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Fathers' Motivation for Involvement with Their Children: A Self-Determination Theory Perspective

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Abstract (Summary)

The degree to which fathers' motivation for involvement with their preschool children was intrinsic versus extrinsic was examined in a sample of 205 French-speaking fathers. Links between fathers' motivation and fathers' perceptions of support from partners, fathers' sense of competence in parenting, fathers' involvement in parenting, and fathers' satisfaction in their performance of the parental role were investigated. Structural equation modeling revealed a father's perceptions that his partner has confidence in his parenting ability were related to both feelings of competence in parenting and to his motivation, which in turn was related to his involvement and to his satisfaction in his performance of the parental role. [PUBLICATION ABSTRACT]

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[Headnote]

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Keywords: father involvement, paternal motivation, paternal satisfaction, selfdetermination theory, sense of competence, partner confidence

Although many men seek a father-child relationship characterized by more nurturance and intimacy than they experienced with their own fathers (Palkowitz, 2002), a significant number of absent and uninvolved fathers do not assume responsibility for their children (Parke, 2002; Silverstein, 2002). A large body of research has examined the determinants of father involvement (Marsiglio, Amato, Day, & Lamb, 2000). Lamb (1997), for example, identified motivation, skills and confidence, social support, and supportive policies as facilitating men's involvement with their children. This study examined the associations between fathers' perceptions of support from partners, fathers' sense of competence in parenting, fathers' motivation for involvement with their children, fathers' involvement in parenting, and fathers' satisfaction in their performance of the parental role. A number of scholars have emphasized the need for interation of theory and empirical findings in this Held (e.g., Marsiglio et al., 2000; Rane & McBride, 2000). Because the study of father involvement lies at the confluence of many disciplines, it has been enriched by a variety of theoretical models.

Men become involved with their children for many different reasons. Some research on fathers in dual income families suggests men engage in child-related activities primarily to compensate for their partner's relative unavailability (e.g., Volling & Belsky, 1991). Thus father involvement is attributed to mothers' increased labor force participation. Identity theory explains men's involvement in terms of the significance they attribute to the parental role (Ihinger-Tallman, Pasley, & Buehler, 1993; Maurer, Pleck, & Rane, 2001). There is evidence that men who report valuing the father role also report higher levels of involvement with their children (e.g., Beitel & Parke, 1998). This valuation of fathering can best be understood as having developed through social interaction (Henley & Pasley, 2005; Maurer et al.). Among the significant people in the man's entourage, the mother plays a very important role. Maurer et al., for example, examined the importance of fathers' perceptions of the partner's evaluation of his parenting. These perceptions, labeled "reflected appraisals" to highlight their subjective nature, were significantly related to men's caregiving identity. Minton and Pasley (1996) found links between sense of competence and involvement were stronger for divorced, nonresident fathers than they were for nondivorced fathers. As a growing number of authors have identified ways in which men can

be self-determined in their role as fathers (e.g., Cole, 2002; Lamb & Tamis-Lemonda, 2004; Pleck & Masciadrelli, 2004), this study examined the usefulness of Deci and Ryan's (1991; Ryan & Deci, 2000) self-determination theory to understand fathers' motivation for involvement with their children.

Self-Determination Theory (SDT)

According to Self-Determination Theory (SDT), an understanding of behavior regulation must include an examination of the origins of the regulatory process, distinguishing between origins that are related to the self and those that are related to forces or pressures external to the self. Deci and Ryan (1991; Ryan & Deci, 2000) have proposed the regulation of behavior can take many forms that correspond to qualitatively different styles of behavior regulation. These regulatory styles vary in their level of autonomy and are associated with one of two basic types of motivation: intrinsic motivation or extrinsic motivation.

Intrinsic motivation represents the manifestation of one's innate tendency to seek challenge, discover novel things, and to master the environment in the absence of material rewards or external constraints. When intrinsically motivated, one embraces the activity with a sense of personal choice and commitment. Extrinsic motivation pertains to a variety of behaviors engaged in as a means to an end and not for their own sake (Deci & Ryan, 1985). The activity is performed to prompt pleasant consequences or to avoid unpleasant ones. The father who is intrinsically motivated to be involved with his child may interact with his children spontaneously for the immediate satisfaction he gains or for the sense of satisfaction of the need to be effective, connected with others, and autonomous (e.g., Palkowitz, 2002; Pasley, Futris, & Skinner, 2002).

Deci and Ryan (1985) have proposed different forms of regulation for extrinsic motivation that vary in the extent to which the regulation of behavior is perceived as constrained by external sources or as freely chosen by the individual. External regulation is the prototype of extrinsic motivation and corresponds to behaviors governed by external sources of control originating from one's environment (e.g., reward or punishment). Explanations for father involvement in terms of mothers' diminished availability and increased demands for an egalitarian sharing of domestic responsibilities imply externally regulated father involvement (e.g., Volling & Belsky, 1991). With introjected regulation, the formerly external sources of control have been internalized so that their presence is no longer needed to initiate behavior. Instead, the control stems from within the person in the form of self-imposed pressures such as guilt or anxiety (Ryan & Connell, 1989). The internalization is only partial in the sense that one is still "being" regulated, resulting in feelings of internal pressure (Williams & Deci, 1996). A father who shows extrinsic motivation by introjection interacts with his children to please other family members or to avoid conflict (e.g., Silverstein, 2002). When external regulatory processes have been internalized into one's sense of self, the resulting regulatory style is identified regulation. The activity is valued and is perceived as being central to one's identity. One personally decides to do the activity because it is congruent with one's own values and goals. Although the behavior is still performed for extrinsic reasons, identified regulation is considered self-determined because it is internally regulated. This refers to the father who values his involvement with his children, even though it may not be pleasurable to him (Beitel & Parke, 1998; Rane & McBride, 2000).

According to SDT, the different regulatory styles of behavior occur along a continuum of self-determination ranging from self-determined forms of behavior regulation to nonself-determined forms of behavior regulation (i.e., intrinsic motivation, identified, introjected and external regulation, respectively). Furthermore, SDT posits that the internalization of the different forms of regulation is fuelled by peoples' natural tendencies to integrate within themselves the regulation of activities useful for effective functioning in the social world even though they may not be inherently interesting (Deci, Eghari, Patrick, & Leone, 1994).

SDT posits greater levels of self-determination should be associated with better psychological functioning (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Because the regulatory styles of behavior vary according to their level of self-determination or perceived autonomy, a higher level of self-determination for the regulation of a behavior is associated with positive consequences (such as enhanced learning, greater interest, more persistence, greater effort, better performance, higher self-esteem, increased life satisfaction, and enhanced health) whereas a lower level of self-determined motivation is negatively related to these outcomes.

Deci and Ryan's theory also identified three universal human needs—the needs for competence, relatedness, and autonomy. Healthy adjustment and higher levels of self-determined motivation are presumed to result when the individual experiences satisfaction of these needs by feeling effective, connected to others, and autonomous. The interpersonal context is assumed to play an important role in promoting or stifling self-determination. A large body of research has examined the ways parents and coaches influence a young person's self-determination for an activity (e.g., Niemiec et al., 2006; Soenens & Vansteenkiste, 2005; Vallerand, Portier, & Guay, 1997). In general, autonomy-supporting behaviors have been shown to promote self-determination in an activity, whereas controlling behaviors tend to thwart self-determination (Deci & Moller, 2005). Other studies have examined the ways organizational climate affects teachers' self-determination (e.g., Pelletier, Séguin-Lévesque, & Legault, 2002). Consistent with the predictions of self-determination theory, mothers' perceptions of their partners' competence in the father role have been found to be related to father involvement (e.g., Bonney, Kelley, & Levant, 1999; McBride & Rane, 1998; Pasley et al., 2002). Bouchard and Lee (2000) found that perceptions of partner support for parenting

were associated with greater perceptions of competence in the parental role and reports of greater father involvement even when marital satisfaction was taken into account. The application of self-determination theory to father involvement offers an intriguing opportunity for a finer-grained analysis of father motivation and an examination of the links between support, sense of competence, motivation, involvement, and satisfaction in performance of the parental role.

The model is represented in Figure 1. According to self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1991; Ryan & Deci, 2000), it was hypothesized that: a) the three types of partner support would be correlated; b) the more a father considers that his partner supports his sense of competence as a parent, provides interpersonal support, and supports his autonomy as a parent, the more he would feel competent in the parenting activities in which he is involved; in turn c) perceived competence would be related to more self-determined motivation for those activities; d) the more self-determined he perceives his motivation to be, the greater involvement he would report, and e) the more self-determined his motivation, the greater the satisfaction he would derive from his performance of the father role.

Dual Income Fathers of Pre-School Age Children

This study focused on the pre-school period when children require considerable direct interaction with parents (Lewis, 1997). Because there may be important differences between men in single income and dual income families (Crouler, Perry-Jenkins, Huston, & McHale, 1987; Volling & Belsky, 1991) it is not suitable to combine them in a single sample. This study therefore examined the most common family type in North America, the dual income family.

French-Speaking Fathers

Although the bulk of research has studied English-speaking fathers, scholars of father involvement recognize the importance of examining diverse populations (Clarke & O'Brien, 2004; Parke, 2002; Silverstein, 2002). Moreover, van Widenfelt, Treffers, de Beurs, Siebelink and Koudijs (2005) argued that cross-cultural adaptation and translation of assessment instruments has not received adequate attention in family psychology journals. In Canada, the largest non-English linguistic group is those whose home language includes French who comprise 23.2% of the Canadian population (Statistics Canada, 2001). This study focused on the most common family type in North America (dual income families), among a minority linguistic and cultural group.

Method

Participants

French Canadian fathers who participated ($N = 205$) ranged in age from 25-52, with an average age of 35.8 ($SD = 4.5$). Participants worked outside the home between 28 and 80 hours a week ($M = 42.3$; $SD = 8.5$), earning \$40,000-\$60,000 (Canadian dollars). Fathers had been married to (66%) or living with (33%) a female partner for an average of 9.2 years ($SD = 3.7$) and had at least one preschooler ($M = 3.4$ years, $SD = 1.2$ years) living at home with them. Fifty one percent of the children were boys. Fathers reported a wide range of educational backgrounds, but overall the sample was well-educated with almost two thirds having a university degree (61.3%). The majority of the sample reported employment in professional or managerial positions (60%), with the others in unskilled (16.7%) technical (13.7%), or service (9%) positions. The partners ranged in age from 23-46, ($M = 33.6$; $SD = 4.3$). These women worked outside the home from 25-60 hours a week ($M = 37.0$; $SD = 7.9$).

Recruitment

Participants were recruited by telephone solicitation, community announcements, and snowball techniques whereby participants provided the names of friends who might also be interested in participating. Of 3,155 calls to residential phone numbers, research assistants were unable to make contact due to an out-of service number or changed number ($n = 436$), or no response at that number after several attempts ($n = 260$). Phone contact was made with 2,549 people, of whom 7.7 percent refused to listen to the recruitment script ($n = 189$) and 81.3 percent did not meet inclusion criteria ($n = 1,999$). Of the 271 men contacted by phone who were eligible to participate, 68.6 percent agreed to receive questionnaires. A further 102 fathers were recruited by media announcements and snowball techniques. A cover letter included with the questionnaire repeated information already delivered in phone contact, namely that participation was voluntary, that participants were guaranteed anonymity and confidentiality, and that they had a right to leave any items blank. Fathers were asked to complete measures independently without consulting their partner. Of the 289 questionnaires distributed, 219 were returned, yielding a 75.8 percent completion rate ($n = 149$, 79.7% for telephone solicitation, $n = 70$, 68.6% for other methods). The response rate among eligible fathers who were contacted by phone was therefore, 52.3 percent ($.69 \times .758$). Data from six fathers were excluded, as they did not meet selection criteria. Eight other questionnaires were excluded due to incomplete data. In total, 205 questionnaires were used for analyses.

Measures

Bouchard and Lee (2000) reported the results of a preliminary study of 104 fathers of pre-school age children in which

internally consistent French measures of father involvement, father sense of competence, and perceptions of partner support were developed. Results of Confirmatory Factor Analyses (CFAs) conducted on each measure in the current study are reported below.

Partner Support for Father Involvement (PSFI). The Partner Support for Father Involvement (Bouchard & Lee, 2000) measure is a 12-item scale developed to assess perceptions of three different kinds of support for the paternal role (4 items per subscale): support for competence (e.g., my partner has confidence in my abilities as a parent), interpersonal support (e.g., my partner does what she can to make things easier in my role as a parent), and support for autonomy (e.g., my partner respects my opinion when we take a decision concerning our child). Fathers were asked to rate the frequency of each response on a seven-point scale (1 = almost never, 7 = almost always). Adequate internal consistency was obtained for each subscale (Cronbach's alpha coefficient: support for competence .83, interpersonal support .86, and support for autonomy .80). For the purpose of testing the structural model and for parsimony purposes, the 12 items representing partner support were used to create 4 indicators (Byrne, 1994). A CFA conducted on the PSFI as represented by the 4 indicators for each subscale supported the factor structure of the scale: RMSEA = .07, CFI = .96, IFI = .96.

Perceived Competence in Childcare Activities Scale (PCCAS). Fathers were asked to rate their sense of competence for each activity listed on the Father Involvement Scale (see below) using a seven-point scale (1 = not competent to 7 = very competent). The Perceived Competence in Childcare Activities Scale (Bouchard & Lee, 2000) is 15-item scale, which yielded a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .90 in the current sample. Once again, for the purpose of testing the structural model and for parsimony purposes, the 15 items representing the levels of father perceived competence were used to create 5 indicators (Byrne, 1994). The 5 indicators were created by grouping randomly 3 indicators to create 5 composite scores. A CFA conducted on the PCCAS as represented by the 5 indicators supported the factor structure of the scale: RMSEA = 0.02, CFI = .98, IFI = .98.

Motivation for Father Involvement Scale (MFIS). The MFIS (Bouchard, 2000) represents a new measure that includes the four sub-scales representing the different types of motivation as proposed by SDT. The measure was piloted on the sample of fathers described by Bouchard and Lee (2000). Bouchard (2000) found that the four subscales have normal distributions. Consistent with self-determination theory, the correlations between sub-scales followed a simplex pattern with higher correlations between adjacent types of motivation and lower or negative correlations with the types of motivation further apart on the self-determination continuum. Motivation by external regulation was positively correlated with extrinsic motivation by introjection $r(97) = .37, p < .01$, was unrelated to extrinsic motivation by identification $r(97) = -.07, ns$, and was negatively correlated with intrinsic motivation $r(97) = -.38, p < .01$. A factor analysis (FA), using maximum likelihood extraction with oblimin rotation supported the presence of four factors with eigenvalues greater than 1, accounting for 64.7 percent of the variance. All loadings were above .30 on their proposed factor and no item had a loading higher than .30 on any other factor. This 20-item scale was designed to measure fathers' motivation for different types of involvement with their children including: physical care activities, emotional care activities, activities that promote learning, activities that promote sports and culture, and social activities. For each item, respondents rate their degree of agreement with statements representing each of the four types of motivation (external regulation: because I have no choice; introjection: because I feel obliged to in order to please my family or to avoid conflict; identification: I choose to do it for my own good and the good of my family; intrinsic: because I enjoy it) on a seven-point scale (1 = do not agree at all to 7 = agree strongly). Subscale scores for each type of motivation were calculated. Cronbach's alpha coefficients indicated good internal consistency for the sub-scales representing the four types of motivation (external regulation: .81, introjection: .89, identification: .89; and intrinsic: .90).

In the present study, Cronbach's alpha coefficients indicated good internal consistency for the sub-scales representing the four types of motivation (external regulation: .85, introjection: .92, identification: .86, and intrinsic: .82). To measure each participant's general level of self-determination for father involvement, scores from each subscale were weighed according to their position on the self-determination continuum. Specifically, self-determined forms of motivation such as intrinsic motivation, and identified regulation were weighed positively and were assigned the weights of +2, +1, respectively. By contrast, nonself-determined forms of motivation such as external regulation, and introjected regulation were assigned the following respective weights: -2, -1. A participant's score on each item is multiplied by the weighting, so that the sum of all four types of motivation can range from -90 indicating external regulation to +90 indicating intrinsic motivation. Given that there were five items for each of the motivational subscales, five indices were computed using the individual motivational items and these five indices were used to form the latent construct representing the level of self-determined motivation for father involvement. Ryan and Connell (1989) have reported extensive support for the construct validity of such a composite index (see also Blais, Sabourin, Boucher, & Vallerand, 1990; Vallerand, 1997). Cronbach's alpha for the 5 indicators was .87. A CFA conducted on the scale as represented by the 5 indicators supported the factor structure of the MFIS: RMSEA = .06, CFI = .99, IFI = .99.

Father Involvement Scale (FIS). Bouchard and Lee (2000) developed this 15-item scale by translating items from published scales (e.g., McBride & Mills, 1993) and adding items addressing emotional-care. A process of back-translation was used to ensure the accuracy of the translation with special care taken to remain culturally sensitive (van Widenfelt et al., 2005). Fathers were asked to estimate their level of involvement in activities requiring

direct interaction with their preschool child (e.g., helping child with the morning routine), using a seven-point scale (1 = never or 0 times a week to 7 = all the time or 7 times a week). Cronbach's alpha coefficient in this sample was .82 for father involvement. For the purposes of testing the structural model and for parsimony purposes, the 15 items representing the levels of father involvement were used to create 5 indicators (Byrne, 1994). The 5 indicators were created by grouping randomly 3 indicators to create 5 composite scores. A CFA conducted on the FIS as represented by the 5 indicators supported the factor structure of the scale: RMSEA = .08, CFI = .98, IFI = .98.

Satisfaction in the Parental Role Scale (SPRS). This 5-item scale (Picard-Lessard, 1995) examines satisfaction with performance of different aspects of the parental role. Fathers indicate their degree of agreement on a 7-point scale (1 = do not agree at all to 7 = strongly agree) with statements about their involvement with their children (e.g., I am satisfied with the extent to which I take responsibility for raising my children). Cronbach's alpha coefficient was .84 in this sample. A CFA conducted on the SPRS as represented by the 5 indicators supported the factor structure of the scale: RMSEA = 0.02; CFI = 1.00, IFI = 1.00.

Results

Descriptive Data

An examination of Table 1 reveals that fathers who participated in this study perceived their partners often provided the three types of support. Fathers rated themselves as fairly competent in the range of child-related activities. Fathers reported most frequent involvement in discipline and least frequent involvement in traditionally feminine tasks such as helping with clothes (data not shown). The global self-determination score for father involvement indicates that fathers reported they engage in activities with their children because they consider it important and because they derive satisfaction from involvement with their children. The high positive mean score indicates fathers' motivation predominantly reflects more intrinsic than extrinsic motivation, including identified regulation (I consider it important) and intrinsic regulation (I derive satisfaction from it). In descending order of strength of agreement, fathers endorsed extrinsic motivation by identified regulation, intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation by introjected regulation and extrinsic motivation by external regulation.

Most experts would agree that although some parenting activities can be intrinsically rewarding, many essential parenting activities are neither inherently pleasurable nor satisfying. Consistent with this, fathers considered themselves most self-determined in activities that focus on their children's emotional and educational needs and least self-determined in tasks related to their children's physical needs. Fathers reported they engage in each of childcare activities just over four times a week. Men reported they were satisfied with their performance of their parental roles.

Model Testing

The hypothesized model was tested with structural equation modeling (SEM; Byrne, 1994). Data were first examined to determine whether they met the assumptions underlying multivariate analyses. Seven cases identified as multivariate outliers were eliminated from analyses leaving a final sample of 198 fathers. Inspection of the data revealed no evidence of curvilinearity, multicollinearity, or singularity. Given the controversy over the usefulness of indices, a number of different statistical criteria for the goodness of fit of the model are presented (Byrne, 1998). The comparative fit index (CFI) ranges from 0 to 1 with scores of > .90 indicating a good fit between the model and the sample data. The incremental fit index (IFI), which takes into account degrees of freedom ranges from 0 to 1, with scores > .90 indicating a good fit. The root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) is affected by the degrees of freedom and can vary between 0 and 1. Models that fit well typically yield an RMSEA \leq .08.

We then tested the proposed model as illustrated in Figure 1 : a) correlations between perceptions of the three types of partner support (competence, interpersonal, and autonomy), will be positive and statistically significant; b) regression coefficients between the three types of support and father sense of competence will be positive and statistically significant; c) the regression coefficient between sense of competence and motivation will be positive and statistically significant; d) the regression coefficient between motivation and involvement will be positive and statistically significant; and e) the regression coefficient between motivation and satisfaction will be positive and significant. In addition to the indices reported with respect to measurement, we also report the parsimony comparative fit index (PCFI) that is an indication of the efficiency of the model in explaining the data. The PCFI ranges from 0 to 1, with scores above .50 considered an indication of a parsimonious model.

Initial analyses provided partial support for the model ($\chi^2(450, N = 198) = 776.58, p < .001; CH = 0.90; IFI = 0.90; RMSEA = .07; PCFI = 0.81$) as most paths were significant, with the exception of the hypothesized links

between support for autonomy ($\beta = -.03$) and interpersonal support ($\beta = -.15$) with sense of competence. An examination of the modification indices suggested an improvement in the overall fit of the model would be achieved by allowing father involvement to also predict satisfaction ($\chi^2(449, N = 198) = 757.49, p < .001; CFI = 0.91; IFI = 0.90; RMSEA = .06; PCFI = 0.82$). This led to a significant drop in the chi-square, ($\Delta\chi^2(1) = 19.09, p < .001$). It was also decided to remove the two links between support for autonomy and interpersonal support, and the sense of competence and to allow two correlations between error uniqueness to correlate freely. The Wald test indicated those

modifications did not affect the support for the model ($\chi^2(453, JV = 198) = 766.91, p < .001$; CFI = 0.91; IFI = 0.90; RMSEA = .07; PCFI = 0.79). This drop in the chi-square was not significant ($\Delta\chi^2(4) = 9.43, ns$). Finally, examination of the modification indices suggested an improvement in the overall fit of the model would be achieved by allowing the fathers' perception of interpersonal support to predict the fathers' motivation ($\chi^2(452, JV = 198) = 754.39, p < .001$; CFI = 0.91; IFI = 0.90; RMSEA = .06; PCFI = 0.82). This led to a significant drop in the chi-square, ($\Delta\chi^2(1) = 12.52, p < .001$). The final model is represented in Figure 2.

The correlation between support for competence and interpersonal support was significant, indicating that the hypothesis a) was partially supported. The regression coefficient between support for competence and perception of competence was significant ($\beta = .59$), explaining 34.8 percent of the variance in perception of competence. The hypothesized relationship between perception of competence and motivation was supported ($\beta = .49$). In addition there was a significant link between interpersonal support and motivation ($\beta = .26$). Perception of competence and perception of interpersonal support together explained 30.8 percent of the variance in father's motivation for involvement. Motivation, in turn, had significant coefficients to both involvement ($\beta = .51$) and satisfaction with performance of the parent role ($\beta = .28$). Motivation explained 26.0 percent of the variance in father involvement and motivation and father's involvement explained 26.3 percent of the variance in satisfaction in the parental role. All estimates reported were significant at $p < .05$.

Discussion

Bouchard and Lee (2000) developed measures for all the constructs examined in this study. Bouchard (2000, unpublished) reported preliminary data on a father motivation scale that was developed using the same sample as Bouchard and Lee. Father involvement was slightly lower in the present study than that reported by Bouchard and Lee, but the sampling procedure in the present study may have yielded a less biased assessment of the average level of involvement. Nevertheless, in interpreting results of the study, it should be noted that the present sample was highly educated and of above average income.

The psychometric properties of measures developed by Bouchard and Lee (2000) were confirmed in this study. Consistent with other Canadian data, fathers in this sample reported significant involvement with their pre-school age children (Statistics Canada, 2000). Fathers' patterns of scores on the MFIS suggest they view their involvement in various childcare activities as reflecting the fact they value these activities rather than because they feel coerced into them. Fathers reported higher levels of self-determination with respect to activities that focus on the child's emotional and educational needs than on activities that focus on the child's physical needs. That is, fathers valued their contribution in terms of fostering the child's emotional development and learning to a greater extent than they did physical care activities. Given the well-established finding that fathers are less engaged than mothers are in physical care activities, it is not surprising to find men in this study described themselves as being less intrinsically motivated to engage in physical care activities than in other activities with their children. The findings with respect to activities related to emotional development are consistent with recent work that has emphasized the psychological benefits that accrue to men from their roles as fathers (Palkowitz, 2002). Overall, fathers reported they engaged with their children because they value the father role rather than because they feel forced to do so. Consistent with this, fathers perceived their partners as sources of support rather than as sources of coercion.

The results provide partial support for the self-determination model in explaining fathers' involvement with their children. The hypothesized links between perceptions of the three types of partner support were significant. However, only one type of perceived partner support, support for competence, was related to men's perceptions of their competence in the paternal role. Neither interpersonal support nor perceived support for autonomy was significantly linked to men's perceptions of their own paternal competence. Nevertheless, interpersonal support was linked to men's motivation. It is possible the construct of support for autonomy with respect to an activity that has been shown to be important in determining motivation for education (Pelletier et al., 2002; Vallerand et al., 1997) is not pertinent to fathering, which is essentially a social activity. It is possible that in applying self-determination theory to different types of activities, some of which are performance-based and others that are relationship-based, the importance of the different types of support will vary.

The hypothesized link between perceptions of competence and motivation was supported. It makes intuitive sense that men are more likely to be self-determined in their motivation to engage in activities to the extent they consider themselves competent in that activity. Motivation explains a significant proportion of the variance in father involvement (26.0%) and a smaller proportion of variance in a man's satisfaction in performance of the parental role (7.8%). Feelings of competence and perceptions of support are related to motivation, which in turn is related to involvement. In interpreting the results of the study, it is essential to remember the data are cross-sectional, so although the sequence is consistent with what has been found in other studies of motivation, confirmation of the temporal sequence requires longitudinal studies.

The link between a man's perceptions of his partner's support for his competence and his sense of competence, motivation, and satisfaction with his performance of the parental role has important implications for practice. Based on these results, it appears that efforts to promote men's involvement in their children's lives should foster men's sense of competence in their parenting. Although men and women are equally capable of interacting effectively with their children (Lamb, 1997), women's greater involvement with children allows them more opportunities to develop a sense of competence in their parenting. Men's longer work hours and differential use of parental leaves (Pleck, 1997) may allow them fewer opportunities to develop skills. Furthermore, there are more resources that directly offer services to mothers than to fathers. Various authors (e.g., Lee, 2006; Lee & Hunsley, 2006; Phares, Fields, & Binitie, 2006; Raikes & Bellotti, 2006) have highlighted the potential benefits of greater father participation in intervention programs. Recent efforts to increase fathers' involvement in Early Head Start have identified the importance of professionals fostering good relationships in order to facilitate men's involvement in programs that benefit their children (McAllister, Wilson, & Burton, 2004; Raikes, Summers, & Roggman, 2005; Roggman, Boyce, Cook, & Cook, 2002).

Results from this study underline the importance of the co-parental relationship in supporting fathers' involvement with their children (McHale et al., 2002). A father's sense of competence as a parent was related to the extent that he perceived his partner to communicate she considers him a good parent. Interestingly, there was no link between his perception of her availability to help him as a parent and his sense of competence as a parent.

In interpreting the results of this study, limits to generalizability must be considered. First, the target population for the study was employed men, living with an employed partner, and raising a preschool age child. The target population represents the most common family type in North America. However, because previous research has established these fathers may differ from fathers in single income families (e.g., Crouter et al., 1987; Veiling & Belsky, 1991) no generalization can be made to men in single income families, or to the many men who do not reside with their children. Consistent with the demographics of the region in which the sample was recruited, participants were well-educated men of above-average income. The generalizability to less educated or less affluent fathers is unknown.

Second, as in all studies of father involvement, it is likely that the 52.3 percent of eligible respondents who completed measures may under-represent uninvolved fathers. It is possible the eligible men who declined to take part in the study included a greater proportion of men who care for their children because they feel coerced to do so by the demands of dual-income family life. It is possible some uninvolved fathers inaccurately declared themselves ineligible for the study. These factors would all have served to yield a more optimistic or socially desirable view of father involvement. Third, we chose to focus only on men's perspectives. The data therefore are subject to a monoinformant bias. It is highly likely the perspectives of their partners would have yielded a picture that overlapped only partially. McBride and colleagues (2005) found that actual levels of paternal involvement are moderated by mothers' beliefs about the role of the father. This moderating effect might also apply to fathers' motivation. It is essential that future research consider the perspectives of both parents, as well as the links between different levels of self-determination and children's well-being.

Fourth, it is unclear whether similar results would be obtained in an English-speaking sample. Replication of the study in an English-speaking sample is required to address this question. Fifth, it is possible this pattern of results applies only to the pre-school period and would not be found in parents of infants or older children. There are sound reasons to expect fathers have more equal opportunities to spend time with preschool children than with infants. Canadian data also suggest that as children age, the difference in time spent with mothers and fathers diminishes (Statistics Canada, 2000). The roles of child gender and child temperament also warrant serious examination in investigations of father motivation. Finally, it will be essential to conduct further research to determine those qualities of the co-parental relationship that promote or inhibit involved fathering.

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