

**Exploring Father Involvement: Fathers' Accounts of Paternal Involvement**

by

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### **Author's Declaration**

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

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## **Abstract**

Fathers with children at home account for a substantial portion of the Canadian population. In contemporary Canada, a father's role no longer consists of distant breadwinning, but rather actively engaging in a family-centered lifestyle and being more involved in child care. Extensive research has focused primarily on the experiences of mothers and given very little attention to involved fathers. This study sought out to explore how fathers understand and describe involved fatherhood. Six participants, who identified as engaged fathers, participated in conversational interviews. The findings suggest that daily interaction through child rearing and playing with children was viewed as part of the father role. As a result, fathers adjusted their paid work and leisure pursuits in order to "be there" for their children. Fathers resisted dominant gendered ideologies through completing 'feminine' domestic chores, providing emotional care, and taking full responsibility for children's care throughout the week. Fathers also reproduced gendered norms, particularly during children's play, and by not taking paid parental leave. This research found that fathers resisted and reproduced gendered roles, and negotiated numerous constraints to meet their fathering responsibilities, which did not consist of solely playing with children. Fathers' involvement level is greatly influenced by leave policies in Canada; therefore changes to leave policies and pay equity are needed to support increased father involvement.

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## Table of Contents

Prologue .....	1
1.0 Introduction.....	2
1.1 Purpose of Study and Research Questions.....	6
2.0 Literature Review .....	7
2.1 Evolution of the Father in Canadian Society .....	8
2.2 The Mother in Canadian Society.....	10
2.3 Father Involvement .....	12
2.4 Involved Fatherhood and Leisure.....	14
2.5 Concluding Thoughts .....	22
3.0 Methods .....	24
3.1 Qualitative Research .....	24
3.2 Recruitment Process.....	24
3.3 Conversational Interviews.....	26
3.4 Data Analysis Procedures .....	28
3.5 Involved Father Versus Engaged Father? .....	29
3.6 Role of the Researcher .....	30
3.7 Ethical Considerations and Credibility .....	30
4.0 Findings .....	32
4.1 Participant Profiles .....	32
4.2 “I’d like to be there”: Part of Engaged Parenting .....	34
4.2.1 Being available for children.....	34
4.2.2 “Engaged is playing with your children” .....	38
4.3 “We’re a team”: Parenting Together.....	43
4.3.1 Discourse of the engaged father: Parenting everyday.....	44
4.3.2 Adapting together.....	50
4.4 Fitting in leisure: “It’s present, it just sometimes shifts” .....	57
4.4.1 Scheduling leisure and multitasking .....	57
5.0 Discussion.....	64
5.1 Resisting Gender Ideologies .....	64
5.2 Managing Involved Fatherhood .....	68
5.3 Negotiating Leisure Constraints.....	72
6.0 Conclusion .....	76

References.....	78
Appendix A.....	89
Appendix B.....	90
Appendix C.....	92
Appendix D.....	93

## Prologue

The topic of fatherhood sparked my interest because upon reflection of my experience with my own father, I quickly realized my father's parenting approach was not practiced by all fathers. My father was self-employed and worked full-time hours during my childhood, yet he was able to negotiate his work schedule to meet his father role responsibilities. I remember him regularly cleaning dishes and the home, doing laundry, and being actively engaged in his three daughters' extra-curricular activities. For example, he drove my sister and me to piano lessons every Friday morning before school for many years. My father was an active parent and held a crucial role to help manage our family's busy schedules. He always knew what my sisters and I were doing because he took us to our various activities and often watched us. He also contributed to the decision making and planning of our family activities, such as vacations.

Upon observation of friends and extended family I noticed not all fathers were present or involved. I realized I rarely saw some of my close friends' fathers even when I was at their home regularly. Similarly, their fathers' had little involvement in our organized leisure, as they did not watch the activity, do drop off or pick up. It became apparent that some fathers' involvement with their children was limited. Subsequently, they took on a secondary parent role, as the child rearing and household chores were done primarily by the mother. This left me wondering why father involvement levels drastically varied. More specifically, how do fathers who parent equally with their partner understand their father role?

## 1.0 Introduction

Parenthood is a key transition period in the life cycle, for it brings familial changes with implications for individuals' lifestyles (Birchler, 1992). Parents with children at home account for as much as 30% of the Canadian population (Statistics Canada, 2006). Becoming a parent entails a huge fundamental shift in adults' lives, one whereby established identities and lifestyles are thrown into flux by the transition into a new and different world (Marsiglio, 2004). Not surprisingly, parenthood is surrounded by changing expectations that alter an individual's identity (Kay, 2007). Palkovitz (2002), for instance, examined the significance of fathering for men and found all fathers in his study felt fatherhood accounted for a portion of their identity. Given leisure's role in reflecting identity (Kleiber, Walker & Mannell, 2010), leisure represents an important realm in which to examine parenthood and the lifestyle transitions parents make with the birth of a child.

Indeed, research has shown the presence of young children in a household can strongly influence parents' leisure in many ways. Leisure activities pre-children are commonly active, social, and out-of-home for both men and women (Such, 2006). They become more child-centered and less personally autonomous after the arrival of children (Such, 2006). Interestingly, there are mixed findings about the implications of leisure for parents of young children. One body of research shows that participation in leisure activities, including leisure alone and leisure with friends, declines for adults once they become parents (Gatrell, 2005; Such, 2006). Other literature reports no differences between new parents and child-free couples in terms of total time spent in leisure, revealing instead different leisure between the two groups (Huston & Vangelisti, 1995). In addition to amount of leisure time, Such (2006) found the onset of parenthood symbolized a significant shift in the form, structure, meaning and experience of leisure for both

men and women. Parents begin to prioritize and schedule leisure after children are born because leisure is less personally autonomous (Such, 2006). Thus far, however, Leisure Studies has focused primarily on the experiences of mothers and given very little attention to *involved fathers*. Those fathers, who actively engage with their children through feeding, bathing and playing, become emotionally connected with their children, and take responsibility for their children's care such as providing healthy food and making child care arrangements (Eggebeen & Knoester, 2001; Marsiglio & Cohan, 2000). Involved fathers play an important role in their children's day-to-day lives, and when they are not directly interacting with their children they are often somewhere close, such as cooking in the kitchen while the child plays in the next room (Daly, 2001; Lamb, Pleck, Charnov & Levine, 1987). Involved fathers are nurturing and develop a sense of responsibility that enables them to actively co-parent (Rehel, 2014).

Involved fatherhood literature has drawn attention to the key obstacles to greater fatherhood involvement, including the role of work in fathers' lives (Dowd, 2000), co-constructed processes of "doing gender" (West & Zimmerman, 1987), discourses of fatherhood (Mandell, 2002), and the role of social networks and the community (Doucet, 2004). Understanding fatherhood and its implications for leisure is a relatively new and growing area of leisure scholarship (Kay, 2006). Topics that have appeared in the literature include fatherhood and masculinity (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Kay, 2007; Pringle, Kay & Jenkins, 2011), fathers' involvement in their children's leisure (Coakley, 2006; Harrington, 2006; Kay 2006), family leisure (Buswell, Zabriskie, Lundberg & Hawkins, 2012; Shaw & Dawson, 2001), and the effects of fatherhood on leisure lifestyle (Such 2006). Not surprisingly, research shows that leisure in fatherhood becomes more child-centered and less personally autonomous (Such, 2006). Moreover, personal leisure is often reduced, albeit not entirely curtailed, because fathers often

use ‘timetabling’ strategies to access personal leisure (Such, 2006). Other research highlights leisure as an ideal context for fathers to become actively involved in their children’s lives. Kay (2007) suggests fathering through leisure allows fathers and children to experience an emotional closeness through a shared experience. With fatherhood being such a common identity among Canadian males, and with the growing movement toward involved fatherhood, leisure studies needs to further explore fathers’ understanding of their father role in addition to the implications for leisure.

As the research on fatherhood has demonstrated, traditional fathering roles are changing in Canada (Doucet, 2004). In the past, fathers in Western industrialized countries were expected to be responsible providers, authoritarian disciplinarians and detached guardians (Kay, 2007). The term “father” was synonymous with breadwinner, a father’s chief familial role. However, over time the conventional detached role has been increasingly replaced by notions of involved fatherhood that resembles someone who is “caring, involved and nurturant ... and is emotionally close to his children” (Kay, 2007, p. 70). In Shaw’s (2008) view, fathers do not want to be ‘emotionally distant’ parents as they sometimes describe their own fathers or men in earlier generations. The expectations of fathers are rising. In short, today’s fathers are much more likely to be engaged actively in the lives of and develop close relationships with their children (Kay, 2007; Shaw, 2008).

The increase in dual-earner families has likely contributed to the emotionally involved fathering role (Such, 2006). Fathers have greater opportunities to be involved with their children when both parents are in paid employment because there may be a greater understanding that domestic responsibilities and child care should be shared by both parents. Parents’ commitment to home responsibilities and child care contributes to strong family functioning. Indeed, research

shows that families intentionally use family leisure as a means to enhance family functioning (Shaw & Dawson, 2001). Buswell et al. (2012) point out that positive family functioning is not simply the product of the quantity of time fathers spend in leisure activities with their family, but rather the quality of the interactions they have with their families. Their study shows that fathers' involvement in home-based activities, such as eating dinner together, participating in hobbies and informal sports, or playing games together, contribute most to family functioning. Even so, family leisure research has concentrated primarily on mothers' perspectives and their involvement in family leisure. Consequently, fathers' involvement in family leisure is typically overlooked in the literature (Buswell et al., 2012).

Surprisingly, *involved* fatherhood receives little attention in the leisure literature. Most of the published research on fatherhood in leisure studies has involved interviewing couples, which has led to parental comparisons (i.e., moms do this, dads do that) (Doucet, 2004; Doucet, 2009), as opposed to understanding the ways men actively care and engage with children. A concern with couples' interviews is mothers tend to provide more content than their male partners, and consequently there is much to learn about involved fatherhood. In contemporary Canadian society, there was an estimated 4,266,000 fathers in Canada with at least one child under 18 years of age in 2006 (Beaupré, Dryburgh, & Wendt, 2010). Similarly, the type of family has changed from single-earner to dual-earner families. The percentage of dual-earner families with children under the age of six has more than doubled from 31% in 1976 to 67% in 2008 (Statistics Canada, 2010). This increase in dual-earner families may have contributed to the expectation that fathers should actively engage and become emotionally involved in their children's lives. How dual-earner families balance work and family responsibilities, especially after a child's birth, is also changing. A growing number of fathers are engaging with their children through parental

leaves. The increase in parental leaves points to changes in gender roles in contemporary society. The proportion of fathers taking time off and receiving paid parental leave benefits has increased from 3% in 2000 to 20% in 2006 (Statistics Canada, 2010). The experiences of this sizable group of stay-at-home fathers need to be explored in leisure research. Understanding fathers' experiences as they move through public spaces with their children is needed to change social perceptions and norms around fathering (Doucet, 2009). Men should share the important responsibilities and not be judged by standards of hegemonic masculinity. The involved father needs to be encouraged in order to achieve greater work flexibility options for both men and women.

### **1.1 Purpose of Study and Research Questions**

The purpose of this study is to explore how fathers understand involved fatherhood and its implications for leisure. This study seeks to answer four questions about involved fatherhood through individual interviews:

1. How do involved fathers understand and describe involved fatherhood?
2. What roles, if any, does leisure play in participants' understanding of involved fatherhood?
3. What are the perceived implications of involved fatherhood on fathers' own leisure lifestyle?
4. What are the perceived implications of involved fatherhood on fathers' family and children's leisure?

## 2.0 Literature Review

Becoming a father entails a huge fundamental shift in men's adult lives. Entrance into the new world of fatherhood brings forth changes to established identities and lifestyles (Marsiglio, 2004). Prior to the onset of fatherhood, men's identities consist primarily of work/career and leisure. Not surprisingly, once men become fathers, research shows fatherhood accounts for a portion of all fathers' identities, regardless of amount of time spent with children (Palkovitz, 2002). There is a growing expectation that fathers should play an important role in their children's day-to-day lives, which is a lifestyle adjustment. One body of research shows fathers have become more involved with child rearing over the past few decades (Wall 2007; Wilson & Prior, 2010). Time studies find fathers' time with children has significantly increased over time (Kay, 2006). Fathers are spending more time doing child care related tasks such as bathing, feeding, dressing and physical care of the child (Yeung, Sandberg, Davis-Kean, & Hofferth, 2001). Other literature reports men are still far from reaching women's child care commitments and fathers play the role of *secondary* caretaker at most (Craig, 2006; Wall, 2007). Regardless of which parent spends more time with children, modern fathers are increasingly involved as active parents.

In addition to child rearing activities, fathers are also very involved with children's leisure. Criticism of scholarship in this area is that the conceptualization of father involvement has been dominated by a focus on the amount of time spent in caring for children (Hawkins & Palkovitz, 1999). Hawkins and Palkovitz argue this conceptualization is lacking in other important dimensions of father involvement such as the nature and experience of the activities in which a father is involved. Recent research has explored fathers' experiences with their children

(Brotherson, Dollahite, & Hawkins, 2005). The expectation of high levels of fathers' involvement has grown over the past few decades.

## **2.1 Evolution of the Father in Canadian Society**

Traditional fathering roles have changed over time in Canada (Doucet, 2004). Eerola and Huttunen (2011) described a three-phase transition from the pre-modern authoritarian patriarch, to the modern distant breadwinning to post-modern equal partner. The father's role during the pre-modern authoritarian patriarch phase largely contrasted the mother's role as primary caregiver. Accordingly, fathers were responsible providers, and breadwinning was their chief familial role.

During the modern phase, fathers were distant breadwinners and engaged in gendered parental roles, thereby positioning them as assistants for mothers. With industrialization, breadwinning became the most important and defining characteristic of fatherhood (Lamb, 2000). Breadwinning and the detached father role endured from the mid-nineteenth century through the Great Depression (Pleck, 1984). This detached and unemotional father role represented acceptable traits of hegemonic masculinity. Connell (2002) defined hegemonic masculinity as a "state or condition of ideology, [framing] understandings of how particular ways of performing maleness seem natural and normal, yet at the same time [acting] to sustain problematic relations of dominance within and between males" (p. 28).

The postmodern phase replaced the detached father with an involved and engaging role. Around the mid-1970s emphasis was placed on fathers to be nurturing parents that could and should be actively involved in the day-to-day care of their children (Lamb, 2000). Social change has occurred to the point where, in contemporary Canada, a father's role no longer consists of distant breadwinning, but rather actively engaging in a family-centered lifestyle and being more

nurturing. In this sense, a father's role changed to be more involved in child care and providing emotional support for his family. Traditionally, being emotionally supportive did not represent a masculine act as it did not exert the dominant position of men and the subordination of women (Pringle, Kay, & Jenkins, 2011). Traditional ideas about the gendered division of caregiving responsibilities are not part of the new fathering role. More fathers are intentionally and unintentionally resisting hegemonic masculinity and are "undoing gender" (Deutsch, 2007). The timing and turning points of roles and expectations of the good father are blurred and therefore features of the different time periods simultaneously persist in our current culture (Eerola & Huttunen, 2011).

The increased level of fathers' involvement has been examined by many scholars. Cook, Jones, Dick and Singh (2005) conducted an analysis of more traditional caregiving activities (e.g. feeding, changing and bathing the child) through frequency scores for each activity during a week. The findings indicated that fathers' prenatal expectations in regard to level of involvement were substantial predictors of involvement. This finding suggests that paternal expectations motivate fathers' behaviour. It also supports the assertion that fathers play a significant role in their own involvement. In addition, Cook et al. (2005) examined the importance of mothers' attitudes when predicting father involvement. They found mothers with traditional attitudes about gendered divisions of caregiving responsibilities, also referred to as "gatekeepers", can hinder father involvement. By contrast, mothers with high expectations for effective caregiving (e.g. reading and playing with child) are found to play a role in increased father involvement. Therefore, mothers' traditional or egalitarian beliefs can influence the level of fathers' involvement.

Another aspect scholars have examined is the influence of the discourse of fatherhood on parental decision making. Eerola and Huttunen (2011) argued the discourse of fatherhood has shaped the idea of what constitutes acceptable fathering. They also asserted the discourse (public and academic) of the father role is well-known and established. A large area of scholarship demonstrates progression within the discourse of fatherhood. Yet, fewer studies have examined if and/or how the discourse of fatherhood *affects* men's fathering decisions. Eerola and Huttunen (2011) conducted a narrative inquiry on fatherhood, one of the relatively few, to explore how the discourse of fatherhood affected men's narration of fatherhood. They examined the development of narratives of 16 first-time fathers in the early years of their experiences as parents. Fathers were asked to explain how they became a father and how they considered themselves as a father. The authors felt the fathers' narratives, which were family-centered, were being told because of the change in the metanarrative of masculinity. The current traits of hegemonic masculinity allowed men to narrate fatherhood in a more familistic and emotionally rich way as they were "undoing gender" (Kekale, 2007; Deutsch, 2007). Interestingly, all fathers in the study narrated themselves as "family men" and emphasized the importance of "being there". Time spent with children was seen as an integral aspect of good fathering. Wall and Arnold (2007) found all fathers in the study, regardless of the amount of time they spend with their families, share a "commitment to being a loving, involved presence in their children's lives" (Fine, 1999). Research shows the discourse of fatherhood supports involved and nurturing fathering (Craig, 2006).

## **2.2 The Mother in Canadian Society**

Awareness of the traditional mothering role is central for developing an understanding of fathers' increased parental involvements. The changed father role is inextricably linked to the

evolution of the mother role in Canada (Hesse-Biber, 2012). In the past, many women were at home raising the children, while their husbands were the chief breadwinner. In the 1980s, there was a huge shift in women's entrance in paid employment. Several feminists expected women spending more time in paid employment would result in men spending more time in domestic labour and child care (Gershuny & Robinson, 1988). Fathers did not increase their participation in household chores and child rearing for some time, which resulted in women working a 'second shift'. Hochschild (1989) found the combination of employment, domestic labour and child care has resulted in a 'dual burden' or 'second shift' for women. As couples continue to work two jobs, the problems of the two-job family will not diminish. Increased father involvement in domestic and parenting responsibilities was widely seen as the solution to women working a 'second shift' (Craig, 2006).

Research shows fathers are spending more time with their children than they did thirty years ago (Craig, 2006). The increase in father involvement is imperative as two thirds of Canadian women with pre-school children work in paid employment (Statistics Canada, 2011). Despite a significant shift in women's employment patterns, research shows mothers' time spent with children have significantly increased (Kay, 2006). The 'good' mother, one of sacrifice and availability to all family members at all times has sustained. In North America, the dominant ideology of mother has been described as "intensive mother" (Hays, 1996). Hays identified the "intensive mothering" ideology to describe the "emotionally absorbing, labour-intensive, and financially expensive" undertaking that motherhood had become by the mid-1990s. Mothers are responsible for various forms of care giving, such as care of children's emotional, social, psychological, intellectual and developmental needs (Wall, 2005). Within this ideological discourse, women focus on their children's needs and wishes to the exclusion of their own

personal requirements and desires (Warner, 2005). Not surprisingly, women's personal leisure is greatly affected.

Research relating to leisure and motherhood has identified the constraints encountered by mothers due to the ideological influences of the mother role (Brown, Brown, Miller & Hansen, 2001). Time use studies have shown that mother's personal leisure time declines substantially after the birth of their first child, and remains low until their children reach the age of independence (Silver, 2000). Wearing (1990) found strategies employed by women in the negotiation for leisure time and space was a form of resistance. From this perspective, engagement in leisure and physical activity can be seen as challenging social expectations of motherhood. It has been suggested that leisure provides an opportunity for women to resist traditional notions of motherhood by creating time for themselves (Shaw, 2001; Wearing, 1990). Father involvement in domestic responsibilities and child care is crucial in order for women to pursue other activities such as personal leisure. The notion of leisure as resistance is not exclusively for mothers, as research has examined fathers' acts of resistance.

### **2.3 Father Involvement**

A sociological perspective is used in this thesis because it views the practice of fatherhood "as an ongoing, negotiated process shaped by a range of socially constructed circumstances that espouse varied messages about fathering" (Marsiglio & Cohan, 2000). The perspective most relevant for this study is commonly referred to as *father involvement*. Father involvement has been defined and measured in multiple ways. The lack of a clear and consistent definition is problematic for research in this area (Pleck, 1997). Lamb et al. (1987) define three forms of involvement: engagement involves direct interactions with children, accessibility refers to activities involving supervision and the potential for interaction, and responsibility is defined

as the extent to which the parent takes ultimate responsibility for the child's welfare and care. This thesis adopts the definition most commonly referred to in sociological studies by Marks and Palkovitz (2004), which views father involvement as involvement in caregiving tasks as well as providing emotional and psychological support and guidance to children. Quantity and quality time spent with children were seen as an integral aspects of good fathering.

As noted above, the social expectations of fathers continue to rise. The term *new fatherhood* implies that fathers in the 1980s began to perform differently than fathers in earlier times (Lamb, 2000). Many men believe both parents should share equally in the various responsibilities of child rearing (Milkie, Bianchi, Mattingly, & Robinson, 2002). This social change has led researchers to suggest we are "moving toward a social ideal of father as co-parent" (Craig, 2006, p. 261). Co-parenting fathers participate in equally shared parenting and provide "mother-like" caregiving. The *new father* role is characterized by fathers who engage in shared parenting, which includes nurturing, caregiving, engaging with their children, and family planning (Eerola & Huttunen, 2011). Shaw (2008) states fathers do not want to be 'emotionally distant' parents as they sometime describe their own fathers or men in earlier generations. Therefore, today's fathers are more likely to engage in the lives and develop close relationships with their children (Kay, 2007).

The increase in dual-earner families has likely contributed to the new emotionally involved father (Such, 2006). Statistics Canada (2008) shows 67% of dual-earner families have children under the age of six. Fathers have greater opportunities to be involved with their children when both parents are in paid employment because there may be greater understanding that child care responsibilities should be shared by both parents. This egalitarian approach to family and work responsibilities can encourage fathers to take time off through parental leaves.

Research shows that Canadian fathers' use of paid parental leaves has risen over the last decade (McKay & Doucet, 2010). Statistics Canada shows 20% of fathers took time off and received paid parental leave benefits in 2010. Mothers continue to use the majority of paid parental leave time; however, mothers' use of paid leave appears to be diminishing in Canada (McKay & Doucet, 2010). Moss and Kamerman (2009) found high use of fathers' paid leave occurs when the wage replacement rate is high and where paid leave is designated as a "take-it-or-leave-it" individual entitlement paternity leave. Several studies have examined fathers' use of paid parental leave, yet little is known about how couples negotiate who will take parental leave, when and why. Lammi-Taskula (2008) found two variables that largely influence fathers' use of paid leave: gender ideologies and labour market status of both the mother and father. McKay and Doucet (2010) asked fathers and mothers to describe in their own words how they decided who would take leave from work to care for an infant and for how long. Their findings indicate that traditional gender norms hold less or no sway when one or both parents see each parent as equally suited to care and to earn income. The increase in fathers' parental leaves points to changes in gender roles in contemporary society.

## **2.4 Involved Fatherhood and Leisure**

There are raised expectations of the father role. Over the past few decades, fathers are increasingly expected to provide emotional care for their children. Increased time spent with children has implications for the amount of time fathers spend pursuing their own leisure interests (Kay, 2007). Research is mixed about whether the birth of children affects the leisure opportunities of fathers. Kay (2007) argues parents' leisure is strongly influenced by the birth of children, while Such (2006) suggests the meaning of leisure changes. Such found the pre-children phase of the life course is generally characterized by autonomous, spontaneous, active

leisure financially enabled by activities in paid employment (2006). In other words, the onset of parenthood symbolizes a significant shift in the form, structure and experience of leisure. Such results warrant further examination of the leisure lifestyles of parents.

A review of the literature indicates mothers' leisure participation has been examined much more than fathers'. Women who are wives and mothers tend to fragment their leisure to fit around the demands of household tasks and meeting the needs of others, or they subordinate their own leisure to the leisure interests and activities of others in the family (Kay, 1996; Thompson, 1999). More recently, scholars have examined what activity changes, if any, occur when men become fathers. Such (2006) conducted a study of dual-earner families and found that fathers' leisure participation was reduced, but not curtailed, because the fathers in the study used a 'timetabling' strategy to access personal leisure. The timetabling method enabled fathers to carve out time to pursue personal interests. Fathers were also able to maintain leisure lifestyles because spending time with children became closely tied to meanings of leisure. Therefore, time spent with children was, for the most part, time that resembled leisure. This notion of time spent with children as leisure-like was not universal for all fathers. Studies comparing mothers' versus fathers' leisure opportunities note leisure participation differs because 'free' time with children retains more of the qualities of leisure for fathers than it does for mothers (Shaw, 1992). Men also experience greater access to leisure than women when women adhere to traditional gender norms (Harrington, 2006). This finding may be dated as involved fathers likely hold progressive gender norms.

Even though fathers seem to have greater access to leisure, research shows men make different leisure lifestyle decisions when they become fathers. Duckworth and Buzzanell (2009) examined how fathers spend their personal leisure time. They found fathers chose not to exercise

or play sports anymore because they would rather get together with friends, go out with their partners, or watch sports. The fathers in the study put family before their own preferred activities on a regular basis (Duckworth & Buzzanell, 2009). A similar study by Palkovitz (2002) also found involved fathers gave up individual exercise programs and organized sport once they had children. As expected, other research has found fathers sustain their leisure involvement. Harrington's (2006) study on Brisbane fathers found many of the fathers' sustained personal involvement in both organized team sport and individuals sport and recreation. Similarly, Silver (2000) found fathers were able to retain the continuation of participation in sports, fitness or other physical activities. Fathers' leisure involvement, at whatever involvement level, is inextricably linked to work-family balance, while meeting their father responsibilities. Duckworth and Buzzanell (2009) explored how fathers constructed work-family balance and their fatherhood roles within their particular life contexts. The findings indicate, for most men, work-family balance did not mean equal resource allocation of these two life aspects. Rather it was their conscious attempts to juxtapose and prioritize family activities around the necessity of work (Duckworth & Buzzanell, 2009). All fathers in the study saw fatherhood as webs of responsibilities to others, but foremost to their children. Subsequently, to manage work-life commitments, fathers in the study did "family work", which Duckworth and Buzzanell conceptualize as the effort exerted to display family prioritization to an appropriate degree within the men's life circumstance. Fathers that had little or no mention about work-family conflict in regard to prioritizing "family first" were fathers with financial resources and work flexibility that enabled direct participation in, or attendance at, activities with their children (Duckworth & Buzzanell, 2009). It is important to note that fathers with more flexible work schedules found it easier to meet the responsibility of engaging with children during leisure.

The discourse of fatherhood, which suggests fathers are more actively engaged with their children, has brought forth the discussion of leisure as an ideal site for fathers to meet this expectation (Kay, 2007). Being with their children is a priority for fathers, and they can achieve this goal through leisure contexts (Such, 2006). Such (2006) suggests fatherhood presents new opportunities for leisure, which are integral to the fatherhood role, and help to produce a type of parenting often described as 'leisure-based' parenting. Refocusing leisure to mean 'being with' children has resulted in a kind of leisure-based parenting for fathers (Shaw, 1992). The term leisure-based parenting is not reflective of mothers' experiences, because their participation in leisure-like activities with children is experienced more as work than leisure (Shaw, 1992). Such (2006) argues leisure and fatherhood are intricately linked, and that leisure is well-established in men's parenting practices. Kay (2007) notes there are social expectations in men's parenting practices through leisure. For example, fathers who do not actively advocate for the interests of their children, in leisure contexts such as sports, are seen by many people as not meeting the standards of good parenting. A good parent is someone who will speak to a referee if a bad call was made against his or her child during a game. Another parenting expectation is how to spend leisure time with children (Kay, 2007). The social expectation of good leisure is mentioned, but not accurately researched. Involved father research has focused largely on the amount of time spent in caring for children (Hawkins & Palkovitz, 1999). One family leisure study found fathers spend on average 12.7 hours per week with children (Shaw & Dawson, 2001). Future research should examine other important dimensions of father involvement as well, such as the nature and experience of the activities a father is involved in with his children (Buswell et al., 2012).

Fathers' engagement in recreation with children is shown to be valuable for both fathers and children (Kay, 2007). Examination of the impact of parenting on children is frequently

researched in family studies. Recent research suggests involved fathering contributes to positive outcomes for children, such as positive cognitive development (Brotherson et al., 2005; Roggman, Boyce, Cook, Christiansen, & Jones, 2004). Leisure studies examine the purpose and benefits of involved fathering through leisure. Leisure is a site where fathers can facilitate their children's development in ways which accord with the values they hold (Kay, 2007). For example, a father signs his child up for soccer because it teaches the importance of competition. The work of recreation in which fathers are involved incorporates teaching children important skills through play, such as cooperation and challenge (Buswell et al., 2012). Dollahite and Hawkins (1998) argue this work of recreation is among the most valuable in caring for the next generation.

Spending time with children through leisure is valued and beneficial for several reasons. Fathers appreciate using leisure as a means of engaging and achieving connectedness with their children (Kay, 2007). Brotherson et al. (2005) state fathers fathering through leisure is valued because men are able to connect with their children by spending meaningful time together in activities of recreation and play. An expectation of the father role is for fathers to achieve emotional closeness with their children. Research shows fathers can achieve emotional closeness with their children by actively engaging in children's leisure because it provides fathers with the opportunity to spend time together, often through a shared interest (Kay, 2007). Fathers in Harrington's (2006) study talked about sport being a context for bonding with children and for instilling values. Fathers mentioned just 'being there' for their children is what matters (Harrington, 2006). It was important for their children to get to know them, and so just being in each other's company was valuable. Fathers also discussed their desire to be a significant influence in their children's lives, so they took advantage of the present time to do so

(Harrington, 2006). Fathers also mentioned the importance of children being aware of their presence during their children's leisure (Kay, 2007). For example, children will seek fathers out for affirmation at games or practices, which is important to fathers.

Sport is a common form of leisure activity in which fathers participate with their children (Kay, 2007). Sport offers a relatively familiar and comfortable site in which men can engage with their children. A study of Australian fathers found that no other leisure activity of social and family life warranted as much attention as sport (Harrington, 2006). Similar to Australia, Canada also focuses a lot on sport. Coakley argues "sport has emerged as a particularly significant leisure form through which parents, especially fathers, engage with their children and simultaneously meet societal expectations about parental responsibility for children's development" (2006, p. 72). Coakley also mentioned sports are highly preferred by parents because they provide parents with measurable indicators of their children's accomplishments. The parents in the study reported feeling that they were meeting their responsibilities as parents when their children play sports. In addition to meeting the expectation of actively engaging with their children, research suggests sport provides fathers concrete ways of supporting their children. For example, children's involvement in sport provide occasions for private and meaningful conversations between father and child during transportation to games or practices. Harrington (2006) stated, just by doing activities together or merely watching their children play, fathers are able to show their emotional connection to them.

Research by Trussell and Shaw (2012) found fathers perceive organized sport to be important to their fathering role and responsibilities related to child rearing. The culture of involved fathering is strongly connected to organized sport because fathers' *moral worth* may be evaluated by their children's successful participation in sport (Trussell & Shaw, 2012). Fathers

spend more time with their children in play outside the home such as sports and outdoor activities than non-active pursuits (Doucet, 2006). Compared to mothers, fathers devote less time to the emotional and physical care of their children (Kay, 2009). Trussell and Shaw (2012) found mothers were primarily responsible for the hidden work, emotional labour, scheduling and coordination of children's sporting activities. Coakley (2009) argued sport reaffirms traditional gender ideology, as women continue to do the bulk of child care responsibilities. Similarly, Harrington (2006) asserted fathers who only engage in play with children do not share parenting responsibilities. Research is needed to explore the emotional care fathers provide during solo leisure pursuits.

Fathers also engage with children during family leisure. Satisfaction with family leisure is found to be an important component of family life. Historically, it has been argued that family leisure is beneficial for families in areas of marital interaction and family stability (Orthner & Mancini, 1991). Research also shows those who engage in more family leisure involvement also report higher family functioning (Buswell et al., 2012). Previous research by Orthner and Mancini (1990) found that family participation led to improved family interaction and cohesion. In this study, family leisure was seen to be a vehicle that encouraged positive interaction between family members. Shaw and Dawson (2001) found parents intentionally used family leisure as a means to enhance family functioning. They termed this type of leisure *purposive leisure*. Parents planned and facilitated family leisure to achieve a particular goal, such as improving interaction and communication. Until recently, much of family leisure research measured family leisure involvement or participation only, without any indication of quality of the individuals' satisfaction with their family leisure involvement (Buswell et al., 2012). Zabriskie and McCormick (2001) used the core and balance model of family leisure functioning to examine

quality of family leisure. In short, core family activities are those regular experiences in family leisure that are predictable and promote closeness among family members, which include watching television or movies together, shooting hoops in the driveway or going on family walks. Balanced family activities are those that provide avenues for the family to grow, be challenged, and develop as a functioning system (Zabriskie & McCormick, 2001). Examples include family vacation, camping, or visiting a public swimming pool together. Their study suggests family functioning is not simply the product of the quantity of time spent in family leisure, but also the quality of interactions families have (Zabriskie & McCormick, 2001). The findings indicate parents who regularly participate in home-based activities, such as eating dinner together, participating in hobbies and informal sports, or playing games together, contribute most to family functioning.

Family leisure research focuses primarily on the work and effort mothers contribute to leisure. Hutchison et al. (2002) argued fathers were the ‘inaudible voice’ in family leisure research, and subsequently scholars started to incorporate fathers’ perspectives in relation to family leisure. Shaw and Dawson (2001) explored parents’ perspective of purposive family leisure because it does not include free leisure characteristics. They found parents viewed family leisure as a duty or responsibility as it was not a freely chosen form of participation. Similarly, due to the goal oriented nature of purposive leisure, parents’ participation in family activities were not intrinsically motivated (Shaw & Dawson, 2001). Zabriskie and McCormick (2001) evaluated the quality or satisfaction with family leisure from the fathers’ perspective. Their study showed fathers who regularly participated in home-based activities, such as eating dinner together, participating in hobbies and informal sports, or playing games together, contributed most to family functioning (Zabriskie & McCormick, 2001). This finding is beneficial for

families and professionals to know because it shows that greater family functioning is achieved through fathers spending time with their families in everyday activities (Buswell et al., 2012). Fathers see themselves as involved parents who are very much concerned about the benefits and outcomes of family participation (Shaw & Dawson, 2001).

## **2.5 Concluding Thoughts**

Becoming a parent can shift parents' leisure in many ways. Leisure studies have primarily focused on the implications of leisure for mothers of young children. However, with the growing movement to involved fatherhood, leisure studies needs to explore fathers' perspectives on leisure. Most of involved fatherhood research in leisure studies involved interviewing couples, which led to unfortunate parental comparisons (Doucet 2004; Doucet 2009). Therefore, this study interviewed fathers and asked them to share how they understood involved fatherhood and its relationship with leisure. Modern fathers are increasingly involved as active parents in child rearing activities and in children's leisure (Such, 2006). Things that can influence fathers' involvement are mothers' attitudes towards caring responsibilities and the discourse of fatherhood (Cook et al., 2005). Research is mixed about whether the birth of children affects the leisure opportunities of fathers. Such results warrant further examination of leisure lifestyles of parents. Fathers' active engagement with their children has brought forth the discussion of leisure as an ideal site for fathers to meet this expectation (Kay, 2007), which led to leisure-based parenting. This research aims to explore the emotional care fathers provide for children and seeks to address gaps in both leisure studies and fatherhood literature by answering the following questions.

1. How do involved fathers understand and describe involved fatherhood?

2. What roles, if any, does leisure play in participants' understanding of involved fatherhood?
3. What are the perceived implications of involved fatherhood on fathers' own leisure lifestyle?
4. What are the perceived implications of involved fatherhood on fathers' family leisure and children's leisure?

## **3.0 Methods**

### **3.1 Qualitative Research**

Qualitative research is emergent rather than tightly prefigured, fundamentally interpretive, and involves a researcher who views social phenomena holistically (Creswell, 2009). This approach is descriptive in that the researcher is interested in process, meaning, and understanding gained through words or pictures (Merriam, 1998, p. 19). Participants' perceptions and experiences, and the way they make sense of their lives, are the primary focus of qualitative research (Merriam, 1998). Understanding how participants make sense of the world is best reached through verbal descriptions and explanations for human behaviour - not objective data (Jackson, 2003). Because I am interested in the meaning of human experience and how people make sense of their experiences I position myself within the qualitative tradition.

### **3.2 Recruitment Process**

Purposive sampling was used, as there were specific criteria for participants in this study. Patton (2002) describes purposive sampling as studying "information-rich cases" for insight into a certain type of behaviour or population for an "in-depth understanding rather than empirical generalizations" (p. 230). Specifically, I recruited fathers who had at least one child in the zero to nine-year-old age group, were in a heterosexual committed relationship, and identified themselves as an involved father. This age designation was chosen because this is when children's care giving needs are typically greatest, and there are a wide range of leisure activities suitable for children of this age, including home-based activities, organized sports, informal outdoor activities, and trips to places such as museums or zoos. The heterosexual committed relationship criterion was selected to determine the implications of gendered and non-gendered

behaviour for father involvement. For instance, fathers who view their family role as chiefly the breadwinner are less likely to engage in a family-centered lifestyle. Lastly, participants needed to identify themselves as an involved father because their perspective on their involvement level was important for understanding their father role description.

I initially planned to post recruitment advertisements at Ontario Early Year Centres and libraries in the Kitchener-Waterloo region. However ‘word of mouth’ quickly became the recruitment method for this study. While I waited for ethical clearance from the Office of Research Ethics at the University of Waterloo I took a vacation with friends and family. During this time several people asked questions about my thesis; in particular what was the purpose of the study, and who I was hoping to interview. I mentioned the purpose was to explore how fathers understand involved fatherhood. I also mentioned six to nine fathers were needed to participate in a conversational interview. I shared during the interview fathers will discuss their experiences as a father, and what that looks like for them. Questions regarding how everyday parenting is worked out by the father and his partner will be discussed.

To articulate the type of father I was looking to interview I mentioned various actions that illustrate an involved father. For instance, a father who regularly makes lunches for his children, picks up and drops off children at daycare/school, stays home to care for children when they are sick, a father who took a parental leave or is a stay-at-home father. Some people mentioned they knew an involved father that I should talk to. One individual stated “you should talk to Ben, he is super dad!” When it was suggested I connect with a particular father, I asked the individual who recommended him questions to ensure the father met the inclusion criteria prior to contacting him. The three questions I asked included: Did the father have at least one child under the age of nine? Was the father in a heterosexual committed relationship? And did

the person who recommended the father think he would identify as an involved parent? If they met the inclusion criteria I asked family to send me the father's email address.

After receiving ethics clearance, I sent a recruitment email (see Appendix A) to the individuals I received contact information for. Participants were contacted by email in order to ensure the fathers were comfortable declining participation in the study. Following the initial email exchange with these fathers, I followed up through email to schedule the interviews. I initially planned to interview between six and nine fathers. In the end, I conducted six interviews, which I felt provided varied fatherhood experiences. I interviewed all the participants who were willing to participate in the study, and stopped after completing six interviews due to time constraints.

### **3.3 Conversational Interviews**

As the research design for this study comes from a qualitative approach with a focus on exploring participants' fatherhood experiences, I relied on face-to-face conversational interviews for data collection. Conversational interviews prevented me from "leading" the participant to confirm notions I already had, and allowed me to engage with the participants to have give-and-take conversations (Dupuis, 1999). My goal was to allow each participant to discuss what was meaningful to him. This is similar to Charmaz's (2006) research technique titled "intensive interviews" where participants are encouraged to be experts and choose what to tell and how to tell it. With this in mind, I guided the conversation but did not constrain the participant from taking the conversation in different, yet relevant directions. To ensure this collaborative, conversational style was upheld I used an interview guide rather than a structured set of interview questions.

Facilitating conversational interviews was important for this study, yet my position as a female interviewer without children presented challenges. I negotiated the interviewee-interviewer relationship through sharing aspects of others fathers' experiences. For instance, I shared ideas another father told me in a previous interview to validate the participant's feelings/experience. I also used examples from participants' experiences to develop questions. I often initiated the topic of 'escaping the chaos of fatherhood' by sharing how one father viewed cleaning dishes a break from his fatherhood responsibilities. This father mentioned when he washed the dishes his children usually left him alone, as they did not want to help. He stated cleaning dishes was quiet, uninterrupted time for him. I followed-up and asked the participants if they related to this situation. If so, how did they escape? While the stories I shared were not my personal experiences, they enabled me to contribute to the fatherhood discussion.

The conversational interviews were arranged for a convenient time and location for each participant. I offered to interview participants in place that was comfortable for them. Three interviews were conducted at the researcher's home, two interviews were conducted in participants' homes, and one interview was conducted at a community library. Each of the interviews, which lasted between one to one-and-half hours were audio-taped with the participants' informed consent (see Appendix B). Prior to each interview I sent participants the interview guide (see Appendix C) to encourage participants to reflect before our conversation. The interview guide was also printed and brought to each interview to use as reference for both the participant and researcher. At the end of each interview I gave participants a \$10 Tim Hortons gift card as a token of my appreciation of their time, and a letter of appreciation (see Appendix D).

### 3.4 Data Analysis Procedures

I transcribed each of the audio-taped interviews into Microsoft Word. After I transcribed an interview I read the entire transcript to get a sense of the whole (Charmaz, 2006). This allowed me to gain a greater understanding of the fathers' experiences. While I re-read each transcript I also wrote memos to myself about what I was reading. I then went back to the beginning of the transcript and began my initial coding where I copied sections of text and placed them under headings (codes) in separate documents. The sections varied in length, some were a few lines long and others were paragraphs. When a particular text seemed to fit more than one heading in my initial coding, I put the text under both headings and re-considered its placement when I refined my categories. For instance, the following text from Phil I placed under 'family-centered' and 'scheduling leisure', until my broader codes were refined.

This year was my last year playing really competitive [baseball], I'm still going to play next year but on a league and those games start at 8:30 at night. So my home games I can put the kids to bed and then go. Away games maybe I'm leaving at 7 [pm], but at least I get to see my kids for a couple of hours and they are just putting on their pjs by the time I'm leaving.

The next step involved taking sections of texts from the broad categories I created and creating sub-categories for where I felt the text belonged. For example, 'flexibility' and 'adapting tasks' became sub-categories within the broader category for 'teamwork'. Once all the texts were sorted under categories I began to form preliminary themes. For instance, the category about teamwork and partnership turned into "Parenting Together". Through coding I was able to define what was happening in the data and begin to determine what it meant (Charmaz, 2006). I analyzed the transcripts individually and then collectively to compare participants' experiences. This constant comparative method led me to find similarities and differences within each category (Charmaz, 2006). I compared sections of text that were given the same code to

determine whether new information about this code was given or whether the same information was repeated (Boeije, 2002). At this point I noticed similarities between several codes, so I began to refine my themes and sub-themes. Once I felt each theme and sub-theme could stand on its own, and that they answered my research questions, I re-read the quotations under each heading (from the transcript) to ensure my interpretation of the quote was correct. This on-going analysis process was guided by my research questions, memos, and knowledge from my literature review.

### **3.5 Involved Father Versus Engaged Father?**

During the data analysis process it became clear that the participants identified with the term engaged father more than involved father. Throughout the conversational interviews the participants described interactions with their children as engaged parenting. For instance, Brett mentioned “a good father should be engaged with his children”. He also shared that he differs from his father in that “[he’s] more engaged”. Phil also mentioned “to me engaged [fathering] is playing with your children ... and being engaged in what they’re doing”. The participants’ described their experiences of fatherhood which consisted of playing an important role in their children’s day-to-day lives. Fathers took responsibility for their children’s care through engaging in cooking, feeding, bathing and playing. I noticed the participants’ description of engaged fathering aligned closely with researchers’ definition of involved fatherhood. Since the purpose of the study was to explore how participants understood their fathering experiences, I chose to use the term engaged father for the remainder of the study because it resonated with the participants.

### **3.6 Role of the Researcher**

In this study, my role as the researcher was to serve as the primary data collection instrument (Creswell, 2009). In addition, I saw my role as a facilitator, rather than an expert. Given that a primary objective of this study was to explore fathers' perspectives of involved fatherhood, it was important that I remained open while listening to their individual experiences. My experience with my father helped me relate to the participants, yet it was a challenge not to bring ideas that were not relevant to the participants' experiences. To ensure that I remained open throughout the research process I felt the need to admit my own values, interests and bias. Through memo writing after each interview, I was able to record my reactions to the research, and explore my ideas. Memos became a space for me to challenge my own values about the father role. Undeniably, my memos helped me develop preliminary ideas, categorize concepts, and kept me engaged in the analysis process.

### **3.7 Ethical Considerations and Credibility**

To ensure this research was ethical, I received ethics clearance from the University of Waterloo Research Ethics Committee prior to participant recruitment. This process involved ensuring participants were aware of the study's purpose and gave informed consent prior to participation; they knew they were able to opt out of the study at any time, and that the information they shared during our discussion would be kept confidential. To keep the information confidential, each participant was assigned a pseudonym. All other identifying information including names of partners and children, neighbourhoods, and places of employment were also changed.

Following the interview, I utilized 'member validation' in order to gain feedback from my participants. I sent my preliminary findings, which included quotes from interview transcripts

to each participant. This provided the participants the opportunity to give feedback on their personal profile and the findings, which helped ensure information accuracy. Five participants responded and provided feedback. One participant corrected information on his personal profile. Another participant revised a few of his quotes to be clearer for the reader. The remaining participants gave their approval of the findings. Only one participant did not reply in some way.

## 4.0 Findings

### 4.1 Participant Profiles

The six participants in this study were between the ages of 30 and 43 years of age. All of the participants resided and were employed in Kitchener-Waterloo and the surrounding area.

**David** is 30 years old and has one daughter. He works at a local non-profit that provides technical support. His position is full-time, and currently his wife takes care of their two-year-old daughter at home. He and his wife were married just over six years before they had their daughter. As a family they love spending time outside and playing games. David also enjoys having his daughter help with his community gardening.

**Andrew** has two children. His daughter is seven years old and his son is four years old. He and his wife were married for seven years, and were both 29 years old when their first child was born. When his children were younger he worked two days a week and took on more of a stay-at-home father role with his children, while his wife worked four days a week. In 2013, his wife started a part-time job working three days a week, and he became self-employed and increased his hours. He is 36 years old and enjoys playing hockey and baseball.

**Phil** is 33 years old and has a four-year-old son, and a two-year-old daughter. He and his wife both work full-time. Their work schedules are Monday through Friday, and Phil works an additional one or two Saturdays per month. Currently Phil does morning drop off, and his wife picks up the kids after school. He enjoys exploring the outdoors with his children, and is an avid baseball player.

**Brett** became a father at the age of 36 to a son, now aged seven years. He and his wife were both in their 40s when they had their second son, a three-year-old. Brett works as a social worker for a local non-profit four days a week. He spends one day at home to care for his

youngest son. His wife works part-time, and spends three days at home. Both he and his wife are busy with various volunteer commitments and enjoy being active.

**Nathan** has a two-and-a-half year-old son, and two step-children. His step-son is ten years of age and his step-daughter is eight years of age. His step-children call him Nathan, as he does not see the need to be called ‘dad’. Nathan’s parenting experience focused primarily on fathering his two-year-old-son. He works a full-time position Monday through Friday, with some on-call shifts. He loves being active and playing sports with his son.

**Michael** is 33 years old and has two daughters. His oldest is almost three years old, and his youngest is six months old. He took a two month parental leave during the summer of 2013 to spend time at home with his wife and daughters. His work is varied every year. He works at a local university as a voice teacher. He also works at his church, and is a musician. His wife takes care of their daughters at home. Michael enjoys spending time with extended family, singing, and playing sports such as hockey and baseball.

## **Findings**

Through my analysis of the interview data, I identified three major themes. Collectively, these themes speak to father’s experiences of engaged fatherhood and help describe participants’ views of their father role. The first theme, ‘I’d like to be there: Part of Engaged Parenting’ explores how fathers negotiated their various responsibilities to be present with their children everyday, and the role leisure played in engaged fathering. The second theme, ‘We’re a team: Parenting Together’ identifies the teamwork approach participants used for child rearing, and the responsibilities they took on as fathers. Lastly, the third theme, ‘Fitting in leisure: It’s present, it just sometimes shifts’ describes how the participants’ leisure changed since becoming a father, and how they negotiated constraints through scheduling and multitasking.

## **4.2 “I’d like to be there”: Part of Engaged Parenting**

There are many lifestyle changes the participants experienced when they entered into parenthood. Familial responsibilities naturally increased, which required them to consistently devote time and energy toward child rearing. Each father in this study took an active role in parenting. In addition to parenting, the participants had many commitments, such as work and volunteering. These various responsibilities are managed by scheduling and setting priorities. Each father in this study made engaging with his children everyday a priority. Some fathers mentioned they did not want to be distant, or unaware of their children’s activities. During my discussions, it became clear that daily interaction with children was viewed as part of their fathering role. It was also noted that much of fathers’ time spent with children was engaged in play. This desire to be present with children and fathers’ involvements in children’s play will be further explored in the following section.

### ***4.2.1 Being available for children***

All of the fathers in this study expressed their desire to be present for their children. They wanted to be available for their kids daily. One common experience participants reflected on was the amount of the time they remembered their own father being home. For some participants, they spoke positively of their father’s parenting, as they remember their father being present in various aspects of their childhood, such as being on the school board, volunteer coaching, and being home regularly to eat dinner with the family. Other fathers mentioned how their own fathers’ employment, such as truck driving or shift work limited opportunities to be there for them and their siblings. The reflection of their fathers’ parenting style led them to either affirm or intentionally choose to parent differently. Michael explained his desire to parent the same way as his parents. He attributed this desire to the decisions he made career-wise:

My life could go many different ways, but I'd like to be present with my kids everyday if possible, I'd like to be there. My work is varied, every year it's different. This summer I was able to take parental leave for two months so I could be at home with both my daughters and my wife. She's not working right now, and that was great family time. I really loved it, partly because my fall I knew it would be busier. Perhaps it's because my parents were actively involved day to day and I want to affirm that. As a music performer, I could have a life where there is regular travel, but I don't want that, and it wasn't necessarily just having children that informed that or solidified that, but I mean any other intentional relationship, my spousal relationship with my wife. She's nice and I like to hang out with her, and likewise there are children to add to that, so those two correlate to affirm that lifestyle. Whether that was influenced directly by my parents or not I'm not certain, but it definitely isn't in contrast to my parents. It might be simply trying to follow in those footsteps because I affirm what they did as parents.

For others, such as Andrew, the model of parenting they received was more gendered. His father saw bread-winning as his responsibility, so employment limited his opportunities to engage in Andrew's everyday activities. Though he thought his upbringing was great, Andrew and his wife intentionally chose to resist the gender divide and parent their children differently. This approach was evident in his description of wanting to spend more time with his children:

I think I definitely wanted to have more time with my kids than my dad did. Even before we had kids we were hoping there wouldn't be just one parent working the whole time and the other parent at home the whole time. We were kind of hoping we could split that somehow, and we have been able to ... I guess I just wanted to be more available and having more time with my kids than my dad was able to have. And trying to talk to each other I guess between Linda and I more about what we were doing, as opposed to just my mom always doing stuff and my dad he was kind of just following along or doing his own thing. An intentional difference from what my dad was able to do.

Similarly, Brett shared how he came to determine his engaged parenting style:

Yah I read an excerpt from a book, long before I became a father, called *The Fourth Turning* ... It's about how every [parent] parents in reaction to how they were parented. So I mean its mothers and fathers. So I would say I parent in reaction to how I was parented. I'm probably similar to my dad in a lot of ways ... but I think a couple ways I would differ from my dad is I'm more engaged ... when I get home from work I'll try to do something with the boys like run around, and then after supper play blocks or Lego. I help with bedtime ... and my wife and I generally alternate and often that is how it works out because one or the other of us is out for some evening. Sometimes we're both home,

and still alternate. So I try to be more involved in playing with them, bedtime stuff, and get to some of their sporting events.

The notion of not wanting to be distant, as perhaps their fathers were, was characteristic of some of the fathers in this study. This desire was reflected in Brett's description of the father role: "a good father should be engaged with his children". The parenting style David received was more traditional as his father's availability to his children was structured around a full time work schedule and numerous volunteer commitments. Yet David explained he thought it worked because his father was fully engaged when he was home. Even though his father may not have spent as much time with him as his mother did, David explained his dad was able to balance his employment and volunteer commitments with the family:

He was very much always available to us, and we were not very well off at all. He worked very hard, and made sure that we went to church regularly, and was very involved in the community, and he was always very involved in church and school boards, and whatever else. And between that and work, his biggest regret is that he didn't spend as much time as he would have liked with us, but I don't see. I can see why he thinks it's a big deal now that I'm a father, but I mean it was the best he did, and I never thought of it as a problem at that time. Part of that was my mom's doing ... they would never say anything bad about each other. They were always very supportive.

In addition to being available for children, the idea that being present, regardless of how much participation fathers had in the activity with their children is important. Participants in this study seemed to value quantity time more than quality time. Nathan discussed his view of being present: "It could mean just being there and allowing him to play independently in a space that is close to me, and not necessarily having to interact directly with him, but being there and his sort of knowledge that daddy's around". Being together as a family, especially for an evening meal was important to many fathers:

One of the things we very intentionally try to do is have as many meals sitting down together as we can and not just gobble down our food and rush away necessarily. We'll sit

down at the table and play cards afterwards and Emily will help us, try to help us, [and will] throw the dice around the room.

The emphasis of being there for children everyday also played into some father's choices of leisure pursuits and career path. Andrew's desire to be there for his children led him to schedule his leisure during "off hours". Andrew explained his current leisure schedule:

My slo-pitch games are sort of at peak times 7 or 9 o'clock on Tuesday or Wednesday nights, but some of my activities are scheduled in off hours. Hockey is at 11 o'clock on Tuesday night, so after the kids have gone to bed and meetings are over and stuff like that ... Basketball is at noon hour so that's kind of in the middle of the work day and doesn't directly impact [time with children]. It slightly impacts the amount of work I can get done, or I arrange to have to stay and work until 6 [pm] on Fridays instead of 5 [pm] ... Sometimes when either [my wife or I] will go to the gym we'll often do that before breakfast so we're back home to help the kids get up. There's a bit of pushing [leisure] outside of prime time, but there's also assuming you can get enough sleep otherwise.

This scheduling of leisure pursuits outside of "prime time" to be present with children was practiced by many of the fathers because they valued having daily interaction with their children. Though the fathers did not state that their children shape their leisure, children seemed to dictate many of the fathers' leisure experiences.

It became apparent that the participants' engaged parenting style was influenced by their fathers' modeling. Through reflection some of the fathers discussed ways they affirm the modeling they received, and others mentioned ways they intentionally do things differently. Regardless of the parenting they received, all of the fathers discussed wanting to be present for their children. As a result of wanting to "be there" some of the fathers altered their career path and/or leisure pursuits because it was important to them that children knew their daddy is around, particularly during children's leisure.

#### ***4.2.2 “Engaged is playing with your children”***

Playing with children is a large part of engaged fathering. Each father spoke at length about various leisure activities in which they participated in with their children. Given that many children of the fathers in this study were not school aged yet, play was a large part of their daily lives. Each father spoke of play as an important daily activity in which they engaged with their children. For example, Phil affirmed his value of engaging in various kinds of play:

To me engaged is playing with your children. Pretending you’re a groundhog as ridiculous as that sounds. Or making a fort, or being a cow, whatever they’re doing I love to [join] ... I’ll make a fort, I’ll be a groundhog, I’ll pretend to milk a cow, and they love it. To me that’s engaged and involved, and being involved in what they’re interested in. If they want to go play in the sandbox, let’s go play in the sandbox. Obviously there are days they go play in the sandbox so daddy can go do this around the house. Just being engaged in what they’re doing ... acknowledging and participating in, I think really gets them excited.

Joining in to support their children’s play and creativity was frequently discussed by participants.

They indicated that they were willing to be silly and have fun for the children’s enjoyment.

Fathers also explained that some activities in which they engaged were ones they prefer themselves. In David’s words, “We do stuff with her that we kind of enjoy. I mean we enjoy playing a lot of games so inevitably she is going to probably like playing games, not necessarily but they’ll probably rub off”. Similarly, Brett described his experience playing activities with his two sons that he enjoyed, too:

It’s fun when they get to a stage where you’re playing games that you can actually enjoy too instead of feel[ing] like this is kind of my duty so do it, and have some fun doing it, but it may not be your first choice of what you want to be doing. Where it does feel like recreation for yourself as well [it’s fun], playing in the water, water polo or tag.

When fathers had the opportunity to choose an activity for their children, they sometimes opted to pick one of their interests, such as board games, which might contribute to them having a more enjoyable experience. Participants also discussed how they offer different leisure

experiences for their children, many of which the children primarily enjoyed. When asked about his children's leisure activities, Brett shared his intention for providing a broad leisure repertoire for his boys, some of which include:

Reading would be the big one, they really like reading. Probably doesn't happen on a weekly basis but every few weeks we'll watch a movie together, they enjoy that. We usually try to limit their screen time to mostly nothing ... They'll get some TV time on Saturday mornings. In the summer bike riding, winter tobogganing, we go skating once a week in the winter. Someone's organized a bunch of families to have a one hour block of skating time. Building snowmen or snow forts. In the summer playing little games of soccer, or baseball and Curtis can do that a little bit more. They're into building stuff with blocks and Lego. They do like playing slay the dragon games or ride the horses games and I'm the horse or the dragon in those two scenarios, kind of some imaginative play with them. And actually getting into board games too, so that's kind of fun as well, and card games.

Many of the participants stated they engaged in various activities for their children because they felt it was beneficial to have diverse activities such as imaginative or pretend play, active play, and crafts. Their willingness to offer diverse play experiences did not matter as much because the children's activities were largely dictated by the children themselves. This scenario was demonstrated by Andrew's description of his children's leisure:

In terms of playing around the house [I'm] very often just playing what they're interested, so hockey nets sometimes "daddy can you play hockey with me?" So we'll play mini sticks or with Paul's train set, or the kids train set. Now that Kaity is a bit older we've played some board games like Sorry, Uno that Paul is kind of getting as well, which in some ways is great kind of school stuff, because it involves all sorts of counting and stuff like that. Or I guess in the back yard, playing t-ball, baseball, just throwing a ball around or kicking a ball. Sometimes they'll want to do tea set or play tea parties. Paul will copy his big sister a lot too.

Andrew's account of his children's activities was similar to many of the participants' children.

The children played with things they liked. Though the fathers were open to non-gendered activities, children often played gendered activities at home. For example, boys played with trucks and hockey sticks, and the girls played tea parties and dress up. Children who had a

sibling of the opposite sex played in a gendered way with their sibling. Some fathers shared their concerns with gendered activities and shared their strategies to create gender neutral experiences for their children.

All of the participants stated they were comfortable with their children playing activities that resisted traditional gender roles and expectations, and many of the fathers expressed they were intentional about not pushing girly or boy things on their children. For example, David purposely does not have a doll in their home for their daughter. Instead, they have teddy bears. Brett mentioned that he and his wife deliberately provided dolls for their two sons:

So we tried to be intentional about having dolls so they could play with the dolls. And not always but the doll would get picked up by its ankle and get walked around and plopped on its head kind of thing. More often [the boys] would go to anything with wheels on it and they would learn how to make those vrooming noise. That would probably be the first kind of noises that they make. So I think there is something innate as well, but I think it's important for parents to give their kids a fuller repertoire of non-stereotypical gender activities to choose from, but realize that the boys will more often than not pick up activities that are stereotypically male, and girls will more often than not [pick up stereotypical female activities]. Not completely, but generally.

Fathers intended to create gender neutral spaces and activities, yet when their children chose to play gendered activities, fathers supported their children's gendered choices. Upon reflection of their actions, fathers realized gendered behaviour was encouraged in some instances. For example, Phil who has a "girly girl and a boys boy", acknowledged that responding to his children's interests likely reinforces gendered behaviour:

What happens is you play off of it though. Christina comes in this morning, and obviously a dress on, and a ridiculous pink polka dotted sweater for the morning, and so you play off it, so you know Christina "what a beautiful pink sweater you have". That is probably reaffirming to her, and "yes daddy, oh it's so beautiful" and girly girly talk.

By contrast, some fathers also made a concerted effort to be open to non-gendered activities.

Andrew offered the following perspective on gendered messages for children:

There's another family in our church that has three girls; one older than our kids, one almost exactly Kaity's age, and one about Paul's age. For a little while Paul really wanted to wear a dress to church. So we let him for a while but there was still subtle not so subtle discouragement from wearing a dress to church from [him and his wife] ... He was obviously picking up on gendered expectations as far as clothing from that. When it's conscious we're trying to be open. Paul picked out some pick lace shoes that were probably a girls' style, and [we] just let him have it. There's been a few times when Kaity [who] is now in school will say stuff like boys don't do that. When it's that obviously said we're trying to say boys and girls can do that, and if he wants to do that he can. So there's a certain amount of wanting them to know how people will expect them, but also not wanting [them] to completely fit in that mold if they don't want to. It is a bit of a juggling act that way.

In short, fathers struggled between resisting and affirming gender roles and expectations with their children.

The participants were also aware of how their actions shaped their children's interests. For example, some of the children watched their father play an organized sport, such as baseball. Fathers recognized they were providing exposure to activities and consequently their children may likely develop an interest in the same activity. Phil's comment that "[his son] loves baseball, because he watches daddy play" supports this notion. A child developing similar interests to his or her father was more common among sons than daughters. When asked about his children's organized leisure Andrew mentioned they have similar organized interests to him at this point:

I guess I lean towards stuff that I'm interested in for instance we've had the kids in organized t-ball and blast ball, which is a kind of a t-ball variant ... we haven't had them in soccer, but both Linda and I play slow-pitch in our respective leagues. So I think in part because they see Mom and Dad doing that and they see what baseball related stuff is and because we're more interested in that we've signed them up for that and not for soccer, or kung foo or whatever else.

It is no surprise that younger children were attracted to similar activities as their parents because parents largely influenced the activities to which the children were exposed. An organized activity in which almost all of the children participated was swimming lessons. Fathers viewed

swimming differently from other organized activities because they regarded it as an important life skill. Brett shared his thoughts about swimming:

Swimming lessons, I don't know if you would call that recreation or not because it's kind of a life skill that we want them to know how to do. And it does improve recreational options when we are at a lake or swimming pool because they can be more independent.

In addition to swimming, all of the participants' children were involved in some organized recreation activity. Fathers discussed benefits of structured activities for their children, which included learning new skills. The structure of organized recreation was particularly useful because more than half of the children in this study were too young to attend school. Fathers viewed organized leisure as a great avenue to learn new skills, as well as helping to prepare children for the organized school schedule. Michael offered the following perspective on organized activities:

My eldest daughter April is almost three years old. We've enrolled her in pre-school, as we see junior kindergarten coming up in a year. So that's on Thursdays. Wednesday mornings is library group, so there's a story time at the local library with a couple of other kids ... Monday mornings is a play group that is run by a local Church ... It's something that is there to give some structure to the week, as lives become more structured as kids get older we want to sort of start implementing structure. This is going to be this day, and this is going to be this day. So there's a little bit of anticipation as well and most of them are social ... [We're] trying to have activities for her outside of the family, as well, that are without us so that there can be the separation of parent and child, so that we aren't always needing to hold her hand for things.

The fathers in this study valued structured activities and for that reason incorporated them into their children's lives. Fathers also wanted to take an active role in and/or watch their children's organized activities. Being present at the children's activities and the children knowing that daddy was watching were important to participants. For example, Phil shared that he went to his children's swimming lessons each week. He and his wife alternated participating in their daughter's swimming lesson, while the other parent watched their son during his lesson.

Several explained that when possible they scheduled children's activities around their work schedule so they could be an active observer. David shared his daughter's swimming schedule:

It's going to be happening at the end of the day well sometime between 5 and 7 [pm] on Fridays. So the idea is that Rebecca will probably walk over there and I'll probably come pick them up after work, or if I'm off early I get to go too. We made it that way so I at least have the option and also have the excuse to get off work early, which is nice.

Altering work schedules for children's leisure is another example of fathers' commitment to everyday parenting.

Coaching was another way participants were present at their children's organized leisure. Andrew and his wife took the role of coaching one of their children's sports activities. Andrew coached his daughter's t-ball team, and his wife coached their son's blast ball (variant of t-ball) team. Volunteering to coach or help with his child's sports team was part of Andrew's description of an involved parent. Some fathers took a very active role in their children's organized leisure (i.e. coaching), and all of the fathers talked about wanting to be active spectators at some of their children's activities to support them. It was clear that the participants' priority was to be available for their children everyday for child rearing, casual and organized play.

### **4.3 “We’re a team”: Parenting Together**

In sharing their experience with fathering, each participant spoke often about his partner and acknowledged the work she contributed toward their effort to parent their children. Some fathers mentioned the ways their partners engaged in everyday forms of parenting. Throughout my discussions, many of the fathers expressed their appreciation for having an active partner with whom to raise their children. Accordingly, the notion of “working as a team” will be

explored further in the two sub-sections of this chapter: the ‘Discourse of the engaged father: Parenting everyday’, followed by ‘Adapting together’.

#### ***4.3.1 Discourse of the engaged father: Parenting everyday***

The participants in this study saw themselves as active agents in their families’ lives, and specifically in their children’s lives. Fathers felt child rearing and household tasks were daily responsibilities associated with being a father. For example, in discussing his experience as a father, Andrew explained:

[It’s] taking on direct duties or things with the kids, whether that’s changing diapers when they’re young ... Doing those sorts of things and trying to do some of the necessary duties of parenthood; picking them up from school, dropping them off sometimes, as it works. I’ve been at home with the kids, as opposed to working full time so that’s part of it. I’m making sure they have lunches and get their lunches packed for school ... [It’s] more than just playing with your kids it’s making sure that they’re getting to bed, putting them to bed, all the different things that has to happen with kids, [and] taking at least part of those responsibilities on. As well as the household duties of laundry and cooking they aren’t necessarily directly parenting things because you have to do that anyway, whether you have kids or not. I’m taking a share of those household things too.

This sentiment was common among participants. Yet the fathers in this study, moreover, underscored the importance of having a genuine partnership with their significant other to ensure responsibilities were accomplished. In illustrating this point, Phil explained a typical weekday morning in his home:

In the morning it’s just a group effort, everyone has got to get out the door. [My wife] is usually prepping; we try to have Nick’s lunch made the night before, it depends on the night and the day. I’m the breakfast guy. I get breakfast ready, whether it’s eggs, or toast, or cereal. You’ve got to work with the kids’ strengths and weaknesses too. Nick can’t stand getting dressed in the morning. Christina can’t wait to get up and get dressed, typical girl ... So Christina is dressed by like 7 [am]. Nick is just getting out of bed, that’s the other thing. During school Nick is extremely tired ... So morning time like I said is obviously a little hectic. Nancy is usually getting something in the crockpot, or just helping with breakfast, and everybody sits down and has breakfast together. But then Nancy leaves right away because she has to get to [work] for 8 [am]. So then it’s daddy’s

job to get everyone upstairs ... Christina is usually dressed and it's great if she is, and I get Nick dressed. Everyone brushes their teeth, back packs, get everything and out the door by 8 [am]. That's a little hectic. I like it because I'm involved with getting the kids out the door and Nancy loves it because she can have a nice calm drive into work.

In short, there was a widely held belief among participants that successful parenting was only accomplished through collective effort. Fathers' descriptions of their everyday routine underscored their belief that family life worked best if parents cooperated by completing different tasks to help get the children ready on time. The various tasks were perceived to be of equal importance, and the fathers believed they were able to complete any task required of them. They did not view themselves as "secondary parents". In several situations fathers saw themselves taking initiative with child care. For example, Brett discussed his involvement with his sons on weekdays:

I find I'm with them before supper and after supper and helping them to get ready in the morning. Our oldest is more independent now so he just needs some reminders that it's time to get going but I'll be [helping] our youngest get dressed, and brush his teeth. Toilet training would have been one that I think I was probably more responsible for that than my wife. Not that she wasn't involved in that, but I was the one who initiated it and probably pushed it a little bit more, and helped to see it through.

As well as engaging in child rearing, fathers pointed to the importance of ensuring the entire family dynamic was healthy and strong. In their view, part of their role as a father was to support their children and their wife. Michael offered the following perspective on what he described as "co-parenting":

For me the ideal would be what satisfies the needs that are present, and for me it's a team effort with my wife. So it's not only meeting the needs of our children, but also spousal relationships needs. It's more of a familial concept and a parent to child concept. I see those as very interconnected. So for example, with my daughter last night she was quite congested, so my wife was actually up with her in a chair, from about 3 [am] until roughly 5:30 [am]. Our [other] daughter then was in our bed from 4 [am] with me. And it becomes a bit of a fruit basket upset, and these aren't things you can establish. But her

need then, we make sure to make communication a part of what we do as co-parents, but it doesn't always happen. So at 6 o'clock when [my wife] said I'm exhausted I can't hold our youngest anymore. Then of course I get up and it's my turn to hold her and do routines in a different way than we would have otherwise. So it's responding to the needs, having the flexibility in what I do, so I can be responsive to the needs of not only the children, but my wife, and ultimately the family, which of course it's influenced by broader needs of home renovations, work, things like this that are expected of me elsewhere as well.

The fathers in this study pointed to being proactive and responding to the family's needs as a part of their role that contributed to successful parenting.

Participants acknowledged their involvement could be limited at times because of commitments they had outside of the home, primarily through paid employment. Fathers openly discussed how they negotiated external constraints, such as their work schedule, to be home with the children. All of the participants engaged in paid employment, and many had a structured work schedule outside the home with minimal hour flexibility. One father worked from home on his schedule, and another father's work schedule varied each year. The fathers negotiated their structural constraints and established a way to engage with their children daily. Brett, for example, mentioned he had flexibility in his work schedule, which enabled him to support his children and wife when preparing for the day:

There's only one day a week when both my wife and I are working, and then Curtis walks to school with neighbours of ours down the street, and George goes to his grandmas, which is on the way to my wife's work. Then the other four days, one or the other [is home], so I'm at home on Thursdays, and she is the other three days of the week. What I try to do on the day that I'm [home] I like to free up my wife to get ready for work and just go, and I'll do 100% responsibilities, getting the kids ready and out the door. And the days that I work I try to pitch in [because] I can bike to work and it's fairly flexible when I get there, so I try to help get the kids ready and out the door ... Helping them get ready in the morning and helping take them to school ... The day that I'm not working I'll do pick up and drop off.

Brett's experience was similar to other participants insofar as they worked actively to negotiate their daily involvements around their career. The intersection of meeting his family's needs and employment schedule was discussed in Michael's comments about how he adapted responsibilities to meet his family's needs. Michael had two daughters under the age of three. At this stage of his life, there were areas, he acknowledged, in which he could not engage. His youngest daughter breastfed, and would not take a bottle. He explained how he adapted to this scenario:

In the recent past, since we've had our second child, who feeds regularly at night, my wife is up more often at night time, and so I do breakfast time, partially because I get up early so that she can rest and I can then be with the girls, and she can get a little more sleep that way. Her needs are being met by me taking the girls in the morning. That and when I leave I don't sometimes get to see them for much of the day this fall, whereas summer and last spring and last fall were all completely different. But this fall where we're currently at, I want to spend that time with them. I do most if not all breakfast with them, and then when I come home it's acknowledged that they would like to spend time with me. So whereas typically I would do more of the cooking when we're all at home, or when I have quite flexible time, my wife has been taking on the role of doing more cooking, so that I can spend unstructured time with the girls when I come home then and we can have that special time together.

Some of the fathers altered the tasks in which they engaged at home to better assist with parenting. In an attempt to increase shared parenting, Andrew and his wife were intentional about not having "just one parent working the whole time and the other parent at home the whole time. We were kind of hoping we could split that somehow". Accordingly, at different periods, they split their schedule to enable them to have time at home and at work. As a result, when asked about a typical day in his home, Andrew stated it depended on which parent was at home:

A lot of [household chores] depend on who is home. It seems that between meetings, and I'm doing some classes sometimes, that a good percentage of the time there's only one of us home at a bedtime. Anyway for instance, usually one of us is home after school, whoever is home after school obviously does the stuff after school.

The distribution of child care and house work, in short, was largely directed according to each parent's availability. For this reason, the fathers in this study adjusted their schedules to ensure they were home in the evenings to do parenting activities.

A common theme throughout all fathers' accounts was the busyness of mornings. Each family had some structure in their lives, primarily related to employment or daycare or school for the children, which produced time constraints. For many of the fathers in this study, the mornings and evenings were the times when they were able to spend time with their children. Not surprisingly, the fathers saw the importance of helping to get their children ready. In the following comment, Nathan described the seemingly chaotic scene in many households to show how parenting is fluid and many things are unplanned:

Everyday parenting in our household is pretty much fly by the seat of your pants. It is like that everyday ... I get up very early in the morning, [and] Amber will get up early to exercise or go for a run. So if she is out running when Malcolm gets up because he generally gets up quite early then I will go and scoop him out of bed. If I had a long day and I'm perhaps sleeping in a little bit, she will get him up. It's just whoever is there when the need arises will step up, and if someone is unable to step up then a shoulder is tapped and the other person will step up ... That goes the same way for meals it's very rarely planned out ... So in the evening, it's hey what's for supper. Well I was thinking about having this. I was thinking about having this. Ok I'll bbq and you'll turn on the oven ... As chaotic as it sounds, things always seem to come together pretty smoothly.

In short, there was a shared understanding that flexibility and teamwork was imperative for balancing parenting and other responsibilities.

Another key dimension of being an involved father was providing opportunities for spouses to have a break. Fathers whose wives took more of a stay-at-home role were cognizant of the work their wives did all day and mentioned that they chose to actively engage with their children to give their partner a break. Fathers in this study often used leisure as a means to give

their wife a break. Michael explained that although leisure is often experienced together as a family, play time is also used for breaks:

Playing, sitting, reading, and depending on what the broader context of that is will identify what that family time looks like and if it does involve all of us or if that will be a break for my wife ... Fridays for the next eight months I've established as off. So I'm not gainly employed somewhere, although I am doing other things, its flexible time, its time to say let's go swimming in the morning, and then have a picnic lunch. Or let's all play together at home. At the same time on that Friday afternoon ... my wife might be tired, and need a break, or she needs to do some errands or something that she hadn't been able to do otherwise. So she'll do that and I'll be with the girls. As far as whole family proper the time is there but sometimes it turns into my wife needing to do something, or I need to do something that's needed, so it is flexible. We haven't needed to put walls around it, and build trenches, and begrudgingly be together, but it often takes the shape of play.

Recognizing and supporting each other's needs, namely a need for a break, was part of engaged parenting. Though the examples discussed were largely fathers providing their spouses with a break, some of the fathers mentioned the reciprocity developed between them and their spouses. That is, they were also recipients of breaks. Fathers' primary motivation for providing their partners with a break seemed to derive from a sense of empathy of how tiring child rearing can be. Brett also conveyed that he used play time as an opportunity to give his wife a break. Brett was home one day a week, whereas his wife was home with the children three days a week:

Because I know she does spend more time with the kids I'm cognizant of trying to give her some time away from the kids, so taking the kids to do something, but then getting back to that enmeshed, detached continuum, she wants to do stuff as a family. So then she has a tension of getting totally silent me time, definite me time, versus being with my family.

Both taking time for oneself and experiencing things together as a family were valued by the participants. Brett noted his wife sometimes felt as though she were "missing out" if he did something with the kids, which was challenging because she enjoyed collective family experiences, but also needed some distance at times. These feelings of guilt made it challenging to ensure both parents received enough of a break from parenting. Despite the conflicting values

of alone time and family time, fathers used leisure to give their partner a break. The fathers initiated and planned for the activities with their children, which made it seem that their partners got a break.

Involvement in everyday parenting was viewed as part of their involved fatherhood role. Fathers attributed successful parenting to shared efforts between them and their partners. Although it was described as a challenge to balance parenting and work responsibilities, the participants were able to create opportunities to fulfill their role expectations. While “working as a team” greatly contributed to co-parenting, fathers also altered various commitments to prioritize parenting as best as they could.

#### ***4.3.2 Adapting together***

The fathers in this study pointed to teamwork being favorable for meeting their partner’s needs, in addition to daily child rearing. Each father mentioned they (and their partners) had other responsibilities to balance, such as work, volunteer, and social commitments. It was important to ensure that each parent had access to opportunities as needed, which were commonly during the evenings. The notion of adapting schedules to meet each other’s needs was highlighted during discussions about the children’s bed time routines. None of the fathers in this study were absent at bed time because of work responsibilities, *per se*. Rather, it was due to other activities, such as volunteering or social events, such as going out for dinner with friends. Michael described how he and his wife managed responsibilities and opportunities around bed time for his daughters:

Due to outside factors of the home, work in my case, I’m sometimes gone in the evenings around bedtime, and so I endeavour when I am home to be the one who does bedtime. That may be more nights than not, if there are a number of nights in a row where I am home my wife might offer to do it if there is other work I need to do. So whoever is home, that is the default. If someone is home at bedtime they’re doing the bedtime

routine. That being said it's not like that is the passive default because what I and my wife endeavour to do is find things for her to do outside the home as well. So since my work takes me outside of the home for much of it, and she is not working right now, trying to establish things for her to do outside of the home. Some of which takes place over bedtime and that is just acknowledged that I would be doing bedtime on those nights.

Working together to ensure each parent could access opportunities and that each other's needs were met was viewed as part of being an engaged parent. There was a mutual understanding that parents' activities or volunteer commitments were scheduled when the other parent could be home during bed time. Brett noted this strategy was important to manage everyday life, especially because he and his wife were both actively involved in various volunteer committees that met in the evenings:

I help with bedtime ... I'm involved in doing bedtime routine, and my wife and I generally alternate and often that is how it works out because one or the other of us is out for some evening. Sometimes we're both home, and still alternate.

For many of the fathers the responsibility of overseeing bed time often alternated between him and his partner. Alternating this task was often shaped simply by who was home and available at bed time. The children in this study were ages seven and younger, which meant they often went to bed early in the evening. For example, Phil mentioned during the school year "we got to get [the kids] to bed so [they're] sleeping by 7:30 [pm]. So by 7 o'clock we're having a tub, or reading books". The fathers in this research acknowledged there were times they had commitments outside of the home around the kids' bed time, yet they were intentional about putting the children to bed regularly when they were available. Phil overtly expressed his enjoyment of putting his kids to bed:

I really enjoy bed time ... I want to be in there reading stories, chatting with them, brushing their teeth. I'm the teeth brusher, only dad [helps] and I don't know why ... Funny how roles like that go and kids take a certain parent ... [For] a lot of parents [bed time] is a negative for them, and that might be true but I really enjoy bed time. I love

reading and we read books to them every night. Nick is at the point where he is reading basic books to us. And for me it's such a comforting feeling to put your kids to bed, safe and sound, lights off, see you tomorrow. To me that is a great feeling, and Nancy and I both do it together. Obviously there's nights when she'll be out or I'll be out, and so the other person does it, but if we're both home we're both doing it [together] and it's a lot of fun.

Putting their children to bed was identified as an important element of engaged fathering. Many of the fathers in this study saw their children briefly in the morning and evening. Due to the limited time they had to spend with their children, the fathers intentionally chose to be an active participant during bed time when they were available. Participating in the bed time routine was important to them because they wanted to "be there" for their children. They chose to be visible to their children on a daily basis to achieve this desire to be present.

The fathers in this study also mentioned the importance of adapting household chores to assist with balancing everyday responsibilities. Even though they did not view household chores such as cooking, cleaning, and laundry as responsibilities of parenting, they acknowledged these chores still needed to get done. Participants spoke of being fluid and flexible as parents. Family dynamics, they argued, were consistently changing and so they underscored the importance of flexibility. When asked directly about household tasks, Michael described the working model he and his wife used for co-parenting:

It's working models or working theory, and sometimes they have to be readdressed or whatever. When it was just my wife and I, who does laundry was the question, and we'd take turns doing it, and eventually it was decided that it would default to her, and that would be something that she'd pick up, and something like garbage where we would both do it, I took that on myself, and they flip. Sometimes they go back and forth, and I'll do laundry and she'll do garbage, but we find that keeping it flexible is very helpful and it allows us to respond to needs as needs change elsewhere, and so we aren't stuck in our roles. If there is a lot of laundry, obviously and if I have time, I'm not going to just let it sit, but at the same time having some sort of default, arbitrary default positions is sometimes helpful just for expectations. Having default roles is helpful both in spousal and parental roles.

Michael and other fathers' comments pointed to the importance of being flexible with household chores to adapt to each other's needs. Similarly, David explained his and his wife's approach to chores:

We're not super formal figuring out how we want to do this or that or how we're dividing up different things. We generally just go off of each other. If I come home and she's all stressed out, I might tell her to go take a walk. Just go have a break or just go crash for a while or something ... Rebecca tends to be very good at doing a rack [of dishes] in between whatever she is doing, and then I tend to start dishes and get them completely done. If I'm going to do dishes I'm going to get them all done, whether it's five racks. I mean we probably end up splitting them about half way but she does them more often than I do the dishes. And for cooking she does most of the cooking, and I do all of the baking. She's better at cooking and I do better baking, kind of somewhat backwards.

There was an awareness of what needed to be done, and so both parents worked on different chores until everything was all completed. In addition, some of the fathers mentioned division of household tasks was based on strengths and in some cases enjoyment (such as cooking). In Brett's situation, his wife was home with their youngest son three days of the week, and part of helping facilitate the household was to take on menu planning and cook more meals. In regard to other chores, such as laundry and cleaning, Brett described how he and his wife shared the work:

I've pondered about being more explicit about the division of labour, but generally it's fairly fluid ... So my wife does the majority of the cooking just cause she's a far better cook than I am, but then I would clean up and I do take my turn making a couple of meals a week ... So we know what days each of us is on for cooking. Dishes is another issue, generally I'll do the dishes but I think it works out more whoever is not putting the kids to bed will do the dishes while the other person is putting them to bed. I'll do the majority of the laundry, and then we both share household clean up. It's kind of who is available ... But she does all the grocery shopping, I don't do any grocery shopping, unless I happen to be out and you know I'll ask if there is anything I can pick up while I'm out, and she does menu planning.

The most common household task built on the strengths approach was cooking. The meals were typically prepared by "the better cook". Some fathers admitted their wives did the majority of the cooking. Remarks such as "my wife is a better cook than me" were mentioned during our

discussion. Was this an example of gender reproduction? Perhaps. Consider Phil's justification and response to this scenario though:

I'm not a very good cook, but I'll take the horn when it comes to cleaning. I like a very clean house, dishes and cleaning up after the kids, while Nancy I guess is usually prepping most of the food. I try to help out, but I'm not a great chef and I'm not going to sugar coat that. So I try and do most of the cleaning, that's how we try and divvy that up.

While Phil's statement that he is not a good cook initially is perhaps a form of gender reproduction, he compensated by doing the dishes, and tidying after the kids, which are typically regarded as feminine domestic responsibilities. Division of tasks based on strengths and preferences is a form of gender resistance. In some discussions the concept of gender roles was formally acknowledged, yet more often fathers unintentionally resisted gendered roles.

Engaged fathering may loosely line up with gender resistance, as these fathers chose to nurture and participate in various aspects of child rearing. In the past providing emotional support and affection towards children was viewed as a mothering trait, and not hegemonically masculine. Fathers in this study seemed to resist this notion, particularly with household chores. Not every type of chore was discussed, and many fathers talked about yard work being one of their responsibilities, so there is evidence to suggest typical gender roles continue to pervade. During our discussion, Nathan acknowledged that he completed several "masculine" house chores. Nathan explained that even though both he and his partner were capable of doing any task, they resorted to adopting typical gender roles more often than not:

In terms of house work in the evening like I said before I would rather spend time with Malcolm than do housework, but that being said there are certain chores that we divide up. Generally speaking her job isn't always doing the laundry and doing windows, and mine is not always the same cut and dry thing either, we do share some things. She probably does the laundry a whole lot more than I do, does the dishes a whole lot more than I do, but I cut the grass. It's very stereotypical I guess male female chore. From whatever you see in society, women cooking, cleaning, and men [doing] maintenance and breadwinning sort of thing. That's sort of how I view it. It may not be that cut and dry,

but it's generally how I view it if I had to categorize it. There's plenty of cleaning and tidying that I do to, and she is handy as well. She can fix a thing or two if she had too. Again, she is working full time so it's not like I'm sole bread winner and she is expected to do all of the parenting.

Even though some participants resorted to typical gendered chores, flexibility and the perspective of working together to make it work were consistent among the participants.

Another aspect of effective adaption was the flexibility partners adopted when household chores needed to be completed. Fathers usually fit chores into their schedule around parenting responsibilities. Fathers of younger children, under the age of four, often mentioned they completed chores after their children went to bed. Children in this age group went to bed earlier in the evening. After the bed time routine, the fathers had more time in the evening to complete their tasks. David, who had one daughter, shared his preference for household chores:

Yah [we complete household chores] usually after Emily is down. Though the other day Rebecca and Emily were kind of tired and they were both kind of grumbling so I told them to go play outside and I did the dishes. Some days you do that and other days you have a late supper and hang out and play around or go for a walk. I mean there's no real pattern to things.

Nathan also discussed his preference for completing chores after his two-and-a-half year old son is asleep:

In terms of house work in the evening like I said before I would rather spend time with Malcolm than do housework ... We're both very busy with family and work so we don't have a white board where we write down tasks and sort of thing because I mean as much as that may be helpful there's just not enough hours in a day to get those things done, and frankly I would rather spend time with Malcolm than worrying about what chores need to be done.

At this life stage, when the children are younger, several fathers decided to complete chores after children were in bed.

By contrast, fathers of the older children in the study (ages four to seven) expressed the importance of having children see both mom and dad doing household chores. Brett explained

that one of his roles as an involved parent was to show his kids “there are household chores”, and he thought “it’s also good for [the boys] to see that their parents have other responsibilities and priorities besides just them, and they need to know they are our number one priority, but not the only one”. Brett noted his boys, ages three and seven, have household responsibilities, too:

The kids pitch in more with household stuff. So Curtis clears all the plates and utensils after every meal, and George has to put away a couple of things back into the fridge. Or we’re starting to do that, and cleaning up their toys. Yesterday morning Curtis came down and just started sweeping the first floor, and I thought huh this is great.

Andrew also pointed to the importance of parents completing tasks in front of the children by “letting them see that we share those duties, let the kids see both mom and dad doing dishes, laundry or cooking”. These sentiments of wanting the children to see parents completing household tasks together support unintentional gender role resistance. The completion of gendered or non-gendered chores was not in the forefront of the participants minds. Rather, flexibility, and working together to get things completed was consistently mentioned. Many of the fathers simply knew what chores needed to be done and took responsibility for many domestic things.

Successful parenting comprised of both teamwork and flexibility. Flexibility was pivotal in managing everyday activities, such as helping the children get ready, bed time routines, and various commitments outside the home. The evolving nature of parenting made the division of household tasks more fluid. Participants in this study negotiated their schedules to be more involved, and as a result resisted many gendered activities. The father’s parental involvements altered their leisure pursuits, a theme I will explore in greater depth next.

#### **4.4 Fitting in leisure: “It’s present, it just sometimes shifts”**

One of the lifestyle changes fathers experienced when they entered into parenthood was having less free time for their own leisure pursuits. Along with their partner, much of their time was devoted to child rearing and other responsibilities. During the discussions, fathers pointed to the ways they accessed leisure (organized recreation and casual leisure), and how their leisure lifestyle has changed since becoming a father. It became clear that the participants’ children shaped the fathers’ recreation because leisure was largely scheduled around the children. Accordingly, the use of scheduling and multitasking is a theme I will explore in this section.

##### ***4.4.1 Scheduling leisure and multitasking***

Participants spent a significant amount of their daily interaction playing with their children. Leisure was a large part of the children’s lives, and also the fathers’ lives because each father also took time to participate in his own leisure activities. Most of the fathers listed active recreation when discussing their personal leisure. Many of them participated regularly in one or more sporting activities. The sports they played were often a continuation of a sport they played when they were younger. Fathers played on adult leagues with evening games, which was ideal because the children would often be in bed before their game. Michael felt that the adult recreation leagues that catered to parents’ schedules helped him continue his activities:

So I play slo-pitch. I did that before I was married, while I was married, and now as a father. Hockey as well is something I engage in quite regularly. The same year my daughter was born I blew out my ACL on my right knee, which doesn’t compromise slow pitch because you don’t have to be athletic to play that game, but it did compromise my ability to play hockey for that next two years. Because one year I had surgery and then I had to wait a year. So that’s something I didn’t engage in but the league that I would have engaged in would have been at a time when the kids would have been already in bed. There are things that cater that way to parents ... And over the summer time I played soccer on Friday nights, sometimes after bed time, sometimes before bed time.

Fathers preferred participating in their own activities later in the evenings because they wanted to spend time with their families after they came home from work. Late games, such as hockey beginning at 10:30 pm, enabled fathers to put their children to bed before they left. Brett also mentioned he appreciated organized sport because “it’s structured so that you make sure you go do it, as opposed to no I don’t feel like it”. Obligation, in other words, meant they had to follow through with their commitment. The emphasis fathers placed on having games scheduled after their children are asleep made it appear that children dictated fathers’ selection of activities.

For many, becoming a father shifted their perspective on leisure and in some instances altered their activities to be more family-centered. For example, Phil played competitive baseball for several years. Being a part of this team was a large commitment as it involved more frequent games and travel for tournaments. Phil continued to play competitively as a parent with two children up until recently. His chief reason for withdrawing from competitive baseball was the travel required of him for tournaments. Tournaments meant traveling to out-of-town destinations and staying in hotels with his family during weekends, something he no longer wanted to do.

Phil discussed his plans for next summer:

This year was my last year playing really competitive [baseball], I’m still going to play next year but on a league and those games start at 8:30 at night. So my home games I can put the kids to bed and then go. Away games maybe I’m leaving at 7 [pm], but at least I get to see my kids for a couple of hours and they are just putting on their pjs by the time I’m leaving.

This notion of being family-centered was consistent among the participants. Not surprisingly, all of the fathers scheduled sports activities outside of family time. In addition to preserving family time, fathers made a concerted effort to find time to spend with their partner. Relationship dynamics were changed when children entered the picture, as the focus was shifted to centre around family. The participants pointed to the ways they met their spousal relationship needs.

Brett and his wife played organized sports (in separate leagues) and had done so for several years. They decided to change the frequency of their participation in sport prior to having children. Brett explained his reasoning for this change:

I still play one sport every season. So I play hockey in the winter and baseball in the summer. Although before kids I had been playing two [sports] in the summer until a certain point, and one summer my wife and I just went you know this is crazy running out of the house every night of the week in the summer instead of being able to just sit down out on our deck and just enjoy summer evenings, so we dropped back to one sport in the summer before having kids.

Contrary to the common perception that sport participation reduces during parenthood, Brett and his wife altered their leisure to spend more time together prior to having their boys. As well as changes to organized recreation, fathers pointed to other changes during leisure with their spouse. The greatest change fathers discussed was the disappearance of spontaneity.

Spontaneous activities were less frequent because more planning was necessary to involve the children. Fathers did not mention this change in a negative way or say they never got to do the activities they did before having children; rather they recognized it just took more planning. Brett discussed a few ways some of his leisure prior to children was altered:

Watching movies has probably reduced. Going out on a whim that's been reduced ... My wife and I probably go on fewer dates now just cause you got to figure out a time to go, get a babysitter, but we are being intentional about at least getting some in. You just can't see something come up, oh this lecture is going on, or this movie is showing that I want to see, you can't go out and do it [as easily], so that's changed. Or just going out for a walk at night together now we'll do it individually, either [with the kids] if the kids want to go for a walk. Generally if I walk I'll go by myself in the evening after the kids are in bed. It has changed to some extent but we still try to do our own recreation and leisure.

Date nights were less spontaneous since having children, though many couples scheduled them in. Phil pointed to how he and his wife scheduled their dates:

A lot of the time when we're getting a babysitter they come over at 6:30 at night, or sometimes Nancy and I go out for dinner after we put the kids to bed to be honest with you. Just so we're not missing time with them. So honestly it's just somebody staying at

our house while the kids sleep. We go out for dinner and come back and they don't even know we're gone half the time ... It used to be that we wouldn't leave until after bedtime, when they were a bit younger. Maybe bed time was a little more stressful, putting a baby down to sleep. Now at this age, when they go to bed they're out and they aren't waking up, sure every once in a while. Usually they're good sleepers and they go to bed just fine, and bed time is eas[ier] so [we] can leave a little earlier, but a lot of times we arrange our schedules around them as well.

Scheduling date nights, or just finding time to spend together as a couple was very much dictated by the children's schedules. At this life stage, time was usually spent together as a family during the day, and couple time occurred after the kids were in bed. Andrew mentioned before children, "Linda and I could do more free play. Linda and I could theoretically after supper play a game if we wanted to. Whereas now we have to make sure the kids are in bed before any of that stuff happens". Time together as a couple was also stretched by work, household and volunteer responsibilities. One thing all fathers did to preserve family time and time with their partner was multitask.

Multitasking enabled the participants to continue engaging in some of their favourite activities. For example, David and his wife enjoy playing games. Prior to having their daughter they played a couple board games every evening. They continued to play games after they had their daughter, but they changed the type of games:

The biggest difference is we went from playing Settlers, Ticket to Ride, Dominion and Carcassonne to Rook, and Pinochle [to] all sorts of little card games that we can finish very quickly. We went from playing a couple board games every evening to playing a card game over supper.

David explained that his daughter was "willing to play" with them by throwing the dice around the room. Because she was too young to play board games, David and his wife played games while entertaining their daughter. Another common form of multitasking was completing a

household task with the children. Doing so enabled parents to complete an errand or chore that their children viewed as a leisure experience. Phil explained this strategy:

Nancy and I would go to a coffee shop for an hour and a half and sip on a latte. That just cannot happen anymore. We'd like to go to the market cruise around and look at the shops, sample some things and have a nice coffee for two hours. Now we go to the market, boom, boom, boom, get a donut for the kids and we're gone. So it just changes, [yet] we still do a lot of the same things.

Shopping for groceries at the market with children was one of many examples where fathers completed a task while entertaining the children. Blending time with the children while completing household tasks was another common occurrence. Fathers shared examples of spending time outside raking leaves in the backyard as a family. The kids helped until they were no longer interested, at which point the task became a balance of doing chores and spending time with the children. Though multitasking was commonly practiced, participants also gave me the impression that they did not want to do gardening or chores, but rather they wanted to spend time with their families instead. Some chores, such as cutting the grass on a lawn mower were easier to complete, because the children enjoyed riding the mower for a few minutes with daddy. When appropriate, the participants tried to incorporate children in the activity. Brett, a social worker, shared his experience of completing a project with his son:

This summer it would have been building an addition onto our play structure where there was a task involved and the kids. Curtis wanted to help a little bit, so I taught him how to use a cordless impact driver for putting screws in. So he could do that with some assistance but it took a little bit longer to build, but he had the sense that he built it himself ... In my line of work there is so much death and destruction so it was nice to have a project of construction and seeing something come to life. I guess it was a nice counter balance for me. Having a planned project where you know you need to put work into it to get it done, so in part you need time to do that, and it feels like you're involving the kids a little bit. He could bring boards up for me and we talked up the design of it and stuff. It felt like you were not totally shutting off of parenting role but you're also able to focus on something that you enjoy doing.

Sometimes completing household chores, such as gardening and building, were perceived by participants as leisure; other times, tasks with children felt like work. When fathers completed household chores independently without their children, some viewed their time doing so as “me time”. Before parenthood, fathers were more likely to view leisure as leisure, yet as a parent, leisure took on many different forms, including what may be perceived as work. Phil shared his perspective on completing household chores:

When I’m on the tractor by myself for an hour, an hour and a half, and it’s awesome! Now if Nick and Christina are around they like to jump on daddy and get a little ride, that’s no problem, but it’s just me and I’m relaxing, that’s me time. Even though it’s work, that’s how leisure time changes, I think ... It’s very soothing to me to be on my own and accomplish something, instead of playing groundhogs or something. Me time is mostly in my work [on the home], whereas before leisure was leisure ... I went out last night and pulled weeds in my backyard. That’s a stress relief, that’s just me and my garden relaxing. Or painting cabinets that’s getting the job done, that’s something that I’m accomplishing and that’s de stressful, that de stresses me, getting something done.

Completing chores was viewed as time away from kids, and a break from parenting responsibilities. Along with an escape feeling, there was a sense of freedom while completing a task. David iterated this sentiment with his comment, “the gardening is my out. It is my get away from work. So gardening, mowing the lawn. People think I’m crazy, but I love mowing the lawn”. Completing chores, at times, was viewed as a break from the busyness of parenting because the fathers had time to be alone. Nathan mentioned he regularly had time for himself while he walked his dog every night. Though he did not appreciate walking in the dark on a cold winter’s night, he had the opportunity everyday during his walk to “clear his mind”. Activities that gave fathers a break from family and the children, such as yard work, were commonly mentioned among many participants, yet they occurred outside of family time.

In a very real sense, children dictated a lot of the participants’ leisure experiences. Engaged fathers prioritized being there for children when possible, and therefore many of their

pursuits occurred after the children went to bed. Multitasking was a common tactic to blend parenting (supervision) responsibilities with chores; even though it generally took longer to complete the task and it was not perceived as leisure-like, participants felt it was worth spending time with children. When participants fit in alone time to pursue several activities, both casual and organized, they were opportunities to take a break from responsibilities to re-charge, and helped them achieve a sense of balance in their lives.

Participants' participation in their families' lives through child rearing and completing household tasks shaped the engaged father role. Their proactive response to meet families' needs, flexibility, and collective effort with their partner was important to meeting responsibilities. Their parenting approach led them to negotiate external constraints and resist gendered roles. They adapted tasks and multitasked to be there for children and provide opportunities for spouses to have a break. Leisure was a central avenue for participants to engage with children, resist and reproduce gendered play, and fulfill their engaged father role.

## **5.0 Discussion**

The purpose of this study was to explore fathers' understanding and experiences of engaged fatherhood and specifically what they viewed as part of their father role, and implications for leisure. The findings from this research suggest that fathers negotiated employment constraints and resisted gender roles to meet their father role responsibilities. The findings also indicate the importance of leisure for fathers to engage and connect with children. Through leisure fathers resisted and reproduced gendered play, created family time, and met their individual leisure needs.

### **5.1 Resisting Gender Ideologies**

Previous research has indicated gender ideologies represent what individuals view as appropriate roles for men and women, which in turn affects their own behavior (McHale & Huston, 1984). The participants' discussions about their parenting style and what they viewed as part of the father role indicated they intentionally and unintentionally resisted gendered norms. Fathers resisted reproducing gendered chores, and regularly completed 'feminine' domestic chores. For example, one participant was responsible for laundry, while his wife took out the garbage. Studies have also suggested society's gender ideologies are widespread, yet cultural expectations for fathers can be confusing (Such 2006; Wall, 2007). Wall's (2007) analysis of a Canadian newspaper findings position employment as fathers' primary responsibility and parental responsibilities were to fit around their employment responsibilities. Wall contends involvement in day-to-day care giving tasks and emotional care were not necessarily expected of fathers. On the contrary, Brennen et al. (2002) assert a growing social consensus suggesting that today's fathers should actively engage with their children on a daily basis. The fathers'

experiences in this research echoed Brennan et al.'s (2002) depiction of engaged fathers. For instance, all of the fathers engaged with children through care giving tasks such as preparing breakfast for children, getting children dressed and ready for the day, dropping children off at school, and helping with the bed time routine.

Although the fathers were actively engaged in their children's lives, fathers' child rearing in the home was limited due to employment in either part-time or full-time positions. The expectation of having a greater involvement in their children's lives, while at the same time spending time in paid employment, made it difficult for fathers to attain the "involved" ideal (Daly, 1996). These two conflicting cultural expectations are a central dilemma to the new fathering ideology because fathers experience tension between these two roles (Trussell, 2009). Fathers experienced constraints due to their work schedules, but were able to negotiate their schedules to be home with their children as needed. One participant's flexible work schedule, primarily for when he arrived at work, enabled him to help support his children and wife when preparing for the day. Through such actions of negotiating more time to spend with their children fathers resisted the traditional gender ideology (Balunda, 2004). Another way fathers negotiated to spend more time with children was by working reduced hours. The participants concerted their efforts to be more available for their children; one father took a stay-at-home role for several years, another father took unpaid parental leave for two months, some reduced to part-time hours, and many worked positions that enabled them to be home for dinner. The participants' actions of spending reduced time in paid work illustrates the participants had more egalitarian attitudes (Kaufman & Uhlenberg, 2000). However, participants' egalitarian attitudes towards child rearing did not transfer to use of paid parental leave. The parental leave taken in this study is reflective of the low paid parental leave rate for Canadian fathers. A recent study in 2010

revealed 20% of fathers took paid parental leave (McKay & Doucet). The lack of fathers taking paid parental leave is largely due to the lack of supportive workplaces and communities, social norms in relation to infant care, and perspective that leave is a privilege rather than an obligation (Guzzo, 2011). Affordability is also a key dimension; if fathers' have greater earnings, there is a greater potential loss to family income while on leave. Fathers' use of parental leave is highest when wage replacement is high and where leave is a "take-it-or-leave-it" individual paternity leave (McKay & Doucet, 2010). Changes to leave policies in Canada and pay equity are needed to address the economic implications that affect fathers' level of involvement, especially during the first year of child's life.

The fathers' participation in household chores suggests the participants' perspective was more egalitarian. Coltrane & Ishii-Kuntz (1992) assert that gender ideology affects the division of labour. Their findings state men with more egalitarian attitudes do more housework than men with traditional views. The description of chores the participants regularly completed support a non-traditional gender approach to household tasks. For example, chores participants took on included cooking meals, cleaning the home and dishes, laundry, and yard work. Many of these chores completed regularly by the participants are considered typical feminine roles (Coltrane, 2000). Several time studies state women in relationships continue to do most of the housework (Firestone & Shelton, 1994; Silver, 2000). This research did not measure the time devoted to chores and therefore it is unknown how many chores the fathers completed in relation to their partners. However, the participants' strong acknowledgment that chores are part of their responsibility, as a father, affirms their performance of gender resistance.

Providing emotional care for children was another 'feminine' task fathers completed. Research suggests fathers are nurturing and affectionate as they provide responsive active care

and affection (Daly 1993; Doucet, 2004). For instance, fathers mentioned they comforted children when they were hurt, and regularly did the children's bed time routine where they shared stories and talked about their day. It became evident that being emotionally involved in their children's lives was part of the fathers expanded role. In addition to being employed, Henwood and Procter state "fathers are expected to be *present* in the home and *involved* in their children's lives, to keep *contact* with and be *sensitive* to their child's needs (including being able to put the child's needs before their own), to value family time (e.g. above work and leisure) and generally be a part of family life" (2003, p. 352). Each of the aspects of Henwood and Procter's description of the father role were revealed in participants' description of engaged fatherhood and what they strived to achieve. Fathers frequently explained the importance of being there on a daily basis, being visible to children and available to meet their needs. The fathers in this study organized their lives to enable them to be with their children, which often included scheduling their various commitments during "off hours". The action of shifting from a preoccupation with their own needs, such as when to pursue volunteer or leisure activities, to the needs of their children was an act of "giving over" to children's activities and sacrificing some of their own (Daly, Ashbourne & Brown, 2012). For instance, one participant stopped playing competitive baseball because he wanted to be more available for his children and meet their needs, which is deeply embedded in the discourse about being a good father (Daly, 1996).

The engaged fathers in this research placed a high value on being available for their children (Daly, Ashbourne & Brown, 2012). It was noted that 'being available' or 'being there' for children had different meanings. Participants repeatedly discussed they wanted to be present in the home to care for children; such as getting them ready and putting them to bed, being at the table during meal times, and available to play with their children. However, being there for

family was not synonymous with interaction. Rather, being at the community swimming pool watching their child was considered ‘being there’. There was a strong association of the child’s awareness of daddy watching and the participants’ description of being there. In addition, working with their partner to organize regular activities for their children such as play groups, library groups, and structured activities, which included swimming and variants of baseball in this research were considered part of their father role. Ultimately, the participants were able to negotiate through many constraints and intentionally resist the distant father image and numerous traditional socialized gender norms.

## **5.2 Managing Involved Fatherhood**

While the participants found themselves negotiating their responsibilities of employment with engaged fathering, each of the participants spoke about his partner’s role in raising their children, and the notion of “working as a team”. The fathers at this life stage with young children are among the most time stressed (Gerson, 2004). Participants mentioned the challenges to find time for both employment and family, yet through partnership participants were better able to meet the families’ needs (Coltrane, 2000). In this research, fathers worked with their partners to meet the daily needs of the family, household, and other responsibilities. A method parents used to manage the household responsibilities was completing multiple tasks at the same time. For example, the dishes were cleaned while the other parent would put the children to bed. The participants’ housework involvements suggest they share the work fairly equally and have progressive gender attitudes (Baxter, Hewitt & Haynes, 2008). The participants’ awareness of what chores needed to be done and their perspective that they persist at tasks, with their partner, until things are finished demonstrated their commitment to their father role.

In addition to housework, fathers in this study provided child care throughout the week. The participants' commitment to child rearing was reflected in Craig's (2006) discourse of fatherhood description; fathers are more emotionally involved, more nurturing, and more committed to spending time with children during infancy and beyond. For example, a couple of the participants adjusted their schedules so they could stay at home during the work week and take the lead in child rearing for specific days. These fathers shared the child rearing responsibilities in a substantial way throughout the week, which challenges Yeung, Sandberg, Davis-Kean and Hofferth's finding that fathers only contribute substantially to child rearing on weekends (2001). This level of commitment and involvement to fatherhood Hatten, Vinter and Williams (2002) categorized as the 'fully involved dads'. Unfortunately, not all of the participants had flexibility in their work schedule, which limited the extent of their involvement in hands-on child care.

The participants who had more traditional working hours took on fathering responsibilities primarily before and after work, and during the weekends. Participants adjusted their work schedule to meet family needs when feasible. For instance, when one father worked overtime he arranged to finish work early on Fridays so he could be at his daughter's swimming lessons. It became evident that the participants who worked traditional full-time positions had less available time for day-to-day management of the home and family. As a result, some of the fathers spent more time engaged with their children on the weekends than during the week (Yeung et al., 2001). Hatten et al. (2002) termed fathers who had less responsibility than mothers for household and child care tasks as 'useful dads'. Hatten et al.'s 'useful dad' asserts that fathers take more of a helper role on the domestic front, and tend to spend most of their time with their children during the weekends. Some of the participants in this research spent less time with their

children than their partners; however spending less time with children was not synonymous with the helper role. The fathers had various responsibilities before and after work to attend to, and they were able to meet those tasks even with employment constraints. Through adjusting their father role and responsibilities they were able to meet both their employment and family expectations.

Another way the participants managed their daily responsibilities was through multitasking. Multitasking, the simultaneous performance of several tasks or the rapid alternation between them (Spink, Cole & Waller, 2008) was frequently utilized by fathers because it enables them to get more things done within a limited amount of time. Examples they shared include doing yard work while watching children play outside and preparing dinner while helping children do their homework. The emphasis on multitasking was reflected in current research which found the number of hours per week that fathers multitask is almost identical among married mothers: 78 and 80 hours per week, respectively (Bianchi, Milkie, Sayer & Robinson, 2000). Multitasking was consistently used to get more things done, however participants mentioned they felt guilty for completing chores rather than spending time with children. Research indicates there is a growing expectation and cultural condition that men are supposed to be available and *should* spend more time with their children, which has resulted in feelings of guilt when they are not spending time with family (Craig & Mullan, 2013; Daly, 1996). This belief was revealed in each of the participants in this study, as they expressed wanting to be present and available for their children. As a result, many fathers altered their personal leisure to have more time for family. For example, one father finished playing competitive baseball, and all of the participants scheduled leisure during “off hours”. The participants wanted to be present for children because they felt responsible for their care (Poortman & Van der Lippe, 2009). To

maximize time with children the participants included children in non-leisure activities (Bianchi et al., 2000). For example, fathers incorporated children in activities such as grocery shopping, running errands or cleaning the dishes. It was apparent that completing tasks with children often took longer, yet congruent with research fathers wanted opportunities to engage with their children (Mattingly & Bianchi, 2003). These examples of fathers spending time with children in the community and at home demonstrate fathers spend a lot of time doing child care. This study's finding challenges the notion that fathers spend the majority of their time playing with children (Craig, 2006).

Another integral aspect of successful fathering was flexibility. This research suggests it is important to be fluid and flexible, particularly with parenting and household chores, because family dynamics are consistently changing. This was commonly practiced as household chores were divided among parents based on what was appropriate at the time. One father stated he was currently responsible for garbage, and his wife did the majority of the laundry, yet these chores alternated based on their schedules, or they adjusted the division of chores simply for a change. Henwood and Procter (2003) identified fathers as helpful agents of change if they adopt positions that foster their children's and partner's fluidity. David's comment that he and his wife are not super formal and generally just go off of each other illustrates the fluid nature in his household. He shared that if his wife was stressed when he came home, he would encourage her to go for a walk and have a break from caring for their two year old daughter. Having breaks from parenting and the time to relax, volunteer or pursue leisure were valued by the participants and their partners. The fathers' efforts to exchange breaks with their partners is indicative of Townsend's (2002) statement that father involvement is often packaged with greater investment in marriage and involvement in the community. The participants' flexibility contributed greatly to managing

everyday parenting and meeting spousal needs. The participants' discussed their father role in relation to their employment, household and spousal responsibilities. The results of this study identify that the father role is better understood in the context of work and home environments.

### **5.3 Negotiating Leisure Constraints**

Previous research has indicated increased fathering responsibilities have implications for fathers' leisure. For some participants in this study the form and structure of leisure experiences shifted (Such, 2006). After entering parenthood, fathers' leisure pursuits became more structured and less spontaneous (Such, 2006). The decrease in spontaneity impacted participants' time spent with partner (i.e. date nights) in particular. Spontaneous activities were less frequent because planning was necessary due to having children. Consequently, the increased planning required greatly influenced the frequency of dates, and the date activity itself. For instance, one father mentioned "I cannot go see the lecture or movie that is going on as easily". As a result, fathers' scheduled in date nights, and often scheduled dates for after the children are in bed. One father mentioned this scheduling tactic was used so he could spend more time with his children. This account where participants' time with partners shifted to be more family-centered was commonly expressed because fathers mentioned being there for their children was important (Harrington, 2006). Daly (2001) asserts there is a growing expectation that parents and children should have "high-quality, mutually enjoyable, sociable relationships, and leisure time with children" (p. 293). In this research, participants mentioned family leisure as an avenue where they could engage with their children, and was often used to achieve connectedness with their children (Kay, 2007). Family time was a combination of playing activities the children chose, and activities they chose as parents. Fathers joined in children's play, and were willing to be silly,

such as pretending to be a groundhog, to show their interest and connect to children (Harrington, 2006).

Family time also consisted of completing chores that children viewed as a leisure experience. Several fathers completed errands with children (market and grocery shopping trips) and tried to create enjoyable experiences for the children. Participants also expressed they included children in various activities because family leisure is part of their “duty”, and it was thought to be beneficial for family cohesion (Shaw 2008; Craig & Mullan, 2012). Fathers in this research had a high commitment to family time, (Craig, 2007) yet meeting the needs of children during family leisure was not always viewed as a mutual leisure experience (Mattingly & Bianchi, 2003). This research extends Shaw and Dawson’s (2001) finding that family leisure involves work, effort, and sometimes lack of enjoyment for the fathers. The term leisure-based parenting (Shaw, 1992), which is often linked to fathers, is not reflective of the participants experiences because their participation in leisure-like activities with children is experienced more as work than leisure. It was evident when fathers wanted a break from parenting and other responsibilities they turned to their individual leisure pursuits.

Much of the research on parents’ leisure has argued fathers have greater access to leisure than mothers. The purpose of this study was to explore whether engaged fathers of young children with limited free time participate in leisure pursuits. Since the participants' time was stretched it was expected participants' would have fewer leisure opportunities. Rather, this research found fathers experience a tension of being there for children and having “me time” to re-energize (Guendouzi, 2006). In this research, the participants felt “guilty” when they did not spend time with children. Their father role within the family was characterized with the desire to place the needs of their children before home responsibilities or themselves. This feeling of

obligation towards others is frequently cited as an 'ethic of care' experienced by mothers (Bialeschki & Michener, 1994). Additional research should examine whether fathers' feelings of guilt constrains their leisure participation.

The participants' commitment to family care led many to find and schedule their individual leisure during "off hours". At this life stage, "off hours" was when the children were bed, and it was routinely practiced for fathers to participate in leisure after children's bed time. The fathers discussed their appreciation for organized recreation leagues that cater to parents' schedules by having later games, as it helped fathers continue their sport participation. Such (2006) asserts fathers' continuation of personal leisure is achieved through 'timetabling'. Each of the fathers had scheduled activities as part of their leisure, which suggests they worked to fit leisure into the family schedule. Another crucial aspect of participants' continued sport participation was they scheduled activities for when their partner was available to be with the children. Several of the participants' partners had regular leisure activities they engaged in. The fathers intentionally supported their partners' leisure and made themselves available to care for children, which unintentionally reduced the constraints mothers typically experience when accessing leisure. It was important to the participants that their partner has access to opportunities (volunteer, social, and/or leisure commitments). The results of this study identified meeting partner's needs, in addition to children's needs became part of the participants' definition of the father role. Additional exploration of how fathers support mothers leisure participation would be beneficial in describing the gender resistance of involved fatherhood.

The participants also engaged in non-organized leisure pursuits, which included gardening, yard work, reading, walking and going to the gym. Fathers discussed task-oriented activities, such as yard work and home renovations, as leisure which supports Such's (2006)

finding that the meaning of leisure shifts upon the onset of parenthood. Sometimes children were present during non-organized leisure activities. For example, David's daughter played outside or "helped" him with his gardening. Such (2006) stated men differ from women in that men prioritize personal leisure above family responsibilities while women do the reverse. This finding was not supported in this research as the participants prioritized family care in numerous ways; perhaps most significantly by taking on a stay-at-home father role. The participants emphasized the importance of meeting family needs, and subsequently the participants' leisure was less spontaneous. Perhaps the engaged father has a greater investment in the family because he is cognizant of the work his spouse does, and having children influenced his actions (Shehan, 1999).

## 6.0 Conclusion

This research set out to gain some insight into the experiences of fatherhood. In particular, how fathers described their role, and what role leisure played in engaged fatherhood, if any. The analysis of the six interviews revealed that involved fathering is challenging, yet very rewarding. Each of the participants has a unique experience, while at the same time shared similarities. All of the participants strived to ensure their family dynamic was healthy and strong. They intentionally chose to negotiate responsibilities, keeping family a priority. Acts of gender resistance through chores, employment and leisure were consistently performed. Fathers embraced leisure with children and accepted altered individual and spousal leisure experiences because being there for their children was an integral part of their father role.

It became clear that daily interaction and being present with children, taking care of children through various activities such as bathing and feeding, and being connected with the family was viewed as part of their engaged father role. Fathers also mentioned completing household chores and meeting spousal needs were a large part of their daily activities, even though they were not parenting specific. In addition, a large part of active fathering is leisure and playing with children particularly when children are not school aged. Fathers engaged in various kinds of play with children because having a broad repertoire of activities was thought to be beneficial for children. The participants also valued their individual leisure, and were able to regularly participate in several organized sports. Late evening games were preferred because fathers wanted to spend time with children while they were awake. In this study, fathers felt “guilty” if they did not spend time with family. The participants were committed to ensuring the children and spousal needs were met, and that the family dynamic is strong. Children’s leisure,

family leisure and fathers' individual leisure are intricately linked to the fathers' experiences of engaged fatherhood.

While this exploratory study was important for understanding fathers' experiences with their biological children, future studies need to examine how fathers with step-children understand and describe their father role. In this research a participant who had a biological son and two step-children shared exclusively about his relationship with his biological son. Research exploring parents with children who have another significant father figure in their lives is needed, especially with the increase in blended families. Likewise, fathers of biological children who live away from home should be examined. Further insight into experiences of other families, such as same-sex couples and single fathers is valuable as the family structure in North America is evolving. Another remaining gap is the experiences of fathers of children with disabilities.

A limitation of this study is that fathers' experiences were limited to the life stage of having young children (under the age of seven). It would be interesting to examine fathers' experiences of children nine years of age and older to understand the different challenges and opportunities they encounter. The racial ethnicity was solely Caucasian in this research. Further research should explore whether fathers of different ethnicities experience constraints.

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**Appendix A**  
**Recruitment E-Mail**

Hello,

My name is Bethany Metzger and I am a 2nd year Master's student in the Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies at the University of Waterloo. I am currently working with Dr. Troy Glover and doing my thesis. I am studying how fathers understand involved fathering. This research will hopefully contribute to a better understanding not only of involved fathers, but the role of leisure as well. If you volunteer as a participant in this study, we will arrange a time that is convenient for you to engage in an open-ended, audio taped interview where we will discuss your experience as an involved father. This interview will take approximately one hour of your time. Please see the attached information letter for further information.

I would like to assure you that this study has received ethics clearance through a University of Waterloo Research Ethics Committee. However, the final decision about participation is yours.

If you are interested in participating, please fill out the following information and I will be in touch with you. Thanks very much, I look forward to speaking with you!

Name:

Email:

Phone Number:

Best Days:

Best Times:

Bethany Metzger

[bmackay@uwaterloo.ca](mailto:bmackay@uwaterloo.ca)

**Appendix B**  
**Information and Consent Letter**

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

This study is being conducted by Bethany Metzger under the supervision of Professor Troy Glover of the Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies at the University of Waterloo. You are being invited to participate in a research study on fathers who actively engage with their children. We hope to learn more about involved fathers and the role leisure plays in their lives.

As a participant in this study, you will be engaging in an interview, discussing your experiences as an involved father and what that looks like for you. For instance, we will discuss the following questions: When did you become a father? Do you see yourself similar to your father? How do you and your partner work out everyday parenting? What activities do you engage in with your children? And so on. You may decline to answer any of the interview questions if you prefer not to answer.

Participation in this study is voluntary and is expected to take approximately one hour of your time. However, there will also be a period a couple months after our interview where I would touch base to discuss my preliminary findings with you. At this point I would hope to receive your feedback on my interpretations, and to ensure that your interpretation, if different from mine is heard. I certainly hope that you will feel that you have benefited from sharing your experiences with me and subsequently the broader research community. You may withdraw from the study at any time by advising me of this decision.

With your permission the interview will be audio-taped, and with your permission anonymous quotations will be used in the final report. All information collected from participants in this study will be presented and stored anonymously. Your name will not appear in any report or presentation resulting from this study. You may choose your own pseudonym that will appear in the research. The data will be kept for three years and will be securely stored in a locked filing cabinet in the researcher's home.

In appreciation for your time, you will receive a \$10 Tim Hortons gift card. The amount received is taxable. It is your responsibility to report this amount for income tax purposes.

If you have any questions about participation in this study, please feel free to ask myself or my supervisor. Our contact information is below. This project has been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance through a University of Waterloo Research Ethics Committee. In the event you have any comments or concerns resulting from your participation in this study, please contact Maureen Nummelin at 519 888-4567, ext. 36005 or [maureen.nummelin@uwaterloo.ca](mailto:maureen.nummelin@uwaterloo.ca).

Thank you so much for your time.

Bethany Metzger  
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University of Waterloo  
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519.807.8268

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## CONSENT FORM

By signing this consent form, you are not waiving your legal rights or releasing the investigator(s) or involved institution(s) from their legal and professional responsibilities.

I have read the information presented in the information letter about a study being conducted by Bethany Metzger of the Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies at the University of Waterloo. I have had the opportunity to ask any questions related to this study, to receive satisfactory answers to my questions, and any additional details I wanted.

I am aware that I have the option of allowing my interview to be audio recorded to ensure an accurate recording of my responses.

I am also aware that excerpts from the interview may be included in the thesis and/or publications to come from this research, with the understanding that the quotations will be anonymous.

I was informed that I may withdraw my consent at any time without penalty by advising the researcher.

This project has been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance through a University of Waterloo Research Ethics Committee. I was informed that if I have any comments or concerns resulting from my participation in this study, I may contact the Director, Office of Research Ethics at (519) 888-4567 ext. 36005 or [maureen.nummelin@uwaterloo.ca](mailto:maureen.nummelin@uwaterloo.ca).

With full knowledge of all foregoing, I agree, of my own free will, to participate in this study.

YES  NO

I agree to have my interview audio recorded.

YES  NO

I agree to the use of anonymous quotations in any thesis or publication that comes of this research.

YES  NO

Participant Name: \_\_\_\_\_ (Please print)

Participant Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Witness Name: \_\_\_\_\_ (Please print)

Witness Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix C

### The Interview Guide

1. Let's begin with you telling me about your family.
  - When did you become a father?
  - How many children do you have?
  - What are their ages and gender?
  
2. What was your father like?
  - Do you see yourself similar to your father?
  - Is that why you're the way you are?
  
3. As this study is about involved fathers, how do you define involved fatherhood? Can you give examples from your own experiences that illustrate involved fatherhood?
  
4. How do you and your partner work out everyday parenting in your household?
  - How do you and your partner divide things up?
  - Are there any challenges you and your partner face while raising your children?
  
5. As I'm in the department of recreation and leisure studies, I am interested in leisure components as well. What activities do you engage in with your children?
  - *During discussion define the activity (e.g. hikes as active activities) and follow up with*  
Do you do other types of activities?
  - How does the gender of your children influence your parenting?
  - Does your children's gender have implications for the activities you engage in with them?
  
6. What sort of organized recreation do your children participate in?
  - Can you provide some examples of your involvement with children's organized activity?
  - What sort of challenges do you face in facilitating your children's leisure?
  
7. In what ways have children impacted upon your own leisure?
  - Are there things you do just for you? "me time"
  - What are the everyday activities you do just for you?
  - How do you escape the chaos?
  
8. How does your leisure change when you spend time with the whole family?
  - What are the roles you and your partner play?
  
9. Is there anything we didn't talk about that you would like to add?

**Appendix D**  
**Letter of Appreciation**

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

I would like to thank you very much for your participation in this study. As a reminder the purpose of this study is to explore how fathers understand involved fatherhood and its implications for leisure. The data collected during interviews will contribute to a greater understanding of active fathers' experiences.

Once I have transcribed the interview, and completed my preliminary results I will send you a copy the findings. I would hope to receive your feedback on my analysis to ensure that your interpretation, if different from mine, is heard. When I have completed the study in Fall 2013, I will provide you with a summary of the final results.

Please remember that the data will remain completely confidential and will be kept securely stored. If you have any questions about the study, please do not hesitate to contact me by email or telephone as noted below. As with all University of Waterloo projects involving human participants, this project was reviewed by, and received ethics clearance through a University of Waterloo Research Ethics Committee. Should you have any comments or concerns resulting from your participation in this study, please contact Maureen Nummelin, the Director, Office of Research Ethics, at 519-888-4567, ext. 36005 or [maureen.nummelin@uwaterloo.ca](mailto:maureen.nummelin@uwaterloo.ca).

Thank you for your participation.

Sincerely,

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