

HOW INVOLVED IS INVOLVED FATHERING?

An Exploration of the Contemporary Culture of Fatherhood

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While popular cultural representations portray the “new father” of the past two decades as more involved, more nurturing, and capable of coparenting, many argue that actual fathering conduct has not kept pace. Others, however, question the extent to which the culture of fatherhood does indeed support involved fathering and, if so, what this involvement entails. This study aims to contribute to the exploration of the culture of fatherhood through an analysis of a yearlong Canadian newspaper series dedicated to family issues. Findings suggest that through representations of parental guilt, parental responsibility, work–family balance issues, and hegemonic masculinity, mothers continue to be positioned as primary parents. Support for father involvement, to the extent that it exists, occurs within the framework of fathers as part-time, secondary parents whose relationship with children remains less important than mothers’.

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Cultural representations of fatherhood, both past and present, have been the focus of numerous studies in sociology and history. Although the extent to which father involvement and nurturing have been portrayed as important to children and families in popular culture has varied over the course of the twentieth century, several researchers suggest that there has been a notable shift in the culture of fatherhood since the

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early 1980s. This shift has entailed higher expectations for father involvement in the care of young children. The “new fathers” of today are ideally more nurturing, develop closer emotional relationships with their children, and share the joys and work of caregiving with mothers.

There is academic debate around the extent to which cultural expectations in this regard match the actual conduct of fathers. Although there are indications that fathers are spending more time with their children than they did 30 years ago, their involvement in caregiving, especially with young children, is still a fraction of that undertaken by mothers. There are a number of complex and interrelated reasons why this happens, including policy shortcomings, workplace culture, and the wage gap between men and women. The persistence of many traditional cultural understandings of motherhood and fatherhood also figure into this mix, and there are a growing number of recent researchers who are questioning the extent to which the culture of fatherhood itself has indeed changed and are examining this culture more closely.

The issues raised in these debates point to the complex connections between the cultural understandings of fatherhood, the possibilities afforded by policy in this area, and actual fathering behavior or, in more traditional sociological terms, between agency, structure, and ideology. Cultural representations both reflect and shape taken-for-granted assumptions about the role of fathering, and although social change evolves through interactions between structure, agency, and ideology, cultural understandings and expectations play a key role in defining the boundaries of the plausible, the possible, and the acceptable. We are interested here in contributing to the exploration of the contemporary culture of fatherhood and examining more closely the taken-for-granted understandings that are part of that culture through an analysis of the cultural representations of fatherhood evident in a yearlong Canadian newspaper (the *Globe and Mail*) series aimed at addressing issues facing contemporary parents.

The “New Father,” Culture versus Conduct

Several researchers have noted the emergence of a cultural shift in expectations surrounding fathering, most notable since the 1980s and driven, in part, by movement of mothers into the labor force (Coltrane 1995; LaRossa 1988; Lupton and Barclay 1997; Pleck 1987; Ranson 2001; Weiss 1999). Compared to fathers in the 1950s to 1970s, who are presented as occupying a more distant breadwinning role, the new father of the 1980s and beyond, as represented in advice literature, television, film,

advertising, magazines, and news reports, is more emotionally involved, more nurturing, and more committed to spending time with his children, during infancy and beyond. This has led researchers to suggest that we are "moving toward a social ideal of father as coparent" (Craig 2006, 261). Indeed, new fathers are presented as being just as capable as mothers with regard to child rearing, and it has become common in advice literature during and after the 1980s to address "parents" rather than "mothers" (Sunderland 2006).

LaRossa (1988) is one of several researchers to have pointed out an apparent disconnect between the culture and conduct of fatherhood. He asserts that the culture of fatherhood, which encompasses a society's values, norms, and beliefs, must be distinguished from the conduct or actual practices of fathers and that indeed American fatherhood appears to have undergone more changes in culture than in conduct. For this reason, the general public, he suggests, may conceive of fathers as being more involved and nurturing than they truly are. Subsequent research has certainly borne out the fact that although the conduct of fathers has changed somewhat, it is still mothers who bear the vast majority of responsibility for young children (Craig 2006; Fox 2001a, 2001b; Ranson 2001; Singley and Hynes 2005).

Studies that examine the amount of time fathers in dual-earner families spend with their children reveal that fathers spend about two-thirds as much time with preschool children as mothers even when both parents work full-time (Silver 2000). Furthermore, fathers' time with children is more dominated by play and leisure, while mothers' time is more dominated by caretaking tasks, and fathers' time with children is more likely than mothers' to be in the presence of the other spouse (Craig 2006; Silver 2000). Similarly, while studies of parental leave statistics indicate that fathers are spending more time than in the past on the care and nurture of infants, these gains are modest. Following the extension of Canadian paid parental leave benefits in 2000, from 15 to 35 weeks, the proportion of fathers who claimed, or planned to claim, paid parental benefits to care for infants tripled from 3 percent to 10 percent (Statistics Canada 2003). In 2005, the percentage of mothers with spouses claiming or intending to claim benefits reached 14.2 percent (Statistics Canada 2006). Even when fathers do share parental leave benefits, however, they take less than half the time taken by mothers (Canada Employment Insurance Commission 2006). There are a number of reasons for this imbalance, which include family policies and workplace cultures that discourage men from taking on parenting responsibilities, the gender gap in earnings and earnings

potential, and persistent social expectations that fathers have greater responsibility for breadwinning and mothers for caregiving (Fox 2001a, 2001b; Lupton and Barclay 1997; Silverstein 1996).

How Much Has the Culture of Fatherhood Really Changed?

Rather than participating in the culture versus conduct analysis described above, there is a growing body of research that challenges the extent to which the culture of fatherhood itself has changed. When media portrayals and advice literature are subject to content and discourse analyses, superficial references to “new fathers” and “parents” are often undermined by images and text that position fathers as part-time, secondary, less competent parents with fewer parenting responsibilities and greater breadwinning responsibilities than mothers (Coltrane and Allan 1994; Kaufman 1999; Lupton and Barclay 1997; Sunderland 2000, 2006). Kaufman (1999), for instance, in an analysis of American commercials, finds that men are less likely than women to be shown with children, and those men who are pictured with children usually also have a woman present, suggesting that men are not expected to take on parenting duties alone. Mothers and fathers also appear in commercials for different types of products. While men are far more likely than women to appear in commercials for electronics and life insurance, they are almost never shown in commercials for children’s medicine (Kaufman 1999). In general, a father usually appears as the less knowledgeable parent, often in need of instructions from the mother if he is shown engaged in domestic tasks. In food and cleaning product commercials, men are often portrayed as similar to children, with both often shown being served by the mother figure or passively watching her cook and clean. Eating with children is one activity men are more likely to be involved in than women are. These commercials, however, are likely to be for breakfasts, desserts, and fast food, therefore promoting father involvement in a way that requires very little cooking or real work. Kaufman concludes that “while they appear to be involved family men, . . . those that are involved need not know how to cook or clean or care for a sick child” (1999, 456).

Historians and social scientists who have analyzed media and advice literature throughout the twentieth century also note that the image of fatherhood has fluctuated throughout the century and cannot be said to have evolved in a gradual, linear fashion from more distant and authoritarian to more involved and nurturing (Coltrane and Allan 1994; Griswold 1993; LaRossa 1997). These authors argue that intertwined throughout the

century with understandings of fatherhood as both distant and involved are other traditional representations of fathers as disciplinarians, sex role models, providers, playmates, and pals.

In a recent discourse analysis of parentcraft texts published in the 1990s, Sunderland (2000) found many of the same tendencies in the depiction of fathers and their roles. The dominant discourse surrounding fatherhood in these texts is one of "part-time father/mother as main parent," a notion that supports traditional divisions of labor and the idea of an innate mother-child bond. The word "help" is often used in relation to fathers, implying that primary responsibility for the job of parenting belongs to someone else. Sunderland notes that authors seldom mention exactly whom the father is helping, because it is taken for granted that the mother is doing the bulk of the work. In articles on expressing breast milk to bottle feed to a baby, fathers are described as able to participate "if [they] would like to" (Sunderland 2000, 259), again framing involvement as an elective exercise rather than an expectation. Texts directed at fathers frequently inform fathers that parenting is important, that they should be involved, and that "babies can be fun" (Sunderland 2000, 262). By contrast, mothers are never told that being involved is important, because it is understood that they already know this.

In a later analysis of parenting magazines, Sunderland (2006) notes that while these magazines are now ostensibly aimed at parents rather than mothers, they do in fact continue to predominantly represent and address mothers. Among other things, Sunderland examines whose images and voices are represented, the extent to which the textual absences or backgrounding occurs, and the extent to which social actors are portrayed in an active or passive way. She found that fathers are not being fully addressed, nor do the magazines explicitly articulate or discuss the issue of shared parenting. She concludes that rather than practice lagging behind culture, the parenting magazines themselves may in fact be lagging behind fathers' actual parenting practices.

The extent to which the culture of fatherhood has indeed changed is an important question. Government policy and educational efforts, workplace culture and practice, individual behavior and identity, and taken-for-granted cultural understandings are intimately interconnected. We aim to contribute to this discussion with an examination of the degree to which a changing culture of fatherhood, and/or more traditional images of fatherhood, is evident in a yearlong Canadian newspaper series devoted to family issues. We ask, What culture of fatherhood is drawn on and (re)produced in this series?

Method

This study involves a critical analysis of the discourse surrounding fathering in the *Globe and Mail* series "Family Matters," which ran from September 1999 to June 2000. Making use of both manifest and latent content analysis techniques, we examine underlying assumptions and the ways in which issues are framed through image, metaphor, exclusion, and dichotomy (Feldman 1995; Sunderland 2006). It is important to note that the goal of this study is not to analyze the attitudes and behavior of the people being interviewed to generalize to the attitudes and behavior of a larger population of Canadians. Rather, our interest is directed to the ways questions are asked and issues are framed and on which aspects of the interviews reporters chose to focus attention. We are interested in what assumptions are being made in this process, what is not being asked or said, and why what parents have to say is presumed to make sense and strike a chord with readers. Such assumptions are indicative of taken-for-granted understandings of fatherhood and thus speak to the collective subjectivity that is part of the culture of fatherhood.

The material examined here consists of 54 articles making up the "Family Matters" series that ran daily for the first week of the series and weekly thereafter from September 11, 1999, to June 2, 2000. The *Globe and Mail* bills itself as Canada's national newspaper. It has an average daily readership of about 1.3 million Canadians from across the country and is aimed at readership with above average education and income (Canadian NewsWire 2007). The "Family Matters" series was launched at a time when the Canadian federal government was promoting a "National Children's Agenda" and extending paid benefits for parental leave and provincial governments were exploring new ways to invest in children through the promotion of early childhood development. Given the seemingly newfound political interest in children and families, the paper decided that a series focusing on the contemporary reality of Canadian families was timely. In the words of Executive Editor Edward Greenspon (1999, A7), "We decided that this was so important that we would make an unprecedented editorial commitment to probing the state of the Canadian family: the joys and anxieties of the newborn child and newborn parent; the marvels of early childhood; the upsets of adolescence; the travails of teenagers. And, of course, the roller-coaster ride of hope and fear that is being a parent. We would devote a year to the task." Reporters recruited families in three middle-class, professional neighborhoods in Calgary, Montreal, and Toronto, who agreed to be interviewed and followed over the course of the series. The journalists also relied on expert

opinion and the results of a concurrent commissioned survey of Canadians on family issues in their composition of the stories.

That the families chosen to represent Canadian families were almost exclusively middle class, highly educated, and professional is reflective of the *Globe's* readership. It is also the group with whom, researchers have suggested, the image of the new involved father would carry the most weight, given that this image is based on middle-class ideals (LaRossa 1988; Ranson 2001). One would expect, then, that this series, given its mandate to explore the lives of parents and its emphasis on portrayals of middle-class parenting, would be a particularly good site to study the extent to which the new father is reflected in the contemporary culture of fatherhood.

Actual analysis of the data involved taking notes and creating synopses for each article that outlined how issues are framed, whose images and voices are represented, the extent to which textual absences or backgrounding occurred, and what underlying assumptions are being drawn on to understand the text as presented. This stage of analysis was carried out by both authors independently. Using modified grounded theory techniques and moving back and forth from synopses to original textual material, we coded themes and patterns that emerged in the notes and synopses. While looking for, and noting, particular new and traditional constructions of fatherhood found in previous studies, we also remained open to new understandings that emerged from the text. It is the patterns and themes that emerged through the analysis that we detail below.

Who Is Being Addressed and Represented?

Sunderland (2006) notes in her analysis of parenting magazines that despite lip service to "parents," it is evident that the magazines are still largely addressed to, and representative of, mothers. We found a similar pattern in this study. The *Globe and Mail* series did feature an article devoted to "the new, improved dads" (Fine 1999b); an article titled "A Well-Kept Child-Care Secret," which explored the experiences of a stay-at-home father (Mitchell 2000c); and a short article on fathers who chose to put children ahead of careers, at least for a time (Fine and Picard 2000). Fathers who are primary caregivers or attempting to share parenting are mentioned and incorporated in several other articles as well. Overall, however, fathers receive far less attention than mothers in the series. Fathers are mentioned, quoted, described, and pictured much less than mothers, and in most cases, fathers who take primary responsibility for their children are positioned as exceptional.

In the images accompanying the stories, there are 35 pictures of mothers and 16 pictures of fathers. Most of the fathers are pictured in company of mothers, while this is not the case with mothers. Breaking this down further, there are 7 pictures of mothers alone or in company of other mothers; 14 pictures of mothers with children; 9 pictures of mothers, fathers, and children together; no pictures of fathers alone or in the company of other fathers; and 7 pictures of fathers with children. While there is some overlap in the types of activities in which mothers and fathers are shown engaging with their children, and both mothers and fathers are depicted playing with their children, a much greater percentage of the mother–children photos feature daily caregiving activities such as feeding, cooking, watching over, and tending to cuts and bruises.

Mothers' voices also dominate the text. Although the word "parent" appears in many articles and article titles, it is mothers who are typically portrayed and quoted in the stories. Many articles make little or no mention of fathers at all. A good example of this can be found in the article titled "When Parenting Becomes Too Intense: This Generation of Mothers and Fathers Finds It Difficult Not to Program Their Children's Lives, but There Has to Be a Limit" (Mitchell 2000d). Here it is mothers who voice their opinions on the issue and discuss the stresses involved in choosing the right number and type of activities for their children. The only father portrayed is the expert on whose book the article is based. Similarly, in "Have Yourself a Frantic Little Christmas: Parents Just Don't Have Enough Time to Do All the Things They Want To in the Days Leading Up to the Big Day" (Mitchell 1999c), there is not a single example of a father being busy or stressed.

Also similar to Sunderland's (2006) findings is the fact that when fathers are mentioned in articles in this series, they often form part of the background and are not portrayed as active subjects. They are mentioned or described by mothers or reporters, rather than speaking for themselves. The following quote from Fine (2000a, A17) is typical of this: "Ms. MacDonald, a stay-at-home mom, does chores that might otherwise have been done by her husband so that he is free to play with his son when he comes home. 'He has to spend at least two hours a day with Andrew. That's for his benefit and Andrew's benefit. They're heavily bonded together. If Chris doesn't come home, Andrew cries.'" The portrayal of fathers as passive rather than active subjects draws on and contributes to cultural understandings of fathers as secondary parents. In this quote, furthermore, the mother is in fact taking responsibility to organize father–son bonding time to further the development of that relationship. That this

additional maternal responsibility is described matter-of-factly and not questioned by the writer also speaks to the degree to which understandings of the mother as the naturally more responsible parent are culturally embedded.

All of these factors contribute to the overrepresentation of mothers in the articles and to the portrayal of fathers as secondary rather than primary parents. There are also notable patterns in the assumptions made about the differing responsibilities and experiences of mothers and fathers. These too speak to the culture of fatherhood that is both drawn on and represented in this series. We have grouped these observations into three categories: parental worry, guilt, and responsibility; stress related to work–family balance; and connections between fatherhood and masculinity.

Worry, Guilt, and Responsibility

Articles in the series pay ample attention to the anxiety and guilt contemporary parents feel as they attempt to do their best by their children in a time of rising parental expectations and decreasing family time. The opening article is titled “The Canadian Family Is in the Throes of Profound Change: From One End of the Country to the Other, Anxious Parents Are Worried That They May Be Failing Their Children” (Mitchell 1999b). Readers are told in another article that “parents are consumed with worry over whether they are pushing their children too hard or not hard enough” (Mitchell 1999a). There are also several stories that emphasize “the enormous distress among parents” (Mitchell 1999e) who worry about the effect that time and energy spent on careers has on their children.

Although it is parents who are said to experience this anxiety and guilt, it is almost exclusively mothers who are provided as examples and quoted in these stories. As one mother notes, “there are days when I say I am a terrible mother, I’m not fit for this. . . . I worry, did I do the right thing? Am I being the right kind of mother for them?” (Mitchell 1999b). In contrast, a father who is often separated from his children because of his political career, in another story (McIlroy 1999), is described as regretting the time he misses with his wife and child, but not as feeling guilty about it. Indeed he is quoted describing what he is missing, “the rhythm of the family, the triumphs, the tragedies,” not what his child is missing because he is not there.

The reliance on mothers as examples in this case is certainly in line with previous empirical research that finds that mothers feel much more anxiety and guilt about caregiving issues than fathers do (Doucet 2004a; Fox 2001a, 2001b). This disparity is occasionally acknowledged in the

series. In the story quoted above about anxious parents, we also hear that “Mr. Homer is more comfortable about his role. . . . Ask him whether he feels guilty about his parenting skills and he asks you to explain what you mean” (Mitchell 1999b). The same article points out the fact that mothers score higher in polls measuring stress levels than fathers do. The disparity itself, however, is not analyzed or explored in terms of what it means for shared parenting. The overall effect of presenting anxiety and guilt as a parental issue (“Now both women and men are haunted by a different refrain: Am I doing enough for my children?”), but providing mothers’ voices and experiences as the predominant examples, is to both gloss over this disparity and at the same time present it as a taken-for-granted reality (Mitchell 1999d).

Related to this gendered anxiety is the fact that despite greater involvement of fathers in child care and domestic work during the past couple of decades, research shows that mothers continue to take major responsibility for organizing, planning, and overseeing family life (Doucet 2004a). The assumption that mothers bear this domestic responsibility is evident in many ways and rarely challenged throughout this series of articles. In an article, for instance, about the importance and demise of the family dinner (Fine 2000b), the reporter visits several families during the dinner hour to discuss the issue. Fathers are at home in a couple of cases when the reporter comes to visit; they are talked about in the article, and a father is pictured in the photo that accompanies the article. However, the articles pay the majority of attention to mothers, and only mothers are quoted describing the importance of organizing family mealtimes, saying such things as eating together “is nourishment for the soul,” and “there is something about having a family dinner that makes a difference.”

In articles throughout the series, mothers are depicted in similar ways as being more concerned about, and working to foster, community involvement and neighborhood ties (Mitchell 2000a, 2000e); taking responsibility for organizing father-child play time (Fine 2000a); worrying about and tending to children’s emotional needs after divorce (Fine 1999d, 2000d); preparing for Christmas (Mitchell 1999c); and organizing space for couple time so that marriages do not suffer (Fine 1999a). In these articles, mothers are quoted much more often as worrying about these responsibilities and are presented as the ones taking action to deal with them. Fathers are placed in the background; the lack of father concern or action in this regard is not challenged, and many questions that could be asked about fathers’ roles in families go unraised. In the article titled “Don’t Forget to Be a Couple” (Fine 1999a), for instance, the writer identifies the problem as the time that caring for young children takes

away from couple time. The time spent on paid employment is not raised as an issue. Given the problem identified, it is mothers, who are presumed to be primary caregivers, who receive more attention. It is mothers who have to remind themselves to “carve out a space” and speak of ignoring their husbands. The husbands in this article are presented as participating in child care to the extent that they can given their employment responsibilities and as being accepting of the fact that children take time away from couple time. Readers are told that Mr. Herrmann, for instance, told his wife, “Don’t worry, the kids need you more than I do right now.” What the reporter does not ask in this article is to what extent the children need their father and whether the wife needs her husband for things other than “respite” from the children.

Work–Family Balance and Stress

The issue of how to manage time and balance both work and family responsibilities for two-career couples is, not surprisingly, a major focus in this series. Responsibility for finding the balance, and dealing with its consequences, is portrayed as belonging to mothers much more than fathers. It is for the most part women who have to struggle with whether to put careers on hold in this series and women who are described and quoted expressing guilt over the time their jobs take away from their children. One could argue that the articles are simply reflecting the reality of women’s lives, and indeed reporters do occasionally question the fairness of this situation. There is a short article on the workplace discrimination faced by pregnant women (Picard 2000a). And in the final article of the series, when some mothers are quoted describing why they have chosen to put children ahead of career at this point, the author asks, “But why should it be the women—again—who must wait? What of their husbands?” (Fine 2000e). The answer to this rhetorical question, however, is a superficial one: “A closer look finds that they too have changed.” And a close analysis of the articles as a whole finds that there are many subtle ways in which the stories both reflect and reinforce the assumption that issues of work–family balance are more of a mother’s than a father’s responsibility.

In the first place, employment is often framed in the articles as a (difficult) “choice” for women and an assumed responsibility for men. Readers are told, for instance, in one September 14 article that “like many other women [this mother] wonders if she should bother to keep her job” (Picard 1999). There are articles on “the new stay-at-home moms” (Fine 1999c, 2000e) who are well-educated women “choosing to live like their own mothers—at least for a few years” and an article titled “A Mother’s

Dilemma: Children or Jobs” (Picard 2000b). Men, on the other hand, are often absent in the articles without explanation, leaving readers to assume that the father is at work when the interview is taking place. Fathers are often talked about in the context of breadwinning, and fathers’ time with children is often assumed to fit in naturally around employment responsibilities. One father, for example, is favorably described as being “so committed to spending time with his kids that he often leaves for work as early as 5:30 a.m.—and even showers there—so he can be home for dinner and bedtime” (Mitchell 1999b). Men are described as supportive husbands in the series when they support their partners’ choices to work or stay home (Fine 1999c). Indeed, both paid child care and fathers who assume some child care duties are described as allowing and “enabling” women to “dedicate time and energy” to careers (Mitchell 1999d, 2000c; Picard 1999, 2000b). There is no discussion of how involved mothers allow men to pursue their careers (or greater involvement with their children), and having “the best of both worlds,” a career and children, is a goal that women alone are presented as striving for, but often not finding (Fine 1999c, 2000e; Mitchell 2000b; Picard 2000b).

Finally, the whole issue of whether women should work is raised repeatedly in the series. Readers are told that the parental anxiety that surrounds the issue of work–family balance exists because Canadians are “utterly torn over what they believe is best for women and [what is best for] families” (Mitchell 1999b). Family policy debates in government are also presented as revolving around “dueling philosophies about whether women ought to be at home . . . or at work” (Freeman 1999). The *Globe and Mail* also commissioned a survey of Canadians on family issues to accompany the series, and reports on specific responses accompany many of the articles. Some of the survey questions asked (and not asked) also belie the assumption that children need mothers more than they need fathers and that women are the ones who must struggle with the guilt that accompanies employment. A survey item, for instance, that asked respondents to agree or disagree with the statement, “An employed mother can establish just as warm and secure a relationship with her children as a mother who does not work for pay” (Mitchell 1999b), is not matched at any point with questions about the importance of fathers’ relationships with children and how employment might get in the way of this. And in an article titled “When Mom Decides to Get a Job,” readers are invited to post answers to the question, “What does a family gain/lose when the mother works?” on the *Globe and Mail* Web site (Mitchell 1999f). In this article, the father is described as working about 60 hours per week and

traveling with his job, yet what his children may lose because of his substantial time away is never considered.

Thus, by framing employment as a choice for women but not for men, repeatedly raising the issue of whether women should work, and questioning the impact of women's (but not men's) work on child well-being, the series reinforces the assumption that career sacrifices and child care responsibilities are women's issues. Within this framework, it follows that responsibility for creating family time and balancing work and family falls more to mothers than fathers.

Fatherhood and Masculinity

While it is true that cultural understandings of both fatherhood and masculinity are multiple, fluid, and changing (Lupton and Barclay 1997), it is also the case that involved fathering, especially of young children, continues to clash with hegemonic cultural ideals of masculinity (Coltrane 1994; Connell 2000; Doucet 2004a, 2004b, 2006). As Doucet (2004a, 104) notes in her study of fathers who are primary caregivers, these men's stories challenge "the ways in which practices, identities, and ideologies of caring remain strongly associated with femininity." The unease with which cultural understandings of the new involved father coexist with (albeit changing) ideals of masculinity was very much evident in the series of articles examined here.

Angst around issues of masculinity is most explicitly evident in articles that focus directly on "new involved fathers" and stay-at-home dads (Fine 1999b, 2000c; Fine and Picard 2000; McIlroy 1999; Mitchell 2000c). Traditionally masculine characteristics of fathers in terms of their activities and interests are often woven into articles that describe warm, caring, and involved fathers. Fathers' breadwinning activities are highlighted, and fathers are described or pictured as roughhousing with their children, coaching sports teams, and being involved in political issues. The novelty of fathers who are primary caregivers is also emphasized in articles that describe stay-at-home fathers. They are described as forging new ground and rejecting traditional definitions of masculinity and femininity. As one article notes, this father "knows all about the expectations on him as a man . . . and [he] rejects them as part of a web of 'cultural tyrannies' society imposes on men and women" (Fine and Picard 2000). At the same time, however, there is also an emphasis on the very masculine characteristics that these men possess. The father described above is also said to believe "that his life is elastic enough that he can be a former cornerback in high-school football and also . . . one of the best cooks and bakers on his

street” (Fine and Picard 2000). Another stay-at-home father is described as not fitting the stereotypes of the stay-at-home dad given that he is “tall . . . husky . . . has muscles on his muscles” and is a “self-confessed jock” (Mitchell 2000c). The article also observes that being a stay-at-home father did not mean he “stopped earning money either”; he runs a business out of his home while he cares for his daughters. That the masculinity of involved fathers needs emphasis in these articles points, on one level, to the acceptance of gendered cultural understandings of caregiving. That masculinity must be affirmed is a nod to the fact that warm, loving, and involved parenting and primary caregiving are still considered feminine. Rather than challenging this assumption, the articles can be read as reinforcing it. It is presented as good news in these stories that men can be both traditionally masculine and involved fathers. Readers are reassured that the two can be combined in ways that do not involve redefining what it means to be a man.

Also connected to cultural ideals of masculinity is the notable lack of emphasis on the importance of fathers’ connection to, and time spent with, infants and young children. Mothers have long been represented in culture and expert discourse as “naturally” better suited than fathers to care for and bond with infants, a position that places the care of infants outside of the realm of hegemonic masculinity (Ranson 1999; Wall 2001). As greater emphasis has been placed by child development researchers and child-rearing advisors throughout the twentieth century on the importance of children’s early experiences for their later emotional, psychological, and cognitive outcomes, mothers’ responsibilities in this regard have expanded accordingly (Hays 1996; Lynch 2005; Nadesan 2002; Wall 2004, 2005). Current child-rearing advice emphasizes the importance of parental bonding and attachment and of ample one-on-one time spent engaging with, playing with, and teaching children during their preschool years. This emphasis on the increasing intensity of parenting, and the importance of one-on-one time spent with children in their early years, is echoed in the series, but there is little evidence that fathers are seen as playing an important role in this respect. As we have already demonstrated, it is overwhelmingly mothers who are described as worrying about children’s development, the amount of time spent with children, and whether they may be guilty of hyperparenting in their efforts to meet their children’s developmental needs. Even in the articles wherein single-parent, stay-at-home dads and/or highly involved fathers are described, there is an absence of talk about the importance of attachment, bonding, and meeting emotional or developmental needs. The assumption that it is mothers in particular with whom young children need to spend time is also reinforced

by framing the problems that middle-class contemporary families face as arising, in large part, from the decision of mothers to pursue careers. "The sticking point," readers are told, "is Canadians' inability to reconcile what they think is best for women in society with what they think is best for children. Bombarded with new information about the importance of proper neural development in the first few years of a child's life, yet committed to the ideal of economic independence for women, Canadians are floundering" (Mitchell 1999b). Fathers do not enter the equation in determining what is best for children in such a framing, and the importance of father involvement in the lives of young children does not emerge as an issue.

Conclusion: The Culture of Fatherhood in the Series

How can the culture of fatherhood that was both drawn on and reflected in the "Family Matters" series best be described? In the November 12 article dedicated to describing "new improved" dads, the author of the article suggests that what is true of all of the fathers described in the series, regardless of other factors (like the amount of time they spent with their families or the types of activities they engaged in with them), is that they share "a commitment to being a loving, involved presence in their children's lives" (Fine 1999b). The expectations surrounding this commitment, however, are obviously very different for fathers than they are for mothers. As Craig (2006) notes in her analysis of child care time and activities, fathers' caring does not necessarily equate with fathers' sharing. The expectation that fathers share is not a part of the culture of fatherhood represented here. Instead, this study contributes to a growing body of research that questions the extent to which the current culture of fatherhood does indeed support involved and nurturing fathering. Rather than the conduct of fathers' lagging behind cultural expectations, this study supports the contention that cultural expectations are in fact in line with the reality of mothers as primary caregivers, a reality that has direct links to gender imbalance in the family and workplace.

In this series of articles, it is mothers who are presented as worrying about children's emotional and cognitive well-being, organizing family time, and struggling with issues of work-family balance and the guilt that results from time spent away from children. Fathers are positioned as part-time or secondary parents whose parental responsibilities fit around their employment responsibilities. They are presented predominantly as workers first and parents second, and their involvement in day-to-day caregiving tasks or emotional care, while admirable when it occurs, is not necessarily

expected, nor is it considered essential to healthy development of their children. Involved and committed fathers in this series need not have made career sacrifices, and the effect of long hours spent working away from home on their relationships with their children or on their children's well-being is not of concern. That the traditional masculinity of fathers is positively emphasized in articles describing involved fathers also speaks to the extent to which the care and nurture of young children continues to clash with cultural ideals of hegemonic masculinity.

Support for father involvement, to the extent that it exists in this series, occurs within the framework of fathers as secondary parents whose primary responsibilities remain in the public sphere. The culture of fatherhood reflected here is not one that seriously challenges individual fathers to spend more time caring for young children or one that provides much support to those fathers who wish to be fully involved in caring for their children. Nor does it present a challenge to workplace cultures that discourage fathers from taking family leave, despite legislation that allows it. Social change in this area, as in others, occurs as a result of complex interactions between individual behavior, social policies, and cultural understandings. As Sharon Hays (1996, 176-77) points out, "transforming child rearing into shared work among social equals" requires changes at the levels of policy, ideology, and actual paternal behavior, and each of these reinforces the others. Given this, it makes sense that public educational efforts aimed at changing taken-for-granted understandings and promoting the importance of both maternal and paternal responsibility for the care of young children could contribute to some degree to greater equality in both the family and the workplace, as could the slowly changing conduct of fathers themselves and shifting cultural understandings of masculinity and femininity. To the extent that the cultural assumptions detailed in this study are representative of the broader culture of fatherhood in North America though, what is clear is that fathering behavior is not simply lagging behind social expectations; rather, these expectations themselves have a long way to go before they can be said to support fully involved fathering and shared parenting.

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