of maintaining theoretical sensitivity as gaining understanding into how the researcher's own knowledge and experience of the topic can direct the research. It is a form of limiting or acknowledging researcher bias within the analysis. Throughout the process of this research, I was sensitized to my own biases through extensive memo writing, allowing analytic insight into the process and tracking my own changes in thought and direction. The extensive literature review helped me to gain valuable analytic awareness, and my own experiences with my own parents, thoughts of my own expectations that I may have as a mother, and self reflective analysis of my own family of origin experiences provided personal insight into how my own beliefs may potentially impact the direction of the research. Collaboration, through constant paraphrasing and correctives with the participants within the interviews and discussions with my advisors, ensured the trustworthiness of my data, as well as the reliability of the codes and the concepts and categories that were developed.

Analysis and Results

Throughout the interviews, mothers were asked about their expectations for the fathers of their children, both in terms of what they expressed that their situation should look like and what they enacted within their home lives. Generally, women's responses emerged into two potentially competing sets of expectations, those that were expressed in terms of what a good father was and

what these women wanted to see in their partners, and the enacted expectations of how involved these mothers felt their partners actually were and how they perceived the division of labour within their own households. The discussions also focused on the potential sources of these expectations, such as their own fathers, and family in general, what they see in friends' relationships, potential influences from the media, from medical and social service professionals, and society. These influences were compared with their expectations and similarities were noted in two ways. Firstly, the messages from society seemed to match the expressed expectations. Secondly, the messages from their family of origin and experiences in childhood and/or childhood dreams of how their parents should have been (especially in situations where there was only one parent while growing up), seemed to have a greater impact on the enacted expectations.

Finally, migration and acculturation was a factor that seemed to alter the potential outcome of mothers' expectations. In those cases where mothers had migrated to a different society, for example, those who had immigrated to Canada prior to having children, the enacted expectations were less influenced by family of origin and more influenced by perceived current societal beliefs. Figure 1 illustrates the relationships between the two forms of mother's expectations for the fathers of their children, the factors that influence those expectations, and finally the influence of migration and acculturation. This model of mothers' expectations for fathers was applied to the individual cases in this study and found to be a good model to describe the relationship between influences on expectations and actual expectations.

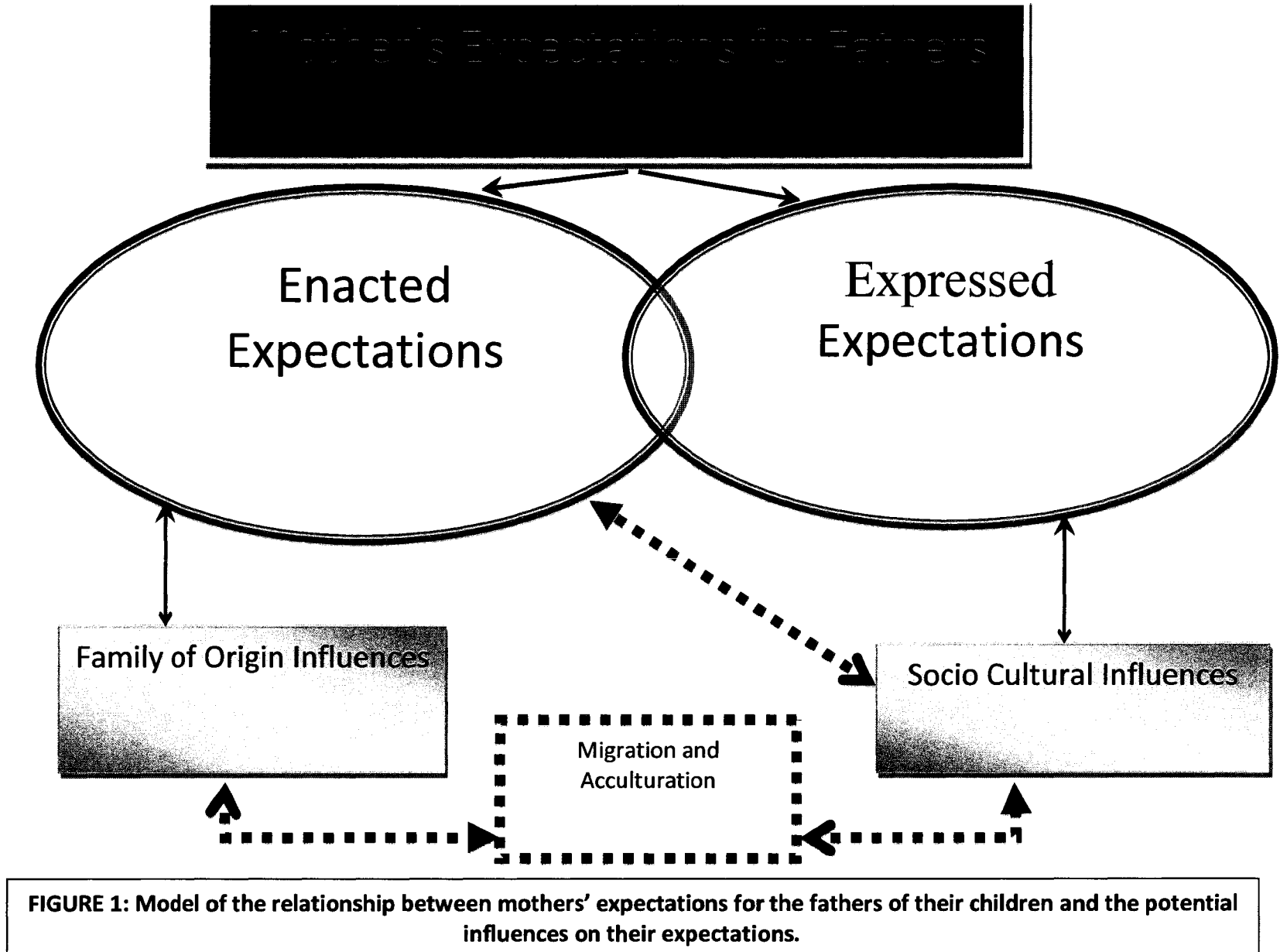


FIGURE 1: Model of the relationship between mothers' expectations for the fathers of their children and the potential influences on their expectations.

Expectations

The model identifies two kinds of expectations, enacted and expressed. Interestingly, the more aligned the enacted and the expressed expectations were, the more frequently mothers seemed to praise their partners, with comments such as those from Jane, “So I figure he is a pretty good dad because most dads would go crazy doing that...I would say he is more involved than in a lot of other relationships” and Mary, “When I compare my husband to them, maybe I am a bit biased, but I really do think that he is far better than any of them.”

Expressed Expectations

Alex’s response to the question of what a good father is was quite typical of most of the women’s responses, “The first thing that comes to mind is involved; a good father is someone who is involved. In their child’s life and activities, and aware of what is going on.”

Despite the differences in their socio-economic statuses, family backgrounds, culture, current situations and childhood experiences, most of the mothers who participated, expressed similar expectations for fathers. They described the elements of a good father using similar language and phrases and highlighted the same fundamental aspects of being a ‘good’ father. Most participants described ‘good’ fathers as involved active participants, interested in their children and caring. Maddy described a good father as “somebody who takes an active interest in their children.” Melanie also emphasized the interest with her response: “Well, the first would be interest... They make time, time for them. And of course being integral part of raising them.”

Yet despite the frequency of words like ‘actively involved’, ‘engaged’ and ‘integral part of raising the children’, very few of the participants could actually describe what that meant to them. When asked to describe what that involvement looked like, many of the women described playing or looking after the child when the mother was busy or being a role model for the child. For Maddy, involvement included “express(ing) to their children, how much they are cherished and cared for, participat(ing) in the day-to-day needs of the child, so the child doesn’t always have to just go to mom.” Pava also had a hard time describing father involvement in concrete

terms: “Um, doing the chores or spend time with the family and the baby especially. I don’t know; spend some quality time with them. Plays with them and talk to them. I don’t know, gives them what they need to because mom cannot be around all the time.”

For Maddy and Pava, the definition of a good father is someone who is actively involved, but what that involvement looks like is a mystery for them, Pava even falls back on another common catch phrase of “spending quality time” with the children. Having a father who is a good role model was an important benefit of father involvement for all the women and was the first reason given when asked why fathers are important in children’s lives, especially for those who had sons. What may be more disturbing to father involvement promoters is that the examples these women gave of active involvement, seem to fit with more traditional fathering roles as ‘playmate’ and ‘mom’s helper’. This description raises questions about the impact of father involvement campaigns on mothers and perhaps identifies one of the challenges that promoters and fathers who want to be involved may face. Do mothers really understand the important role that fathers play in their children’s lives and what effective father involvement should look like?

Another common element described was the importance of emotionally ‘helping’ or ‘supporting’ the mother. Good fathers are expected to play a supportive role to their partners, providing not only hands on support, but also emotional support by validating their partners’ roles as mothers. In fact, for Maddy and Natalie, this was a crucial element in good fathering:

“To start with a good father is also a good husband, providing a safe and secure home and a loving relationship within which to raise a child. If the relationship between the mother and the father isn’t good, then it’s going to impact on the child. So that’s the first primary thing a good father is also a good husband.” (Maddy)

“He needs to also be here for the wife. Like, yes he needs to be there for her (the child) but she goes to bed at seven or eight o clock as night, right? Then he needs to also let the mother know that she’s doing a good job.” (Natalie)

The power of the parental relationship seems to be quite a strong factor in many of the mothers' definitions of a good father, and in some cases, the belief that a man would be a good father was one of the main reasons for deciding to marry him and have children with him. For Natalie, the role of father was so closely tied to his role within the couple and their joint role as parents that when her husband was not involved with the child, her romantic feelings for him came into question:

“And I said (to her spouse) ‘For me what is happening is its just making me turn completely off of you. I’m losing respect, I have no interest in you, like I just, you know and you need to be showing me that you are interested in being her father for us to have a relationship.’”

(Natalie)

For other participants, a good relationship between the parents had the power to help the mothers overlook what they felt was a lack of involvement, in that their love for their husbands helped them to believe that their partners were indeed good fathers despite perceived lower levels of involvement. For these mothers, the fathering role was more about helping the mother by being understanding and their involvement was measured by their level of support for the mother and her decisions regarding the child. For other mothers the role of mother’s helper was crucial to their acceptance of a man as a good father, both Zohra and Dina evidenced this in their responses:

“Honestly, the first thing that comes to mind is somebody who helped mom to raise a child... Like somebody who cares, and somebody who understands the situation and somebody who understands the situation has changed after the baby has arrived”

(Zohra)

“I guess it is just being supportive of the mother, because most of the responsibility of children usually falls on the mother. You know, she is sort of viewed as the main provider for the child so a good father would be someone who takes an interest in the child, but mostly who helps out the mother with the upbringing of the child in general.” (Dina)

When the questions shifted to their own situations, the participants said that they expected their partners to “do their share”, but as with the active involvement, the descriptions of ‘their share’ tended to be vague, focusing on household chores and not childcare chores. Jane felt that expected her husband to “do half of everything” and Susan also expected “a more shared workload.”

While many of the women were unclear about what exactly they wanted their partners to do with the children, bath time was consistently mentioned as the one task that the father was expected to do. Susan describes her partner as the bath time parent saying that “in the beginning, he always did the bath, and that was his thing and it was a great bonding thing for them.” In fact, for most of the mothers, bath time was often viewed as father’s bonding time, almost an equivalent bonding opportunity for fathers as breastfeeding was for mothers. Alex explains the bonding that she felt her partner would get from bath time when she says “when she (her daughter) was younger, bath time was something that was actually his because it was something, because I breast-fed. And even when she got older, that was his thing, that time with her.”

One last expectation that was mentioned frequently amongst the interviews was the issue of taking initiative. Many of the women felt that the greatest challenge to father involvement was their partners’ lack of initiative. They felt that although their partners would willingly help with any task, on the whole, their partners rarely initiated any task themselves; even bath time would need a daily reminder despite it being known as father’s time. Both Sara and Maddy explain the frustration that arises from their partners’ lack of initiative: “I expect him to do things for her and with her without me having to tell him to do it.” (Sara) and “He will do anything I tell him to do, but I have to tell him, he won’t just remember to do it or think about what may need to be done.” (Maddy)

This lack of initiative was a constant source of conflict for the mothers. When asked why they felt fathers never initiated, the mothers had two main reasons, one biological and one situational. Some of the mothers went so far as to claim that it was a biological difference

between men and women that prevented fathers from initiating tasks and preparing ahead of time for up-coming tasks. While others acknowledged that the reason was probably due to their own inability to stop doing everything or some form of social conditioning of women. Both Andrea and Alex provided very good examples of their understanding of the difference between mothers and fathers:

“Girls grow up thinking about babies, thinking about babies and wanting a baby, wanting a husband to have babies with. So we have been conditioned into it whether it is evolution or social conditioning is bred into us and men don’t have that same breeding. So, I think it is different.” (Andrea)

“I often wonder if I was to just not pack a bag or not make up a snack and not buy clothes or milk or whatever, I’m interested what would happen... I don’t know if that’s a gender thing, the way women feel more controlling over the house or if they really believe that that is their job, just like for how ever many centuries we felt vacuuming was our job, maybe this is the same thing. Or maybe we’re just hardwired to think that the child is our responsibility.” (Alex)

To summarize, despite the number of expressed expectations that mothers had for the fathers of their children and fathers in general, it was surprising how few of them were able to articulate exactly what they meant by father involvement or to explain in a concrete manner exactly what it should look like. There was an inability to express exactly what father involvement is and a tendency to describe father involvement in terms of ‘playing’, ‘doing his share’ and ‘helping the mother’. These expressed expectations provide little guidance to fathers about how exactly they should be involved.

Enacted Expectations

The second form of expectation identified in this model was enacted expectations. Enacted expectations are those expectations that are expressed through the actions of the mother. It is a way of ‘doing’ gender. Through her actions, what she does in the home, what she refuses to

do, what she complains about, and does not complain about, a mother gives her partner messages about what she expects from him, how he should be involved and what his role is in relation to her own role as a mother. Listening closely to mothers' description of each partner's role within the home, although not an objective measure of task breakdown, is an indication of how the mother sees the breakdown of tasks within the household, and what she expects within her own home from her partner and herself. This perception of the task sharing is important because it influences how and if mothers will use control behaviours to either include or exclude the father from the household/childcare tasks. The situations described by these participants raise questions about how conscious these women actually are of the messages that they are sending to their partners, which may be contradictory to the expressed expectations, discussed previously. In many cases, the life they say they want is quite different from the life they seem to 'fall' into.

Maddy's situation shows how the contradiction between her expressed expectations and her expectations through actions can cause conflict within the family. Maddy described a good father as firstly a good husband, emphasising emotional support for the mother. She said that she expected her husband to be more than just a provider. He needs to be present and involved, participating in the day to day care of their daughter. In comparison to her ideal of the 'good' father, in her situation, her husband actually works two jobs and is only home on Sundays, as a result, she does all of the childcare and is the one who takes time off work if needed. While she does say that he helps when he can, her description of what a good father is, would discount her own spouse if applied to her current situation. Despite his primary role as provider and his lack of participation in the day to day running of the household, she still considers him an active and involved father. Ultimately Maddy expresses an expectation for an almost equal partnership (sixty-forty task division) between herself and her partner, but in reality she is enacting a much more traditional (ninety-ten) expectation through her actions.

Susan says that to be a good father, her spouse must support her emotionally, have time for his children, enjoy being with them and play with them. He must provide and protect, and be

involved in his child's life as much as possible. In reality though, her situation is startlingly different. Her husband is usually out of the house, working late at his business, while she is a stay at home mother who does all the childcare and the cooking and cleaning for the family. When her husband does return home, he will play with his child if he has time before he goes out again to play evening sports three times a week, a hobby that he has had since prior to their child's birth. His lack of involvement is actually explained by Susan as simply a scheduling issue so the semi-traditional situation that she says that she expects is in reality a much more traditional household.

“He used to always do bath but he is always done sports in the evening. I guess he used to do it (bath-time) before he went before he went out. But now things are later, because our son is getting older and he no longer naps in the afternoon. So, usually he'll go to bed a bit earlier. And so that cuts out some of the time they can spend together, because my husband is not home from work until about seven, and so we might start bath at seven thirty. So there's not a lot of time, for the two of them, before he has to go to his sports.” (Susan)

Both Susan and Maddy, expressed expectations of active involvement, equal or almost equal childcare loads and engaged participating fathers, according to their own descriptions they have instead found themselves in more traditional roles. This kind of contradiction was also seen in situations where both parents were home together. In fact, many of the participants explained that if both parents were home then the childcare tasks fell to the mother while the father did more household chores.

“Well, when we are both working, if we both have a day and we both get home at the same time. Then it is my duty to do my son stuff and settle him down. And my husband will come home and do the cooking and I will come home and do the cleaning of the kitchen and putting my son to bed so we have kind of split the tasks.” (Lisa)

Lisa is quite clear in her example of what happens when both parents are home is quite clear about the way the tasks are split. She deals with the child, while her husband prepares the

food and does some of the housework. She also describes a similar situation when they are going out as a family:

“But usually what happens is he looks after himself. And I have to look after my son and I don’t think he, I don’t know how the two of them leave in the morning to go to daycare because I have never seen them get themselves ready without me doing me and my son. He (husband) just kind of yeah, it’s amazing he puts his stuff on and then says ‘Will you guys hurry up, what is taking you so long?!’ So if I am around then definitely it seems to be my job.” (Lisa)

Other participants describe their partner’s role as a kind of back-up for times when the mother cannot be present, for example Alex highlights a common belief that the father really should be available to help when the mother is unable to be there.

“My husband does the grocery shopping, that’s his thing...I expect him to empty the dehumidifier... I expect that if I am unable to get home in time for dinner that it is done... I expect that if I’m not there in the morning, because I have taken the dog out for a walk or run, something like that, that she gets, I expect him to get her up.” (Alex)

Alex’s comments fit with those of Lisa, and seem to indicate an underlying belief that the mother should be the primary caregiver for the children and the father is really there to fill-in when the mother is away or to provide the mother with occasional breaks. These comments are on the surface a contradiction of the actively involved fathers that they tried to describe when asked to express their expectations. But such a description definitely falls in line with the unspoken messages and reactions of medical and social service professionals, raising questions about the idea of parenting as a way of ‘doing gender’. Despite the expressions and societal vocalizations about father involvement, the unspoken messages and actions of self and others seems to be hegemonic. Is it possible that parental roles are better defined through one’s actions as parents rather than through the vocally expressed expectations? The participants in this study

seem to be enacting a specific parental role, which, through action, encourages and elicits specific responses from their male counterparts.

It is important to note that while some mothers' actions contradicted their expressed expectations, other mothers seemed to act in ways that were very much in line with what they expressed. In fact, almost half of the participants described a home life in which they and their partner had almost completely shared parental roles, although it seems that when both parents are in the home, situations such as Lisa's and Alex's are common.

To recap, regardless of the similarities in their expressed expectations, all of these women actually have quite different family structures. The enacted expectations are more clear and specific about how each woman expects her partner to be involved. There is evidence of women 'doing gender' in their relationships, specifically when both partners are home at the same time. While some women have vastly different expressed and enacted expectations, others expectations are quite similar. The interviews focused on potential sources of information about fathering, looking for factors that influence these expectations, in order to understand the differences and the similarities between the two types of expectations.

Influences

The interviews with participants identified two main conscious sources of information about fatherhood. The first was socio-cultural influences such as media and society, including television, books, magazines, healthcare and social service professionals, and economic and work related influences. The second source is family of origin, exploring mothers' childhood experiences with their own parents and parental role models in their lives. Finally, migration and acculturation has an impact on mothers' expectations that alters the model of expectations in a fundamental way. In Canada, a country of incredible diversity, many families migrate from their family of origin culture and as such, the inclusion of this aspect of the model is fundamental to understanding mothers' expectations for fathers in Canada.

Socio-cultural Influences

When asked about the sources of information about fathering that they had been exposed to, all of the women spoke about their own childhoods and their experiences or lack of experiences with their own fathers, but all of these women had a difficult time identifying the sources of information that they received from society. None of the women identified advertisements or print materials readily, television shows provided one or two examples but were limited in what was considered realistic views of family life, and the messages from social services and medical professionals were very mixed and often contained messages about getting fathers involved but not why it is important or how to do it. Susan provides a good example of the lack of clarity most participants expressed regarding the messages from society. She was quite clear about the message, but her description is laden with catch phrases with no clear meaning, she does not elaborate on 'involved' or 'active role'.

“I think the message is that he will have an active role and I think that’s, well, everything has given me the idea that I am not going to settle for a husband that just comes in and doesn’t want to be involved and looks at the child as some kind of a, you know, a nuisance or bother to have around.” (Susan)

Messages from social service professionals seemed quite varied, in that the expressed messages would promote father involvement, but the level of surprise at seeing an involved father indicated that perhaps these social services professionals did not really expect father involvement to happen. Despite the increase of agencies such as FII-ON and FIRA and the posters and information booklets and advertisements that are aimed to promote father involvement, none of the women mentioned having seen or noticed any posters or advertisements or being given any booklets regarding fatherhood.

Most of the women had referred to various child-rearing books such as The Mother of All Baby Books (Douglas, 2001) and parenting information on the internet. They described these sources as fitting into two categories, either androgynous information using language such as ‘as

a parent you should' or solely aimed at mothers with little or no relevant information about the role of fathers or the importance of father involvement. Jane describes her experience with parenting books and websites, describing little to no information for fathers or about fathers. Her words also highlight the idea that fathers will be unwilling participants and that the mother is the primary caregiver.

“But I don't think any of the books give you any expectations of what a father should be... Well... yeah like how to get them to help you change diapers and things like that, but... that's all... Yeah, they (the books) give you the impression of how to get them (the fathers) to help you but not how they help the child. Yeah... like a supportive role and moral support for the mother and things like that.” (Jane)

The majority of participants felt that these sources told them that they should give the baby to the father only when they need to rest. Susan's understanding of the parenting literature was similar to Jane's, with the common message of mothers having to 'force' fathers to be involved, implying that fathers would not want to be involved. Women also felt that they were advised to 'give up control' and let fathers do some of the work, also implying that women do generally do everything. Overall, the general message here was that mothers are the main caregivers, and that father involvement means allowing fathers to help out when the mother is tired. Mothers are encouraged to allow fathers to help, or force them to help.

“They (the books) were more geared towards mothers reading them and would encourage you to try and get the father involved - so that they can attach or have a good attachment with their children early on, and I seem to remember them saying that I should try to back off so that my husband can do it and don't take over completely.” (Susan)

These literary messages seemed to correspond with mothers' expressed expectations of fathers' roles as physical and emotional helper to the mother, and as someone who will not initiate action, but will need to be forced and cajoled into participating. Like Susan, Mary claimed

to have “read ALL the books” and claimed that the books validated her decisions as a mother, proving that she was doing everything “perfectly”. If the books can validate mothering choices to such an extent, then how strong an influence can the subtle messages about fathering be, when read as part of material that affirms one’s belief in one’s own role?

“Up until I read this book, there has been a lot of conflict in terms of what I do with my son, because my mother-in-law doesn’t agree with me and even my husband sometimes doesn’t agree with what I do. But reading this book, it has been like the heavens have opened up and shone down on me saying “you are right!” So I wish I had read that before. It probably wouldn’t have made a difference to how I parented my son, but it would’ve made me feel better to know that I was doing the right thing.” (Mary)

Television is another powerful source of societal messages, both reflecting and influencing how society thinks and feels about issues. Most of the participants felt that overall, television shows were unrealistic or idealistic, and could not be counted on to provide information about how fathers should act. The fathers portrayed in shows were either perfect, a common example of this was Bill Cosby, or completely unfit to parent of which the example given most often was Ted Bundy. For this reason many of the participants felt that television did not influence them at all in terms of their expectations for fathers. Alex was one participant who really felt the influence of television, both prior to having her baby and after. For her, television shows and Hollywood initially led her to expect too much from her husband in the beginning.

“You look at kind of a Hollywood type of scenario where the baby is crying, and the man runs in at the end of the day and takes the baby, runs a bath and says to you “go and have a warm bubble bath”, you know in your head, you kind of expect that, especially in those early days, that he will be there and confident, especially when you’re home all day. I guess in my head I expected that at the end of the day and he would be there. I would have a break.” (Alex)

For Alex, as her child has grown, her fears have changed, as have her expectations, but she still feels the impacts of Hollywood and television. Now, television shows seem to confirm her fears that most fathers are incompetent and unwilling to participate. She describes how this encourages her to be a ‘nagging’ wife, forcing her husband to do more around the home.

“It’s stereotypical what we see is the woman doing the child rearing and the men, you know, usually in a comedic way; they make fun of how men can’t get it right. So he is on the couch watching a football game, while chaos is going on all around him. So I think it is influencing me because in some ways, it reinforces what you might be nagging about. And although you laugh along, you start to think that maybe it’s normal for the mother to have to do everything.” (Alex)

While none of the participants mentioned seeing or hearing any of the father involvement promotional campaigns, they did have experiences with both medical and social service professionals. These experiences became another source of potential expectations for their partners. The influential power of doctors and social services is best described by Alex:

“Well I did have an expectation that the medical community would know all the right answers and be able to tell me what to do... And then even after baby was born, you would think that the medical profession can help you with medical things like caring for the baby for example, in terms of breast-feeding but you get a lot of different opinions about breast-feeding. Nobody quite knows all the right answers, you know, every nurse that comes in has a different technique and you just want someone to say. I know what you need and that’s it.” (Alex)

The differences in terms of advice and support within the social service field creates mixed messages for mothers, who struggle to understand the difference between what is said and what is done. For example, despite the promotion of father involvement many of the participants noticed how surprised doctors and nurses were when their partners were actively involved, these reactions reinforced the belief that fathers should not really be involved.

“I remember when we went to have an ultrasound and my husband and I were both so excited to finally see the baby. But when we got there, the technician literally told my husband to sit quietly in the corner and like he was not part of the event or even welcome in the room, we were both very hurt by that. Later when I was telling a friend of mine who is a public health nurse, she told me that that was quite a common reaction in public health and that the focus is on mother and child and not on the father. It actually seemed like he was just an extra; he is simply the sperm donor.” (Maddy)

Sarah, who works in social services herself, often sees the kind of double standard that most of these mothers describe and in fact realized during the interview that perhaps she had been guilty of that too, despite her own knowledge of the father involvement promotion in social services.

“If we go to the doctor, I think he (the doctor) tends to direct more of the questions and that sort of thing at me and I think, now that I think about it, I probably do that as well in my practice. As much as I try not to, when I’m asking things, I guess I do focus on the mother.” (Sarah)

Jane described a situation with the daycare center that her child attended where she got the impression that they had very traditional views about parenting roles. Despite the fact that she was the primary breadwinner in the family and her husband was a graduate student with very flexible hours, she would be the primary contact for the daycare regardless of instructions to contact her spouse.

“We would take him (to daycare) after I had worked a 15 hour overnight shift. So my husband would drop him off so I could stay home and sleep, and we would write, there’s a place on the daily form, where they have all your contact information so there we would write that they must call my husband today and they would call me 15 minutes later and I would find it really upsetting and I would say you need to call my husband and

they would say we don't want to bother him at his work, so either it wasn't important enough to call either of us or you're being sexist." (Jane)

To sum, all of these societal messages, from books, media and social service and medical professionals, echo the expressed expectations of the participants. The 'catch phrases' such as active involvement, engagement and participation in day to day childcare, are twisted by the lack of definition and information about the importance of fathers. Mothers seem to know that they should expect fathers to be involved, but they remain baffled by what exactly the engaged, actively involved father does. As a result, most of the mothers in this study spoke of their expectations as being too high prior to having the baby and then 'falling' into roles that are more realistic over time. As the interviews explored both expressed and enacted expectations, and the differences between them, along with the sources of information, some of the mothers realized how confusing and convoluted the expectations actually were:

"Sometimes I think the shift (to parental equality) has happened, but maybe we're putting too much on fathers, where they have to do the breadwinning and the childcare. I mean, it's fair because moms are now in the workplace, but we can't do it all and yet we still expect them to do it all. I mean, I think it's hard to find that middle ground." (Alex)

Family of Origin Influences

The participants in this study seem to have family of origins that could be divided into three main categories. The first category would be those mothers who came from traditional families in which their own fathers were mainly providers, with limited involvement with their children. The second category would include those whose own fathers were involved in childcare and all aspects of their childhoods. Finally, the third category would be those mothers who were raised by one or other parent with little or no involvement from the other parent, this situation was due to divorce or death of the other parent. In cases where participants were raised by single parents, remarriage of the parent provided an opportunity for a new father or mother role model

and for two participants (Susan and Haley), their current spouses had been with them since their young adolescent years and they describe their spouses' family of origin as equally influential to their own.

Maddy, Jessica and Susan are good examples of the link seen between traditional family of origins and mothers' expectations. In all of their cases, equal parenting was considered an expectation and yet these women have all fallen into very traditional roles and despite the difference between what their expressed expectations and their enacted roles, the women felt that their partners were good fathers. One of the most noticeable aspects of their described situation was the strong parallel between their own fathers and their husbands. These women describe their own fathers in a way that echoes their descriptions of their husbands. For example, just as her husband was a busy man, working late or playing sports, Susan describes her father as the same kind of father:

“He (her husband) used to always do bath but he has always done sports in the evening. So I'm trying to think how it (their roles) changed. I guess he used to do it before he went before he went out. But now things are later, because our son is getting older and he no longer naps in the afternoon. So, usually he'll go to bed a bit early. And so that cuts out some of the time they can spend together, because my husband not home from work until about seven, and so we might start bath at 7:30. So there's not a lot of time, for the two of them ... My dad went out to work and you know, was very traditional in terms of, my mom did everything and she had dinner on the table as soon as he got home. We would have dinner, and I don't know. I don't know what we did. I know he used to go out and play sports and things, a couple of nights a week he would play badminton.” (Susan)

In contrast to the traditional mothers, Jane, Sarah and Dina describe their situations as equal in terms of parenting and house-hold chores and when describing their family of origin, all three of these women also describe equality amongst their parents, noting that their own fathers

were very involved in their day to day care. In all six of these women, we see the patterns of childhood repeating themselves, regardless of their expressed expectations. Haley, raised in a very tradition family, describes her own marriage as a partnership, almost fifty-fifty in terms of childcare. But looking closer at her family of origin, she noted that her husband's family was a strong influence in her life because they had been together since she was thirteen, in her case, it seems that her contemporary situation may have stemmed more from influences of her spouse's family than her own. Haley also has twins, which seems to force both parents to be involved as much as possible:

“When I think about those kinds of roles I really don't look to my family because I've been with my husband since I was 13 years old. So I kind of look at his family because his father and his uncles, are all big role models to me, because they go to the kids' school plays, they coached them in hockey, the kids asked to go out to them and ask them for advice whereas with my dad, I would never use him as a role model just because my mom did everything and he was not there for us.” (Haley)

Mary, Alex, Melanie and Natalie were all raised in unique situations. Mary was raised by a nanny and she had older parents who both worked long hours. Alex was raised by a single mother with no contact with her father. Melanie comes from a divorced family where she initially lived with her father as her mother left the home and then after her mother remarried she moved in with her and her stepfather and his children. Melanie's stepfather was described as very involved. Finally Natalie was raised by her father after her mother's death, but describes his involvement as limited after he remarried. She also describes being moved into the cottage at the bottom of the garden while her father, stepmother and her stepmother's children lived in the main house.

With all of these women, the influences of their family of origin can still be seen in their current situations. All of them seem to have some kind of 'ideal' situation of what their lives 'should' have been like if they had had both parents, a kind of dream scenario that they seem to

enact with their own children. For example, Alex saw her mother doing everything with no father figure at all. She describes being “gypped” and not wanting her daughter to have the same experience so she ensures that her husband is involved, creating an equal parenting relationship. Alex also seems to have a great fear about something happening to herself and stresses the importance of the father as someone who can care for their child should anything happen to the mother:

“I think it has to be where, whatever the level is, if the mother suddenly wasn’t there. Basically, then they would know what’s going on ... again I think that’s more of like I have to really tell myself to let go and let him do it, because I mean, I think very consciously I had to make a decision not to do it all. Not to only be me because what if I’m not there or what if something happens to me. You know, I mean, whatever that situation might be I don’t want my daughter to not know who this person might be, that is taking her to the doctor’s appointments. It sounds really harsh, but she needs to know him.” (Alex)

On the contrary, Natalie, raised by her grandmother and her father with no mother, has beliefs about what being a mother is, that seem to stem from the lack of her mother in her childhood and the identification of her own mother role defines what she expects from her husband. Natalie believes that mothering is a natural instinct, genetic and unshakable. She believes that she should instinctively know exactly what to do with her child and is consequently upset with herself for not being able to be a “good” mother. In terms of her expectations for her husband, she seems to look for the traditional type of father role for her child, the provider and emotional supporter of the mother. Natalie acts in such a way as to involve her spouse in the day to day care of their daughter but not equally, rather he is involved in a supportive role when she may need a break from caring for the child. Her priority for the father of her child is to have someone who provides what she did not have, or more specifically what she lost when her father remarried:

“You know from what I’ve seen, the mothers always seem to be really close to their kids, always. And some fathers are but I think that starts to fall away as the kids get older, unless they actively work on continuing it ... I think what is really important, especially with her being a girl and this has crossed my mind as far as my dad versus my husband is that it can be awkward as they grow and being opposite sexes and stuff and I don’t ever want that to happen, like I want it to be an open, natural, you know, no weirdness in the family and I never want her to be uncomfortable with him and he needs to be comfortable with her.” (Natalie)

Finally in the case of Mary, her parents were described as much older, in their forties when she was born. She describes being raised by a nanny, and then being with her parents on weekends. She also talks of the challenges her own father had in being involved in her life because he had “less energy than the other fathers” and “could not do as much”. In her own life now, Mary measures her husband’s fathering on the number of activities he does with their son, and what he can teach him. She measures her husband on all the things she felt was lacking in her father:

“(My husband) wants to teach him. I mean, for everything, for a well-rounded child, I mean like he’ll sit down and read with him, he’ll play with him, he’ll let him do stuff around the house, I mean, he’s only 17 months old, but he will allow him to help out, to pass him tools and you know, I mean, everything we don’t limit him whatsoever. My husband is great with him ... (my father) was there in the day-to-day all the time, I mean, he was older. I mean, he wasn’t going to go ice skating with me or something, because he was 55 at the time.” (Mary)

To summarize, it is clear through their descriptions of their current situations and their own childhoods, that all of these women have felt a significant impact from their family of origins on the choices and roles that they ended up enacting. Whether it is the roles they observed in their own parents or the roles they imagined when their parents were not present, these

women repeat the patterns of their childhood in their enacted expectations. Four of the participants acted in a distinctly different way to how their parents had behaved, breaking away from their family of origin patterns. Looking more closely at their stories, there seems to be an emerging trend, a commonality amongst these women that seems to be related to their ability to break away from old patterns and behave in a manner that is more closely linked to societal expectations. All of these women experienced migration away from their family of origin and are in the process of acculturation.

Migration and Acculturation Influences

Lisa (South African), Halima (Iranian), Pava (Indian) and Zohra (Iranian) all immigrated to Canada less than four years prior to the birth of their first child. All of these women described their own childhoods as quite traditional in that their mothers dealt with the children while their fathers worked to provide for the family. Their fathers were involved with them, but not on a day to day basis, rather through family holidays and vacations or special activities. Lisa was the exception here, in that she described her mother as raising the children but with the help of servants as is the South African way. Indeed, all of these women felt that their childhood was typical of families within their home countries.

Despite having been raised in quite traditional homes, these participants were living significantly less traditionally than their parents had before them. They believed that had they remained in their home countries to have their children that they would have ended up in more traditional roles similar to those of their families of origin. In fact for these women, the act of immigration and the lifestyle in Canada was the greatest influence on how they divided up the parenting roles.

“I think that men in Canada are, well, more of a family role is expected, it is the norm. That’s the way it is. So being here, that is what I expect too, and I think that if I had stayed in South Africa, I would not expect as much help and support as I do now. So I guess I think the cultural thing is quite huge.” (Lisa)

Among the factors in Canada that affected their parenting roles, these participants frequently cited the lack of social support, thus needing their spouse's involvement just to cope and different societal expectations. Pava was quite clear about the challenge of not having extended family support when she said, "I think if I was back home, and I was close to my mom, she could take care of the baby even when I'm not around, but here it is me or my husband." Lisa and Zohra echoed her comments with their own descriptions::

"I think that life in Canada is hard work, you work much harder than you ever did in South Africa, and I think it is harder to make money and harder to get ahead. Also because here you do not have servants, because maids were the norm in SA and very cheap. I think that that's changed, the cultural dynamic, because there was always someone there to look after the children if you want to go out. Whereas here you don't have that option, so I think you are forced to make more of an effort with both parents. You are forced into teamwork." (Lisa)

"Of course in Iran, mostly the children are raised by families by grandparents, you know, and that's quite normal. So they wouldn't be bothered so much by having a child. But I guess, being alone. My mom was here, but I expected my husband, I did not want my mom to do it I expected my husband to do it and to be more involved." (Zohra)

To conclude, the insights of Lisa, Halima, Pava and Zohra highlight the impact that immigration has on parental roles, the isolation that immigrant couples feel coupled with the pressure to acculturate into their new society seems to influence how roles within the family are divided and minimise the impact of their families of origin. It is vital to be aware of how important an influence migration can be on individuals.

Discussion and Conclusion

Previous research has explored the role of fatherhood, the barriers to increased father involvement and the perceptions of fathers within society. The goal of this research was to look more closely at three specific research questions, what messages do new mothers receive about

the fathering role, where do they get these messages from, and what impacts do these messages have on their expectations for the fathers of their children. These questions take the study of father involvement in a new direction and providing new implications for those working to increase father involvement. The model that resulted from the analysis of the interviews begins to answer the questions, providing a starting point for understanding how women understand the role of fathers and how they begin to form expectations for the fathers of their children. Some of the findings parallel findings from previous research and the conclusions drawn from the application of the model provides a useful guide for future research and suggestions for future father involvement and parental support initiatives. The discussion that follows will look at each of the research questions in turn relating the model to previous research and highlighting the main implications of found in this study.

What messages do mothers receive about fatherhood?

In 1988, LaRossa commented on the changes to the role of fathers up until that point in history. He recognized that fathers' roles have changed but more in terms of expectations and culture than in actual division of work or conduct. Today, twenty years later, the culture of fatherhood continues to change, with increasing expectations and roles of fathers, the conduct is still slow to change (Coltrane, 2007). Later in the nineties, Belsky and Kelly (1994) and Cowan and Cowan (1992) agreed that contemporary parents now find themselves in a culture of confusion around the role of fathers, with no clear divisions to the labour, no clearly definable gender roles and 'outdated' and at times 'socially unacceptable' role models from their own parents. Similarly, in this study, participants do not seem to be clear about the actual meaning of fatherhood or the details about what such a role would look like. It appears that in twenty years, little has changed to clarify exactly what the role of fathers is in contemporary society. Indeed, the continued difference between what LaRossa (1988) defines as the culture and the conduct of fathers appears to still be unclear.

Throughout the discussions with the participants in this study, it became quite clear that the messages received about fatherhood were often contradictory and confusing. The participants' ability to use the same words to describe a 'good' father and their inability to explain the meaning or concrete understanding of those descriptions highlights their confusion about what exactly the phrases meant and how they should be enacted in reality. Coltrane identifies a similar confusion noting that Americans "typically define father presence in vague and nostalgic terms – as in marrying the mother and serving as 'masculine role model' – rather than taking responsibility for routine everyday tasks" (2007; p. A20).

One possible way to understand the confusion is to apply LaRossa's (1988) theory of culture and conduct to the messages received. Viewed in this light one could say that the catch-phrases and verbal expectations relate to the culture of fatherhood and the actions and nonverbal messages are related to the conduct of fathers. The consistent use of phrases such as "active interest", "actively involved", "engaged", "provides and protects", and an "integral part of the day to day family life" are elements of the new culture of fatherhood as promoted by father involvement initiatives. On the other hand, the unspoken messages for example, the surprised reactions to fathers who are actually involved, and the professional practise of directing all child related questions to the mother, are examples of messages about the conduct of fathers. These messages appear to be subtly enmeshed within our society.

The work of Sunderland (2000) and Nentwich (2008) highlight the challenges of messages about conduct of fathers and the difficulties of changing the current perceptions about fatherhood. Sunderland's (2000) study identifying the ways in which men are usually portrayed as either 'bumbling assistant' or 'baby entertainer', was supported in the interviews through the participants' responses. Nentwich's (2008) findings of the tendency of individuals to reify the dichotomy of gender is also evidenced in the interviews as participants justify the roles that they have 'fallen' into as equitable because of various contextual factors.

The experiences in childhood are examples of the conduct of fatherhood, how women see their own fathers behaving is a powerful message about how fathers should behave, how fathers should act and what duties they should be involved in. Despite the changes in the culture of fatherhood and mother's expressed expectations, when mothers find themselves trying to enact the culture of fatherhood, they seem to fall back on the conduct they experienced in their own childhood as reflected in their enacted expectations. Many of the participants described their expectations prior to the baby's birth as 'unrealistic' or 'Hollywood-ized'. The expectations they seem to have had were closer to the "culture" description of fatherhood, but once the baby arrived and they felt that a more realistic division of labour evolved and the division described was often similar or parallel to the conduct of their own fathers or father models from childhood. In this way, the reactions of mothers seems quite consistent with the reactions of fathers described by Beaton and Doherty (2007), in that mothers who were either very close or very distant to their own fathers in childhood had high positive expectations for their partners. Also the power of these family of origin messages seem to hold more power than the societal messages, because the women in this study, were clearly generally satisfied with their partners and considered them good fathers even when their actions differed greatly from the 'actively engaged' fathers that were held as the 'good father' model.

Cowan and Cowan (1992) and Walzer (1998) found that traditional roles for spouses in parenting seem to be more powerful than egalitarian ones. This finding is similar to the findings here in this study in which the participants describe "falling" into their roles, usually roles from their family of origin and more traditional in nature. Both the works of Cowan and Cowan (1992) and McMahon (1995) highlight the power of the traditional messages of conduct over the more contemporary messages of culture. As evidenced in this study, mothers from traditional backgrounds tend to follow traditional lives, while those from non-traditional backgrounds follow non-traditional paths; if the non-traditional messages about engaged fathers were more powerful than family of origin, then one would expect to see the traditional mothers following non-

traditional roles despite their family of origin experiences. The evidence supporting mothers' choices with regard to traditional vs. egalitarian childcare practices is crucial to understanding father involvement because of the prominence of the mother's view on the traditionality of the family as a whole (Greenstein, 1996).

Kroska's (1997; 2002) findings relating to the effects of mainstream gender socialization on the meanings individuals give to themselves and to their partners, may at first appear to be contradictory to the findings in this study, but looking more closely at the messages that mothers receive from society, both verbal and non-verbal, it is clear that despite the increase in egalitarian messages, the non-verbal messages and expectations of traditional roles is still profoundly evident in society and the social service and medical professions.

Perala-Luttunen (2007) findings of Finnish respondents' tendency to use the mother role as a model against which fathers could be understood, and West and Zimmerman's (1987) concept of "doing gender" tie together using the dichotomy of gender as a way to understand the differences between the two parental roles. The messages about fatherhood must as such be gleaned as much from the messages and reactions to fathers as the messages and reactions to mothers. Susan is a good example of this phenomenon, using her own mother to define her behaviour and her partners, "my mom did everything at home and she had dinner on the table as soon as he got home. You know, it was just... it was always perfect that way..."

Susan's use of her mother as an example of how mother's behaved helped her to understand how her father behaved in return and to a certain extent, helped her to define what she should reasonable be able to expect of her own spouse. Situations in which doctors and other professionals direct questions about the child to the mother are also examples of indirect messages or using the mother role to define the father role. In such situations, doctors may be implying that the mother should know more about the child, but by ignoring the father or not directing questions his way; they are also implying that the father should not know about the child. It is not an expected part of his role. Similarly public health nurses who show surprise at

the involvement of fathers at home, making comments such as “you are lucky to have him here” imply that it is not normal for fathers to be home (out of their provider role) or involved with the childcare. The message in such situations is clearly that women should not expect men to be involved.

The general messages received about the culture of fatherhood, say that fathers should be “actively engaged”, they should be involved in the day to day care of the child, and that they should be more than just the provider. The good father should also be involved in all aspects of childcare to a level that is close to equal with the mother. Unfortunately, these culture messages are not specific about exactly what this looks like, what tasks an actively engaged father participates in or how exactly the day to day involvement with both parents should be divided. For the specific details, women turn to more concrete information about the conduct of fathers. Here the messages are not as contemporary and equitable. Society is often surprised when fathers are involved or impressed with fathers who are minimally involved, implying that despite the cultural expectations of actively engaged and involved fathers, society actually expects them to do less than mothers, to not be fully engaged, and to remain to a large extent as simply the provider. Perhaps these contradictions within society’s message are the reason that family of origin messages are so powerful. One’s family of origin provides a clear and concrete example of how fathers should behave, and what can and cannot be expected from them.

To sum up, the messages that mothers receive about the role of fathers are received both verbally and non-verbally. Messages also talk about two different aspects of fatherhood, the culture and the conduct, and these may be quite different. While the culture of fatherhood is the general overall societal beliefs about how fathers should be, women may find these idealistic, and the conduct or specific actions that fathers engage in, are more concrete. The messages about culture are more contemporary and seem to be harder to define, while the messages about conduct are specific and highlighted in society through more non-verbal means such as actions of known fathers and reactions by society to fathers’ actions. The messages about fatherhood also arise

from understanding of the messages about motherhood and, due to the dichotomous nature of male versus female; it may appear that fathers are simply the opposite of mothers. Because the messages about fatherhood are varied and complex, mothers must decide how best to implement or enact the role of mother for themselves and thus create expectations for the fathers of their children by combining these messages in such a way as to fit with their specific lives and experiences.

Where do mothers get messages about fatherhood from?

The second research question attempted to identify some of the sources of messages about fatherhood that mothers could identify. While the results here were based only on what the participants could identify or describe through their answers, it quickly became clear that many of the messages received were to a large extent unconscious. The interpretations of the actions of those around them were a strong influence on women and their understanding of the actual tasks fathers should perform.

To sum up, the messages women receive come from many sources around them including healthcare professionals, social service professionals, magazines, television, and other media, parenting literature and other parents. The most influential messages seem to be those from their own parents, and other father figure role models from their childhood. Despite the power of societal messages about engaged and active fathers, if their own families are not egalitarian then the women fall in to more traditional roles.

What impact do the messages about fatherhood have on mothers' expectations for the fathers of their children?

The final research question asks how these messages influence mother's expectations for the fathers of their children. Thompson and Walker believed that "through their interactions, couples construct gendered parenting" (1989, p. 864) and research has shown how mothers' expectations impact father involvement (Beitel & Parke, 1998; Deutsch, Lussier & Servis, 1993; Fagan and Barnett, 2003). The analysis in this study showed how women's experiences, the

conscious and unconscious messages about fatherhood that they receive from both their own families and society in general, can impact their expectations for and, as research has shown, ultimately their actions and reactions to the fathers of their children.

With regard to Doherty et al.'s Model of Responsible Fathering (1998), the model developed here does not directly show that mother factors influence responsible fathering, but rather helps to identify how those mother factors may influence responsible fathering. The model developed here shows how mother's expectations may develop and how they may react in turn to the actions of the father.

The model developed highlights how specific messages about fatherhood influence women's expectations for the fathers of their children. The model shows that women's expectations are expressed both verbally and through the actions and reactions they have as mothers in their families. This duality of expectation is similar to the concepts of culture versus conduct defined by LaRossa (1988) in relation to fatherhood. The expressed expectations may or may not be in direct conflict with the enacted expectations but the enacted expectations are the ones that would most likely impact father involvement. The conflict between enacted and expressed expectations seems to be an indicator of the level of satisfaction for these women's current level of father involvement.

The model shows that the societal and media messages influence the expressed expectations that women have for fathers. The confusion in messages from society, between culture and conduct or between the expressed messages promoting father involvement and the non-verbal reactions implying fathers should not be involved, is heard in the difficulty that mothers have when trying to explain in concrete terms how an active, engaged and involved father would behave. The model also shows that the enacted expectations match most closely with the participant's experiences in childhood. This means that participants' are ultimately living the same kind of lives that their parents lived before them. While their level of traditionalism may not be as extensive as their parents, women from traditional families, despite expressing

egalitarian views on fatherhood, live more traditional lives than those women who come from egalitarian families. Interestingly, in the cases of women from families where one or other parent is missing, the power of their own dreams and wishes of what a family should be like or what they have missed is powerful enough to override societal messages. The participants without involved mothers wanted to be the mothers that they missed themselves and those without fathers are determined to have involved and engaged fathers for their children. Even in these situations, the messages relating to the culture of fatherhood do not have as powerful an influence on the actions and expectations of these women as the power of the imagined conduct of the parents of their dreams.

Finally, for those who move from another country, the effects of their own family of origin and the conduct messages of their childhood are not powerful enough to override the culture of fatherhood in the new society. These effects mirror those of other studies looking at the impacts of immigration and acculturation, in that the family becomes more and more like the culture in which they live (Cheah & Chirkov, 2008; Driscoll, Russell & Crocket, 2008; Marrow, Smith, Lai & Jaswell, 2008; Zadeh, Geva & Rogers, 2008).

Looking at the model as a whole, one can start to see that the messages that women receive both from society and throughout their lives from their families impacts both the verbal expressions that they make about their expectations for the fathers of their children and the way that they enact their own roles as mothers and in turn how their expectations come through in their actions and reactions.

Implications for Father Involvement Promotion, Parental Support Programs and Future Research

The purpose of undertaking this study was to understand how mother's expectations are formed. Ultimately the hope is that this information can be used to guide father involvement initiatives to find new and more effective ways to increase father involvement, to move the current conduct of fatherhood closer to the new culture of fatherhood. Knowing that mothers play

such an important role in the level of father involvement (Beitel & Parke, 1998; Deutsch, Lussier & Servis, 1993; Fagan and Barnett, 2003), it seems prudent to work towards understanding how mothers' perceptions and expectations are formed.

During the interview process, many of the participants seemed to enjoy being part of the analysis process and many made comments about the insight that they had gained from the interview process. It seems that even the simple process of talking about their experiences of, messages about and expectations for fathers was enough to begin to bring the unconscious messages and their impacts into conscious thought, Zohra really felt the awareness develop through the interview process: "Your questions are really interesting, I had never thought about that" (Zohra). Natalie also commented on her own increase awareness, "I had never connected the two (sources and situation) until you brought this up".

The process of making the unconscious conscious can help to raise awareness about how mothers are behaving, and help to promote change within the family unit. Promoting such awareness within both parents in prenatal and parenting programs may be a starting point to effecting positive increases in father involvement; this finding has also been identified by Schultz, Cowan and Cowan (2006) and Cowan et al. (2007). Similarly, using these kinds of insights within family therapy may help mothers to gain awareness of their actions and how their experiences in childhood may have contributed to any challenges in adjusting to their new role during the transition to parenthood. Walsh (2003) highlights the importance that belief systems can play in building resilience within families.

Another aspect that may prove to be critical in the design of parenting programs, especially for mothers, is an understanding of exactly why father involvement is important. Many of the women in this study also felt that they did not really know why father involvement was important citing only the obvious need for a role model. Perhaps by explaining the importance to women, they would be more inclined to engage fathers in the daily child rearing tasks.

While change is already being pushed for within the media and society in general, changes also need to happen within the social service and medical field. Professionals need to be made more aware of the mixed messages that they may be inadvertently sending out through their actions and interactions with parents. Awareness training for all social services professionals should highlight reflective practices around work with parents, allowing professionals to assess their own understanding of the culture and conduct of fathers. Sensitivity training would help to minimize the over praise of father involvement and the resulting implication that it is something unusual that should be praised. Until we can reach a point where father involvement is taken for granted, such reactions will always serve to reify the belief that it is ‘not natural’ for fathers to be actively engaged in child rearing.

Change will not be easily achieved or quickly implemented. It will be a long process to move from a system of dichotomous, gendered parenting to a naturally egalitarian system. The challenges of changing such a long standing and powerful belief system are already starting to be identified by father involvement proponents such as Paquette and Campbell who stated that “The new ‘hands-on’ father role has been a recent social development, within the last 10 years. It will take organizations time to catch up with these recent societal changes to the role of fathers. It has taken many decades to build a very comprehensive family services system for mothers and children, but it will take additional time to be more inclusive of fathers built at a time when fathers went to work and mothers stayed home with the babies and children” (2008, p. 4).

Limitations

When assessing the limitations of this study, it is critical to remember that this is a study of women’s perceptions and beliefs. It is not a quantitative study of exactly how the division of labour works within these families, but rather an understanding of how these mothers perceive their own role and that of their partners. Future research should include a study of how accurate mothers’ perceptions of the division of labour actually is, utilizing time-diaries and observations within the home. This study could also be expanded to include interviews with fathers and parent

child interaction measures to gain a greater understanding of the interaction between the factors that influence responsible fathering.

Another notable limitation to the findings of this study is demographic profiles of the sample. Although the age range of the participants is consistent with the general population of first time parents, other demographic means may not match the general population, for example, because the later participants were selected based using purposive sampling techniques, the group would not reflect the diversity of the Canadian population. Also the exclusion of single mothers and mothers with more than one child or remarried mothers, means that information about those populations' expectations cannot be attained. However, the goal of this study is to begin to understand mother's expectations of fathers and some of the sources of these expectations, despite the increasing number of lone parents, married or common law family situations are still the majority when the first child is born (Statistics Canada, 2006b). Consequently this married/common law group was selected for initial study. Furthermore as this study is intended as a starting point to understanding women's expectations, more extensive research of mothers in other family situations would be the next logical step.

In terms of future research, while the findings in this study propose a starting point for understanding the sources of expectations that mothers may have for the fathers of their children, it also points to a new and expanding field of study. As the mothers in this study were all first time parents living with the fathers of their children, further research should look to understanding how those expectations may change after the birth of subsequent children, how single mothers and mothers who have remarried or are in blended families might differ in their understanding of fatherhood. The effects of migration and acculturation on mother's expectations needs much more in-depth study to understand more clearly how that migration mechanism may work within this and other models. Also further questions have been highlighted by one of the participants in this study, how do expectations change when the children are twins? Does having twins force fathers to be more involved and force mothers to display less gate-keeping behaviours

that those without twins. Same sex parents should also be explored in more detail to identify how these partners define their parental role and if any kind of gender binary is applied in their situations. While this study does begin to answer the questions about mothers' expectations for fathers, it also provides many more questions yet to be asked.

Although we have only begun to understand the critical role that mothers play in father involvement, the perspectives provided by participants in this study open new research doors and help to build a greater understanding of father involvement can better be more effectively promoted, working towards positive changes in society. The model developed here is a starting point to mapping women's expectations and possibly beginning to identify mothers who may become barriers to father involvement. The model can begin to scaffold our understanding of both fatherhood and motherhood. Hopefully, with further research and a more directed service approach, we can work with mothers to change not only the culture of fatherhood but the conduct of it too.

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Appendix A

Participant Demographics

(*) All names have been changed to protect the identity of participants and their families.

Pseudonym *	Ages	Situation
Jane	Participant: 36 yrs Spouse: 35 yrs Son: 22 mths	Participant works in emergency services, spouse is a University Student.
Mary	Participant: 32 yrs Spouse: 35 yrs Son: 18 mths	6 month pregnant with 2 nd child. Participant has an office job; spouse is a fire fighter.
Susan	Participant: 37 yrs Spouse: 39 yrs Son: 38 mths	Participant is a stay at home parent, spouse is self employed in family business.
Alex	Participant: 37 yrs Spouse: 40 yrs Daughter: 34 mths	Both parents work 9-5 jobs.
Maddy	Participant: 29 yrs Spouse: 35 yrs Daughter: 33 mths	Participant is a computer engineer; spouse works two part time jobs. Very religious.
Lisa	Participant: 36 yrs Spouse: 39 yrs Son: 39 mths	Emigrated from South Africa, before child was born. Participant works in airline corporate office; spouse is a pilot.
Sarah	Participant: 27 yrs Spouse: 28 yrs Daughter: 22 mths	Unplanned pregnancy. Participant is in social services; spouse works from home.
Jessica	Participant: 29 yrs Spouse: 29 yrs Son: 4 mths	Participant works in financial industry, currently on maternity leave, spouse is self employed.
Halima	Participant: 39 yrs Spouse: 40 yrs Daughter: 23 mths	Immigrated to Canada from Iran, prior to child's birth. Participant is a university student; spouse is in social services.

Pseudonym *	Ages	Situation
Melanie	Participant: 32 yrs Spouse: 33 yrs Son: 27 mths	8 months Pregnant with 2 nd child. Participant is in sales and works part time in the evenings; spouse is a full time employee working regular 8-4 hours.
Andrea	Participant: 32 yrs Spouse: 30 yrs Son: 21 mths	Participant works at a university, spouse is in social services.
Zohra	Participant: 28 yrs Spouse: 32 yrs Daughter: 32 mths	Immigrated to Canada from Iran, prior to child's birth. Participant is a stay at home parent, spouse is a businessman.
Pava	Participant: 29 yrs Spouse: 32 yrs Daughter: 21 mths	Immigrated to Canada from India, prior to child's birth. Both Participant and spouse are university students.
Haley	Participant: 26 yrs Spouse: 27 yrs Twin Sons: 6 mths	Participant works in financial industry, currently on maternity leave; spouse is in skilled labour & will be working part time.
Natalie	Participant: 31 yrs Spouse: 33 yrs Daughter: 15 mths	Multicultural couple - Participant emigrated from South Africa, spouse is Canadian. Participant is exec assistant; spouse is employed working 9-5.
Dina	Participant: 32 yrs Spouse: 34 yrs Daughter: 26 mths	Multiracial couple, Participant is east Indian 1 st generation Canadian, spouse is Caucasian Canadian. Both Participant and spouse work 9-5.

Appendix B

Outline of Base Questions for Interviews

1.	How do you define a 'good father'?
2.	How do you think a 'good father' is involved with his children?
3.	Why do you think fathers are important for children?
4.	How are mothers and fathers different?
5.	What expectations do you have for your partner and why?
6.	Where do you think you learned what a 'good father' is?
7.	what messages about fathering do you think you get from :
a.	the media
b.	family
c.	friends
d.	professionals
8.	Do you think those messages influence your expectations for your partner? How?