



What  
supports  
**engaged**  
fathering?

**Employment and  
Family Supports**

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December, 2008



# WHAT SUPPORTS ENGAGED FATHERING?

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This paper was commissioned by the Father Involvement Research Alliance (FIRA) based at the University of Guelph. Funding support for FIRA and this paper was provided through a Community University Research Alliance grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and through additional support from the Public Health Agency of Canada.

The intent of this paper is to promote informed dialogue and debate. The views expressed are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of FIRA or of other researchers/collaborators associated with FIRA. Communications can be addressed to the author.

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### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Public policy attention is increasingly focused on labour market attachment, which is argued to be essential for our competitiveness in a global economy. This leaves others clamouring for similar attention directed to social reproduction, the day to day activities necessary to caring for ourselves and dependent others amidst the crush of competing labour market demands. This is often described as the cash/care nexus, where cash by way of employment income competes with our care needs and responsibilities (Bezanson, 2006; Hearn, 2002; Hobson and Morgan, 2002). The role of fathers in this cash/care nexus is of increasing interest.

“Engaged” or “involved” fathering has been shown to have multiple types of effects on families and this, combined with women’s rates of labour market participation, has forged new considerations about the appropriate role for fathers and the appropriate levels of social policy oriented to supporting more engaged fathering. This paper focuses on Canadian fathers as “subjects of social policy” (Hobson and Morgan, 2002). Policies such as maternity, paternity and parental leave arrangements, employment standards, childcare provisions and cash and in-kind supports to families are revealing of a state’s expressed ideology with respect to families and the expected roles of fathers. Canada’s use of gender-neutral language in parental leave policies is an illustration of the ideology that underlies existing policy. Perhaps simply by offering a “choice” to families, gender neutrality makes father involvement a matter of negotiation at the level of the family rather than a matter of state interest. This contrasts sharply with Quebec policy, which offers a markedly different set of family support policies. Thus analyses of these differing policy agendas are enabled.

Employers too play key roles in supporting work/family balance through workplace provisions such as lieu time, flexible hours, family sick time, etc. These provisions, even when offered, need analysis to determine their take-up and their impacts on fathers and families.

This paper examines current Canadian social policy provisions and surveys the standards of practice or “take-up” for policy provisions supporting men’s fathering roles. Data from Sweden and other comparator states establish a context for an examination of Canadian policy and whether and how it might move beyond simple gender neutrality to support men in their roles as fathers.

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The paper explicates the following thesis: that policy related to the labour market, such as paternity and parental leave, childcare and employment standards legislation regulating hours of work and leave provisions, all contribute to father involvement. However, such policies exist within a broader ideological and political context which has much to do with both how far these policy provisions extend and, even more fundamentally, with whether they really help to engage fathers. In short, this paper suggests that a combination of social norms supporting gender equality and well-placed, effective public policy will both be necessary to more engaged fathering.

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We have examined father involvement policy in each of Sweden, Germany, the U.S. and Canada. We have noted that Canadian public policy provisions fall between the U.S. and Sweden and Germany, the latter two countries having much more extensive provisions for parental leave, increased flexibility about how such leaves may be utilized, stronger systems of public and subsidized childcare and an employment environment which continues to be more closely regulated. In Canada, by contrast, outside of Quebec, we have no national childcare provision and the paltriest of cash benefits in lieu of childcare are paid to parents of young children. Where subsidized and licensed daycares do exist, they are always wait-listed and have an inadequate amount of subsidy dollars available to meet demand. Additionally, the Canadian labour market is increasingly without the regulation of employment standards legislation as the precarious labour market – consisting of unregulated part-time and casual workers – grows alongside a decline in the numbers of people in a standard (and hence regulated) employment relationship. Our strong Employment Insurance parental leave program does afford paid leave to many working Canadians and is a strong element of the policy system that might enable more involved fathering. Yet it too suffers from restricted eligibility, leaving out the growing number of non-standard workers and the self-employed. It is a gender-neutral provision too, so that while men may choose to take parental leave, the system provides no additional supports for them to do so. Recent comparisons between fathers' use of paid parental leave in and outside of Quebec provide important insights into the effects of alternative social policy approaches in this area.

Beyond public policies, “additional supports” warrant further scrutiny. We have discussed, pointed to and referenced a number of factors that may be compounding in the environment in which men make decisions about their roles as fathers. First, do they make decisions, or do they simply take up the scripts of hegemonic masculinity that are everywhere around them?

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These scripts are shaped by our social norms: the behaviours and attitudes that are constructed through processes of social reproduction. Sweden is alone, among the countries examined, in articulating a policy goal that directly challenges these normative social roles, in contrast to the more passive “enabling” of most policy. The Swedish government campaign was directed at fathers and would-be fathers (and their female partners) to cause them to reconsider the social expectations of fathers. Very pragmatically, training programs for prospective fathers accompanied the media campaign, followed by strong policy provisions that would provide men with few reasons not to choose to take paternity leave. In many respects the Swedish policy initiative has been successful, with 85 per cent of Swedish fathers taking leaves. And we know from other research (Nepomnyaschy and Waldfogel, 2007; Haas and Hwang, 2005; Wisensale, 2001; Hwang and Lamb, 1997; Lamb, 1997) that, having taken care of their children at an early age, fathers may be more likely to continue to be more involved with their children at a later age.

So, while Sweden clearly tried through policy to shift the public discourse on fathering, other recent research points to several other factors not addressed in Sweden or elsewhere, which likely affect men’s willingness to take up new and more engaged fathering roles.

First, and perhaps most importantly, the corporate employment environment has not been re-oriented to support men’s leave-taking and even less their being more involved fathers with stronger commitments to their family life. Work/family balance remains a significant workplace issue, a fact attested to by articles on the subject published in the past few years in journals of business, sociology, social policy, and family studies (Daly and Hawkins, 2005; Palkovitz and Daly, 2004; Duxbury and Higgins, 2003; Evans, 2002). These articles decry the blurring of boundaries between work and family and claim either that the attention to work-family conflict is due to the increase in the number of women in the labour market or from a gendered lens and argue that, given women’s presence in the labour market, new family-oriented policy responses are in order. Caring for children and elders continues to fall along gender lines and absenteeism as a result of employees taking time off from work to care for family members has a significant economic impact. It is estimated that Canadian organizations lose 2.7 billion dollars each year because of excess work absence from employees “working under conditions of high work-life conflict” (Duxbury, Higgins, and Johnson, 1999, 7.2.4). A potential resolution to this

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conflict will likely occur only when men seek both to engage more as fathers and carers and when their work environment legitimizes their doing so.

A major factor recognized consistently across the literature examined for this policy review is the salience of the father's work environment in impacting on his leave-taking choices (Ferrer and Gagne, 2006; Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2005; Pulkingham and Van Der Gaas, 2004). While leave provisions may be available, a work climate which gives tacit or not-so-tacit messages about family leaves as impeding careers will affect father's and mother's choices about father leave-taking. "The caregiving responsibilities of fathers or same-sex couples may not be recognized because of stereotypes and assumptions about appropriate family structures and so these employees may have difficulty in having their Code-related needs [i.e., right to parental leave] recognized and appropriately dealt with by employers. For example, it may be assumed that fathers will not or should not take parental leave and those who do may be perceived as not being serious about their careers" (Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2005, p. 22).

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The male partner continues across most countries examined to be the higher income earner (Statistics Canada, 2007b; Chronholm, 2002), which adds additional weight to a man's work disruption and the employer's having a negative view of his work "commitment." Sweden once again provides a good exemplar: Sweden's combined media campaign and policy addressed most factors relating to engaging fathers, but did not, by way of either challenge to the prevailing discourse or by fiat, address the resistance to be expected from the work environment if men's primary attachment to the labour market were to shift in favour of, or even to be equal with, that of their family.

A second and perhaps more insidious factor affecting men's more active fathering roles is women's responses to men's parental leave-taking to care for a newborn or newly adopted child. Although there is limited data in this area, women may want to continue to be primary carers in these roles (Statistics Canada, 2005), taking up the same normative scripts that their male partners do with respect to gendered parental roles. While most women want more equality in the day to day care of the home, this may not extend to giving up maternity leave time so that this leave can be taken by a male partner.



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Adaptive policy could address both of the above noted issues, but the policy response would necessarily need to be oriented primarily to supporting families and changing and broadening entrenched gender roles. This is unlikely to be accomplished if family policy remains only an adjunct to labour-market retention policy. The public policy that we have reviewed has been labour-market oriented, with the addition of social goals, and only sometimes have these been specifically directed to fathering rather than more generally to families. As long as fathering practices are an “add-on” to labour-market retention policies or even to gender neutral family policy, they are not likely to be as strong or directive as they might need to be to challenge such deeply embedded social roles and the ideology that underlies them.

Canadian social policy has done little to encourage fathering models other than “father as breadwinner.” Gender neutrality, as has been pointed out by numerous feminist theorists, perpetuates the status quo. Thus, the state is only very minimally engaged in developing the capacity of Canadian men to care for their young children. In fact, more broadly, the state has developed only limited and piecemeal policies that support caring labour.

Men balancing the breadwinner role with a more active caregiver role have the opportunity to model a different notion of citizen that extends beyond the labour force to include the nurture and care of future generations. With these changes in men’s roles come corresponding changes in women’s roles, facilitating perhaps more balance between the private and the public spheres, with men and women able to negotiate equitably their place in each. In a Canadian context, Quebec’s family policy provisions offer a model which, while not new to some of the E.U. nations, offers a challenge nationally and to the other Canadian provinces: to address and prioritize the needs of families amidst the work/family balance crisis, and actively and specifically to encourage fathers to be engaged carers. If we shift from our present policy conservatism, changes of the type discussed here and in the accompanying policy recommendations will be likely to have long-term consequences as they model new social roles.

(Appendix A makes recommendations for future research and Appendix B makes policy recommendations.)

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### Introduction

Public policy attention is increasingly focused on labour market attachment, which is argued to be essential for our competitiveness in a global economy. This leaves others clamouring for similar attention directed to social reproduction, the day to day activities necessary to caring for ourselves and dependent others amidst the crush of competing labour market demands. This is often described as the cash/care nexus, where cash by way of employment income competes with our care needs and responsibilities (Bezanson, 2006; Hearn, 2002; Hobson and Morgan, 2002). The role of fathers in this cash/care nexus is of increasing interest.

In the western world, it was once sufficient for fathers to come home after a work day, spend a few minutes playing with the children and retreat to the couch waiting for dinner to be served and the evening, unburdened, to unfold. Women's steadily increasing engagement in the labour market has challenged this picture as men in dual-earner couples have had to assume more roles in the domestic sphere. Although men do more housework than they used to (Statistics Canada, 2006), their care work has not increased in proportion to that of female partners in meeting the demands of a two-earner family with no full-time caregiver. This is but one impetus for a change in the role of fathers. A second impetus for change in fathering practices emerges from rapidly advancing theory deriving from empirical investigations about parenting and about father engagement itself and its impacts on children and on the father's role in the family.

"Engaged" or "involved" fathering has been shown to have multiple types of effects on families and this, combined with women's rates of labour market participation, has forged new considerations about the appropriate role for fathers and the appropriate levels of social policy oriented to supporting more engaged fathering. This paper focuses on Canadian fathers as "subjects of social policy" (Hobson and Morgan, 2002). Policies such as maternity, paternity and parental leave arrangements, employment standards, childcare provisions and cash and in-kind supports to families are revealing of a state's expressed ideology with respect to families and the expected roles of fathers. Canada's use of gender-neutral language in parental leave policies is an illustration of the ideology that underlies existing policy. Perhaps simply by offering a "choice" to families, gender neutrality makes father involvement a

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matter of negotiation at the level of the family rather than a matter of state interest. This contrasts sharply with Québec policy, which offers a markedly different set of family support policies. Thus, analyses of these differing policy agendas are enabled.

Employers too play key roles in supporting work/family balance through workplace provisions such as lieu time, flexible hours, family sick time, etc. These provisions, even when offered, need analysis to determine their take-up and their impacts on fathers and families. A major factor affecting father involvement remains the strong social expectation that fathers' careers are paramount even in two-earner families. Thus, the availability of provisions to support fathers' caring labour may be insufficient when weighed against these strong social norms, especially when one recognizes that women's increasing labour force roles over more than fifty years have been accompanied by only a minimal shift in their primary responsibility for the domestic sphere.

A word must be said about the diversity of fathers. Within the western context in which this paper is grounded, fathers include racialized men, men from all economic and social classes, resident fathers and those who father from a distance, custodial and non-custodial fathers and fathers who are gay, two-spirited and transgendered. While we wish to acknowledge these multiple types of fathers, the literature focuses more narrowly and most often presumes fathers to be employed in the labour market and to be in heterosexual relationships with the mother of the involved children. Cultural differences in fathering practices are presumed to be negligible if they are acknowledged at all. In other words, the literature on fathering for the most part presumes a white western tradition and this paper is thus constrained except as it advocates further research to acknowledge this diversity. (See Long, 2008.)

This paper examines current Canadian social policy provisions and surveys the standards of practice or "take-up" for policy provisions supporting men's fathering roles. Data from Sweden and other comparator states establish a context for an examination of Canadian policy and whether and how it might move beyond simple gender neutrality to support men in their roles as fathers. The paper explicates the following thesis: that policy related to the labour market, such as paternity and parental leave, childcare and employment standards legislation regulating hours of work and leave provisions, all contribute to father involvement. However, such

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policies exist within a broader ideological and political context which has much to do with both how far these policy provisions extend, and even more fundamentally with whether they really help to engage fathers. In short, this paper suggests that a combination of social norms supporting gender equality *and* well-placed, effective public policy will both be necessary to more engaged fathering.

### Fatherhood and Social Policy

Understanding “fathering” requires a critical, reflexive gaze. Where have our images of fathers come from, what has sustained them and, within them, what makes a “good” father? Fathering, like mothering, is socially constructed (Hobson and Morgan, 2002) and, with respect to role identification, likely continues to come well behind the masculine conceptions of identity associated with paid work (Townsend, 2002). Our images of fathers likely derive from the secondary importance of fatherhood identities and are themselves Eurocentric “stories” that may have little to do with the realities of most Canadian fathers. A particular picture of white, western “dads” often characterizes them as gentle, stern but fair, in charge, “appropriately” playful, but only irregularly primarily responsible for their children.

Two shifts have occurred that necessitate a rigorous consideration of the desired roles of fathers. First, feminist theory and real changes in women’s roles have made male household participation essential. While women’s labour market participation in Canada is edging close to that of men and the household work done by married men is increasing, in 2005, married men still spent almost two hours per day less on housework than did married women (Statistics Canada, 2006). This differential very likely strains the capacities of women and contributes to problems of work-family balance. A significant literature describes this crisis in social reproduction, especially in the face of retreating welfare state benefits which had previously socialized some of these social reproduction roles (Bezanson, 2006; Neysmith, Bezanson and O’Connell, 2005). As caring labour has become again the more singular responsibility of “the family,” men’s participation in the household realm has come under closer scrutiny. Secondly, although we acknowledge fathers’ roles to be socially constructed, we have perhaps inadequately theorized and examined what good fathering looks like, especially in ways that acknowledge the multiple types of Canadian fathers and

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including their wide range of cultural backgrounds. This deficit in the literature is addressed in several recent studies but requires continued focus.

A new and growing literature theorizes the effects of involved fathering as these fathering practices correlate with positive impacts on infant and child welfare (O'Brien, Brandth and Kvande, 2007). A recent study by Nepomnyaschy and Waldfogel (2007) found that among U.S. fathers, those who took more than two weeks of parental leave were more involved with their children nine months later. Theoretically, this may be explained by notions of bonding and developing fathers' comfort and expertise with childcare activities. If fathers bond early with their children and know how to take care of them, it is more likely that they will continue to do so (Hwang and Lamb, 1997; Lamb, 1997; Wisensale, 2001). This is the rationale for the policy focus, in some countries, on paternity leave as a component of the leave provisions for parents immediately following birth or adoption.

There is also increasing evidence of the ongoing value of involved fathering. As numerous studies demonstrate, children's emotional, cognitive and social well-being are positively correlated with active fathering (Gottfried, Gottfried and Bathurst, 2002; Lamb and Lewis, 2004; Tamis-LeMonda and Cabrera, 2002). Theoretically it seems likely as well, that children who see their fathers in these nurturing roles will, themselves, be less likely to hold traditional gender roles. Such views are, of course, factors in whether men take up roles as active fathers (Tanaka and Waldfogel, 2007). Thus, in the construction of social roles, children parented by involved fathers may be more likely to see those roles as normative and later incorporate them into their expectations for their own fathering or that of their partner.

Policy theorists readily argue that research should guide policy, and policy rationalists further argue for detailed analyses of the social problem or issue to be addressed and a full elaboration of the policy options as if policy processes were coherent, rational and able to address complex social issues with a single focus (Lightman, 2003; Teple, 2000). In contrast to these more idealistic theoretical perspectives, our current policy realm reveals policies that affect fathering practices both directly and indirectly, as there is no singular orientation to address or facilitate engaged fathering (Lero, Ashbourne & Whitehead, 2006). Rather, as is usually the case, policy related to fathering derives from a "mixed bag" of social concerns. Perhaps most pressing



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among these goals has been the retention of women in the labour market, which has spawned a variety of parental leave arrangements, some more recently directed specifically to men. Perhaps for this reason, and the earlier cited theory about father-infant bonding, parental leave tends to be the dominant policy thrust in the field of policy options affecting fathering. As we consider policy that supports fathering, we must be conscious that it has been driven by aims other than simply supporting men to be better and more engaged carers in their families.

Feminist theorists continue to argue that the lesser status assigned to women in both social and economic arenas is perpetuated by “men’s reluctance to engage in household work and take equal or greater responsibility for child care...” (Lupton and Barclay, 1997) and by the social structures that produce and reinforce such reluctance. The concept of “hegemonic masculinity” (Hearn, 2002) perhaps defines what is expected of fathers in our society, referring to fathering practices such as being a good financial provider, being physically present in the home, occasionally engaged with the children and reliant on the wife for management of all or most aspects of the domestic sphere (Silverstein, 1996; Townsend, 2002). This hegemonic construction fits well with the images we suggested earlier as congruent with our notions of “good” fathers. We suggest these continue to dominate even as they are being challenged and new and competing discursive constructions are available. As these existing “scripts” so readily enable our adoption of social roles with minimal conscious reflection, hegemonic challenges are inherently difficult, and nowhere is this more evident than with respect to fathering.

Before moving to a detailed policy analysis, it is important to acknowledge the power relations in which we must situate any analysis of men’s and women’s roles. Historically, women were keepers of the private realm, conveniently seen to be ill-suited and ill-equipped to manage the tussle of the marketplace and denied the acknowledgement of personhood and citizenship (Arendt, 1958; Pateman, 1998). Fast forward a little more than a century and women’s involvement in the labour market is an important element of western capitalist growth and their status as workers and as citizens gives some volume to their cries for change in the organization of the family. However, as Cossman and Fudge (2002), Collins (2000), Fraser and Gordon (1994), Lehr (1999) and others have claimed, marriage (and the nuclear family) has been the site of much of women’s oppression and it is through this historical and

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gendered lens that we must, with caution, view employer/state intervention in support of fathering. While engaged and active fathers and carers are highly desirable socially, the roles of women and mothers must not, through such policy, be relegated to positions of less choice and less power.

Social policy has often established the baseline for our expectations of men as breadwinners and caregivers. Hobson and Morgan (2002) support this view, suggesting that, “It is through policy discourse, new laws and practices that the most conscious and purposeful attempts have been made to connect men to fatherhood” (p. 2). Perhaps the state can achieve what millions of female partners have failed to do.

Policy is driven by implicit and explicit values about human relations and human beings and is often directed at encouraging or discouraging particular social behaviours. The use of policy in such a manner presumes that the state acknowledges a collective interest in social behaviour rather than privileging individual interests and also presumes a more interventionist state prepared to shape its citizenry. Esping-Andersen (1990) divided nations into three welfare regime types based on his analysis of a state’s intervention interest and, while now almost 20 years old, his typology warrants a brief summary in the context of thinking about state policy directed at encouraging men to father more actively. *Social Democratic* welfare states (e.g., Sweden) value egalitarianism and universalism while *Liberal* states (e.g., Canada, United States) value individual autonomy and responsibility. *Corporatist* states (Germany, Netherlands, and Spain) ensure institutionalized support of families and individualized benefits, often employing insurance schemes where benefits are related to class and status (Esping-Anderson, 1990; Hobson and Morgan, 2002; Olsen, 2002). In spite of its utility as a classificatory schema, Esping-Anderson’s typology has been much critiqued for its lack of a gender analysis and, as we will later discuss, the schema’s locating of Canada and the U.S. in the same classification may suggest a need for a finer classificatory lens.

Lewis (1992) offers a competing feminist typology, suggesting there to be *Strong Breadwinner States* (e.g., U.K., Ireland) that have a firm dividing line between public and private responsibility and with benefits used to replace male earnings. *Modified Breadwinner States* (e.g., France) give priority to horizontal redistribution between those with and without children, have high levels of universal child provisions, and recognize women’s claims as workers and mothers. In contrast, and as the name

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suggests, *Weak Breadwinner States* (e.g., Sweden) commit public resources more equally to breadwinners and non-breadwinners with services and benefits to parents – male and female, married and unmarried.

While useful for categorizing “what is,” both typologies fail to problematize or theorize the issues arising from the breadwinner focus. Fraser (1997) claims that even the best of the “breadwinner” models “delivers the best outcomes to women whose lives most closely resemble the male half of the old family-wage ideal couple” (p. 55). And, as long as women are assumed to be the carers and labour market interests drive policy agendas, men’s roles, too, are constrained. Even in Sweden’s “weak breadwinner” category, the most generous with respect to eligibility and benefits for fathers, the focus remains only indirectly on supporting families as its primary focus is supporting labour market attachment. Thus, while these regime types are an aid to policy analysis, our critique of the policy models we explore will attend to Fraser’s critique of the “breadwinner” policy focus. That breadwinner schemas are related to our discussion of engaged fathering demonstrates clearly that most of the relevant policy is labour market policy modified to address these new social concerns *also*.

## Parental Leave: A Comparison of the U.S., Germany, Sweden and Canada

The United States has been described as a liberal policy regime (Esping-Andersen, 1990; Hobson and Morgan, 2002; Olsen, 2002) and a strong breadwinner state (Lewis, 2002) in that it relies on means-tested assistance and the private sector labour market to provide most social welfare benefits. “Comparatively speaking, the U.S. welfare state is full of holes, with a far narrower range of programs and services, covering fewer social contingencies, and reaching a much more attenuated and select portion of its population than the welfare of most other nations” (Olsen, 2002, p. 37). In fact, when it comes to parental leave, the U.S. is in very interesting company as one of only four countries in the world that provide no paid parental leave for birth or adoption. Swaziland, Liberia, and Papua New Guinea are the only other states to lack such a provision (O’Brien, Brandth and Kvande, 2007). Given the American reliance on individual autonomy and on the private sector for provision of social benefits, there has been a corresponding reluctance to interfere politically with the functioning of

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the labour market (Orloff and Monson, 2002). Men's roles as fathers have been seen more singularly in terms of their labour market participation, as the breadwinners in their families. Orloff and Monson (2002) comment "... the most salient fact about the treatment of fathers in U.S. social policy is the virtual absence of programs targeting them *as fathers*" (p. 61), as this role is subsumed by their status as breadwinners. U.S. programs directed to fatherhood interestingly tend to target low-income fathers, perhaps presuming that it is only in this realm where non-fathering occurs. Even here, the emphasis is on reducing the number of absent fathers and their non-payment of child support (Bellotti, 2004).

The following two tables describe the relevant policy provisions related to enabling fathers to engage more actively as carers rather than only as breadwinners. We have chosen to examine policy provisions in Sweden, Germany and the U.S., presented in Table 1, to contrast with Canadian provisions because each represents a different approach to, and public interest in, fathering. Within Canada we highlight Québec for its innovative family-focussed policy. Data on Canada and Québec are presented in Table 2.

Table 1 Sources: Chronholm and Haas, 2005; Ebbinghaus and Eichhorst, 2006; Erler, 2005; Jochum, 2006; Kamerman and Waldfogel, 2005; Lero, 2003; Orloff and Monson, 2002; Ostner, 2002; Rostgaard, 2002; U.S. Department of Labor, 2007; White, 2006

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Benefit Type	Sweden	Germany	United States
<b>Parental Leave</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 480 days paid leave</li> <li>• 60 days reserved for each parent</li> <li>• benefits paid at 80% of salary up to \$47,000</li> <li>• denominated in days, can be taken for any duration up to child's 8<sup>th</sup> birthday</li> <li>• highly flexible</li> <li>• 10 additional days of paternity leave at 80% salary</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 14-week maternity leave (incl. part-time) paid at 100% of earnings</li> <li>• leave taken during the 6 weeks prior and 8 weeks after the birth (100% take-up rate)</li> <li>• 12 to 24 month child-rearing benefit</li> <li>• can be taken for any period prior to child's 8th birthday</li> <li>• new benefit (2008) to pay 67% of earnings</li> <li>• flat-rate benefit to non-working parents</li> <li>• new (2008) father-only benefit of 2 months of above leave</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA) grants families twelve weeks of <i>unpaid</i> leave for childbirth/adoption</li> <li>• covers only public employees or employers of &gt;50 employees with 1 year's continuous employment of at least 1,250 hours</li> <li>• Temporary Disability Insurance (TDI) is provided in a few states, offering partial earnings replacement for leaves under the Family Medical Leave Act.</li> <li>• California provides 6 weeks of paid leave at 55 to 60% of earnings after the birth or adoption of a child</li> </ul>
<b>Employment Standards</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• unpaid reduction in working hours of 25% for all parents with child &lt; 8</li> <li>• minimum vacation periods, sick time and other benefits</li> <li>• most Swedish workers remain covered by these provisions</li> <li>• 60 days/year sick time/child</li> <li>• paid child allowance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• legislation protects against dismissal for women who are pregnant, on maternity leave, and parents taking childcare leave</li> <li>• employees entitled to part-time childcare leave for up to 19 hours a week if both parents work</li> <li>• non full-time work models or "mini-jobs" enabled but are without social insurance protection</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Family Medical Leave (above) is a provision of Employment Standards Legislation that also regulates for standard workers benefits such as vacation</li> <li>• frequency of non-standard work means that only some workers are covered</li> </ul>
<b>Child Care</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• subsidized daycare or supplement for home care</li> <li>• daycare access guaranteed for children &gt;12 months</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 3 to 6-year-olds have a right to childcare</li> <li>• low-income families receive a family allowance, generous tax provisions for higher income families</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• federal childcare subsidies are administered by states under Temporary Aid for Needy Families (TANF) and are means tested and variable by availability and benefit level</li> <li>• childcare tax credits are available to those with incomes high enough to benefit from a tax credit</li> </ul>

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The Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) provisions that are described in Table 1 (Kamerman and Waldfogel, 2005; Lero, 2003) are meagre at best and amount to even less when one considers the large number of American workers employed in small firms, combined with those employed in part-time and seasonal work, all of whom are excluded from the leave provision. It is estimated that only about 45 per cent of private sector employees are eligible for FMLA (White, 2006) and there are no estimates of the percentage of those eligible that could reasonably be expected to afford to take an unpaid leave. The law serves only minimally to insure that an employer cannot restrict an employee's *access* to maternity, paternity, and parental leave and that the employee may return to the same or an equivalent job (U.S. Department of Labour, 2007). Not surprisingly, researchers have found that the FMLA has had small effects on leave usage by mothers, and little or no effects on leave usage by fathers (Han and Waldfogel, 2003; Singley and Hynes, 2005), as many families who qualify for the leave can't afford to take it. Overall, less than 5 per cent of American new parents have access to paid family leave (White, 2006) and these are generally workers in so-called "good jobs" or where leaves are provided under collective agreements.

In the U.S., the strength of the breadwinner model is apparent, as there are few legislated social benefits to support families. Thus, support for involved fathering at a national or even state policy level is almost non-existent although, as Table 1 demonstrates, California's leave provisions are an important shift in U.S. policy direction. Most provisions to support work/family balance or the cash/care nexus that do exist in the U.S. have been implemented by private firms and are most often available only to select groups of employees in "good" jobs. Even these do not specifically target fathering.

While better supporting families and fathering than the U.S., German social policy, influenced by reunification in 1990, has not tended to see fathers as carers and nurturers. "Since reunification, the state has played a more active role in helping parents to combine employment and family life, framed in the best interests of the child" (Ostner, 2002, p. 158). Germany has been described as a conservative, corporatist welfare regime, combining state support for families and children in a modified breadwinner model (Hobson and Morgan, 2002).

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The benefits described in Table 1 have been recently revised with more flexible options to support employment retention by parents and to increase the number of fathers willing to take parental leave (Erler, 2005; Ostner, 2002). We see again a mix of public interests underlying the policy initiative: labour market retention on one hand combined with, on the other, concern for how caring occurs. Part of the German leave benefit may be used only by fathers “to counter the gender inequality effects of the current scheme, due, in part, to the very low percentage of fathers taking parental leave which reinforces the gendered division of labour” (Erler, 2005, p. 59). This new benefit is also seen as one way of addressing Germany’s falling birthrate (Jochum, 2006); however, the benefit payment will be reduced to one year to provide an incentive for parents to return to the labour market.

In 2002, the take-up rate of the childrearing benefit in Germany was 92.4 per cent, with 78 per cent of families extending their leave beyond the sixth month and 69 per cent to year two (Erler, 2005). Only 11.6 per cent of families chose to take the higher benefit over the shorter time period. Fathers’ use of parental leave has increased very slowly from 0.68 per cent in 1987 to 4.9 per cent in 2003. The 2008 changes stipulate fathers’ exclusive use of two out of the twelve months of parental leave, causing some groups providing support and education for fathers to predict that up to 10 per cent of fathers might now take parental leave (Jochum, 2006).

The ability to work part time and receive benefits has not been highly utilized in Germany and, in 2002, only 8.5 per cent of recipients were working part time. Erler (2005) speculated that the low proportion of families combining leave and part-time work may be due to difficulties finding quality childcare. The “mini job” provisions (See Table 1) are intended to support work/family balance; however, such employment has been defined as “low level part-time work not covered by full social insurance coverage” (Ebbinghaus and Eichhorst, 2006, p. 15). In spite of this view, the number of individuals working in a mini job has increased from 2 million in 1991 to 4.7 million in 2005 (Ebbinghaus and Eichhorst, 2006). There is no direct evidence, however, that this trend is related to a change in fathering practices.

In 1974, Sweden initiated the type of paternity leave provisions that Germany has just adopted (Jochum, 2006; Rostgaard, 2002). Due to the progressive nature of its social policy with respect to parents, Sweden is arguably the most researched nation

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when it comes to parental leave policy (Bergman and Hobson, 2002; Chronholm, 2002; Haas, Allard and Hwang, 2002; Haas and Hwang, 2005; Pylkkinen and Smith, 2003; Rostgaard, 2002). The thirty-plus year period of its policy measures to support more active fathering have entailed policy and program modifications based on take-up data and detailed evaluation of these provisions. While legislators have stressed the “equality gains” of giving parental leave rights to fathers, the leave has set a new standard for men’s caring at home and women’s participation in the labour market (Pylkkinen and Smith, 2003). The generous leave provisions are set out in Table 1. Part of what sets Sweden’s parental leave apart from most other leave policies is its flexibility and that it is combined with other initiatives designed to change the social context in which leaves can be taken. An apparent emphasis in Swedish policy is a focus on not only ensuring that children are well cared for and parents remain in the labour market – elements central to most breadwinner models – but on fathering itself. This is manifested in a number of ways.

Fathers are given access to other benefits to encourage their involvement, including “father training” which takes place before the birth of the child and equips men to take on the role of caregiver for young children. Perhaps of greatest importance, Bergman and Hobson (2002) report a general remaking of men’s identities as participatory fathers that “was not primarily a grass-roots movement, as it was in many countries where men’s consciousness-raising groups questioned macho images and styles of masculinities. Instead, in Sweden, the movement was orchestrated by a government campaign that was picked up by the media and featured images of the soft, nurturing father (known as the “velour pappa”), the image of which was imprinted in Swedish culture in a series of posters of men with children. . .” (p. 107). Media campaigns targeted the general population to remind citizens that fathers who used parental leave developed strong ties with their children and would also develop a more nurturing style of parenting (Haas and Hwang, 2005). Ties were drawn between a nurturing father and a strong, confident worker who was a great addition to the labour market (Rostgaard, 2002). These media campaigns were likely successful in affecting parental leave usage, as an E.U. study found that 97 per cent of Swedish fathers were aware of men’s rights to take parental leave in contrast to only 71 per cent of men in other E.U. countries (Haas and Hwang, 2005). Attitudinally, popular opinion in Sweden began to lean toward gender equity in the home and in the labour market (Rostgaard, 2002).



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Even in Sweden, change in fathering practices has been slow. While 85 per cent of men have taken parental leave during their child's first eight years, leaves are most often taken on a part-time basis, usually when the child is between one and four years old, and mothers continue to use the majority of days of parental leave. The proportion used by fathers increased from 7 per cent in 1987 to 18.7 per cent by 2004, the change being at least partially attributable to the 2002 increase of the father's quota to two months (Chronholm and Haas, 2005).

An important aspect of the Swedish policy is that benefit rates have been set high enough (with relatively high earnings ceilings) so that there is less of a financial disincentive to fathers to take leave. In fact, in 1994, when the Social Democratic government came into power, they lowered the rate of parental leave benefits from 90 per cent to 75 per cent, but only lowered the father's quota to 85 per cent in an attempt to introduce an economic incentive for men to use the leave (Rostgaard, 2002). The parental leave payment and father's quota have since been standardized to 80 per cent of earnings.

Bergman and Hobson (2002) report that although time studies of households show that Swedish men give more time to household chores and parenting than do men from other Western welfare states, women still undertake the majority of the social reproduction roles and men's time in paid work is virtually unchanged. "[T]here is little evidence of a shift in the practices of fathering . . ." (Bergman and Hobson, 2002, p. 113). This of course follows, given Fraser's critique; however good the Swedish model may appear to be, it is fundamentally a breadwinner model.

Haas and Hwang (2005) report an important finding, however, related to the construction of men as fathers. "Taking substantial amounts of leave . . . appears to have the potential of helping fathers construct a model of fathering that includes the type of childcare once associated only with mothers" (p. 13). The availability of paid leave takes away one constraint to being "engaged and equal parents" (Haas and Hwang, 2005, p. 13).

Swedish fathers using parental leave are more highly educated and are often partnered with someone who has a higher level of education. Bergman and Hobson (2002) report that the resistance to parental leave is highest among private-sector employees with high incomes, despite the existence of corporate subsidies (top-ups). The possibility of financial losses, coupled with potential harm to one's career,

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causes men to discount the importance of parental leave. “Active and participating fatherhood has become hegemonic in Sweden, but labour market options and opportunities determine how much leave men take” (Bergman and Hobson, 2002, p. 117). Again the breadwinner-focussed nature of the leave provisions is echoed. Haas and Hwang (2005) offer the following observation to which we will return: “Gendered expectations in the workplace make it difficult for fathers to reduce their paid work hours and to be equally involved in childcare, even if they were able to get a good start at developing childcare skills during parental leave” (p. 14).

Canada	Québec
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>provincial legislation enables ~ 1 year unpaid parental leave compensated through federal Employment Insurance for those eligible</li> <li>varying by province, 0 to 12 months consecutive, prior employment is required to be eligible for parental leave</li> <li>most provinces require the leave to begin within 52 weeks of birth/adoption</li> <li>Employment Insurance pays 55% of the applicant's insured earnings to a maximum of \$435 /week</li> <li>no paid leave for casual, part-time, seasonal, self-employed workers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>basic plan for parental leave: 25 weeks at 70% of wages and 30 weeks at 55% of wages for a total of 55 weeks or: special plan: 40 weeks at 70% of wages</li> <li>maximum insurable income of \$57,000</li> <li>paid paternity leave of 5 weeks at 70% of father's earnings or 3 weeks at 75% of earnings</li> <li>self-employed, part-time, and contract workers can contribute voluntarily</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>legislation regulates benefits such as vacation pay, sick leave, unpaid leaves, break and meal times, hours of work and limits to amounts of overtime</li> <li>frequency of non-standard work means that only 1/3 of workers are covered</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Québec parental leave benefits are available to all workers with no prior work requirement and leaves can begin within 70 weeks following birth or adoption</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>federal tax credit of \$100/month for each child &lt; 6</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>publicly funded childcare centres offer care at \$7/ day</li> </ul>

Sources: Doucet and Tremblay, 2005; Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, n.d.; Mahon, 2005; Mason, 2003; “Quebec Parental Insurance,” n.d.

The contrast between Sweden's gender-specific and Canada's gender-neutral approach to supporting families is striking. Canada, as a liberal welfare regime, relies heavily on the labour market for benefit provision (Lightman and Riches, 2001; Olsen, 2002) and in matters of public policy it chooses to not adjudicate on gender inequality. However, when one compares Canada to the liberal model of the United States, a

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different picture emerges. Olsen (2002) states it is more accurate to refer to Canada as having a form of social liberalism or falling somewhere between Lewis' conception of the Modified and Strong Breadwinner States due to its blending of European-style social provision and American liberalism. Canada's funding of maternity and parental leave through Employment Insurance begs comparison with Sweden more than with the United States.

With the exception of Québec's allowance for maternity and parental leave (see Table 2), most provinces and territories legislate leaves similar to, if not identical with, the time for which income replacement is available through Employment Insurance. In 1990, a change to parental leave benefits allowed for biological parents to receive 10 weeks of benefits that could be split between the parents or used by one of them (Marshall, 2003). In 2000 when parental leave benefits were extended to 35 weeks, benefit sharing was further facilitated by removing a second 2 week period when benefits would not be received if both parents were sharing EI parental leave benefits. These changes were significant in recognizing the possible contribution of fathers in caring for children in the early years, although it does not move beyond gender neutrality to encouraging paternity leave. Deficiencies in the Canadian leave provision arise because of its direct labour market tie to eligibility for Employment Insurance. Most self-employed individuals are not eligible for parental leave, as they are not considered to have "insurable employment," and many contract and part-time workers are not covered, as they do not work sufficient hours/weeks to be eligible for EI contributions.

Statistics Canada (2007a) reported that in 2006, 76.5 per cent of mothers had insurable employment under the Employment Insurance program. While about 64 per cent of new mothers have consistently used maternity or parental benefits (Statistics Canada, 2007a) the percentage of mothers whose spouse was claiming the parental benefit increased from 15 per cent in 2005 to 20 per cent in 2006, up from a more consistent 10 to 11 per cent. This is especially significant when compared to the 3 per cent take-up rate in 2000, before the extension of paid parental leave from 10 weeks to 35 (Doucet and Tremblay, 2005; Statistics Canada, 2007a;). The most recent increase is likely not reflective of a Canada-wide change but a reflection of Québec's new and father-focused policy (Statistics Canada, 2007a), to which our discussion will return.

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In Canada, those with “good jobs” and/or those covered by collective agreements often have an additional maternity leave provision, as 20 per cent of mothers receiving Employment Insurance maternity benefits received a “top-up” from their employer (Pulkingham and Van Der Gaas, 2004). There are no data about father’s access to, or utilization of, these provisions.

Québec’s interest in retaining and strengthening its francophone culture has caused it to depart from the Canadian policy approach in a number of areas. Nowhere is this more true than in the area of family policy and nothing demonstrates this more strongly than the Québec Parental Insurance Plan (QPIP), which took over the funding and administration of maternity and parental leave from the federal Employment Insurance program.

Québec’s paternity leave provision does not decrease the mother’s access to leave, but is restricted to fathers only. Limited research suggests that fathers’ leave time may be related to the amount of leave time planned by the mother. “The mother’s desire to stay with her child was the most frequently reported reason for the father’s not taking parental leave, followed by financial reasons” (Statistics Canada, 2005). Marshall (2003) reported that 25 per cent of fathers who took parental leave had wives who took less than 9 months off for maternity leave. Men who were married to long leave takers were much less likely to take leave themselves. Thus, Québec, like the Nordic countries and Germany, has extended benefits that go beyond just ensuring that there is care for the child; they specifically direct and support fathers to care for their children. The correspondence between mothers’ leave-taking plans and the leaves taken by fathers further suggests another element in the father involvement equation, and that is mothers’ willingness to share childcare roles.

A recent analysis of fathers’ use of paid parental leave confirms the major impacts that Québec policy has had in this area. According to Marshall (2008), the proportion of fathers taking time off and receiving paid parental benefits in Canada has increased from 3% in 2000 to 20% in 2006. This increase masks dramatic contrasts in and outside of Québec. “Without doubt the QPIP has had a profound influence on fathers’ use of paid leave in Québec. Of those eligible for the program, 56% claimed benefits in 2006, up from 32% in 2005...The participation rate for fathers outside Québec remained steady over the three years examined, at around one in ten” (p.8-9). Marshall notes that even before the introduction of QPIP, Québec fathers were more

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likely to claim parental benefits than those in other provinces, reflecting cultural differences that pre-dated the policy change. Marshall's analyses provide further insights into how parental leave is used/not used by fathers when it is available as a gender-neutral benefit with a lower replacement value than as a designated paternity leave benefit with a higher replacement value in a cultural context that seems to be more supportive of fathers' involvement. More research is needed to determine the characteristics of Canadian men who take parental leave. The use of so-called gender-neutral language in the federal parental leave policy, coupled with the relatively low benefit rate, makes the program vulnerable to traditional gender roles. In most dual-earner heterosexual households, the father is the one with the higher income and therefore would have the most to lose financially by taking parental leave. The traditional notion that mothers are the appropriate caregivers in a child's early years is also an influence on a family's decision-making concerning parental leave. Therefore, the gender neutral parental leave policy leads to very gender-specific outcomes.

With respect to Employment Standards regulations of such factors as overtime, sick leave and vacation time, it is important to point out that much of the Canadian labour force no longer works in a standard employment relationship. Only about a third of workers work a regular full-time work schedule (Arthurs, 2006); thus, regulated benefits such as vacation, sick leave, unpaid leaves, break and meal times, hours of work and limits to amounts of overtime are now largely unregulated for many employees. The erosion of policy protection in all of these areas likely impacts more engaged fathering negatively, as employees lack protections from overwork and lack ensured minimums of time for undertaking family responsibilities. Once again, the lack of such protections primarily affects workers in low-skilled and low-paying jobs.

Canadian programs such as the National Child Benefit and the First Nations National Child Care Benefit provide some direct income-tested support to families and financial support to the provinces and territories for childcare subsidies and other supports. While critical to poor families, these provisions are not extensive enough to affect fathering practices. For most Canadians outside of Québec, childcare is a major issue in work/family balance and a significant expenditure. Moreover, even for those with the necessary resources, good quality licensed childcare spaces are in short supply (ACTEW, 2007; Noik-Bent, 2008).

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In summary, Canada has a good national parental leave program similar to those of some of the European countries discussed herein, except for its eligibility criteria and delivery through Employment Insurance, which severely restrict it. Striving for “gender neutrality,” Canadian policy makes no attempt to influence or support fathers in expanding their role. As with Employment Insurance, the strong protections associated with employment standards legislation apply to fewer and fewer workers, generally excluding those who need these guarantees the most. With respect to child care, the Canadian approach makes a full departure from being comparable to Europe and, as in the U.S., relies almost entirely on families to manage on their own. Québec stands in stark contrast, having taken a strong North American lead in asserting a family policy that targets active fathering while continuing to support labour market attachment. The latter emphasis remains apparent across the countries examined and acts consistently to limit the effects of any fathering policy for those who are marginal to the labour market.

## Making Meaning

We have examined father involvement policy in each of Sweden, Germany, the U.S. and Canada. We have noted that Canadian public policy provisions fall between the U.S. and Sweden and Germany, the latter two countries having much more extensive provisions for parental leave, increased flexibility about how such leaves may be utilized, stronger systems of public and subsidized childcare and an employment environment that continues to be more closely regulated. In Canada, by contrast, we have no national childcare provision and the paltriest of cash benefits in lieu of childcare are paid to parents of young children. Where subsidized and licensed daycares do exist, they are always wait-listed and have an inadequate amount of subsidy dollars available to meet demand. Additionally, the Canadian labour market is increasingly without the regulation of employment standards legislation as the precarious labour market – consisting of unregulated part-time and casual workers – grows alongside a decline in the numbers of people in a standard (and hence regulated) employment relationship. Our strong Employment Insurance parental leave program does afford paid leave to many working Canadians and is a strong element of the policy system that might enable more involved fathering. Yet it too suffers from restricted eligibility, leaving out the growing number of non-standard

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workers and the self-employed. It is a gender-neutral provision as well, so that while men may choose to take parental leave, the system provides no additional supports for them to do so.

It is these “additional supports” that warrant further scrutiny. We have discussed, pointed to and referenced a number of factors that may be compounding in the environment in which men make decisions about their roles as fathers. First, do they make decisions, or do they simply take up the scripts of hegemonic masculinity that are everywhere around them?

These scripts are shaped by our social norms, the behaviours and attitudes that are constructed through processes of social reproduction. Sweden is alone, among the countries examined, in articulating a policy goal that directly challenges these normative social roles, in contrast to the more passive “enabling” of most policy. The Swedish government campaign was directed at fathers and would-be fathers (and their female partners) to cause them to reconsider the social expectations of fathers. Very pragmatically, training programs for prospective fathers accompanied the media campaign, followed by strong policy provisions that would provide men with few reasons not to choose to take paternity leave. In many respects the Swedish policy initiative has been successful, with 85 per cent of Swedish fathers taking leaves. And we know from other research (Haas and Hwang, 2005; Hwang and Lamb, 1997; Lamb, 1997; Nepomnyaschy and Waldfogel, 2007; Wisensale, 2001), having taken care of their children at an early age, fathers may be more likely to continue to be more involved with their children at a later age.

So, while Sweden clearly tried through policy to shift the public discourse on fathering, other recent research points to several other factors not addressed in Sweden or elsewhere. It is likely that these factors affect men’s willingness to take-up new and more engaged fathering roles in addition, of course, to their enduring status as the higher income earners. Beyond this as an underlying factor, the corporate employment environment has not been re-oriented to support men’s leave-taking and even less their being more involved fathers with stronger commitments to their family life. Work/family balance remains a significant workplace issue, a fact attested to by articles on the subject published in the past few years in journals of business, sociology, social policy, and family studies (Daly and Hawkins, 2005; Duxbury and Higgins, 2003; Evans, 2002; Palkovitz and Daly, 2004). These articles decry the blurring

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of boundaries between work and family and claim either that the attention to work-family conflict is due to the increase of the number of women in the labour market or from a gendered lens argue that, given women's presence in the labour market, new family-oriented policy responses are in order. Caring for children and elders continues to fall along gender lines and absenteeism as a result of employees taking time off from work to care for family members has a significant economic impact. It is estimated that Canadian organizations lose 2.7 billion dollars each year because of excess work absence from employees "working under conditions of high work-life conflict" (Duxbury, Higgins, and Johnson, 1999, 7.2.4). A potential resolution to this conflict will likely occur only when men seek both to engage more as fathers and carers and when their work environment legitimizes their doing so.

A major factor recognized consistently across the literature examined for this policy review is the salience of the father's work environment in impacting on his leave-taking choices (Ferrer and Gagné, 2006; Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2005; Pulkingham and Van Der Gaas, 2004). While leave provisions may be *available*, a work climate which gives tacit or not-so-tacit messages about family leaves as impeding careers will affect fathers' and mothers' choices about paternal leave-taking. "The caregiving responsibilities of fathers or same-sex couples may not be recognized because of stereotypes and assumptions about appropriate family structures and so these employees may have difficulty in having their Code-related needs [i.e., right to parental leave] recognized and appropriately dealt with by employers. For example, it may be assumed fathers will not or should not take parental leave and those who do may be perceived as not being serious about their careers" (Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2005, p.2 2). The male partner continues, across most of the countries examined, to be the higher income earner (Chronholm, 2002; Statistics Canada, 2007b), which adds additional weight to a man's work disruption and an employer's having a negative view of his work "commitment." Sweden once again provides a good exemplar: Sweden's combined media campaign and policy addressed most factors relating to engaging fathers but did not, by way of either, challenge the prevailing discourse or by fiat, address the resistance to be expected from the work environment if men's primary attachment to the labour market were to shift in favour of, or even to be equal with, that of their family.



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A second and perhaps more insidious factor affecting men's more active fathering roles is women's responses to men's parental leave-taking to care for a newborn or newly adopted child. Although there is limited data in this area, women may want to continue to be primary carers in these roles (Statistics Canada, 2005). While most women want more equality in the day to day care of the home, this may not extend to giving up parental leave time so that this leave can be taken by a male partner. Thus women take-up the same normative scripts that their male partners do with respect to gendered parental roles.

Adaptive policy could address both of the above noted issues, but the policy response would necessarily need to be oriented primarily to supporting families and changing and broadening entrenched gender roles. This is unlikely to be accomplished if family policy remains only an adjunct to labour-market retention policy. The public policy that we have reviewed has been labour-market oriented, with the addition of social goals, and only sometimes have these been specifically directed to fathering rather than more generally to families. As long as fathering practices are an "add-on" to labour-market retention policies or even to gender-neutral family policy, they are not likely to be as strong or directive as they might need to be to challenge deeply embedded social roles and the ideology that underlies them.

Conceptions of the family as a private entity responsible for sustaining itself except in the direst of circumstances underlie most of the policy provisions in the countries reviewed here. This construction invites policy oriented to presuming families' right to "choose" how to handle the demands of work and care. Daly and Hawkins (2005) argue this to be a middle-class discourse that both negates the fiscal realities of many families and assumes that the man is the member of the household who will work outside of the home.

These considerations warrant re-visiting Nancy Fraser's comment cited earlier. Even the best of the "breadwinner" models "delivers the best outcomes to women whose lives most closely resemble the male half of the old family-wage ideal couple" (Fraser, 1997, p. 55). Now, while Fraser was clearly interested in what happens to women in the breadwinner model, a gendered analysis reveals the breadwinner model as equally defining and constraining of men. It presumes them to be breadwinners and to want *to be* breadwinners even at the cost of more engaged fathering.

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## Conclusion

Canadian social policy has done little to encourage fathering models other than “father as breadwinner.” Gender neutrality, as has been pointed out by numerous feminist theorists, perpetuates the status quo. Thus, the state is only very minimally engaged in developing the capacity of Canadian men to care for their young children. In fact, more broadly, the state has developed only limited and piecemeal policies that support caring labour.

Men balancing a breadwinner role with a more active caregiver role have the opportunity to model a different notion of citizen that extends beyond the labour force to include the nurture and care of future generations. With these changes in men’s roles come corresponding changes in women’s roles, facilitating perhaps more balance between the private and the public spheres, with men and women able to negotiate equitably their place in each. In a Canadian context, Québec’s family policy provisions offer a model which, while not new to some of the E.U. nations, offers a challenge nationally and to the other Canadian provinces: to address and prioritize the needs of families amidst the work/family balance crisis and actively and specifically to encourage fathers to be engaged carers. If we shift from our present policy conservatism, changes of the type discussed here and in the accompanying policy recommendations will be likely to have long-term consequences as they model new social roles. (Appendix A makes recommendations for future research and Appendix B makes policy recommendations.)

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## Appendix A

### RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The literature provides significant direction for future research:

- Duxbury and Higgins (2003) highlighted the weakness of the literature in the general area of work and the family, particularly linking work-life conflict to family outcomes.
- Perry-Jenkins *et al.* (2000) suggest further research exploring the social context factors such as occupation and personality of men taking up father engagement provisions. Other social context factors that intersect with work-family would include ethnicity, sexual orientation and class.
- Marsiglio and Pleck (2005) advocate further research on men's use of parental leave. What factors influence men to use parental leaves and other occupational provisions? What impact does the use of these programs have on fathers and their families? The latter question is of particular importance in advocating for policy change.
- Little has been said in the context of this paper about gay fathers and other groups of fathers including young fathers, poor fathers, and non-custodial fathers. The literature here too is deficient in understanding how these men take-up fathering roles. These families may present interesting models that will challenge hegemonic notions of fathers' roles.
- Culture as a definer of fathering practices is also under-researched and under-reported. The "father" is too often presumed to be white and western and there is little or no research that explores aboriginal fathering traditions or those of other cultural or minoritized communities.



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### Appendix B

#### **POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Quebec's QPIP program introduces many "Nordic style" aspects of parental leave including higher benefit rates, flexibility in length and payment, and the availability of leave for self-employed individuals. This should be a model for a national parental leave plan in Canada.
- Canada's gender-neutral language in parental leave policy, coupled with the relatively low benefit rate, leaves the program vulnerable to gender-based decisions. If Canada is to make further headway in improving the rate at which men take-up parental leave, it will have to be more directive with policy and explicitly support parental leave taken by fathers.
- Governments in many countries have taken leadership roles in attempting to encourage corporations to offer "family friendly" provisions in the workplace. Canada and the provinces could advocate for these types of corporate initiatives. Ferrer and Gagne (2006) call on the government also to prevent firms from discriminating against employees using family benefits.
- Policy change requires an analysis of where supports to families are embedded in other policy initiatives. Documents such as the Inventory of Policies and Policy Areas Influencing Father Involvement (Lero, Ashbourne and Whitehead, 2006) provide a framework for this examination.
- Parental leave and other family policy must be de-coupled from labour-market initiatives. Especially given the changes to EI over the past two decades, there are too many parents who effectively have no paid parental leave provisions at all.

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- Employment standards legislation must be amended to ensure broader workforce coverage and we would do well to examine in more detail some of Sweden's provisions in this area, especially those related to time off for caring labour. In short, Canada and the provinces need a policy strategy that works with existing policy such as the National Child Benefit to build a framework of support for families in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.
- Corporate Policy: engaged fathering must be placed on the corporate agenda as well as the public one. Strategies could include corporate role models to engage with other corporate HR departments and senior managers. For example, the Co-operators has demonstrated such leadership in Canada (Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2007). Russell (2001) recommends approaches such as conducting fatherhood workshops in the workplace as part of an equal opportunity and diversity agenda and showcasing men who have taken time off for fathering.

