

Parents' Gender Stereotypical Biases towards their Children May Be Negatively Affecting Their Son's Involvement as a Father with His Children

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Abstract

There is a distinct difference in parenthood roles between mothers and fathers where mothers perform most “expressive” functions, and fathers perform most “instrumental” functions often leaving fathers on the sidelines of parenthood (Bernard, 1975). Many factors “ranging from outright discrimination to the process associated with gender role socialization” contribute to these gender role patterns (Eccles, 1994, p. 585). Parents, through reinforcement, encourage daughters to “place more value on putting family needs before work” (Eccles, & Wang, 2016, p. 102). However, sons are encouraged to “place more value on jobs that allow them to make a lot of money” (Eccles, & Wang, 2016, p.102; Jozefowicz, Barber, & Eccles, 1993). Father's attitudes “about their children and their roles as parents may be important in determining the father's involvement with their children” (Cox, Owen, Henderson, & Margand, 1992, p. 1022). A father's involvement may be influenced by their experiences and perceptions of self-efficacy originating in childhood (Eccles, 2014). Many fathers “express a desire to parent differently from their own fathers, whom they perceived as having been distant or disengaged from their families (Goodman, 2005, p. 193). It can be contributed to the parent's gender stereotypical biases towards their children.

Parenthood is a significant life course transition. For the most part, with all the contraceptives available, having a child is a decision (Nock, 2000). Most parents can attest to the fact that entry into parenthood is forever life changing (Buchler, Perales, & Baxter, 2017). Some people give many reasons why not to enter parenthood such as gender role inequality (McDonald, 2006), economic uncertainty (Kreyenfeld, 2009), changes in partnership behaviour (Baizán, Aassve, & Billari, 2003), fear of disappointment in the child or as parent (Qu, & Weston, 2001), and restrictions of loss of freedom and time (Michaels, 1988). On the other hand, some people give many reasons why to have a child such as to provide love and companionship (Morgan, & King, 2001), adult status and identity (Hoffman, & Manis, 1979) and makes evolutionary sense to have children and teach them (Kaplan, Hill, Hurtado, & Lancaster, 2001). Researchers have identified many reasons why people become parents from being pre-programmed to respond to babies (Kringelbach, 2008) to being influenced by their culture (Hoffman, & Manis, 1979).

Parenthood and Culture

Parents contribute “to the socialization of gender in their children by adopting the dominant cultural prescriptions that girls and boys are different” (Leaper, 2005, p.190). Culture is the set of values, beliefs and ways of thinking for a specific group (Brym, Lie, & Rytina, 2006) which shapes the view of oneself (Mezirow, 2000). It is the physical and social setting where the values and recommended behaviors for parents and children alike become systematic and predictable (Harkness, & Super, 2002). Thus, parenting becomes an interactional process between parent, child, and culture (Belsky, 1984). Parents teach these cultural values, which are then learned by children and transmitted from one generation to another through socialization (Eccles, 2014). According to Brym, Lie, & Rytina (2006) socialization is “the process which people learn their culture, including norms, values, and roles” (p. 100) and adjust their behavior accordingly. Parents influences on gender differences towards their children impact the child and the child's future roles (Eccles, 2015), including parenthood roles.

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Although parents are not the only agents contributing to the socialization of children, the family has “continued to be seen as a major—perhaps *the* major—arena for socialization” (Maccoby, 1992, p. 1006).

Parenthood and Socialization

Parents have one of the most critical roles in socializing their children. Parents “act as expectancy socializers for their children and children’s self-perception reflect children’s and parents’ interpretation of reality” (Frome, & Eccles, 1998, p.446). There is no doubt; parents have a strong influence on children. In fact, “parent’s perceptions influence children’s self-concepts of ability” (Frome, & Eccles, 1998, p.447). Eccles, Midgley, & Adler (1984) found that gender differences in perceptions and ability increased between early and mid-adolescence. Early adolescence is when gender role stereotypes and expectations are likely to become most influential (Eccles, & Bryan, 1994). The period of adolescence is a critical crossroad in the path of gender-role development for choices (Eccles, & Bryan, 1994). Interestingly, research with adolescents found “when asked who should take responsibility for childcare in the family, young people were almost unanimous that it should be a joint responsibility (males 98%, females 100%)” (Tinklin, Croxford, Ducklin, & Frame, 2005, p.135). However, “they were aware that this was most often done by mothers” (p.136), not fathers. During the socialization process, there are many similarities among the attitudes, values, and behaviors of parents and those of their children (Eccles, & Wang, 2016). So much so, behaviors children observe within the family are then modeled by them throughout their lives (Keizer, Lindenberg, & Steg, 2008). For example, a parent who is depressed will increase the likelihood the child will be sad (Beardslee, Gladstone, & O'Connor, 2011). Adolescents are more likely to start drinking alcohol if their parents do (Donovan, 2004). Child abusive behavior occurs across generations more often than what would be expected (Putnam, 2003). Parents who smoke can do little to dissuade their children from smoking (Jackson, & Dickinson, 2006). In fact, most socialization that occurs in the context of parent-child interaction affects children's social behavior in most settings (Maccoby, 1992). Therefore, if a parent exhibits gender stereotypical biases towards their children, children will be socialized to learn these stereotypical gender roles and repeat them with their children.

Parenthood and Gender

There are many unique differences between fathers and mothers in play, work and how they interact with their children. In play, fathers tend to be more playful, less rigid, more physical and more unpredictable than mothers (Wilson & Prior, 2011). Fathers play more with their sons and mothers play more with their daughters (Lytton, & Romney, 1991). Fathers report less work-family conflict and less stress” than mothers (Hill, 2005, p.793). However, mothers tend to do more caretaking for the children than fathers and try to balance work and family (Fagot, 1978; Hill, 2005). It is evident fathers, and mothers socialize their children in unique ways by responding to their sons and daughters differently. For example, parents encourage sons to “explore objects, to learn about the physical world” (Fagot, 1978, p. 465). Parents “emphasized achievement and competition for sons, encouraged them to control their affect, were more concerned about punishment orientation, and emphasized independence more for sons” than daughters (Fagot, 1978, p. 459). On the other hand, daughters were encouraged to be dependent, learn to help others and ask for help themselves (Fagot, 1978). In fact, sons are “criticized or ignored” when asking for help from their parents (Fagot, 1978, p. 464). Parents give criticism, praise and use more physical punishment with sons than daughters (Lytton, & Romney, 1991) in an effort for children to meet their stereotypical gender expectations (Fagot, 1978). These gender differences lead to significant consequences for the child’s developmental process and throughout their entire life (Fagot, 1978).

Purpose of the Paper

The purpose of this paper is to assess the factors that may be negatively impacting a father’s involvement with his children. The thesis of the paper is fathers are less involved with their children than mothers in parenthood because their parents encouraged their daughters to participate in parenthood better than their sons. Included will be the statement of the problem, the rationale, scope and severity of biases, and definition of terms. The application of the conceptual and theoretical framework of Eccles (2014) *Conceptual Model of Parental Influences on Children* may help explain how fathers may be less involved in parenthood than mothers. A review of the literature regarding the importance of fathers, fathers impact on children, father’s perceptions of parenthood, perceptions of fathers and implications for fathers.

Statement of the Problem

The problem is parents' gender stereotypical biases towards their children may be negatively affecting their son's involvement as a father with his children.

Rationale

There is a distinct difference in parenthood roles between mothers and fathers where mothers perform most "expressive" functions, and fathers perform most "instrumental" functions often leaving fathers on the sidelines of parenthood (Bernard, 1975). For example, fathers are more likely to invest time in paid work and less likely to spend time in child care and household chores than mothers (Fagot, 1978; Hill, 2005). Many factors "ranging from outright discrimination to the process associated with gender role socialization" contribute to these gender role patterns (Eccles, 1994, p. 585). For most of human history "women have spent most of their adult lives gestating, nursing and caring for small children" (Bernard, 1975, p. 9) contributing to the commonly held recognition that mothers are the primary parent (Hoffman, & Manis, 1979). According to the motherhood mandate, women are expected to bear and raise children and put children first in their lives to be defined as a woman (Park, Banchevsky, & Reynolds, 2015). Motherhood has a special status for women, one that serves societal and political institutions (Russo, 1976). It is not a surprise then mothers view "parenthood as a desirable role" and in fact seem to be enculturated into parenthood (Knaub, Eversoll, & Voss, 1983, p. 361). It is an attitude held by mothers and society at large which believes a women's sense of fulfillment involves marriage, having children and becoming a parent (Bernard, 1975). A "good" mother is available to meet her children's needs (Russo, 1976) and "good parenting is their responsibility, if things go wrong, they are to blame" (Park, Banchevsky, & Reynolds, 2015, p. 965). It results in "perceiving mothers in relatively more essentialist terms as a parent than fathers" (Park, Banchevsky, & Reynolds, 2015, p. 952).

On the other hand, it is not the same for fathers. The Fatherhood Institute highlights a "parent" comes to mean "mother" and fathers "remain marginal" to parenthood (McAllister, Burgess, Kato, & Barker, 2012, p.6). Fathers seem to have a secondary role in parenthood as there has been little change in social attitudes to support fathers (Featherstone, 2009). In fact, fathers are enculturated to spend a majority of their time and energy devoted to their occupations (Moen, 1982). Consequently, fathers may not have the same parental rights, privileges, and access to his children as the mother would. It creates issues for fathers in parenthood and effects his involvement with his children compared to mothers. Possibly, mothers end up doing more of the childcare and fathers end up doing more providing for the family due to their "greater endorsement and internalization of intensive parenting biases" (Schiffrin et al., 2014, p. 1078).

Biases of favoring mothers over fathers in parenthood can lead to the development of negative attitudes and beliefs toward fathers as well as "unfair treatment" of fathers by both individuals and social institutions (Clark, Anderson, Clark, & Williams, 1999, p.812). Biases are tricky and may seem "natural" and mostly "invisible in daily life" (Hollander, 2001, p. 85). Biases in parenthood may contribute to the "particular difficulties experienced by fathers" when trying to parent their children (Smithers, 2012, p. 5). It is evident literature on fathers paints a bleak picture. Research indicates there are many long-standing problems for fathers (Smithers, 2012) such as parenting services unjustly aligned to focus on mothers and a mother's needs (Zanoni, Warburton, Bussey & McMaugh, 2013), fathers not adequately accounted for in parenting (Baum, 2015), fathers are not in a professional's field of vision (Zanoni, Warburton, Bussey, & McMaugh, 2013), the relationship between a mother and child is primary but the relationship between father and child is secondary and ignored (Brodie, Paddock, Gilliam, & Chavez, 2014), explicit prevalence where fathers, perpetrators of abuse or not, are omitted from child records (Dominelli, Strega, Walmsley, Callahan & Brown, 2010; Edelson, 1998), fathers are considered to be the invisible parent (D' Cruz, 2002), and so forth. A possible bias towards fathers can have many dire outcomes (Davidson-Arad, Peled, & Leichtentritt, 2008).

Scope and Severity of Biases

Research shows, individuals are aware of bias behavior directed at them and these perceptions of unfair treatment generate stress (Clark, Anderson, Clark, & Williams, 1999). Any form of discriminatory treatment is attributed to "predict psychological distress" and negatively affects an individual's well being (Clark, Anderson, Clark, & Williams, 1999). There is a plethora of literature describing the impacts of biases on an individual's biological, psychological and social aspects of life. The following provides a suggestive, not exhaustive overview of findings for physical, mental and social impacts.

Physical Impacts. Physical outcomes of biases affect a person's "health and health behaviors *directly* through the increased and prolonged stimulation of the human body's physiological stress response" (Hyman, 2009, p. 9). The individual's coping mechanism becomes overwhelmed and distressed (Clark, 2006). Research shows stress lowers the immune system and people become a higher risk for disease such as cardiovascular and coronary heart disease (Harris et al., 2006a; Kubzansky, Kawachi, & Spiro, 1998). There is an elevation in heart rate (Brondolo et al., 2008) and, a higher systolic and diastolic blood pressure output (Steffen, McNeilly, Anderson, & Sherwood, 2003). There is an increase in obesity (Pamuk, Makuc, Heck, Reuben, Lochner, 1998), reduced sexual functioning (Zamboni, & Crawford, 2007), accelerated aging (Epel et al., 2006) and elevated mortality (Williams, Neighbors, & Jackson, 2003). It leaves individuals with less energy or resources for making healthy behavior choices (Wamala, Merlo, Boström, & Hogstedt, 2007). Patterns of behavior change as people tend to participate in unhealthy and not participate in healthy behaviors (McSwan, 2001). People are less likely to seek medical treatment for illness ailments (Wamala, Merlo, Boström, & Hogstedt, 2007). There is a reduction in the use of a condom to prevent sexually transmitted diseases such as Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) (Yoshikawa, Wilson, Chae, & Cheng, 2004). Clear links to smoking (Bennett, Wolin, Robinson, Fowler, & Edwards, 2005; Landrine, & Klonoff, 1996), alcohol abuse (Martin, Tuch, & Roman, 2003), and substance abuse such as marijuana, inhalants and cocaine (Choi, Harachi, Gillmore, & Catalano, 2006). It is evident biases inadvertently, lead to wear and tear on the body as individuals try to adapt to what they are experiencing creating an allostatic load (Seeman, Singer, Rowe, Horwitz, & McEwen, 1997). Overall there is a lower physical functioning as well as a lower mental health (Harris et al., 2006b).

Mental/Psychological Impacts. Several studies have found a direct positive association of the consequences of biases on an individual's mental health symptoms (Brody et al., 2006; Greene, Way, & Pahl, 2006; Simons et al., 2006). Psychological outcomes of biases cause negative emotional states such as anxiety (Carter, 2007), depression (Cohen, Janicki-Deverts, & Miller, 2007), and post-traumatic stress syndrome (Yehuda, 2002). There are lowered levels of self-esteem/identity (Kubzansky, & Kawachi, 2000), conduct problems (Brody et al., 2006) and, enacted forms of violence (Choi, Harachi, Gillmore, & Catalano, 2006). The psychological impacts may also lead to clinical levels of mental illness (Brown et al., 2000; Schulz et al., 2006) such as schizophrenia (Veling et al., 2007). It creates hardships, conflicts and disruptions in life (Pearlin, Schieman, Fazio, & Meersman, 2005).

Social Impacts. Social outcomes of biases may erode an individual's protective resources and increase their vulnerability (Gee, Spencer, Chen, Yip, & Takeuchi, 2007). For example, research shows that people whose biases were made salient had more impaired self-control than those whose biases were not made salient (Inzlicht, McKay, & Aronson, 2006). Biases reduce access to socioeconomic opportunities and desirable goods and services (Keith, & Herring, 1991). It leads to a decrease in employment, lower income and limited social supports (Williams, & Collins, 1995). Biases mark a social divide where individuals encounter barriers to participating fully in family life, the community, educational achievement and professional opportunities (Diaz, Ayala, Bein, Henne, & Marin, 2001). Biases isolate individuals resulting in a low sense of self-worth and stress that impact an individual's overall well being.

Definition of Terms

The following definitions are used to provide clarity.

Fathers. Eichler and McCall (1993) define the term father by suggesting men become designated as fathers through their association with women who are mothers, through behaving in a parental manner or through a legal act. Mothers are the biological factor of giving birth to the child as expressed in the dictum "*mater semper certa est.*" The determination of a father is the relationship a man had with the mother, therefore has a much more significant social component (Eichler & McCall, 1993, p. 198). This definition thus defines fathers as an intention to mother's parental title.

Gender. In this paper, gender is "a person's sense of being male or female and the playing of masculine and feminine roles in ways as appropriate within a culture or society." It comprises feelings, attitudes, and behaviors typically associated with being male or female (Brym, Lie, & Rytina, 2006, p. 307). It is the overt classification of gender that women are mothers and men are fathers.

Gender Role. A gender role is "a set of behaviors associated with widely shared expectations about how males and females are supposed to act" (Brym, Lie, & Rytina, 2006, p. 112). In this case, mothers are primary parents and fathers are secondary parents.

Gender Bias. A gender bias refers to the “unequal treatment” of an individual based on their outward gender (Hick, 2006). For this paper, gender bias is the unequal treatment of sons compared to daughters in preparation for parenthood.

Self-Fulfilling Prophecy. A self-fulfilling prophecy is “an expectation that helps bring about what it predicts” (Brym, Lie, & Rytina, 2006, p. 109). For example, in the case of parenthood roles, if a father of a family takes a secondary role to parenthood and a primary role in providing financially for his family it is likely that his son has learned to do the same. On the other hand, if a mother of a family takes a primary role to parenthood and a secondary role in providing financially for her family it is likely that her daughter has learned to do the same. Their distinct parental roles become like their self-fulfilling prophecy.

Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

Parents’ gender stereotypical biases towards their children begin immediately after the birth of their baby, throughout childhood and are most evident in the perceptions and attitudes of adolescents.

Parenthood Gender Stereotypical Biases in Infanthood

When new parents ask, "is it a boy or a girl?". It may seem like a trivial question, but in fact, it is the beginning of “parents' organizing their perception of the newborn baby concerning a wide variety of attributes-ranging from its size to its activity, attractiveness, even its future potential” (Rubin, Provenzano, & Luria, 1974, p. 512). For example, parents of infant boys describe their sons as robust, alert and well-coordinated whereas infant girl’s descriptions are soft, fine-featured and beautiful (Rubin, Provenzano, & Luria, 1974). Baby boys are wrapped in blue blankets, and baby girls are wrapped in pink blankets as if to represent their destined gendered label. The first question 80% of the time friends and relatives ask parents about their newborn is concerned with the baby’s gender (Intons-Peterson, & Reddel, 1984). Even congratulation cards sent to parents have different colors and messages depending on the infant’s gender (Bridges, 1993). This gender distinction begins to inform how their infant ought to behave as well as the parental behavior (Rubin, Provenzano, & Luria, 1974). These gender-stereotyped perceptions of infants result in “parental expectations and behavioral pressure to behave consistently with cultural norms of typical gender behavior” (Karraker, Vogel, & Lake, 1995, p. 688). It is the beginning of a parents’ lifelong training for their son or daughter to conform to masculine and feminine gender stereotypical roles (Bandura, 1969; Wigfield, & Eccles, 2000). For example, parents dress their infants in clothes that convey their gender (Shakin, Shakin, & Sternglanz, 1985) and provide gender-specific bedroom décor (Bandura, 1969) and toys (Pomerleau, Bolduc, Malcuit, & Cossette, 1990).

Parenthood Gender Stereotypical Biases in Childhood

In childhood, parents continue with different gender stereotypical perceptions of their children to reinforce the critical role of socializing gender in children’s “self-perceptions, interest and skill acquisition” (Eccles, Jacobs, & Harold, 1990, p. 184). Parents encourage gender-stereotyped play activities with their children (Lytton and Romney, 1991) and “promote the association with same-sex playmates” (Bandura, 1969, p.215). Through play, children identify with their gender, gender-specific roles and appropriate behavior for their sex (Turler, 1998).

The two most purchased toys for children are dolls for girls and action figures for boys (Bozal-Alvarado, 2014). Daughters learn and have experience with caring, nurturing and playing with baby dolls such as Barbie. On the other hand, sons learn and have experience with competing, battling and winning (Brasted, 2010) in play with action figures such as Transformers. Parents are quick to react to any “deviant gender role behavior” (Bandura, 1969, p.215) exhibited by their children. Research shows parents gave negative responses to their sons when they played with “girl toys” and negative response to their daughters when they played with “boys toys” (Fagot, 1978). Gender stereotypical roles become “restrictive and rigorously enforced,” and any changes are regarded as only “temporary and playful variations” of what the son and daughter are meant to be and do (Garfinkel, 1967, p.116). So, it makes it unacceptable for the daughters to play with Transformers and sons to play with Barbie (Brasted, 2010; Messner, 1990). It is “culturally conditioned patterns basic to all members of the same sex” (Bandura, 1969, p.215) or the child’s sex-linked stereotypes. Parents condition and shape their children’s behavior and attitudes “by the same mechanisms that apply to all kinds of behavior, viz., reinforcement and modeling” (Lytton & Romney, 1991, p. 267). Parents reinforce and model gender stereotypical behaviors for their children in the home. Children then align their concepts of self in behaving like their same-sex parent, sons like their fathers and daughters like their mothers (West, & Zimmerman, 1987). It results in sons and daughters becoming products of their parents socially guided perceptual, interactional, and expectations that define their gender roles (West, & Zimmerman, 1987).

For example, parents encourage their sons in “rough and tumble” behavior (Fagot, 1978, p. 461) and daughters are encouraged in “lady like behavior” (Fagot, 1978, p. 459).

Adolescents' Gender Stereotypical Biases for Parenthood

During the adolescent period, parents are actively preparing their children for adulthood (Arnett, 2010). According to Bandura (1969) “given the intensive discrimination training, peer modeling” (p. 215) and frequent parental demonstrations of masculine and feminine gender stereotypical roles adolescents consider what they have learned from their parents, like a self-fulfilling prophecy (Eccles, 2014). A self-fulfilling prophecy is “an expectation that helps bring about what it predicts” (Brym, Lie, & Rytina, 2006, p. 109). Parent's gender stereotypical biases towards their children may encourage a gender specific pathway that the son becomes the man and the father he is expected to be, and the daughter becomes the woman and the mother she is supposed to be. It is possible adolescents have learned their roles for parenthood by what they have seen, learned and experienced in their own homes by their parents (Tinklin, Croxford, Ducklin, & Frame, 2005). Adolescents begin to establish pathways for the expected roles they will occupy as adults such as decisions about education (Eccles, & Wang, 2016), future occupations (Noonan, Hall, & Blustein, 2007), and “develop attitudes and ultimately make decisions concerning their marital and familial futures” (Sampson, 2010, p. 126). Adolescents know “what actions need to be undertaken to achieve a goal” as well as “to be confident about their ability to carry out those actions” (McKay, McKay, Dempster, & Byrne, 2014, p. 1131). In other words, their self-efficacy, which is their beliefs of perceived capabilities to perform those actions (Bandura, 1997).

Research with high school students found that they “believed it is more important for boys to get good qualifications because the man [father] should take primary responsibility for being the breadwinner in the family” (Tinklin, Croxford, Ducklin, & Frame, 2005, p. 136). Likewise, they also believed that the primary responsibility for caring for the children “was most often done by women [mothers]” (Tinklin, Croxford, Ducklin, & Frame, 2005, p. 136). It was the same pattern the students reported “they had observed modeled by their parents” (Tinklin, Croxford, Ducklin, & Frame, 2005, p. 133). Research shows that “unless people believe that they can produce desired effects by their actions, they have little incentive to act” (Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara, & Pastorelli, 1996, p. 1206). Adolescents align their own sense of efficacy for specific roles (Skinner, Connel, & Zimmer-Gembeck, 1998), including parenthood.

Adolescents select specific courses, such as math or English, to achieve their goals of a self-fulfilling prophecy for adulthood (Reynolds, Stewart, MacDonald, & Sisco, 2006). Once the goal is in place “it remains in the periphery of consciousness as a reference point for guiding and giving meaning to subsequent mental and physical actions” (Locke & Latham, 2006, p. 267). So that goal is given priority, commitment and motivation to achieve that goal (Locke & Latham, 2006). Therefore, an adolescents' self efficacy affects the eventual outcomes they seek to attain (Bandura, & Locke, 2003) and do everything in their power to remain on task. For example, adolescent students stereotyped “mathematicians as loners who have little time for their family and friends because they work long hours” (Eccles, 1994, p. 600) unlike a career in English. Despite similarities in math performance between the students, “girls' liking of math decreases as they move through adolescence to a greater extent than boys do” (Eccles, & Wang, 2016, p. 101). Due in part, girls believe that courses such as math, science, technology, and engineering would not position them for future careers to allow for their “desired work-family balance” and “make it harder to fulfill their prescribed roles within the family” (Hakim, 2006, p. 101). These gender differences contribute to the girl's belief that it is important to make course choices for the future family, different from boys (Eccles, & Wang, 2016; Schoon, & Eccles, 2014). To no surprise, the girls had lower ability in their self-concepts for math and higher ability in their self-concepts for English, and the reverse was true for boys (Eccles, & Wang, 2016). It was the same as their parent's perceptions of their children's abilities. The parent's gender stereotypical bias of abilities for math and English towards their children biased their children's expectancies and values of math and English despite the teachers rating of the actual math or English ability (Eccles, 2015). It is evident children's self-concepts are strongly related to their parent's gender stereotypical biases (Parsons, Adler, & Kaczala, 1982). In turn, students with “typical gender aspirations are significantly more likely to end up in gender-typical jobs and roles as adults” (Polavieja, & Platt, 2014, p. 1). Research found that girls prefer occupations that allow them to help and interact with people, whereas males prefer occupations that involve work with things, machines, and tools (Benbow, Lubinski, Shea, & Eftekhari-Sanjani, 2000; Eccles, Barber, & Jozefowicz, 1999).

Girls value the development of altruistic, reciprocal relationships more than boys do (Di Dio, Saragovi, Koestner, & Aube, 1996; Schwartz & Rubel, 2005) as well as put more value on jobs that allow them to help others and do something worthwhile for society (Abele & Spurk, 2011; Eccles, Barber, & Jozefowicz, 1999). Boys place more value on jobs that allow them to make a lot of money and have power (Abele & Spurk, 2011; Eccles, Barber, & Jozefowicz, 1999). Girl students place “more value on putting family needs before work” than boy students (Eccles, & Wang, 2016, p.102). The students chose courses aligned with the preference of either placing an “emphasis on activities related to children and family life” or placing an “emphasis on employment and competitive activities” (Hakim, 2006, p.286). It aligns with parents who think their daughters are better at English and their sons are better at math (Eccles, & Wang, 2016). It provides a great example of “one way in which parents of daughters may be inadvertently be pushing their daughters away from math and towards English” (Eccles, & Wang, 2016, p.123) and parents of sons be pushing their sons away from English and towards math. The same way parents may be pushing their daughters to be the primary parent and their sons to provide for the family and take a secondary role in parenting.

Parents influence their children’s “developing math or English ability self-concepts in two ways. First, “a positive meditational effect reflecting the accuracy of their perception of their children’s math or English ability” (Eccles, & Wang, 2016, p.123). Second, “a stereotypic biasing effect that results from their endorsement of the culturally shared gender stereotype” (Eccles, & Wang, 2016, p.123). In other words, girls are “getting a heavier dose of the things that are characteristic for females” (Eccles, & Wang, 2016, p.129) like being good at English and boys are getting a heavier dose of the things that are characteristic for males like being good at math. Therefore boys “are more likely than girls to receive a great deal of support for their interest in math” (Eccles, & Wang, 2016, p.130) to attain a high paying job to support the family. On the other hand, girls may receive a great deal of support for their interest in English to place their family as a priority. It is evident parents contribute to these gender differences “through the messages they provide their children regarding their perceptions of their children’s ability and efforts” (Frome, & Eccles, 1998, p. 447). Through reinforcement, parents encourage daughters to “place more value on putting family needs before work” (Eccles, & Wang, 2016, p. 102). However, sons are encouraged to “place more value on jobs that allow them to make a lot of money” (Eccles, & Wang, 2016, p.102; Jozefowicz, Barber, & Eccles, 1993). In doing so, daughters have more advanced abilities for English and less for math whereas sons have more advanced skills for math and less for English. So, if parents have to gender stereotypical biases towards their children to conform to cultural shared gender stereotypical patterns for parenthood, then daughters will have more advanced abilities for parenting and less for work outside the home whereas sons will have more advanced skills for work and less for parenting.

Eccles (2014) *Conceptual Model of Parental Influences on Children* shows how a gendered bias may emerge (Eccles, 2014). Parents tend to “treat boys differently than girls” (Lytton, & Romney, 1991, p. 268) and the “transmission of gender-specific norms, values, and aspirations lead to segregated outcomes” (Polavieja, & Platt, 2014, p.2). The *Conceptual Model of Parental Influences on Children* illustrates the theoretical approach of “how one gets from the child’s biological sex to gender differences in children’s achievement-related behaviors and decisions” (Eccles, 2014, p. 119). Parental influences on gender differences, personal agency (self-fulfilling prophecy) and socialization all contribute to understanding the “forces that set up the opportunities and barriers to pursuing or picking one’s path” and influence people’s life decisions (Eccles, 2014, p.118). It explains “how parents’ perceptions of their children’s abilities predict the children’s confidence in their abilities; how parents’ beliefs differ according to the gender of their child; and how these beliefs predict children’s own beliefs and behaviors” (Eccles, 2014, p. 116). According to Eccles (2014), gender-role stereotypes are a “central component of one’s culture, as are gender-role-related beliefs about what beliefs, goals, and behaviors are appropriate and inappropriate for females and males. As children grow up, they have to make sense of the gendered world in which they live. This cognitive process will influence how they interpret everything that goes on around them. Gender-role-related beliefs also influence the behaviors of teachers, parents, and other individuals in children’s lives. There is no doubt that children’s gender influences the way individuals interact with them” (p. 119).

In adapting Eccles (2014), *Conceptual Model of Parental Influences* the possible outcome of a parent’s involvement or lack of involvement with children, two influential factors contribute to stereotypical roles in parenthood; personal factors and environmental factors which may lead to a son’s or daughters’ involvement with their children. Personal factors include the gender of the child (boy or girl), the family’s history of what role the father and mother have assumed in parenthood and a self-fulfilling prophecy. A son’s goal is to be like the same gender role model, the father and the daughter’s goal is to be like the same gender role model, the mother.

Environmental factors primarily include the parent's attitudes, perceptions and behaviors and how they relate to their son or daughter. Through toys, encouraging a specific type of play for sons (rough and tumble play) and daughters (lady like behavior) and expectations of their children, parents help to develop their children's abilities. Sons and daughters receive reinforcement for gender-appropriate behavior and punishment for inappropriate gender behavior. It is internalized within children, evident by adolescents choosing courses, such as either math or English, to align with their specific life goals, i.e. distinct gender roles in parenthood.

The personal factors and environmental factors lead children to specific pathways for individual parenting behaviors. For example, sons who become fathers may be less involved with their children and more engaged with work outside the home whereas daughters who become mothers are more involved with their children and less engaged with work outside the home. Fathers who have assumed a secondary parenting role to provide for the family (Lamb, 2000) may have limited involvement with his children. It may be due to many reasons such as employment constraints (Buchler, Perales, & Baxter, 2017), perceptions about his abilities to parent and maintaining conformity with stereotypical gender roles he has learned from his parents in childhood. However, despite mothers considered as the "primary parent" of children (Maxwell, Scourfield, Featherstone, Holland, & Tolman, 2012, p. 163), fathers perceive fatherhood as a significant marker in their lives (Duckworth, & Buzzanell, 2009).

Literature Review

Importance of Fathers

The father-child relationship is vital to the children's well-being. Supporting research has shown for years that there are negative consequences of father-absence on children (Lamb, 2010; Rohner, & Veneziano, 2001; Seltzer, & Bianchi, 1988). However, since the impact of mothers on the development of children is believed to be more significant than fathers, research has been aligned with a maternal focus to a far greater extent than a paternal orientation (Rohner, & Veneziano, 2001). However, research has shown that a father who is highly involved with their child produces favorable developmental outcomes for the child such as fewer school adjustment difficulties, improved mental and physical health, self-confidence and self-regulation skills (Wilson & Prior, 2011).

A recent meta-analysis study by researchers Leon, Bai, and Fuller (2016) titled *Father involvement in child welfare: associations with changes in externalizing behavior* provides credence. This study included 333 children, between the ages of six and 13, from the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS). Using the Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths (CANS) the externalizing behaviors were measured. The results were a negative correlation of less involved fathers and an increase in externalizing behaviors of children. These findings support the importance of the father and child relationship.

Fathers, like mothers, have specific roles to provide for both the child's well-being and family functioning (Panter-Brick et al., 2014). Research shows there is an overall positive effect of a father involvement. Children have better mental health (Flouri, 2005), parental attachment (Bakermans-Kranenburg, Van Ijzendoorn, & Juffer, 2003), primary needs met (Kim, Mayes, Feldman, Leckman, & Swain, 2013), and increased cognitive scores (Martin, Ryan, & Brooks-Gunn, 2007). It is clear that fathers and their positive involvement with their children can have many different impacts on the child's cognitive, emotional, social, and physical development.

Fathers' Impact on a Child's Cognitive Development

Infants of highly involved fathers, measured by interaction, levels of play and caregiving activities are more cognitively competent at six months (Pedersen, Anderson, & Cain, 1980). By age one they have "higher mental scores" and cognitive functioning (Nugent, 1991, p. 482). Toddlers "who were securely attached to their fathers also exhibited more positive affect and better orientation in problem-solving," and adaptation skills (Easterbrooks, & Goldberg, 1984, p. 750) and by age three had a higher Intelligence Quotient (IQ) (Yogman, Kindlon, & Earls, 1995). The children tend to be more resourceful and skillful when presented with a problem. A fathers' talk with toddlers is different than mothers on many measures of child-directed speech. Fathers talk more to their children (Rowe, Cocker, & Pan, 2004). Fathers have more "diversity of vocabulary including the number of wh- and total questions posed, and a higher number of direct and indirect directives" (Rowe, Cocker, & Pan, 2004, p. 288) which require the child "to assume more communicative responsibility in the interaction" (Rowe, Cocker, & Pan, 2004, p. 289) and talk more. By school aged the "children are more likely to get A's, are less likely to have ever repeated a grade or have ever been suspended or expelled" (Nord, & West, 2001, p. 10). Children have better verbal skills (Radin, 1981), enjoy school and have positive attitudes towards school (Flouri, 2005).

Adolescents have the higher educational achievement, better relationship quality and career success (Amato, 1994). Fathers are “the primary household influence on adolescent boys’ academic motivation” to try hard in school and value an education (Alfaro, Umaña- Taylor, & Bámaca, 2006, p.289). Positive father engagement was related to tenth-grade adolescents to have fewer behavior problems (Zimmerman, Salem, & Notaro, 2000).

Fathers’ Impact on a Child’s Emotional Development

Infants with involved fathers in their care are more likely to have a secure infant-father attachment (Cox, Owen, Henderson, & Margand, 1992) and be able to handle stranger sociability (Kotelchuck, 1976). Infants react to their fathers with “cooing, smiling and become excited” with the father’s approach (Billier, 1993, p.11). They are more trusting and curious to explore their environments (Billier, 1993). Father involvement is positively correlated with children’s overall life satisfaction and experience of less depression (Dubowitz et al., 2001). Father’s love is vital to a child’s emotional well-being and health (Rohner, 1998). Adolescents with involved fathers have more self-control and higher self-esteem (Amato, 1994). They have higher self confidence (Doyle, Moretti, Voss, & Margolese, 2000), less expressions of negative emotions (Easterbrooks, & Goldberg, 1990), less anxiety (Jorm, Dear, Rodgers, & Christensen, 2003), less psychological distress (Flouri, 2005) and less impulsivity behaviours (Mischel, 1961). Father’s acceptance of his child is significantly related to “adolescents’ self-reports of psychological adjustment” (Veneziano, 2000, p. 123). Research shows “that although both father and mother involvement contributed significantly and independently to children’s happiness, father’s involvement had a stronger effect” (Flouri & Buchanan, 2003, p. 399). Overall, there are better adolescent outcomes regarding grades, self-efficacy, internalizing and externalizing behaviors, and acting out in school (King, 2006).

Fathers’ Impact on a Child’s Social Development

Father’s involvement positively correlates with children’s overall social competence, social maturity and the capacity to relate to others (Krampe, & Fairweather, 1993; Stolz, Barber, & Olsen, 2005). Fathers who were considered to be warmer and more sympathetic to their children had children who were found to be “as kinder, less hostile, and less competitive” (Rutherford, & Mussen, 1968, p. 755). Children who had a positive relationship with their fathers reported less conflict in their peer interactions (Ducharme, Doyle, & Markiewicz, 2002).

On the other hand, children with a negative relationship with their father had a significant and direct effect on children’s negative social behavior as reported by siblings, which in turn predicted decreased peer acceptance” (Paley, Conger, & Harold, 2000, p.761). Adolescents who have involved fathers are more tolerant, understanding, socially accomplished and likely to report good relationships with significant others (Franz, McClelland, & Weinberger, 1991). Adolescents with close relationships with their fathers were predicted to have successful marriages (Lozoff, 1974) and were “less likely to divorce” (Risch, Jodl, & Eccles, 2004, p. 46). Also, a father’s involvement significantly relates to children’s moral judgment, rule conformity and moral values (Hoffman, 1971).

Fathers’ Impact on a Child’s Physical Health

Fathers protect children from engaging in delinquent behavior (Harris, Furstenberg, & Marmer, 1998). For example, there is less drug use such as marijuana (Zimmerman, Salem, & Maton, 1995), less alcohol use (Barnes, 1984) and less victimization from bullying (Flouri & Buchanan, 2002). Research shows less frequency of externalizing and internalizing symptoms such as acting out (White, & Gilbreth, 2001). Obese children are more likely to live without their fathers than non-obese children (Struass & Knight, 1999) and an overweight father may increase by four times the risk of obesity in adolescents at the age of 18 years of age (Burke, Beilin, & Dunbar, 2001). Father’s involvement is also negatively associated with children’s conduct disorder, and hyperactivity (Flouri, 2005). It is clear a father’s relationship constitutes many multi-dimensional aspects of children’s lives. A father’s positive involvement also has many positive affects for the mother.

Fathers’ Impact on a Mother

Research has shown a father’s positive involvement with his children directly impacts mothers. Fathers can provide “economic and emotional support for the mother” (Cowan & Cowan, 1987, p. 225). Fathers involvement can provide fathering to his unborn child through caring for the mother during pregnancy (Habib, 2012). During childhood, mothers reported “fewer externalizing behaviors (e.g., aggressive and delinquency behaviors) of their children” with a father’s high involvement than mothers with fathers with low involvement (Culp, Schadle, Robinson, & Culp, 2000, p. 35).

Mothers experienced psychological, social and physical relief to mothering and caring for the child (Clarke-Stewart, 1978). For example, when the father was in the room “the mother talked, responded and played with the child less” (Clarke-Stewart, 1978, p. 476). All these factors further enhance the mother child relationship and the father child relationship.

Fathering Impact on a Father

Fathers who are involved parents feel more self confident in their parenting abilities (De Luccie, 1996) and find parenting more satisfying (Goodman, 2005). Their reluctance to participate may be influenced by their experiences and perceptions of self-efficacy originating in childhood. In fact, many fathers “express a desire to parent differently from their own fathers, whom they perceived as having been distant or disengaged from their families (Goodman, 2005, p. 193). Mothers who believe that a fathers’ involvement is important may be more likely than other mothers to encourage paternal involvement (De Luccie, 1996). In fact, a mother’s support was positively related to the degree of shared parental involvement (De Luccie, 1996).

Fathers realize that there is much “time, energy and hard work required” to care for a child and the adjustment to fatherhood may prove to be “disruptive, disappointing and frustrating” (Goodman, 2005, p. 194). Many fathers have succumbed to the fact that they “lack skills, experience, support, time and recognition needed for fathering” (Goodman, 2005, p. 194). Some fathers have reported feelings of “helplessness and inadequacy in providing care” to the child and “guilty that they were not being more helpful” (Goodman, 2005, p. 194). However, other fathers have “developed their own ways of relating” to a child (Goodman, 2005, p. 195). For example, for breastfeeding mothers, fathers would feed the child from a bottle once a day (Goodman, 2005) to encourage an emotional bond with the child. However, some fathers felt “they had few or no role models or guidelines to follow in helping them develop their desired role as active, involved fathers (Goodman, 2005, p. 196).

Fathers’ Perceptions of Parenthood

Father’s attitudes “about their children and their roles as parents may be important in determining the father’s involvement with their children” (Cox, Owen, Henderson, & Margand, 1992, p. 1022). Many fathers speak very fondly about who their children are and strive to maintain a family and home sometimes under challenging circumstances (Cameron, Coady, & Adams, 2007). Some fathers believe their “main responsibilities are to educate, care for, and provide basic needs for their children, and maintain good, loving and supportive relationships with them” (Pleck, 2010, p. 105). Fathers try to build a fatherhood based on a close emotional relationship with their children” (Carrillo, Bermúdez, Gutiérrez, Camila, & Delgado, 2016, p. 104). Some fathers are making a dedicated effort to be more available to their children and can spend on average up to five hours per day with their child (Pruett, 1998). Young fathers who aspire to be more involved than they are with their children “lack the modeling and experience of the fathering they hoped to create, and they struggle to overcome their early family patterns” (Krampe, & Fairweather, 1993, p. 576).

Perceptions of Fathers

The attitude towards fathers is concerning. There is an overall negative perception of fathers in the literature compared to mothers (Coakley, 2013; Dominelli et al., 2010; Edleson, 1998). Fathers are considered to be risky (Scott, & Crooks, 2004), worthless (Rosenberg, & Wilcox, 2006), and dangerous (Ferguson & Hogan 2004).

Fathers are Risky. Featherstone (2004), argues fathers are perceived to be a risk rather than a resource for families. For example, some professionals feel fathers pose a threat to the child, whether it be perpetrators of physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse or child neglect (Scott & Crooks, 2004). Despite the fact, fathers are “relevant stakeholders” for the protection of their children” (Lonne et al., 2008, p. 86). A risk-averse practice can influence professional’s response to the father in a biased way. For example, a father may have restricted access visits to discourage the relationship between a father and a child.

Fathers are Worthless. There is a pessimistic view of fathers (Brewsaugh & Strozier, 2016; O'Donnell, Johnson, D'Aunno, & Thornton, 2005). Descriptions of fathers include uselessness (Baum, 2017), irrelevant (Scourfield, 2001), and problematic (Storhaug & Øien, 2012). Some researchers argue the lack of a father’s involvement with his children is due to his awareness that professionals perceive them to be worthless and dangerous (Coakley, 2013; Dominelli, Strega, Walmsley, Callahan, & Brown, 2010). For example, a father’s paternal function is considered to be less critical than a mother’s maternal role (Bellamy, 2009).

Fathers are Dangerous. Fathers are labeled as dangerous and aggressive (Ferguson & Hogan 2004) with little attention given to their roles as parents. Ferguson and Hogan (2004) point out even fathers who labeled as dangerous can be worked with effectively to become good parents. Some fathers are reported to be a threat to professionals through acts of aggression and confrontation (O'Donnell et al., 2005). However, these fathers characterized as dangerous when they attempt to question or challenge judgments made of them (Smithers, 2012). For example, this perceived aggression may be the result of the father's last-ditch attempt to have access to his children which some professionals may attribute the father's assertiveness as fitting the label for an abusive father rather than a concerned parent (Mandell, 2002). These negative perceptions of fathers have many implications for fathers (Brewsaugh & Strozier, 2016).

Implications for Fathers

Brown et al., (2009) reminds us the “precepts of good practice with mothers should hold true for fathers” (p. 31). However, even parent programs which are to “improve parental competencies” and promote a child's health, development, and behavior for fathers are very few in numbers (Olds, Sadler, & Kitzman, 2007, p. 355). According to Panter-Brick, et al. (2014), “engaging with fathers is one of the least well-explored and articulated aspects of parenting interventions” (p. 1187). In fact, few minimal services are focused on the father-child dyad (Panter-Brick et al., 2014). However, fathers need to be involved as they uniquely impact the child's well being (Leon, Bai, & Fuller, 2016) but a review of the literature shows evidence of negative stereotyping, inequality of treatment and exclusion from services for fathers.

Negative Stereotyping. A negative stereotyping of a father's ability to parent maybe leading to the reluctance of fathers to fulfill their parenting obligations (Greif et al., 2011). Some fathers have reported that professionals are suspicious of their desire to parent their children (Smithers, 2012). Stereotypes like these have both influenced psychologies of fathers as well as professional responses to, and expectations of fathers (Smithers, 2012). For example, professionals who focus only on mothers have inadvertently excluded fathers from services (Black, Dubowitz, & Starr, 1999).

Inequality in Treatment. It is evident that fathers are not involved with their children in services to the same extent of mothers (Risley-Curtiss & Heffernan, 2003). It is apparent double standards are a recurring issue in literature where “as a whole is imbued with a sense of fathers not being listened to by professionals and of being marginalized from processes.” Often, fathers tend “to go unrecognized and unacknowledged” (Baum, 2015, p. 1465). For example, many reports written about children are in collaboration with the mother, but the father has not been consulted (Smithers, 2012). Research shows many examples of how fathers are treated differently from mothers. For example, many services, support, and interventions are available for mothers (Arber, & Gilbert, 1989) and not fathers (Panter-Brick et al., 2014). There is a minimal investigation on fathers influences on a child compared with the impacts of mothers on a child (Panter-Brick et al., 2014; Phares, & Compas, 1992). Fathers can be just ignored and avoided (Frank, Brown, Johnson, & Cabral, 2002; O'Hagan, 1997).

Exclusion from Services. Some fathers report that they are not involved in services as much as they would like to be (Brodie, Paddock, Gilliam & Chavez, 2014; Risley-Curtiss & Heffernan, 2003; Storhaug & Øien, 2012). Dominelli (2002) states engaging with fathers in family-based interventions have been the exception rather than the rule. There are many possible reasons for exclusion from services fathers may encounter. Professionals may find it easier to work with mothers, not fathers (Baum, 2015; Smithers, 2012), the impact of a professionals' negative relationship with their father may influence their attitudes and behaviors towards clients who are fathers (Veneziano, 2009). Or maybe there is a lack of education about fathers as many students have commented on the lack of a theoretical framework to help them work with fathers (Ewart-Boyle, Manktelow, McColgan, 2013). Or the lack of information on fathers and father parenting programs (Bayley, Wallace, & Choudry, 2009; Jenkinson, Casey, Monahan, & Magee, 2016). Perhaps there is a gender bias towards fathers (Brandon et al., 2009) or maybe it stems from the fathers' perceptions of parenthood. Nonetheless, one thing for sure is there is great difficulty for fathers in parenthood (Edleson, 1998) as they are considered to be the “unheard gender” (Baum, 2015). At times, minimal effort is sought to account for the contribution of fathers “to be brought centrally into the equation” of professional practice (Dominelli, 2002, p. 104). Professionals directing their attention to the mother as the primary parent do not consider the absence of the father as a critical issue (English, Brummel & Martens, 2009). Fathers can be described as effectively “missing in action” (Smithers, 2012, p. 8).

Both parents are equally influential people in a child's life. Fathers are important parents and directly impact the children's overall well-being. It is essential to consider if parents' gender stereotypical biases towards their children may now be negatively affecting their son's involvement as a father with his children. Fathers encouraged to take a proactive approach to parenting, may become more receptive to services and feel more valued for contributing to their children lives. Children will benefit immensely having a father in their life. Research shows that fathers increase the overall well-being of their child. Fathers gaining more attention in parenthood may increase his hands-on involvement with their children.

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