

Stay-at-home Father Families: Family Functioning and Experiences of Non-traditional Gender Roles

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PREFACE

This thesis is the result of my own work and includes nothing which is the outcome of work done in collaboration except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text. It is not substantially the same as any that I have submitted, or, is being concurrently submitted for a degree or diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text. I further state that no substantial part of my thesis has already been submitted, or, is being concurrently submitted for any such degree, diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text. It does not exceed the prescribed word limit for the relevant Degree Committee.

Stay-at-home Father Families: Family Functioning and Experiences of Non-traditional Gender Roles

Catherine Jones – Abstract

Social change over the last few decades has resulted in a dramatic increase in mothers in the paid workforce and increased paternal involvement in caregiving. This has led to a rise in families with male primary caregivers, including stay-at-home father families. Yet very little is known about the functioning of stay-at-home father families in comparison to other family forms. The aim of this thesis was, firstly, to examine parent wellbeing and family functioning in these families and, secondly, to explore the fathers' motivations and experiences of their non-traditional gender role.

Data were obtained from a sample of 127 families in the UK; 41 stay-at-home father families, 45 stay-at-home mother families, and 41 dual-earner families. All families were two-parent heterosexual families who were either married or cohabiting. Sixty percent of the children were female and the average age of the children at interview was four-years, eight-months. Standardised semi-structured interviews were conducted with fathers and mothers, and questionnaire measures completed. Observational assessments were conducted with father-child and mother-child dyads. Data were also obtained from the children on their perspectives of their family life. In addition, teachers completed a standardised measure of child adjustment. The fathers' experiences of their role were examined in depth by interview.

Few differences were found with regards to parent psychological adjustment and couple functioning and parents across the three family types generally reported a high level of wellbeing, although a third of primary caregiver parents scored above the clinical cut-off for anxiety. With regard to quality of parenting and parent-child relationship, no differences were found between primary caregiving fathers and mothers, and the few differences found between fathers favoured stay-at-home fathers. Stay-at-home fathers did not differ in terms of conforming to masculine norms in comparison to the other fathers in the sample, and the children too showed comparable gendered

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play behaviours across all family types. Child adjustment did not differ between family types; instead, family processes were more influential. In particular, parenting stress was associated with significantly higher levels of child difficulties. Children rated their primary caregiver mothers as higher on emotional security than stay-at-home fathers.

Qualitative analyses illustrated that stay-at-home fathers and mothers adopted their roles in their family for a variety of reasons, including financial considerations and a desire to be the primary caregiver. A thematic analysis indicated that stay-at-home fathers engaged in meaning-making strategies to make sense of their non-traditional parenting role that simultaneously rejected and reinforced masculine ideals. Facing prejudice was common throughout the fathers' narratives, although they also showed resilience to stigmatisation, reflecting the overall high level of wellbeing reported by the fathers. The implications for parents, policy and research are discussed.

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Finally, I would like to dedicate this thesis to the families who took part. Thank you for sharing your stories with me.

"We tend to count fathers less, notice them less,

and understand less about the correlations

between fatherhood and childcare,

and between fatherhood and wage work."

(Dowd, 2000, p.1).

'Nothing about a person's sex determines the capacity to be a good parent'.

(Lamb, 2012, p.101).

"It is now argued that the most revolutionary change

we can make in the institution of motherhood

is to include men in every aspect of childcare." (Ruddick, 1983, p. 213).

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1. Introduction

Historically, the predominant family set up is for fathers to be financial providers and for mothers to be primary caregivers for their children. There is a plethora of research on mothers' parenting quality and child adjustment in families with the mother adopting the primary caregiving role. As it is less common for fathers to take on the primary caregiving role, there is less research documenting the quality of parenting by male primary caregivers and whether child adjustment in these families differs from families with a female primary caregiver. Fathers may face barriers to feeling integrated in parenting circles and may suffer from a lack of social support. Despite these concerns, few studies have examined the potential impact of the father not conforming to traditional gender roles on his wellbeing and his parenting. Further, very little research has examined the overall family functioning of stay-at-home father families, especially regarding all members of a family system.

The over-arching aim of this thesis was to explore the adjustment of all members of stay-at-home father families compared to families with more 'traditional' set ups: with the mother staying at home, and with the predominant family type in the UK in the 21st century; the dual-earner household. This aim was motivated by the concerns surrounding stay-at-home father families, given that they stray from gender norms. A further aim was to establish whether the gender of a primary caregiver influences parenting and child outcomes. Three aspects of family functioning were examined: (1) parent psychological adjustment, (2) parenting and parent-child relationships, and (3) child outcomes. In addition, this thesis aimed to explore in depth the experiences of stay-at-home fathers regarding their non-traditional gender role; firstly, their motivations for adopting this role, and secondly, how they make sense of their role and their experiences of stigma. Together, these aims combine qualitative methods to study stay-at-home fathers with quantitative analyses using comparison groups. Using two different approaches to analyse these families allowed for a rich and detailed

exploration of stay-at-home fathers' experiences, alongside an empirical examination of these families.

This introductory chapter begins with a brief overview of research on fatherhood, including new depictions of more involved fathers. Subsequently, the three bodies of literature that informed this thesis are discussed in turn. Firstly, research on the unique aspects of stay-at-home father families are outlined, covering scholarship on the reasons for becoming a stay-at-home father, masculinity, stigma and matricentric views of parenting. Secondly, aspects of parent wellbeing and parenting that influence family functioning are summarised, in line with the family and ecological systems theory framework that guides the present work. The final section of the literature review discusses specific findings related to family functioning and child adjustment in a range of male primary caregiver families, including extant research on family processes within stay-at-home father families. The chapter concludes by presenting the rationale and aims of this thesis.

1.1. Overview on Fathers

The segregation of mothers and fathers into different parental roles and different social spheres has led to figurative, and indeed literal, barriers preventing mothers and fathers from adopting non-traditional roles within the family. This has begun to be addressed in the last few decades, partially reflected in the increase in primary caregiving men. A discussion on the experiences of primary caregiver fathers needs to be situated within the historical context of the roles of mothers and fathers.

Historically, reproduction has often been 'feminised' (Chodorow, 1999), such that not only birth but also childcare has been associated with mothers, and the father's role has been seen as directly opposite to that of a mother. Chodorow (1999) argued that motherhood is socially and culturally reproduced, by girls being socialised by their mothers to be nurturing and prepared for the parental role. Boys, and later men, are not socialised in the same way. The exacerbation of separate roles for mothers and fathers occurred during the Victorian era, with the legacy from this period of the separation of the domestic ('female') from the public ('male') still influencing social structures and parenting in the modern day (Coltrane, 2004). As such, the assumption that mothers are better at primary caregiving than fathers is one of the major beliefs upholding the image of the 'traditional' family (Lamb, 1999).

Due to historical viewpoints and longstanding social conventions placing mothers as primary caregivers, mothers were the initial focus of research on families and children. Nevertheless, there is now a wealth of work on paternal involvement, motivated by a significant increase in research interest in the role of the father within the social sciences in the 1960s and 1970s (Lamb, 2000). Chronologically, the importance of the father in family life has been characterised by Pleck (1984) according to four distinct roles: (1) as a source of moral guidance; (2) as the breadwinner for the family; (3) as a sex-role model, particularly for sons; and (4) as a nurturing parent, the model of fatherhood

that has received the most attention since the mid-1970s. Today, the nurturing qualities of fathers are a major topic of enquiry within psychological research, particularly as there has been a steady increase in the amount of time fathers dedicate to the daily caregiving responsibilities for their children (Lamb, 2000).

Aside from theorising on the role of the father compared to a mother, discourse on fathers has often operated around a deficit model, exploring father-absent families and what the effects of this may be (Lamb, 2010). When considering the effects of having a present father, research around the 1950s relied on correlational analyses of the associations between characteristics of fathers and their children, for example masculinity. The 'present' versus 'absent' father concern dominated much of psychological research on fathers until the 1980s. At that time, researchers turned their attention to assessing how much fathers were contributing to caregiving and the types of contributions fathers made (Pleck, 2010). Following from this, Lamb, Pleck, Charnov and Levine (1987) formulated a new model of father involvement, comprising three key dimensions of paternal involvement: (1) engagement (the father directly caring for their child or playing together); (2) accessibility (whether the father is available to their child); and (3) responsibility (whether the father is providing suitable resources for their child and is ensuring their child is cared for). The Lamb-Pleck conceptualisation (Pleck, 2010) paved the way for research to expand beyond just fathers 'being there' and into the type of involvement demonstrated by fathers. As asserted by Parke and Brott (1999), it is not just father presence that is important; the availability and engagement of fathers is what matters.

Fathers in contemporary society

In the twenty-first century, gradual but continuous social change has brought a diversification of family types and allocations of childcare. This is multi-faceted and motivated by numerous factors such as the increase in women in employment and the increased availability of outsourced childcare. Today, the majority of families in the UK are classed as 'dual-earner' families (Parke, 2013). As

described by Family Systems Theory (Broderick, 1993), one partner changing their work patterns elicits a reactionary change in the other partner, as one half of a couple's actions cannot be understood in isolation of the other's (Minuchin, 1985). Hence, more mothers working outside the home has led to a change in the behaviour of fathers. Dermott (2008) discussed how the new image of fathers depicts fathers spending significantly more time directly caring for their children than previous generations of men. Associatively, there has been an increase in paternal involvement in the current generation of parents compared to previous ones (Cabrera, Tamis-LeMonda, Bradley, Hofferth, & Lamb, 2000; Craig, Powell, & Smyth, 2014; Flouri, 2008).

However, it has been suggested that most fathers are not living up to expectations of the new image of involved fatherhood, and there is a disjunction between the image of the highly involved father, and the actual conduct of fathers (Dermott, 2008). Whilst representations of fatherhood have undergone dramatic change over the last few decades, LaRossa (1988) argued that there has not been an equal change in the gendered division of labour, as demonstrated through mothers generally still taking on the primary caregiving role. More recently, research has outlined how despite advancements in gender parity more generally, the transition to parenthood remains pertinent for the reproduction of traditional gender roles and hence gender inequality. It has been repeatedly found in research on parenting amongst heterosexual couples, mothers typically take on a greater proportion of childcare and housework, and fathers are more involved in economic provision (Baxter, Hewitt & Western, 2005; Bianchi, Milkie, Sayer, & Robinson, 2000; Rehel, 2014). This effect is exacerbated by mothers mostly taking a significantly longer period of parental leave compared to fathers. Studies of parents suggest that fathers still tend to regard financial provision as a key aspect of their role (Craig & Mullan, 2010; Shows & Gerstel, 2009). Although financial provision for one's family can be considered as an aspect of parenting, as it involves providing necessary resources for the functioning of a family, it cannot be labelled as 'caregiving' (Schmidt, 2018). These factors have all contributed to a lack of primary caregiving men in comparison to women. In addition, research largely

overlooks primary caregiving fathers who would be anticipated to be meeting such expectations of being a highly involved father.

Regarding contemporary depictions of parents, ideologies of intensive parenting have been afforded attention in the last few decades (Hays, 1996). These have outlined how parents, but mostly mothers, are expected to be highly involved, nurturing, attentive parents, even with an increase in participation in paid employment. These ideas have begun to emerge regarding expectations of fathers (Craig et al., 2014). The intensive parenting ideology would predict that the high time investment of fathers and mothers who are primary caregivers, particularly those who do not engage in paid employment for childcare reasons, would lead to beneficial outcomes for their children's development. In a similar vein, as discussed by Solomon (2014), stay-at-home fathers can be understood within Pleck and Lamb's framework of father involvement (Lamb, Pleck, Charnov & Levine, 1987); these men are highly engaged with their family, they are constantly accessible to their offspring and, as they spend a greater volume of time in direct caregiving than their spouse, they are also highly responsible for the actions, and outcomes, of their children. However, the view that fathers are not living up to new expectations of fathering, and the commonly held belief that mothers are better prepared for primary caregiving, have resulted in concerns being raised about stay-at-home fathers and their children.

Fathers in the UK

Parents in the UK face several challenges when negotiating how to arrange childcare and work, particularly regarding the provision of parental leave and access to affordable childcare. In terms of governmental support facilitating this, the UK's approach to parental leave has undergone change in the past few years, in line with wider change across Europe (Baird & O'Brien, 2015). In 2003, the UK introduced two weeks of paid paternity leave for fathers. Over a decade later, the Children and Families Act (2014) legislated that couples can share 50 weeks of parental leave between them in whichever way best suits the family after the mother has taken the statutory two weeks after birth.

This change in legislation has opened up opportunities for couples to either share the childcare more equally between them, or for the father to take the lead in terms of the amount of parental leave taken, hence is a key factor in creating a more father-friendly government parenting policy. However, regrettably, take-up of shared parental leave has been low and less than 2% of couples are taking advantage of the new policy (Birkett & Forbes, 2018), indicating greater efforts must be made to disseminate information on the new legislation. Also, research suggests that the difference between UK fathers' typical earnings and statutory pay during paternity leave deters fathers from taking more than two weeks' leave (Kaufman, 2016). This obstacle can only feasibly be addressed by a combination of greater governmental financial support and more contributions from companies whose employees take parental leave, and if left unaddressed, may prevent some fathers from taking on a primary caregiver role.

Another aspect to consider regarding parents' caregiving arrangements is the availability and affordability of childcare in the UK. In terms of the childcare options available to parents, legislation in the past few years has led to an increase in the number of free hours of childcare available to use for children aged 3- and 4-years-old, from 15 to 30 per week, for 38 weeks per year (Yerkes & Javornik, 2019). However, when children are outside of this age range, accessing affordable childcare is considerably more challenging, not least because the UK's childcare system is market-led rather than being publicly organised and funded (Yerkes & Javornik, 2019). In particular, Lewis and West (2016) note that since 2010, the government has done little to either stabilise or lower the high costs of childcare, which is a clear struggle for parents. As such, research indicates that families frequently turn to informal childcare arrangements, such as relatives or friends (Verhoef et al., 2015). Alternatively, parents often alter their work arrangements instead of finding outsourced childcare; in 2019, 30% of mothers and 5% of fathers in the UK reported changing their employment arrangement due to childcare responsibilities (Office for National Statistics, 2019).

The lack of adequate childcare options and long working hours for parents (Gregory & Milner, 2011) create practical challenges for parents in the UK when balancing paid employment and caregiving. Despite the rise in dual-earner families in the UK, these competing demands for parents provide the context within which some families decide to have one parent work significantly fewer hours, or not engage in paid employment.

1.2. Stay-at-home Fathers

A stay-at-home father can be defined as a man who is not in full-time employment outside the home and is the primary carer for his children (Stevens, 2015). The term 'stay-at-home parent' is not without controversy as it can be considered a reductionist term, for both mothers and fathers, as it places emphasis on only one aspect of a parent's identity. However, as a social category it is given meaning through its use in academic research (Chesley, 2011; Fischer & Anderson, 2012; Kramer, Kelly & McCulloch, 2015; Latshaw & Hale, 2016; Lee & Lee, 2016; Rochlen, McKelley, & Whittaker, 2010; Rochlen, Suizzo, McKelley, & Scaringi, 2008; Snitker, 2018; Solomon, 2014; Stevens, 2015; Zimmerman, 2000) and in the media (BBC, 2018; Dailey, 2014; Hart, 2015; Karpf, 2013; Peacock & Marsden, 2013). Other terms used to refer to stay-at-home fathers include 'house-husbands' and 'at-home fathers', and fathers who take on more childcare than their spouse have also been termed 'primary caregiver fathers' and 'male primary caregivers' (Boyer, Dermott, James, & MacLeavy, 2017). The terms 'stay-at-home father' and 'primary caregiver father' are used interchangeably in the present thesis, to define the highly involved fathers that were the focus of the research.

Although these men still represent a small portion of parents overall, the number of stay-at-home fathers is increasing. In September 2016, 254,000 men in the UK reported being economically inactive because they were looking after their family, and/or their home. This was an increase from 230,000 in September 2014. In parallel, the number of women who stated they were economically inactive due to home or family reasons fell from 2,054,000 in September 2014 to 1,975,000 in September 2016 (Office for National Statistics, 2016). Other sources of demographic data have also reported an increase in families with a female breadwinner (Connolly, Aldrich, & O'Brien, 2013; Connolly, Aldrich, & O'Brien, 2014). However, no data specifically on stay-at-home parents are currently gathered by the Office for National Statistics (ONS), which reflects how these parents often go unnoticed, and lack attention in policy and research. In addition, fathers who define themselves as

a stay-at-home father while working part-time are not classified as stay-at-home fathers in demographic data (Boyer et al., 2017).

The trend of increasing numbers of stay-at-home fathers is not restricted to the UK; the Pew Research Centre recorded two million stay-at-home fathers in the US in 2014, whereby stay-at-home fathers were defined as men not employed in the previous year and who lived at home with children under 18 years (Livingston, Parker, & Kilbanoff, 2014). The rise in stay-at-home fathers in the US is similarly found within census data (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014). In North America, the rise in the number of stay-at-home fathers has been explained by increased female participation in paid work, and a societal change in the level of father involvement in caregiving (Boyer et al., 2017).

The increase in the number of stay-at-home fathers opens important avenues for research and for policy. Firstly, the rise in the number of families with stay-at-home fathers warrants research on fathers who are primary caregivers, in order to establish an in-depth understanding of the functioning of these families. Secondly, the increase in stay-at-home fathers is highly relevant for the achievement of greater gender parity. Father involvement has been a crucial consideration within debates on gender equality (Coltrane, 1996), and recognition of the impact of the gendered division of childcare on wider gender equity has fed into political discourse. Specifically, it has been argued that there needs to be parity in gender roles within the family to achieve social equality (Coltrane, 1996).

Regarding the functioning of stay-at-home father families, there are two overarching concerns. Firstly, there is concern that the father will experience adjustment difficulties due to adopting a non-traditional gender role. Secondly, the adjustment of children comes under scrutiny in these families, as typically, fathers are not the primary caregiver, and concerns have been raised over the capability of fathers taking on this role. Therefore, it is expected that child outcomes, including gender development, could differ between stay-at-home father families and families with female primary caregivers. The following section outlines four aspects of stay-at-home father families that

require consideration when thinking about the experiences and adjustment of these fathers: the reasons for becoming a stay-at-home father, masculinity, stigma and matricentric views of parenting.

Reasons for becoming a stay-at-home father

Stay-at-home fathers present an 'extreme' version of highly involved fathers, such that they not only contribute to childcare more than their female spouses, but also, in many cases, do not engage in paid employment. Thus, it is likely there are complex reasons, and a longer decision-making process, for these fathers in adopting a primary caregiving role.

Social research indicates that economic reasons contribute significantly to the rising number of stay-at-home father families. Lamb (1986) reported that, based on early studies of primary caregiving fathers, the two key reasons why a family decides to arrange their employment and childcare in a non-traditional way are: (1) economic reasons insofar as the family needs the mother to be the main wage earner to be financially stable; and (2) the father is supporting the mother's career by engaging in more childcare, or because the family is trying to take on a more equal balance of male/female roles. This was true of an early study of stay-at-home fathers conducted in California, which reported that the decision for the father to be an at-home parent was mainly driven by economic factors (Davis, 1986). This finding has been replicated in recent research using interviews and population data in the US (Caperton, Butler, Kaiser, Connelly, & Knox, 2019; Chesley, 2011; Rochlen, McKelley, & Whittaker, 2010; Smith, 2009; Zimmerman, 2000). It has been suggested that issues occurring at the macro-level, such as male-predominant industries being more affected than female-predominant occupations by the last decade's economic crash, may continue to produce an increase in stay-at-home father families (Boyer, Dermott, James, & MacLeavy, 2017; Chesley, 2011; Philpott, 2011).

Additional factors also contribute to the decision for the father to be the primary caregiver. For example, fathers in Doucet's (2004) study of stay-at-home fathers reported that not only was their

partner earning a higher salary important, but also their belief that a parent at home is fundamental for a child's optimal development, alongside a perceived lack of suitable childcare facilities in their area. Other research has found that stay-at-home fathers' desire to be a stay-at-home parent was the most influential factor (Fischer & Anderson, 2012), that it was a voluntary decision (Lee & Lee, 2016) and fathers were supporting their spouses' career by making that choice (Harrington, Deusen & Mazar, 2012). Further, in an investigation of the perspectives of breadwinner mothers, 70% of mothers with a stay-at-home partner stated that their family arrangements were motivated by a desire for a better work/life balance within their marriage (Rushing & Sparks, 2017). Overall, the mother being the higher earner in a couple seems to be the most influential factor in this childcare arrangement.

Much less is known about whether there are differences between the factors that motivate men to make this choice compared to women. Zimmerman (2000) conducted the only qualitative study comparing stay-at-home fathers' reasons for entering this role to those of stay-at-home mothers. Interviews were conducted with each spouse in 13 stay-at-home father families and 12 stay-at-home mother families. The differences between the reasons motivating mothers and fathers to become a stay-at-home parent were stark; the mothers most frequently referred to religious or family reasons. In comparison, the fathers cited financial motivations for their family set-up. Contrastingly, demographic data from the US suggests a trend towards fathers' reasons for becoming a stay-at-home parent aligning more with mothers' reasons (Kramer, Kelly & McCulloch, 2015). Over a 40-year period, the number of fathers who reported being at home due to unemployment or illness fell sharply, and the number of fathers citing looking after their home and family saw a significant increase. Across the same time period, most stay-at-home mothers stated that looking after their home and family was their primary reason for being a stay-at-home parent (Kramer, Kelly & McCulloch, 2015). However, the closed-question format prevented more detailed accounts to be obtained regarding these parents' decision to become a stay-at-home parent.

Research on the reasons for becoming a stay-at-home father highlight a key area of tension for these fathers; whether it was a choice, or not. It could be expected that fathers who feel they need to take on the role for reasons outside of their control, such as economic recession, may experience poor mental health compared to fathers who actively made the decision to take on the role. In contrast to this assumption, Rochlen, McKelley and Whittaker (2010) found no differences in perceived social support between fathers who became stay-at-home parents for practical or work-related reasons compared to those who were motivated by a desire to be a highly involved parent. Yet, there was a significant difference in life satisfaction, with fathers feeling less satisfied if work considerations had been the main influence on their decision.

The recent body of research on stay-at-home fathers has begun to address the criticism levelled at previous studies of male primary caregivers for failing to analyse the reasons motivating these fathers to take on the larger proportion of caregiving (Wilson & Prior, 2010). However, it is evident that more research is required to fully understand the fathers' routes to, and experiences of, their role, particularly the ways in which in their motivations for becoming stay-at-home parents may differ from those of stay-at-home mothers.

Masculinity and gender roles

Another factor which may influence stay-at-home fathers' experience of adopting the primary caregiver role is that of masculinity. Connell (2000) theorised that although there are many forms of masculinity, they do not co-exist without tension. Instead, almost universally across different socio-cultural contexts, there is a form of masculinity that is most respected or regarded as more socially desirable, labelled hegemonic masculinity. Connell asserts that masculinity is not biologically determined but is socially acquired. Hence, there is the opportunity for masculinities to experience change and flux over time. However, the transformative nature of different masculinities is often undermined by social pressure for men to abide to the ideals associated with the hegemonic form of masculinity.

One of the focus points of the early work on stay-at-home fathers was whether they would demonstrate more feminine and fewer masculine behaviours. However, across different studies, findings were inconsistent on the gender characteristics of these men (Russell, 1982). Nevertheless, this interest highlights the importance of masculinity in research about primary caregiving fathers. Recent research has also considered the gender behaviours of stay-at-home fathers; Fischer and Anderson (2012) examined the gender typed behaviours and gender role attitudes of 35 stay-at-home fathers and 49 employed fathers. The stay-at-home fathers showed comparable feminine and masculine behaviours to the men in paid work, through rating themselves higher on characteristics considered to be masculine, such as competitiveness, and lower on the traits labelled feminine, for example, being emotional. However, the fathers in full-time employment demonstrated more traditional gender role attitudes than stay-at-home fathers, such as endorsing ideas on mothers only being in employment if necessary (Fischer & Anderson, 2012).

Regarding more subjective experiences of masculinity amongst stay-at-home fathers, it appears that the narratives of primary caregiving fathers on masculinity are complex and demonstrate the social importance of hegemonic masculine ideals. Snitker (2018) used grounded theory to explore the perspectives of 40 stay-at-home fathers in the US. The fathers reflected upon the negative reactions they often received from the general public; feedback from others frequently suggested they are perceived to be emasculated by taking on a role traditionally occupied by women. The fathers in Snitker's (2018) study constantly distanced themselves from mothering, and stay-at-home mothers, by rejecting the label 'Mr Mom'. A few of the fathers stated that they did not like feminine labels and perceived their primary caregiving to be a masculine role, in line with their masculine identity. It is interesting that these fathers, seen to be progressive due to their parental role, still felt the strong pull of hegemonic masculinity. Chesley (2011) also found that during interviews with stay-at-home fathers and breadwinner mothers, references to the significance of men breadwinning, and women engaging in intensive mothering practices, frequented their narratives.

Stay-at-home fathers' accounts of their experiences of masculinity are often characterised by ambivalence; these fathers are seen as both resisting and reproducing hegemonic masculine ideals. This complex narrative is reflected in Doucet's (2004) seminal study of 70 Canadian stay-at-home fathers. Doucet reported that stay-at-home fathers neither specifically conformed to all aspects of hegemonic masculinity nor rejected it outright. The men often demonstrated some adherence to traditional masculine norms, as shown through the fathers maintaining links to employment through either engaging in part-time paid work or taking on voluntary activities that they felt contributed to a sense of being a working man. It was evident that these men thought it was of value to still be associated with work and felt the pressures of living up to societal expectations of men. Similarly, Rochlen, Suizzo, McKelley and Scaringi's (2008) study of the experiences of 14 stay-at-home fathers in the US found that the fathers held flexible ideas on masculinity, believing that masculinity and femininity should not be seen as polar opposites, while referring to their connection to activities associated with the male gender role. Given that these fathers stand at the intersection between traditional and new conceptualisations of what it means to be masculine and, associatively, what it means to be a father, it is not surprising that they present many different, often contradictory, aspects of masculinity.

A series of studies has focused on movement towards a new form of masculinity, rather than adherence to hegemonic masculinity. In particular, there has been a recent shift in thinking, indicating that some men have positive views on deviating from traditional masculine ideals. Elliott's (2016) framework of caring masculinities theorised that men partaking in caregiving work enables them to develop a more nurturing, caring masculinity. In line with this theoretical shift, Lee and Lee (2016) found the experience of being a primary caregiver, and being highly engaged with their children, altered stay-at-home fathers' attitudes towards their masculine identity. Their version of masculinity included being a caregiver, and saw gentle, nurturing activities such as rocking their infant child as an expression of their manliness. Likewise, some fathers in Solomon's (2014) study of stay-at-home fathers in the US did not embody traditional masculine characteristics and instead celebrated the

emotional closeness they felt with their children since becoming a stay-at-home parent. These fathers largely depicted parenting as non-gendered (Solomon, 2014). The findings from these studies offer insight into how, in certain groups of men, conceptions of masculinity have evolved.

As discussed, stay-at-home fathers appear to struggle with conforming to, and resisting, hegemonic masculinity. Aside from theorising on how different groups of men experience masculinity, the importance of exploring men's experiences of non-traditional gender roles lies in the psychological implications of gender incongruent behaviours. Mental health may be affected by the extent to which an individual perceives that their behaviours are in line with gender roles. Male gender roles 'entail standards, expectations or norms that individual males fit or do not fit to varying degrees' (Pleck, 1995, p. 13). Social norms and historical convention depict the father's primary role as the breadwinner for his family (Dowd, 2000) and being a financial provider remains a pivotal aspect of most men's identities (Pleck, 1995). Along this line, family work is attributed less value than paid employment, particularly due to its association with femininity (Coltrane, 1996). Regarding stay-at-home fathers, the economic provider role stands in direct contrast to primary caregiving. These gender incongruent behaviours may prompt an individual to evaluate whether they perceive themselves to be acting in a way that they consider appropriate for their gender identity. According to gender role strain theory (Pleck, 1981; 1995), gender incongruent behaviours may have negative consequences for psychological wellbeing and thus the pressure on men to act in line with hegemonic masculine ideals can be harmful. Pleck (1981; 1995) showed that men straying from gender norms can negatively impact self-esteem and other indicators of well-being, known as gender role discrepancy strain. This experience of gender role discrepancy strain occurs through negative reactions from other social agents, as well as men internalising negative impressions of themselves based on their non-conformity to a male gender role.

To combat feelings of gender role discrepancy strain, individuals may engage in gender deviance neutralisation, a phenomenon that occurs when a person believes they are transgressing

from gender norms and compensates by adopting stereotypically masculine behaviours in other aspects of their lives (Evertsson & Nermo, 2004; Kurian, 2018). Consistent with gender deviance neutralisation theory, one could expect that stay-at-home fathers would try to ease the potential negative psychological consequences of adopting a non-traditional gender role through emphasising their connection to other aspects of masculinity and the male gender role. For example, men and women have been found to enact gender norms at home, such as women doing more housework and men doing fewer household chores, in a couple where the woman is the primary wage earner (Kurian, 2018). In support of these findings, Latshaw and Hale (2016) found that after work hours, stay-at-home fathers and their breadwinner spouses would adopt traditional gender roles, with the mother taking over the household chores and childcare, enabling the father to engage in other pursuits. This is suggestive of both parents 'doing gender' (West & Zimmerman, 1987), such that they enact traditional gender scripts when both parents are at home. Further research also corroborates stay-at-home fathers engaging in gender deviance neutralisation. Solomon (2014) reported that stay-at-home fathers had created justifications, for themselves and others, of how they were providing for their family without giving financial support. Further, a media analysis of UK articles on stay-at-home fathers found constant references to these fathers' involvement in typically masculine activities such as manual labour and paid work alongside being the primary caregiver, portraying the importance society places on these men keeping involved in the world of work (Locke, 2016). Likewise, Liong's (2015) media analysis revealed that news articles reporting on stay-at-home fathers in Hong Kong emphasised connections that the fathers had to the public sphere, such as gaining a new educational qualification. These findings all point to the difficulties stay-at-home fathers face; as described by Doucet, 'the long shadow of hegemonic masculinity hangs over them' (Doucet, 2004, p.277).

It is evident that important insights have been gained from psychological and sociological explorations of stay-at-home fathers' experiences of masculinity, in particular, the relevance of drawing upon the theories of gender role strain and gender deviance neutralisation. However,

numerous questions regarding fathers' experiences, and consequences, of their non-traditional gender role remain unanswered, particularly in relation to their mental health.

Stigma and social support

Alongside internalised negative feelings regarding their non-traditional gender roles, stay-at-home fathers often experience stigma from external sources which may have adverse consequences, particularly as stigma can harm mental health (Crocker & Major, 1998). First and foremost, research on social attitudes indicates prejudice against men adopting a primary caregiving role. Brescoll and Uhlmann (2005) explored attitudes of the general public towards men and women adopting traditional or non-traditional parenting roles. More negative attitudes were demonstrated towards stay-at-home fathers and working mothers, and more positive ones towards stay-at-home mothers and working fathers. Further, questionnaire data gathered on the experiences of stay-at-home fathers in the US showed stigmatising experiences were commonplace (Rochlen et al., 2010). Specifically, almost half of the fathers reported they had experienced stigma due to being a stay-at-home father, and 70% of these experiences were reported to have been caused by stay-at-home mothers, involving mothers expressing discomfort with men being in areas with children such as playgrounds. Other studies have corroborated these findings; stay-at-home fathers have reported feeling socially isolated and, in particular, fathers report feeling uncomfortable when attending parent-child groups run by stay-at-home mothers (Ammari & Schoenebeck, 2016; Robertson & Verschelden, 1993; Smith, 1998; Zimmerman, 2000). Perceiving playgroups as a particularly difficult social situation for fathers to negotiate is evident from other research on stay-at-home fathers (Rochlen, Suizzo, et al., 2008). Other social spaces also felt uncomfortable for the fathers; the accounts of these men show that there is a bias towards mothers in public areas typically used by mothers with their children (for example, play parks and shopping centres) causing fathers to feel out of place and isolated. The fathers felt that stay-at-home mothers were judging their ability to parent, with some advising them on how to parent their children (Rochlen, Suizzo, et al., 2008).

In a similar vein, the majority of fathers in Lee and Lee's (2016) qualitative study of 25 stay-at-home fathers in the US reported that the biggest difficulty they faced was social isolation. Over half of the fathers experienced ambivalent reactions from others, who often showed disapproval or made assumptions that they would soon seek out employment. Providing a new methodological approach to study stay-at-home fathers, Haberlin and Davis (2019) used poetic inquiry to analyse stay-at-home fathers' interviews. Their work revealed the stigma the fathers faced, and that schools still prioritise mothers and overlook the needs of stay-at-home fathers.

It appears that being a male stay-at-home parent results in more stigma and isolation than being a female stay-at-home parent. Zimmerman (2000) found that stay-at-home fathers felt lonelier than a comparable sample of stay-at-home mothers. Also, these fathers reported levels of loneliness that were nearly twice that of their working spouses, and thought that their friends and family saw their family-set up as temporary, rather than a long-term solution to childcare, and viewed it as an 'unnatural' division of care. Stay-at-home fathers had less contact with other stay-at-home parents than stay-at-home mothers, and were less likely to be involved in community projects or activities outside of the home (Zimmerman, 2000). Thus, the current body of research indicates a high level of stigma within wider society and strongly suggests that social isolation presents a significant risk to the wellbeing of stay-at-home fathers.

Associated with experiences of stigma, there is evidence to suggest that stay-at-home fathers lack social support. In particular, Rochlen, McKelley, Suizzo and Scaringi (2008) found stay-at-home fathers had significantly lower perceived social support from friends compared to male students. However, the fathers reported high relationship quality and life satisfaction, and had low levels of psychological difficulties. Nonetheless, the use of a comparison group of college-age students, who were at a very different life stage to stay-at-home fathers, is arguably problematic, so the findings should be interpreted with some caution. In research on fathering in general, increased paternal involvement in childcare is negatively associated with social support (Whelan & Lally, 2002), raising

further concerns over the wellbeing of highly involved fathers. However, to a large extent, research on stay-at-home fathers has afforded very little attention to empirical measures of social support, or, indeed, lack of social support. Instead, qualitative research has offered insight into fathers' experiences of support. Specifically, Lee and Lee (2016) found that stay-at-home fathers appreciate the support of those close to them; namely, their spouse or partner, family and friends and support groups that specifically catered for stay-at-home fathers. Further, Ammari and Schoenebeck (2016) found stay-at-home fathers turned to social media for social support. However, it is important to highlight that most research on stay-at-home fathers in the past decade has been conducted in the US. With regard to stigma and social support, the socio-cultural context may uniquely influence the experiences of stay-at-home fathers. There is a national support network for stay-at-home fathers in the US (<https://www.athomedad.org/>). This is a volunteer-led organisation that offers support through local groups for stay-at-home fathers as well as an annual convention. In the UK, there is no comparable network formed solely to cater to the needs of stay-at-home fathers.

Matricentric views on parenting: the primacy of the mother

The following section expands upon the idea that scholarship on parenting is matricentric, as firstly outlined in Section 1.1. Based on assumptions of gender roles favouring mothers, it is suggested that fathers who are primary caregivers would parent differently from mothers in the same role. Relatedly, it is expected that the children of stay-at-home fathers would hence develop in different ways from children with female primary caregivers. To understand the root of these concerns surrounding stay-at-home father families, it is important to consider the wider maternal-focused view of parenting, especially primary caregiving, and research indicating that there may be differences in parenting approaches by mothers and fathers.

As discussed by Ehrensaft (1987), fathers are socialised in measurably different ways from mothers, leading to mothers being expected to adopt the nurturing, caregiving role. Contrastingly, the

emphasis afforded to the father as the economic provider has led to in-depth examinations of the impact of financial contributions of fathers to families (Duncan, Morris, & Rodrigues, 2011) with less attention on the emotional labour and care provided by men. Accordingly, the study of parenting and child development has focused on mothers and the contribution of fathers has often been overlooked (Cabrera, Volling, & Barr, 2018; Ramchandani & McConachie, 2005). This has led to two major consequences regarding research on fathers and fathering. Firstly, less is known about fathers compared to mothers, particularly fathers who are highly involved in caregiving. Secondly, due to the focus on mothering versus fathering, research has largely sought to confirm one of either two perspectives: (1) mothers and fathers are different; (2) mothers and fathers are not different (Fagan, Day, Lamb & Cabrera, 2014). Therefore, the field has become dichotomous and lacks nuance in its conclusions on fathers, their role and how they influence child development. The following section discusses these two perspectives in turn.

Aside from theoretical conceptualisations of mothers and fathers as different, empirical studies of parenting have found differences in parenting styles which appear to be associated with parent gender. A body of literature has focused on the differences between fathers' and mothers' interaction styles, especially during play; fathers typically have more energetic and playful interactions with their children, whereas mothers are, on average, more calming (Dickson, Walker, & Fogel, 1997; Lamb, 1977; Lamb & Lewis, 2010; Parke, 1996; Teti, Bond, & Gibbs, 1988). Through their play interactions with their children, fathers appear to be providing a *secure base* from which children can engage in exploratory play (Grossmann et al., 2002). This can be beneficial for children's learning and development, particularly in terms of developing independence, and is associated with children's attachment to their father (Grossmann et al., 2002). Along this line, father play has been found to help children feel less anxious, be less aggressive, and facilitates emotional regulation (Cabrera & Roggman, 2017). However, this body of research is confounded by the majority of families having mothers and fathers who have adopted the primary and secondary caregiver roles, respectively. This can lead to

the assumption that mothers are best suited to primary caregiving, and fathers are playmates, without examining fathers in primary caregiving roles.

A growing body of research has studied fathers' unique contributions to child outcomes aside from playful interactions. Scholarships suggests that children benefit from increased paternal involvement, but it is not simply the level of involvement that matters, but the types of parenting behaviours that fathers may demonstrate (Lamb & Tamis-LeMonda, 2004; Palkovitz, 2019). Specifically, it has been found that supportive fathers help their children's cognitive and language development, and exert a greater influence on these aspects of development compared to mothers (Cabrera, Shannon & Tamis-LeMonda, 2007). Longitudinal research has also elucidated the relationship between direct father involvement and child adjustment; in a systemic review, Sarkadi, Kristiansson, Oberklaid and Bremberg (2008) reported that boys with more engaged fathers demonstrated fewer behavioural difficulties and girls had lower levels of psychological difficulties. In addition, Jeynes' (2016) meta-analysis suggested that fathers appear to be particularly important in helping foster children's independence and encouraging academic achievement. In line with these findings, Pougnet, Serbin, Stack and Schwartzman (2011) found children living with their father benefitted from better cognitive and behavioural outcomes throughout childhood, and this association was explained through fathers' use of positive parental control and paternal involvement during middle-childhood. Overall, these studies indicate that fathers have an important, unique influence on their children's academic achievement, behaviour and cognitive development, suggesting that fathers in primary caregiver roles may influence their children's outcomes in different ways to mothers in this role.

The above studies have led to a greater research emphasis on the contribution of fathers to child development. A different body of literature suggests that, contrary to how they have traditionally been depicted, mothers and fathers are remarkably similar across many different dimensions of parenting. In a seminal review of literature, Fagan et al. (2014) concluded that fathers are much more

similar to mothers than they are different, and that parenting by mothers and fathers should not be conceptualized as different from one another for three key reasons. Firstly, the concepts of mothering and fathering, according to research evidence, are largely identical. Secondly, the way mothers and fathers interact with their children is becoming increasingly alike. Thirdly, the behaviours of mothers and fathers affect children's development in similar ways. Fagan et al. (2014) noted that many studies of fathers are now adopting similar approaches to those studying mothers, showing convergence in the ways in which parenting by mothers and fathers are conceptualised and assessed. Further, there is growing evidence that parenting constructs demonstrate measurement invariance between mothers and fathers. For example, a Finnish study of 600 families found measurement invariance for fathers and mothers across parenting constructs from the Ghent Parental Behaviour Scale (Van Leeuwen & Vermulst, 2004). Measurement equivalence between fathers and mothers has also been found on assessments of parent nurturance and involvement (Finley, Mira, & Schwartz, 2008), parent discipline (Prinz, Onghena, & Hellinckx, 2007) and autonomy support (Hughes, Lindberg, & Devine, 2019). Fagan et al. (2014) concluded that although more research is needed in this area, there is not a strong argument for conceptualising mothers and fathers as particularly different.

Similarities between mothers and fathers have also been identified in research studying cognitive changes during the transition to parenthood. Despite the assertion that pregnancy enables mothers to prepare for motherhood in advance of fathers, similar changes have been observed in mothers' and fathers' brains early on in their journey to parenthood (Feldman, 2015). The authors argued that a combination of hormonal changes and plasticity of the brain enabled both parents to develop heightened awareness to their child's signals, as supported by a series of studies using functional MRI to examine which areas of the brain were activated when parents were exposed to infant stimuli. The 'parental caregiving network', including the amygdala, hypothalamus and the dopaminergic reward circuit, was found to activate in scans of mothers' and fathers' brains when exposed to infant cues (Feldman, 2015). Corroborating this, Abraham et al. (2014) used functional MRI to examine which areas of the brain were activated in different types of parents in response to infant

stimuli; primary and secondary caregiving fathers, and primary caregiving mothers. It was found that parenthood activated a similar neural network associated with emotional and mentalising functions across different types of parents, though the level of father involvement was associated with greater activation of the amygdala. Together these findings suggest a comparable neural network of parenting that adapts based on parenting experiences.

1.3. Studying Families as Systems and Processes of Family Functioning

In order to understand the father within the context of his family, this thesis draws upon two key theories which regard the individual and the family as part of a system: Family Systems Theory and Ecological Systems Theory.

Family Systems Theory depicts families as ‘a special subset of social systems and are structured by a unique set of intergender and intergenerational relationships’ (Broderick, 1993, p.51). The family system is conceptualised as open, insofar that there are reciprocal influences between the family system and the wider (social, psychological and physical) environment, whilst permitting some boundaries against outside influences. Family Systems Theory posits that as relationships between family members are reciprocal, one can only attempt to understand an individual within the context of the relationships their family is organised around, such as the marital relationship and relationships between siblings (Cox & Paley, 2003). Similarly, parent-child relationships can also be better understood by adopting a family systems perspective. In this way, parent-child attachment is not simply represented as a dyadic relationship (Cox & Paley, 2003). Instead, wider family influences are studied in tandem with the quality of parent-child attachment (Cowan, 1997), affording attention to how parent-child attachment influences the family system, and vice versa. Factors such as parenting behaviours and other defining features of a family system can explain differences in the quality of parent-child relationship (Cowan, 1997). Therefore, although the present research is informed by Attachment Theory, Family Systems Theory contributed to the theoretical framework to a greater extent.

Other family processes, such as the presence, or absence, of social support, and parental psychological wellbeing, further contribute to an understanding of the adjustment of individual family members and the functioning of the family unit as a whole. Alongside the study of relationships within the family system, it is important to afford attention to other aspects and characteristics of the family

system, as Broderick (1993) argued that the experiences of an individual family system are influenced by three core components; (1) family members' attributes, such as gender, (2) the structure of the family, such as the number of family members, and (3) the wider ecosystem, for example, socio-economic status and geographical location. These different components are rooted in North American and European family contexts (Rothbaum, Rosen, Ujiié, & Uchida, 2004).

The core components of Family Systems Theory overlap with those of Ecological Systems Theory. However, Ecological Systems Theory focuses more on the 'wider ecosystem' by conceptualising different aspects of the wider ecosystem into separate, but connected, spheres. The ecological systems model draws upon Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological theory and also incorporates aspects of Family Systems Theory (Cox & Paley, 2003). In an overview of how the ecological systems framework can be used effectively to guide research on fathers, Volling et al. (2019) summarised the theory as follows; primarily, the child is placed at the centre of the four different systems that are interconnected. The first is the microsystem, comprising the immediate family environment, such as the division of care between parents. This is connected to the mesosystem, which represents the relationships between multiple different microsystems that are closely entwined with an individual's life, such as work and school. The exosystem refers to contexts which indirectly influence the child. These include wider social relationships such as extended family, friends and community support. The macrosystem comprises all the relationships between the microsystem, the mesosystem and the exosystem, hence representing a specific sociocultural context (Volling et al., 2019). This includes politics, discrimination and social attitudes towards childcare.

Overall, it is evident that the two theories are complementary, yet there are clear advantages that arise from using both theories in parallel. Family Systems Theory provides an equal focus on every family member and Ecological Systems Theory allows for a deeper understanding of different social influences. Recent research demonstrating the usefulness of analysing fathers as part of the family

system provides additional support for the present theoretical framework (Barker, Iles, & Ramchandani, 2017; Cabrera et al., 2018).

Parent psychological adjustment

There is a large body of literature showing that parent wellbeing has an important and long-lasting impact on the functioning of the family unit. Placing the parent within the context of a family system has increased understanding of the impact of parent mental health on the marital relationship, parenting quality, and the parent-child relationship, which can mediate other aspects of family functioning. The following section will provide an overview of aspects of mental health, couple relationship quality and parent-child relationship quality that are considered to be important when studying family functioning, insofar as this body of research and Family Systems Theory (Cox & Paley, 2003) highlight the usefulness of understanding the adjustment of parents and their children as influenced by family processes, not just family structure.

Depression

Numerous studies have shown that maternal depression is a risk factor for child adjustment difficulties. In particular, maternal depression is associated with increased child internalising problems (Connell & Goodman, 2002; Kelley et al., 2017). Less research has been conducted on fathers' experiences of mental health (Ramchandani & Psychogiou, 2009). However, recent studies have shed light on the importance of involving fathers in research on parent psychopathology. A meta-analysis reported that, similar to depression amongst mothers, paternal depression has wide-reaching implications for child adjustment (Sweeney & MacBeth, 2016). In particular, fathers' depression has been found to be associated with child behavioural and emotional difficulties throughout childhood (Flouri, Sarmadi & Francesconi, 2019; Kane & Garber, 2004; Phares & Compas, 1992; Ramchandani & Psychogiou, 2009; Ramchandani, Stein, Evans & O'Connor, 2005), although the strength of this relationship varies between studies (Cheung & Theule, 2019). Further, the influence of paternal

depression on child outcomes can be understood to begin prenatally, as well as postnatally. Based on data collected at four time points from pregnancy to the first few years of infants' lives, paternal, as well as maternal, depressive and anxious symptoms across this period were found to be associated with children's adjustment during infancy and toddlerhood (Hughes, Devine, Mesman, & Blair, 2019).

One mechanism, amongst many, explaining the transmission of parental depression to child adjustment is poorer quality of parenting. This is supported by meta-analyses of studies exploring maternal and paternal depression. For mothers, investigations of observational data have found a consistent effect between depression and negative parenting behaviours (Lovejoy, Graczyk, O'Hare, & Neuman, 2000). Likewise, for fathers, the literature points to depression translating into fewer positive and more negative parenting behaviours (Wilson & Durbin, 2010). Hence, this body of research emphasises the importance of exploring paternal and maternal depressive symptomology as a possible indicator of family functioning.

Anxiety

In general, mothers report higher levels of anxiety than fathers (Möller, Majdandžić, & Bögels, 2015), in line with other research showing the higher prevalence of anxiety amongst women compared to men (McLean & Anderson, 2009; McLean, Asnaani, Litz, & Hofmann, 2011). Research examining the impact of parents' anxiety has often focused on maternal anxiety and its effects on child adjustment. The pathways through which this relationship is enacted include intergenerational transmission; as infants pick up on social cues from their caregivers in order to guide their reaction to new situations, anxious responses can be transmitted from mothers to their children (Murray et al., 2008). Also in support of a transmission model of anxiety, a study of 129 older children found that if a child had a parent with an anxiety disorder, they were more likely to experience anxiety themselves (Beidel & Turner, 1997). In addition, longitudinal studies have contributed to the understanding of the role of parental anxiety on family functioning. Using data from the Avon Longitudinal Study of Parents and Children, O'Connor, Heron, Golding, Beveridge and Glover (2002) found maternal antenatal

anxiety predicted negative child outcomes at four-years-old, including increased hyperactivity amongst boys, and emotional and behavioural problems experienced by boys and girls.

Recent research has found paternal psychopathology to also negatively impact child adjustment. In a review of research on paternal influences on child anxiety, Bögels and Phares (2008) found evidence to suggest that fathers' anxiety negatively influences child outcomes, including an increased likelihood of anxious symptomology. Parental anxiety also influences family functioning through the impact of anxiety on parenting. Specifically, anxious mothers have been found to discipline their children more whereas fathers with elevated anxiety adopt more controlling parenting behaviours (Teetsel, Ginsburg, & Drake, 2014). Correspondingly, in an investigation of children with anxiety disorders, it was reported that fathers who also had an anxiety disorder were more dominant when interviewed and more controlling in their parenting (Bögels, Bamelis & van der Bruggen, 2008). In line with Family Systems Theory, maternal parenting behaviours have been found to mediate the association between paternal anxiety and child anxiety, through mothers being less encouraging of their children being independent during toddlerhood if their partner is anxious (Gibler, Kalomiris, & Kiel, 2018).

As anxiety and depression are frequently comorbid with one another (Gorman, 1996; Hiller, Zaudig, & Bose, 1989; Schoevers, Beekman, Deeg, Jonker, & Tilburg, 2003), it is important to examine anxiety in tandem with depression.

Parenting stress

Parenting stress, defined as the 'aversive psychological reaction to the demands of being a parent' (Deater-Deckard, 1998), has also been found to negatively influence family functioning. Parenting stress is commonplace and is, to a greater or lesser degree, universally experienced by parents (Crnic & Greenberg, 1990), yet parents differ in their response to stress. Research suggests parenting stress exerts a direct influence on parenting. Namely, parenting stress can negatively affect

an individual's ability to parent well (Abidin, 1995), for example through reducing the quality of parent-child communication (Ponnet et al., 2013). Parenting stress has been found to contribute to child adjustment problems (Dennis, Neece, & Fenning, 2018), yet this relationship is better understood as bi-directional; significant covariance has been found between parenting stress and children's behavioural difficulties (Neece, Green, & Baker, 2012). As such, this indicates the importance of studying parenting stress within a family systems framework.

Parenting stress also influences parenting and child outcomes through its interaction with other aspects of parent mental health, such as anxiety and depression (Gelfand, Teti, & Radin Fox, 1992; Leigh & Milgrom, 2008; Misri et al., 2010), which can then impede effective parenting. For example, parenting stress has been found to act as a mediator between parental depression and harsh parenting (Choi & Becher, 2019). Regarding child outcomes, parenting stress can act as a mediator between maternal mental health and child internalising and externalising symptoms, with a similar, yet smaller, mediating effect reported for fathers (Weijers, van Steensel, & Bögels, 2018).

Social support

Receiving support from others, within and outside the family, is most often referred to as social support, and is closely linked with mental health. Research on social support has surged since the 1970s (Zimet, Dahlem, Zimet, & Farley, 1988). Increasingly, evidence has been presented for the association between social support and an individual's ability to cope with stressors, with social support acting as a buffer against adverse experiences (Cohen & Wills, 1985).

With regard to parental experiences of social support, Cochran and Brassard (1979) suggested that social support outside of the immediate family provides valuable assistance for parents and thus has the potential to shape child outcomes. For example, mothers benefit from higher levels of social support, including feeling more positive and improvements in mother-infant interaction (Crnic, Greenberg, Ragozin, Robinson, & Basham, 1983). Similarly, mothers who have more social support

have also been found to offer more stimulation to their infants (Adamakos et al., 1986). Family structure can account for some differences in experiences of social support; a small study of mothers in one and two parent families reported that the single mothers felt less supported (Weinraub & Wolf, 1983).

There are fewer studies of paternal social support, however, research has begun to explore fathers' social support in different family contexts. Amongst single fathers, experiences of social support have had positive implications. For example, in a study of single fathers who did not live with their children, social support was related to higher paternal involvement (Castillo & Sarver, 2012). Also, for single fathers through divorce, social support helped ease the effects of daily stressors and conflict with their ex-spouse (DeGarmo, Patras, & Eap, 2008). In terms of the level of social support received, gay fathers have been found to have comparable social support to lesbian mothers and heterosexual parents (Sumontha, Farr, & Patterson, 2016), and another study reported gay adoptive fathers receive more social support than heterosexual adoptive fathers (Goldberg & Smith, 2014). Similar to the findings of research on single fathers, gay fathers' social support appears to be important for other aspects of mental health; a US study found that lower levels of social support amongst gay adoptive fathers was associated with elevated levels of parenting stress (Tornello et al., 2011). Hence, these studies serve to highlight that, in agreement with research on mothers, social support plays an important role in paternal wellbeing.

Relationship quality

Both Family Systems Theory and Attachment Theory place the marital relationship at the centre of family functioning (Rothbaum et al., 2004). Becoming parents often presents challenges to maintaining the quality of the marital relationship (Cowan & Cowan, 2000). A plethora of research has found that poor marital quality can negatively influence child adjustment (Cummings & Davies, 2002; Davies & Cummings, 1994; El-Sheikh & Whitson, 2006; Reynolds et al., 2014). In particular, children

are more likely to experience adjustment problems when their parents' relationship is characterised by consistent conflict (Amato, Loomis, & Booth, 1995; Booth & Amato, 2001).

Another key aspect of the relationship between parents is coparenting, which describes 'the ways that parents work together in their roles as parents' (Feinberg, 2002). Coparenting is particularly relevant for studies of primary caregiving father families, as the father will be taking on much of the childcare, the reverse of the traditional model of the father as the secondary caregiver, 'assisting' the mother.

Positive coparenting benefits family functioning as a whole (Feinberg, 2002; McHale & Rasmussen, 1998), can encourage greater father involvement in childcare (McClain & DeMaris, 2013), and also has indirect effects of child adjustment. For example, positive coparenting has been found to help children with behavioural difficulties (Schoppe-Sullivan, Weldon, Cook, Davis, & Buckley, 2009) and is associated with higher quality parent-child relationships (Peltz, Rogge, & Sturge-Apple, 2018). In contrast, negative aspects of coparenting, such as partners undermining each other's parenting approaches, have been found to be associated with poorer family functioning over time (LeRoy, Mahoney, Pargament, & DeMaris, 2013), and heightened child externalising difficulties (Schoppe, Mangelsdorf, & Frosch, 2001). This suggests that it is pertinent to explore both positive and negative aspects of coparenting.

Quality of parenting and parent-child relationship

Parent-child relationships have largely been studied within the context of Attachment Theory (Bowlby, 1969). Attachment describes the proximity-seeking behaviours of infants to their caregivers when they are feeling distressed, scared or in need of emotional support (Bowlby, 1969). Attachment is regarded as an evolutionary trait that encourages survival as the relatively helpless infant will be protected by an experienced, caring adult, usually their biological parent. Attachment relationships remain important throughout development; they influence emotional adjustment and children's

relationships with others (Bowlby, 1969; Bowlby, 2005; Holmes, 2014). Ainsworth (1985) found that mothers' behaviour toward their offspring influences the type of attachment the child has to their caregiver; either secure or insecure. Children with secure attachments to their parent(s) generally fare better than those with insecure attachments in terms of fewer behavioural difficulties (Belsky & Cassidy, 1994; Suess, Grossman & Sroufe, 1992) and higher quality friendships (Groh, Fearon, van IJzendoorn, Bakermans-Kranenburg & Roisman; 2017, Youngblade & Belsky, 1992).

Early scholarship on attachment emphasised the importance of the mother as a child's main attachment figure (Bowlby, 1969). However, it is now generally accepted that children are able to form multiple attachments to multiple caregivers (Bretherton, 2010) and children form attachments with fathers, not just mothers (Lamb & Lewis, 2010). Early studies found children aged one- and two-years-old showed similar attachment behaviours, as assessed using the Strange Situation paradigm, toward their mothers and fathers (Feldman & Ingham, 1975), and that infants did not differ in their preferences for their mother or father (Lamb, 1977). Fox, Kimmerly and Schafer (1991) conducted a meta-analysis of 11 studies on infant attachment, all of which used the Strange Situation methodology to classify attachment. It was reported that mother and father attachment security was related, however other research has reported a weak relationship between the two (van IJzendoorn & De Wolff, 1997).

A growing body of research literature has examined the parenting constructs that underlie attachment security. In particular, maternal sensitivity has been found to be highly important for the development of secure attachment relationships between children and their mothers (Ainsworth, Bell & Stayton, 1974; Van IJzendoorn & De Wolff, 1997; Verhage et al., 2016). The evidence examining the effect of father sensitivity on infant's attachment security is less consistent. Meta-analyses have found that whilst father sensitivity is related to parent-child attachment, this effect is stronger for mothers (Van IJzendoorn & De Wolff, 1997) and some research suggests that, for fathers, it is a relatively weak relationship (Lucassen et al., 2011). Instead, other factors may play an important role in the

development of father-infant attachment. Scholarship has suggested fathers' pleasure in parenting contributes to the formation of attachment bonds, as it acts as a moderator between paternal sensitivity and security of infant attachment (Brown & Cox, 2019). Research has also pointed to the positive relationship between fathers' engaging in stimulating play and infant secure attachment (Olsavsky, Berrigan, Schoppe-Sullivan, Brown, & Kamp Dush, 2019). In addition, research has found infants are more likely to be securely attached if their fathers show positive parenting behaviours, regardless of the level of father involvement in caregiving (Brown, McBride, Shin, & Bost, 2007). This body of scholarship demonstrates the usefulness of firstly, studying fathers as well as mothers in research on child development, and, secondly, points to potential differences between mothers and fathers in the antecedents of positive parent-child relationships.

Another parenting concept that has been extensively researched, and can be considered pertinent regarding the development of high-quality parent-child relationships, is parental warmth. Warmth depicts affection within parent-child dyads, and is specifically measured by the behaviours and verbalisations parents adopt in order to signify these feelings of warmth (Rohner, Khaleque, & Cournoyer, 2012). Warmth fits into the broader framework of parental acceptance and rejection, whereby parents whose approach is characterised by high levels of warmth, alongside nurturing and sensitive responses, are depicted as accepting. Parents who show rejection not only demonstrate a lack of warmth, but also adopt harmful behaviours, both physical and affective (Rohner et al., 2012). Low parental acceptance is associated with adverse child adjustment (Rohner, Khaleque & Cournoyer, 2005), and the relationship between parental acceptance and child outcomes has also been found during adolescence (Ahmed, Rohner, & Carrasco, 2011) and cross-culturally (Ali, Khaleque, & Rohner, 2015).

Parent-child relationship quality can also be empirically measured outside of attachment-related paradigms, for example through behavioural assessments of parent-child interactions that code specific positive and negative behaviours. Research has often focused on rough-and-tumble play

during observations of father-child interactions and the effects this form of play has on children (Flanders, Leo, Paquette, Pihl, & Séguin, 2009; Fletcher, StGeorge, & Freeman, 2013; Paquette, 2004). However, one of the most robust methods of examining parent-child interaction quality is through assessing dyadic mutuality (Harrist & Waugh, 2002), which encompasses interactions that are 'coherent, synchronous, mutually warm and cooperative' (Deater-Deckard & Petrill, 2004, p. 1171). Deater-Deckard and Petrill outlined four observable components of dyadic mutuality; the parent's responsiveness to their child, the child's responsiveness to their parent, cooperative behaviours between the two members of the dyad, and lastly reciprocity, characterised as joint mutual positive affect; specifically, incidences of smiling and eye contact between the pair. Parent-child interactions characterised by mutuality are associated with higher quality parenting (Kochanska, 1997) and have been found to contribute to a range of positive outcomes amongst children in infancy (Harrist & Waugh, 2002) and school-aged children (Harrist, Pettit, Dodge, & Bates, 1994). As with most of research on parent-child relationships, less research has measured mutuality in father-child interactions compared to mother-child interactions.

1.4. Family Functioning and Child Outcomes in Male Primary Caregiver Families

The first wave of research on parenting by male primary caregivers in the 1970s and 1980s

The first findings on family functioning in stay-at-home father families come from a group of studies initiated in the 1970s and 1980s examining families in which the father was the primary caregiver. Interest in primary caregiving fathers after this period dwindled, however important insights were gained from these studies.

One of the initial studies in this field observed three types of parents interacting with their 4-month old infants; 12 primary caregiver mothers, 12 primary caregiver fathers and 12 secondary caregiver fathers (Field, 1978). Both the primary and secondary caregiver fathers showed a more playful interaction style with their children, but held their infants less, compared to mothers. Both primary caregiver mothers and fathers initiated more smiling and pretended to imitate their children more, for example by using a very high voice, than the secondary caregivers. Field (1978) suggested that this could be due to the higher volume of time the primary caregivers spend with their infants, encouraging greater use of infant-oriented interactions. However, only three minutes of play observation was analysed for each dyad and the sample was small. Hence, while the research can be considered seminal in terms of paving the way for further studies on male primary caregiving families, the extent to which the findings can be extrapolated to other families with stay-at-home fathers is limited.

With regards to other observational research on primary caregiver fathers, Frodi, Lamb, Hwang and Frodi (1983) conducted one of the few controlled longitudinal studies of this family form. Fifty-one couples were recruited through parent preparation classes in Sweden, following an increase in paternity leave. If the father was planning on taking more than one month of parental leave in the first nine months, the family was classed as non-traditional. The traditional families had fathers who

planned on taking less than one month of leave in this period. A series of interviews from the last trimester of pregnancy to when the infant was 16 months old were conducted with the parents, and observational assessments were administered. From the observations taken at three months old, it was found that in both family types, mothers kissed their children more and engaged in more direct contact than the fathers (Lamb, Frodi, Hwang, Frodi, & Steinberg, 1982). At eight months old, mothers in both family types were more affectionate, held their child more and smiled at them more frequently. At this stage, the traditional fathers played more with their children than the non-traditional fathers, however the non-traditional fathers held their children more to show affection (Lamb et al., 1982). Regardless of family type, the children sought out their mothers more, and showed more attachment behaviours toward their mothers, such as approaching their mother, and vocalising and smiling more in her presence (Frodi et al., 1983). This suggests that, even in non-traditional families, aspects of gendered parenting roles were evident.

Another study using observational methodology explored whether the caregiver status of fathers influenced interactions with their children when mothers were either present during an interaction or not (Hwang, 1986). The research comprised of two 30-minute observations of interactions between 27 fathers and their young infants in two conditions: with the mother interacting too, and the father alone with his child. The families were categorised as either traditional or non-traditional depending on the length of parental leave the father had taken and his engagement in solo care with his child. In both family types, when parents were interacting with their child together, the mothers were more affectionate with their infants. As discussed previously, this could suggest parenting behaviours in non-traditional families are still influenced by gendered expectations of parenting. When alone with their infants, fathers were more affectionate and playful compared to when they were engaged in a triadic interaction with their child and partner. Interestingly, the traditional fathers were more affectionate than the non-traditional fathers in this condition (Hwang, 1986). The author suggested that this effect may have occurred due to traditional fathers feeling the

need to compensate for engaging less in day-to-day caregiving, hence may try to have high-quality interactions with their child when they are home.

In terms of the effects on children of being raised by a primary caregiver father, questions have been raised over children forming secure attachments. Shedding light on this issue, Lamb, Hwang, Frodi and Frodi's (1982) studied attachment in a sample of infants with highly involved fathers in Sweden. The Strange Situation paradigm was used to compare infant attachment behaviours between traditional and non-traditional families. Across the sample, 73% of children were securely attached, which is slightly higher than the norm. In both types of families, children who were more securely attached to their fathers demonstrated more sociability towards strangers, showing that regardless of paternal involvement, there was an influence of father-child attachment security on infant behaviour (Lamb, Hwang, Frodi & Frodi, 1982). This indicates that father-child attachment can be uniquely beneficial, but is not necessarily influenced by the level of father involvement in caregiving.

The initial body of research on primary caregiving fathers also included several longitudinal studies in different sociocultural contexts including Australia, the US and Israel (Russell & Radin, 1983). A comparison between male primary caregivers in the US and in Israel found some important differences between the two groups of fathers. In the Israel sample, the male primary caregivers were more satisfied in their role and scored higher on a measure of nurturance than less involved fathers, yet for US fathers there was no relationship between paternal involvement and fathers' satisfaction in their role (Radin & Sagi, 1982). However, across both samples, positive effects were found regarding children's adjustment with a male primary caregiver; Sagi (1982) found that children with primary caregiving fathers scored higher in empathy, which was associated with having a highly nurturing father. In the US, Radin (1982) reported that the level of father involvement was positively related to ratings of children's verbal intelligence. However, the sample sizes were small, with 20 US male primary caregivers and 15 from Israel, and a follow-up of the US sample found that, for many of these

families, having the father as the primary caregiver was temporary rather than a long-term role (Radin & Goldsmith, 1985). Furthermore, 55% of the mothers in the Israel study were not employed (Sagi, 1982), which may have been a confounding factor, as the mothers may also have been highly involved parents.

Another longitudinal study of a small sample of 17 male primary caregivers in the US assessed the families within the first 2 years of the infant's life and followed up throughout childhood. The children were consistently found to be well-adjusted (Pruett, 1983; 1985). At the 2- to 4-years-old wave, approximately half of the fathers remained in the primary caregiving role, despite the intention in all the families that the father taking on the primary caregiver role was going to be a temporary arrangement. Like at the first phase, the children showed optimal adjustment. When visited again at 6-years-old and 8-years-old, the children demonstrated normative gender development and were doing well at school. At 10-years-old, the children took part in semi-structured interviews, which overall indicated high quality parent-child relationships and offered a new perspective on the functioning of these families. At this phase too, the children showed positive psychological adjustment and fathers reported they felt comfortable in their role (Pruett, 1987; 2000).

Further positive effects stemming from being a male primary caregiver were found in Russell's (1983) study of 20 Australian families. Around two-thirds of the mothers and fathers in this sample believed that the father-child relationship was closer than before the fathers took on their role due to the high level of involvement of fathers, and that the fathers were also more sensitive in their parenting approach. The fathers reported feeling more competent and self-assured in their parenting. However, it's important to note that these fathers reported that the adjustment period to their new role was a difficult one, especially due to the dearth of support available from those around them. In these families, a similar proportion of couples reported negative and positive consequences of their new family set-up on their marital quality (Russell, 1983), indicating no clear relationship between the two in this early work.

The studies presented here indicate an interesting difference between primary caregiver fathers' behaviour early in their children's lives, and primary caregiver fathers who have been in the role for a longer period of time. The assumption that fathers in primary caregiving roles would behave more similarly to mothers in primary caregiving roles compared to secondary caregiver fathers was not evidenced in the observational work with families during infancy. It is worth acknowledging that this may, in part, be due to mothers in non-traditional families still taking on the primary caregiver role for a significant period of parental leave (Russell, 1999). The second set of studies presented, which used interview and self-report data from groups of primary caregiver fathers later in their children's lives, suggested that overall the fathers and children had experienced positive effects that stemmed from the father being highly involved. However, due to the potential of social desirability influencing interviews and self-report data to a greater extent than observational data, it is important that research incorporates multiple methods of studying families to allow for a broader picture of family functioning. Overall, the findings largely indicate that, as described by Lamb (2012), parenting skills are learned 'on the job', hence fathers, like mothers, are able to acquire the necessary skills to be a primary caregiver. However, there is some evidence to suggest that gendered expectations still exert an influence on parenting behaviours in families adopting non-traditional gender roles.

Gay father families

In recent decades, there has been a rise in the number of families headed by fathers – families formed by gay couples and families with single heterosexual fathers. Gay father couples initially started families through adoption, though in more recent years a growing number of same-sex couples have opted for surrogacy (Bos, Tornello & van Rijn-van Gelderen, 2016). These families are of interest not only because they are increasing in number, but as they offer insight into parenting and child adjustment in families without a mother.

A longitudinal study of adoptive same-sex families in the UK found gay fathers with children aged 3- to 9-years-old showed more positive parenting in terms of higher expressed warmth, more

time spent interacting with their children and lower disciplinary aggression compared to heterosexual parent adoptive families, in which mothers were predominantly primary caregivers (Golombok et al., 2014). The second phase of the study, conducted when the children were aged 10 to 14 years-old, found children with gay fathers showed higher levels of secure attachment compared to children adopted by heterosexual couples (McConnachie et al., 2019). A US study of adoptive gay father families reported similar levels of wellbeing and high quality of parenting. Farr, Forssell, and Patterson (2010) found no significant differences in parenting approaches and parenting stress between couples with pre-school age adopted children in gay father families compared to lesbian mother or heterosexual families. In addition, observations of family interactions found gay adoptive fathers undermined each other less and showed lower anger towards their partners than heterosexual couples (Farr & Patterson, 2013). Other research on gay father families has demonstrated the importance of family processes, such as parental psychological wellbeing and marital quality, in predicting child outcomes, over family type (Goldberg & Smith, 2014). Yet these findings are potentially confounded by the difficult process that parents must go through to adopt; gay fathers are likely to be particularly caring to pass the stringent screening process required to adopt a child, so this may partly account for the high quality of parenting in these families.

Regarding gay father families formed through surrogacy and egg donation, very little research has been carried out, yet studies so far have shown positive findings for both the parents and their children. Gay fathers who used surrogacy to form a family have reported high levels of psychological adjustment (Van Rijn-Van Gelderen et al., 2018) and also report higher self-esteem since becoming a parent (Bergman, Rubio, Green, & Padrón, 2010). In terms of family functioning of these families, research in the US has found no differences in quality of parenting or parent-child interaction between gay father and lesbian mother families formed through assisted reproductive technologies, and gay fathers reported their children showed fewer internalising problems (Golombok, Blake, et al., 2017). Similarly, research on Italian gay fathers who used surrogacy reported no differences in child

adjustment compared to children in families with two mothers and heterosexual parent families (Baiocco et al., 2015).

Single father families

Another type of primary caregiving father family is single father families. These families are often formed as a result of divorce or parental separation (Weinraub, Horvath & Gringlas, 2002). Single father families differ from single mother families in several key ways. Firstly, they are far less common, though the number of these families is increasing (Golombok, 2015). Secondly, while these families are less likely to experience poverty than single mother families (Kramer & Kramer, 2016), other concerns have been raised regarding the functioning of single father families. Similar to other families headed by fathers, questions have arisen about children being at risk for developing adjustment problems. Relatively few studies have examined single father families, yet in recent years research has begun to address this gap in the literature.

In terms of the parenting approach of single fathers, Biblarz and Stacey's (2010) review found that single fathers showed lower levels of communication, supervision and control than single mothers. Regarding child outcomes, compared to children in two-parent families, adolescents with a single father have been found to show higher rates of antisocial behaviour and substance use (Breivik & Olweus, 2006). However, other research has found that for the majority of measures of parenting and child adjustment, there are no significant differences between single mother and single father families (Dufur, Howell, Downey, Ainsworth, & Lapray, 2010; Hilton & Devall, 1998), with these studies reporting that the few differences indicated that single fathers are slightly less warm, yet permit their children to be more independent, than single mothers. The heterogeneity of findings from these studies may in part be explained by the difficulties experienced when studying single father families. For example, single father families are more likely than single mother families to include older boys who often demonstrate behavioural difficulties (Biblarz & Stacey, 2010). Hence, when adjustment problems are present in single father families, it is challenging to unravel whether the difficulties arise

due to having a male primary caregiver, as opposed to a female primary caregiver, or due to other factors.

Very limited research has been conducted on the newest form of male primary caregivers; single fathers by choice. These men actively embark on parenthood alone and often use assisted reproductive technologies to become fathers. Single men who choose surrogacy to start their family do so because of a desire to have a child, especially one that is genetically related, though an initial study found the majority of these men reported that they would have preferred to start a family with a partner (Carone, Baiocco, & Lingardi, 2017). Research is yet to report on the functioning of this family form in the UK.

Recent research on family functioning in stay-at-home father families

Studies of single and gay father families suggest fathers are equally capable at caregiving, and their children have shown positive adjustment. However, the circumstances of children with stay-at-home fathers in heterosexual couple families are different to children living in other kinds of families with male primary caregivers. Research on single father and gay father families is confounded by the other family factors at play; the stigma these families may face, the adoptive status of children in gay father families, and the lack of a partner in single father families (Biblarz & Stacey, 2010). In addition, regarding the first set of studies on primary caregiving fathers in heterosexual parent families, the social environment has changed dramatically since the 1980s and so has the way we think about the role of the father, creating the need for research on stay-at-home fathers in the 21st century. In particular, Lamb (2004) asserted that at the time of the initial studies, it was less common and less accepted for mothers to be in full-time paid employment, and fathers largely made only a small contribution to everyday caregiving for their children. This creates the need for more research examining stay-at-home fathers and their families.

Regarding the recent research interest in stay-at-home fathers, few studies have focused on examining the psychological adjustment of stay-at-home fathers, though some initial insights have been gained. A qualitative study of 12 fathers' experiences of self-identified depression indicated social isolation and inadequate social support played a key role in stay-at-home fathers' poor mental health (Caperton et al., 2019). Stigma was also highlighted as an important contributor to depression. Interestingly, fathers sought support for their depression to improve their mental health for the benefit of their children, highlighting a complex relationship between stay-at-home fathers and depression; their experiences appeared to contribute to depression, yet their role also motivated help-seeking behaviours. It is, however, important to note that an empirical measurement of depression was not adopted. Other research has suggested that stay-at-home fathers do not experience negative effects on their wellbeing due to their role; Robertson and Verschelden's (1993) study of 12 couples with stay-at-home fathers found that the fathers reported similar self-esteem to general population norms, did not experience more symptoms of depression, and reported higher life satisfaction than the general population. However, the small sample size of both these studies warrants further investigation into the wellbeing of stay-at-home fathers.

Regarding relationship quality amongst couples with a stay-at-home father, Zimmerman (2000) found stay-at-home fathers' accounts reflected positive feelings toward their spouse, and the participants reported that they communicated well with their partner. Reports on relationship quality within stay-at-home father families have also been gained from breadwinner mothers; Rushing and Powell (2014) conducted a phenomenological exploration of the experiences of 20 US working mothers whose partners were primary caregivers. The mothers reported high marital satisfaction and most perceived that they worked as a team with their husbands to parent. However, the mothers reported less positive experiences of their family set-up outside of their relationship; they did not feel supported by society, and they felt that their husbands did not either (Rushing & Powell, 2014), raising concerns over whether both parents' adjustment could be effected over time due to a lack of social

support. This research is important in highlighting the worth of exploring the adjustment of different family members within stay-at-home father families.

In the past decade, there has been a resurgence of interest in stay-at-home fathers' approach to parenting. Some studies have suggested that these fathers parent in similar ways to mothers. For example, an internet-based survey of a large group of stay-at-home fathers found high levels of parental self-efficacy amongst fathers, and fathers' scores were in line with those reported by mothers in similar work (Rochlen, McKelley, et al., 2008). In a qualitative study, Robertson and Verschelden (1993) found that stay-at-home fathers saw the opportunity to foster a close bond with their children and play an active part in their child's development as an advantage of their primary caregiver role, echoing intensive mothering ideology. Other research has found evidence to suggest fathers in non-traditional roles parent in similar ways to the 'traditional' depiction of fathering. For example, Doucet (2006) found that the narratives of male primary caregivers contained a consistent theme of encouraging their children to be independent through letting them take risks, which contrasts with the typically risk-adverse approach of mothers. A similar narrative emerges in other research; stay-at-home fathers, gay fathers and single fathers have all been reported to encourage 'risky' play (Bauer & Giles, 2019). These studies have contributed to an understanding of stay-at-home fathers' experiences of parenting; however, little research has directly compared the parenting of primary caregiving fathers to either secondary caregiving fathers or mothers, particularly beyond the first few years of a child's life.

Since the studies of primary caregiving fathers conducted in the late 1970s and 1980s, few studies have adopted observational measures when studying primary caregiving men in comparison to other types of parents. An exception was Lewis et al.'s (2009) comparison between primary caregiving fathers and secondary caregiving fathers. The sample was recruited from the Families, Children and Child Care study. Based on reports from mothers, the 25 primary caregiving fathers spent at least 20 hours per week taking sole responsibility for caregiving, and the comparison group

comprised of 75 fathers who were secondary caregivers. Father-child interaction was observed at the family's home when the infants were between 11 and 13-months-old during daily activities: play and mealtimes. It was found that during play, primary caregiving fathers were rated higher on emotional tone, and their infants scored better on mood ratings, than secondary caregiving fathers. It is likely that the primary caregiving fathers were more in tune with their children during play, as a result of spending a larger amount of time with them compared to the other fathers. There were, however, no significant differences during mealtimes. Amongst the primary caregiver fathers, there was a positive association between the number of hours the father was the sole caregiver per week, and infant emotional tone, indicating that increased father involvement relates to how happy infants were during dyadic interactions with their father (Lewis et al., 2009). Overall, this study suggests there may be some positive effects of increased paternal involvement on both the father and the infant, yet more research is needed to further explore this possible relationship.

As the study of primary caregiver father families is still a developing field, questions remain about the adjustment of children in stay-at-home father families compared to children raised by female primary caregivers, such as the acquisition of gender-role behaviours. Like families with gay fathers, concerns have centred around the expectation that due to spending more time with their fathers, boys and girls in these families would show more masculine and fewer feminine behaviours.

Different theoretical perspectives suggest different hypotheses regarding the acquisition of gender-typed characteristics by children in stay-at-home father families. The social learning perspective argues that gender differences arise primarily as a result of differential treatment of girls and boys from birth, including differential reinforcement of gender role behaviours (Hines, 2004), and also due to children imitating same-sex role models, such as parents (Mischel, 1970). According to social learning theory, fathers who spend more time with their children may influence their children's gender development, firstly, through the extent to which they reinforce gender typical behaviours, and, secondly, through their children imitating their gendered behaviours. Regarding reinforcement

of gender role behaviours, it has been suggested that fathers police gender transgressive behaviours more than mothers (Pruett, 2000). This is found to be a more common experience for boys than for girls (Raag, Raag, Rackliff, & Rackliff, 1998). Yet, in relation to families with male primary caregivers, these assumptions have not consistently held true. Radin and Sagi's (1982) study of children with primary caregiver fathers found that girls were less feminine in their gender role behaviours than the norm, which may be due to girls modelling their father's behaviour more, or primary caregiver fathers showing different patterns of differential reinforcement than other parents. Mixed results have been reported in terms of the influence of male primary caregivers on the gender development of their children in gay father families; some studies have shown the fathers to hold a lower inclination towards promoting gender conformity in children (Mallon, 2004; Scallen, 1982). However, lower levels of gender stereotyped behaviours have been found to be more common in children of lesbian mothers than gay fathers (Goldberg, Kashy, & Smith, 2012), and other research has found no difference in children's gender role behaviour between gay father and heterosexual parent families (Farr, Forssell, & Patterson, 2010). Overall, these findings suggest that it is not clear how having a male primary caregiver influences children's gender development.

An alternative theoretical stance, the cognitive theory of gender development, posits that children self-socialise into gendered behaviours and preferences from a young age. According to this theory, there are individual differences in how children process gendered stimuli; some children more readily process and categorise information about gender than other children (Martin, Ruble, & Szkrybalo, 2002). As a result, some children behave in more gender-stereotyped ways due to influences aside from parent-led socialisation. In accordance with the cognitive theory of gender development, it could be hypothesised that having a male primary caregiver would not exert a significant influence on the acquisition of gender-typed behaviours. This perspective fits well with both Family Systems Theory and Ecological Systems Theory, such that there are many different social agents that children interact with who could exert an influence on their ideas on gender and gendered behaviours. It also reflects previous scholarship asserting that children's gender development is

influenced by multiple forms of socialisation, not solely socialisation from one's parents (Golombok et al., 2008; Hines, 2004).

Research so far on children's development with primary caregiving fathers in heterosexual parent families has largely focused on infants. However, studying children when they are slightly older enables the children themselves to contribute to research, as found with Pruett's longitudinal study (1987; 2000). Recent studies have highlighted that children in early years education and the first few years of school can participate in research through interviews, in addition to observational measures. Specifically, children from 4-years-old show a keen awareness of their family structure and have been able to contribute meaningfully to research studying children in modern family forms (Zadeh, Freeman, & Golombok, 2017). Further, other research has shown children aged 7-years-old are able to articulate their views on the roles of mothers and fathers (Sinno & Killen, 2009). However, data is lacking on children's perspectives of their mothers and fathers in their own family in traditional, versus non-traditional, set ups.

Conclusions

Stay-at-home fathers have been found to experience prejudice and social isolation, which is expected to have negative implications for aspects of mental health such as anxiety, depression and stress. However very little research has examined stay-at-home fathers' wellbeing, particularly in comparison to other fathers, and to mothers in primary caregiving roles. Regarding couple functioning, research so far has indicated that there is not a conclusive effect of adopting a non-traditional gender role on relationship quality. Furthermore, little is known about coparenting within these families, and in particular, whether the enactment of 'traditional' gendered behaviours to 'counteract' non-traditional gender roles in parenting may play a part. Therefore, an exploration of stay-at-home fathers' psychological wellbeing and relationship quality, in comparison to parents in traditional parenting roles, would further understanding of these families.

As demonstrated by the research previously outlined, the field of parenting is moving toward studying mothers and fathers as similarly important in child development. However, longstanding views of the primacy of mothers in parenting, as well as few examinations of highly involved fathers alongside highly involved mothers, result in concerns still being raised over whether stay-at-home fathers would parent in different ways to that expected of a mother. Research so far on primary caregiving fathers in the 1970s and 1980s, and more recently, research on gay fathers, has reported positive parenting in these families and well-adjusted children. Regarding studies of heterosexual primary caregiver fathers, children in these studies have largely been examined during infancy, when the father has just entered into his primary caregiving role, and longitudinal studies have rarely used comparison groups. Thus, less is known about parent and child adjustment when the father has been in the role for a longer period of time, and by association, when the mother is less involved too, after parental leave.

Furthermore, few studies have examined children's gender role behaviours in families with a stay-at-home father compared to children in other family types, raising questions around whether children would show different gendered behaviours to their peers with primary caregiver mothers. In addition, given that recent research has shown the usefulness of exploring families from the child's perspective, and the gap in the literature of children's perceptions of their family in stay-at-home father families, including children in studies of this emerging family form would provide important insights into the functioning of these families.

Regarding stay-at-home fathers' experiences of their role, research so far has highlighted the importance, and usefulness, of allowing fathers to describe their own experiences, and to give attention to, and reflect on, their narratives. However, as stay-at-home fathers' accounts of their role have been characterised by ambivalence, more research is needed to understand how fathers make sense of their role as a male primary caregiver. Studies have indicated that stay-at-home fathers experience stigma, but as research has generally been conducted in the US, little is known about UK

stay-at-home fathers' experiences of stigma and support, in light of the different support systems in place. As such, a limitation of the current body of research on stay-at-home fathers is that it has a US-bias. This is problematic; firstly, because much of the research has used a national support group to recruit, which does not exist in the UK, and may have shaped the US fathers' experiences of their stay-at-home parent role. Secondly, other factors found to contribute to stay-at-home fathers' experiences of their role have been found to differ between these two socio-cultural contexts, for example, masculinity, attitudes towards fathers, and conceptualisations of fatherhood (Randles, 2018).

Importantly, as noted within previous research, the number of fathers who are stay-at-home parents is influenced by factors that are specific to different contexts, such as macro-level economic factors and availability of affordable childcare, thus examining the motivations for UK parents to become stay-at-home parents would be a useful addition to scholarship. As previously described, most of the research in this area has been conducted in the US, where there are different considerations to take into account, such as different parental leave laws, and differing availability and affordability of childcare (Petts, Knoester, & Li, 2020). Also, more research is needed comparing stay-at-home fathers' motivations for becoming a primary caregiver compared to those of stay-at-home mothers, in order to elucidate whether gender influences their decision.

Finally, the mismatch between the positive wellbeing demonstrated in the small number of quantitative investigations and experiences of stigma reported by qualitative studies needs to be given greater consideration, as it raises the question of how these fathers are adapting to their role, and the factors that help alleviate the risks to their mental health. Notably, the integration of these two methodologies is largely lacking from extant work.

1.5. The Present study: Aims, Rationale and Hypotheses

The aim of this thesis was to explore parent psychological adjustment, parent-child relationships, and child development in stay-at-home father families, and the experiences these fathers have of being a male primary caregiver. Studying stay-at-home father families, in comparison to families with primary caregiver mothers and secondary caregiver fathers, allows for an investigation of the impact of parent gender on parenting and other indicators of family functioning, whilst controlling for the level of parental involvement.

Social research shows that the number of stay-at-home father families is increasing. However, since the initial interest in male primary caregiver families in the 1970s and 1980s, little research has examined the functioning of these families and the outcomes for children. There are theoretical and practical implications that stem from an investigation of these families. Regarding the former, research comparing primary caregiver fathers to primary caregiver mothers addresses the theoretical debate on whether mothering and fathering are distinct, or comparable, constructs. Regarding the latter, since the number of stay-at-home father families is rising, research on these families could help understand why more families are choosing to arrange parental roles this way, and the ways in which these families can be supported through policy.

Further, the adjustment of stay-at-home fathers has largely not been considered within the wider marital and family environment. Considering the importance of the wider family system on the adjustment of any member of a family, it is worthwhile to analyse the adjustment of all members of stay-at-home father families. Furthermore, research has rarely included multiple comparisons groups, leading to a lack of studies comparing fathers and mothers with differing levels of involvement in caregiving and employment.

Importantly, after infancy but when children are still in early childhood, parents are expected to spend a large amount of time engaged in direct caregiving. This is firstly due to a lack of affordable

full-time childcare at this age, exacerbated by the shortened days in preschool and primary school compared to secondary school. Secondly, significance is placed on child development at this age, resulting in intensive parenting ideologies placing great importance on parental contributions during this developmental stage. Therefore, due to the high burden of childcare at this age, it makes it an interesting time frame within which to explore the allocation of caregiving between parents and family functioning.

Crucially, there is a disjuncture between the qualitative research on stigma experienced by stay-at-home fathers, and the small number of extant quantitative studies that report largely positive adjustment amongst these men. As such, for the present thesis, an integrative approach was used combining quantitative and qualitative analyses in order to allow for a more nuanced understanding of these fathers' wellbeing, in light of their experiences of adopting a non-traditional gender role.

This thesis had the following aims:

1. To examine the reasons for becoming a stay-at-home father.
2. To explore stay-at-home fathers' experiences of their role, specifically to address the following research questions: (a) How do stay-at-home fathers narrate their experiences of being a male primary caregiver and articulate their role? (b) What is the nature and extent of stigma experienced by stay-at-home fathers? and (c) How do stay-at-home fathers tackle stigmatising experiences?
3. To explore the psychological adjustment of stay-at-home fathers.
4. To determine whether family functioning in stay-at-home father families differs from stay-at-home mother and dual-earner families regarding (a) quality of parenting and (b) quality of parent-child relationships.
5. To examine whether children with stay-at-home fathers differ in their psychological adjustment and gender role behaviour to children with female primary caregivers.

The first two aims were examined through qualitative methods. As these analyses were exploratory and descriptive, no hypotheses were tested. For aims 3-5, quantitative methods were used. To address these aims, stay-at-home fathers were compared with stay-at-home mother families and dual-earner families. The hypotheses were as follows:

3a) Based on research suggesting stay-at-home fathers experience difficulties regarding a lack of social support and social isolation, and literature indicating that pressure to conform to hegemonic masculine ideals can adversely impact mental health, it was hypothesised that stay-at-home fathers would show lower levels of psychological adjustment compared to fathers in secondary caregiver roles.

3b) As discussed above, differences in parental wellbeing between stay-at-home fathers and primary caregiving mothers were expected, due to concerns about the effects of adopting a non-traditional gender role on psychological adjustment. Therefore, it was predicted that stay-at-home fathers would show lower levels of psychological wellbeing compared to primary caregiver mothers.

4a) Based on research indicating that highly involved parents often show high quality parenting, and the body of literature demonstrating high quality of parenting by male primary caregivers in same-sex parent families, stay-at-home fathers were predicted to show a higher quality of parenting, and of parent-child relationships, than fathers in both dual-earner and stay-at-home mother families, such that the level of paternal involvement was expected to be associated with quality of parenting.

4b) Based on the literature demonstrating that there are more similarities than differences between mothers and fathers regarding parenting, and research showing that children form secure attachments to fathers and mothers equally, stay-at-home fathers were predicted to show a similar quality of parenting, and quality of parent-child relationships, to primary caregiver mothers. Furthermore, based on Family Systems Theory, and Ecological Systems Theory, which both highlight

how different aspects of the family system influence parenting, the quality of parenting of all parents was expected to be associated with their psychological wellbeing and quality of marital relationship.

5) Very little research has investigated the adjustment of children in stay-at-home father families. However, based on research on other male primary caregiving families, such as families headed by gay fathers, children in stay-at-home father families were predicted to show similar levels of adjustment to children in stay-at-home mother families. Children in stay-at-home father families were expected to demonstrate higher levels of adjustment than children in dual-earner families, due to having a highly involved parent. Based on Family Systems Theory, it was hypothesised that children's adjustment across all families would be influenced by family processes, such as quality of parenting and parent wellbeing. Based on research showing children can form equal attachments to fathers and mothers, it was hypothesised that children in stay-at-home father families would rate their father similarly on positive parenting and emotional security to children with female primary caregivers, and would rate primary caregiver fathers higher than secondary caregiver fathers. Due to previous research on children with male primary caregivers in gay father families, and the multiple influences on children's gender development beyond parental gender roles, it was expected that the gender role behaviours of children raised by stay-at-home fathers would not differ from children in other family types.

2. Methodology

This chapter outlines the methodology of the present study. Section 2.1 outlines the recruitment process of the families to the study. Section 2.2 outlines the sample characteristics. Section 2.3 describes the study procedure. Section 2.4 describes the interview, questionnaire and observation measures used for both the qualitative and quantitative analyses. Lastly, the ethical considerations of the project are described in Section 2.5.

2.1. Recruitment

Forty-one stay-at-home father families, 45 stay-at-home mother families and 41 dual-earner families took part in the study with their children aged 3- to 6-years-old. All the families lived in the United Kingdom.

Data collection was conducted between February 2017 and March 2019. For practical reasons, families were recruited through preschools, schools, playgroups, parenting groups on social media and electronic mailing lists, and by word-of-mouth, as it was not possible to recruit a representative sample. A similar approach was taken in other studies of stay-at-home fathers by Rochlen, Suizzo, McKelley, and Scaringi (2008) and Caperton, Butler, Kaiser, Connelly and Knox (2019). The primary methods of recruitment were the researcher sending emails to preschools and schools¹ around the UK outlining the study and providing the information sheet², and the researcher posting the advert on social media. Regarding the first method, emails were sent to school administrators³ asking if they would be happy to circulate information about the study to the parent mailing list, as

¹ Schools were chosen to be contacted initially in East Anglia and the search widened outwards.

² See Appendix 1.

³ The email addresses of school administrators were found on school websites. The majority of schools did not reply; 400 schools were contacted during the data collection period, of which 8% directly replied to the researcher. Of these, 65% said they were happy to send out the information, and 35% said that they would not at this time. It is possible that other schools sent out the information sheet yet did not contact the researcher to say they did so.

parents could not be directly contacted due to data protection guidelines. Regarding the second method, an advert about the study was posted on social media parenting groups⁴, following permission from the group administrators, and sent to an electronic mailing list of parents in the local area. The advert was also handed out to local playgroups⁵ to pass onto parents and a few of the families in the sample were snowballed from other participants. Any parent who expressed an interest in the study was given the researcher's university email address and an email exchange was initiated about taking part in the research. Information was sought on the eligibility of the family for the study before the researcher emailed the information sheet for the parents to read through. Once they had read the information sheet and raised any questions they wanted, the date, time and location for the research visit was arranged.

Previous research has defined a stay-at-home father in different ways, for example, as a man who considers himself the primary caregiver whether or not he is employed (Latshaw, 2011), or a male primary caregiver who earns less than 20% of the family income or works less than 10 hours a week (Solomon, 2014), or who works fewer than 20 hours per week and their spouse works for 32 or more hours a week (Fischer & Anderson, 2012). The father's spouse or partner being the main wage earner has been identified as a key criterion (Caperton et al., 2019). Other research has required a period of time between adopting the role and taking part in research; inclusion criteria for Doucet's (2004) study were that the fathers had to either be working flexibly part-time or they needed to have had a year in-between ending their job and being interviewed. Some studies have used the father identifying as a stay-at-home parent as the sole criteria (Merla, 2008; Rochlen et al., 2008; Rochlen, McKelley, & Whittaker, 2010). For the present study this was considered not stringent enough, however, these studies all highlight the importance of the father identifying as a 'stay-at-home' parent.

⁴ Likewise with the schools, initially local parenting groups on social media were contacted, before groups around the UK were contacted. The advert was initially circulated to 20 parenting groups, but it was understood that the advert was shared between different groups after being initially posted.

⁵ 15 playgroups were happy for the information to be distributed.

Following these guidelines, the inclusion criteria for stay-at-home fathers and mothers in the present sample were as follows: they were the primary caregiver for their children and had been so for at least six months by the time of interview; their partner was the primary wage earner and worked at least four days per week or the equivalent in hours; the primary caregiver self-identified as a stay-at-home parent; and if employed, then they were in part-time or flexible work which was arranged around their caregiving commitments⁶. For the dual-earner families, the inclusion criteria were that each parent had to work at least half of the standard working week, so that there was an opportunity for childcare to be shared reasonably equally. All couples were in a heterosexual relationship and were either married or cohabiting.

⁶ This criterion was informed by previous research which found that stay-at-home fathers often engaged in some form of paid employment (Doucet, 2004; Fisher & Anderson, 2012; Solomon, 2014).

2.2. Sample Characteristics

Sample characteristics by family type are summarised in Table 2.2. The average age of mothers was 37.39 years with significant differences between groups, $F(2, 124) = 4.11, p = .02$. Bonferroni post-hoc tests showed that mothers who were stay-at-home mothers ($M = 36.20, SD = 3.44$) were significantly younger than mothers married to a stay-at-home father, also known as breadwinner mothers ($M = 38.43, SD = 4.16$). The age of mothers in dual-earner families ($M = 37.68, SD = 3.43$) was not significantly different to stay-at-home mothers or breadwinner mothers, and fell between the two.

The average age of fathers was 39.69 years with significant differences between groups, $F(2,124) = 6.96, p = .00$. Bonferroni post-hoc tests showed that fathers who were stay-at-home fathers ($M = 41.95, SD = 6.21$) were significantly older than fathers married to a stay-at-home mother, also known as breadwinner fathers ($M = 37.95, SD = 4.83$). The age of fathers in dual-earner families ($M = 39.33, SD = 3.75$) was not significantly different to stay-at-home fathers or breadwinner fathers, and fell between the two.

The average age of the children was 4.68 years and there were no significant differences between groups, $F(2, 124) = 1.35, p = .26$. The average age of children in each group was 4.87 years ($SD = 1.22$) for stay-at-home father families, 4.47 years ($SD = 1.06$) for stay-at-home mother families and 4.71 ($SD = 1.07$) years for dual-earner families.

No significant differences were found regarding the number of siblings in the family, $\chi^2(4) = 3.98, p = .41$. Within each family type, there was a range of family sizes from having a single child to having four siblings, although most families were comprised of the target child and one sibling. In terms of child gender there were also no significant differences between family types, $\chi^2(2) = 2.04, p = .36$. There were more girls than boys in all three family types, with 76 girls and 51 boys in total.

With regard to education, no significant differences were found between family types for highest educational attainment for mothers, $\chi^2(4) = 4.89, p = .29$, or fathers, $\chi^2(4) = 7.41, p = .12$. Education levels ranged from GCSEs to a doctorate degree, with a high level of educational attainment overall; 85% of mothers and 76% of fathers had a Bachelor degree or above.

There were no significant differences in ethnicity between family types for mothers, $\chi^2(2) = 2.70, p = .30$, or fathers, $\chi^2(2) = 4.13, p = .15$, with 88% of mothers identifying as White and 8% identifying as another ethnic group, and 91% of fathers identifying as White and 6% identifying as another ethnic group. There were no significant differences between groups with regards to marital status, $\chi^2(2) = 1.10, p = .69$. Of the total sample, 95% of couples were married and the remaining couples were in a cohabiting relationship.

Stay-at-home fathers had been a stay-at-home parent for an average of 4 years ($SD = 2$ years 9 months) and, similarly, stay-at-home mothers had been a stay-at-home parent for an average of 4 years 2 months ($SD = 2$ years 1 month), with no significant differences found, $t(84) = 0.32, p = .75$. The shortest either gender of parent had been a stay-at-home parent was 6 months and the longest was 11 years 6 months for a stay-at-home father and 10 years 6 months for a stay-at-home mother.

Eighteen of the stay-at-home fathers (44%) engaged in part-time work (M hours per week = 9.33, $SD = 5.77$)⁷. Eight of the stay-at-home mothers (18%) engaged in part-time work (M hours per week = 7.31, $SD = 6.63$). There was a significant difference in the number of primary caregiver parents who were employed, $\chi^2(1) = 6.94, p = .01$, with more fathers than mothers in part-time employment. However, there was not a significant difference in the number of hours worked by stay-at-home fathers and mothers with part-time jobs, $t(23) = 0.93, p = .36$.

⁷ Importantly, as required by the study criteria, all the stay-at-home fathers, inclusive of those who sought out part-time paid work, self-identified as a stay-at-home parent, and those who were in paid employment were only doing so for a small part of their week compared to other parents in the sample.

Table 2.2. Socio-Demographic Characteristics by Family Type

	Family Type						ANOVA		
	Stay-at-home Father		Stay-at-home Mother		Dual-earner		<i>F</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>			
Father's age (years)	41.95	6.21	37.95	4.83	39.33	3.75	6.96	2, 124	.00
Mother's age (years)	38.43	4.16	36.20	3.44	37.68	3.43	4.11	2, 124	.02
Child's age (years)	4.87	1.22	4.47	1.06	4.71	1.07	1.35	2, 124	.26
	Stay-at-home Father		Stay-at-home Mother		Dual-earner		Chi-Square		
	<i>n (%)</i>		<i>n (%)</i>		<i>n (%)</i>		χ^2	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
No. of Siblings							3.98	4	.41
None	7 (17%)		7 (16%)		8 (20%)				
1	31 (76%)		28 (62%)		26 (63%)				
2 or more	3 (7%)		10 (22%)		7 (17%)				
Child Gender							2.04	2	.36
Female	28 (68%)		24 (53%)		24 (58%)				
Male	13 (32%)		21 (47%)		17 (42%)				
Mother's Education							4.89	4	.29
GCSEs / A Level / NVQ	4 (10%)		6 (13%)		3 (7%)				
BA	12 (29%)		21 (47%)		14 (34%)				
Postgraduate	22 (54%)		16 (36%)		23 (56%)				

	Stay-at-home Father <i>n%</i>	Stay-at-home Mother <i>n%</i>	Dual-earner <i>n%</i>	Chi-square		
				χ^2	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
Father's Education				6.71	4	.15
GCSEs / A Level / NVQ	12 (29%)	7 (16%)	3 (7%)			
BA	12 (29%)	15 (33%)	15 (37%)			
Postgraduate	16 (39%)	17 (38%)	21 (51%)			
Mother's ethnicity				2.70	2	.30
White	38 (93%)	39 (87%)	35 (85%)			
Other ethnic group	1 (2%)	4 (9%)	5 (12%)			
Father's ethnicity				4.13	2	.15
White	37 (90%)	42 (93%)	36 (88%)			
Other ethnic group	3 (7%)	0	4 (10%)			
Marital Status				1.10	2	.69
Married	38 (93%)	43 (96%)	40 (98%)			
Cohabiting	3 (7%)	2 (4%)	1 (2%)			

2.3. Research Design

Piloting the study

The measures used in the present study were piloted in two phases. Firstly, in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with 13 stay-at-home fathers at a stay-at-home father convention in the US in October 2016. The pilot interviews helped in the designing of both the research questions and the measures for the full study. Secondly, the children's tasks were piloted on nine children aged 3- to 6-years-old in December 2016 and January 2017. The children's pilot was useful in establishing that the battery of tasks took an appropriate length of time for children aged 3- to 6-years old, particularly in order to ensure that the youngest in the sample would be able to participate without the assistance of a parent.

Procedure

All of those who expressed an interest in the study were emailed an information sheet, which covered what taking part involved and the data protection policy⁸. After reading through the information sheet and confirming that they wished to take part, the families were given the option of being visited at home, interviewed at the Centre for Family Research (outside of working hours) or, if either was not possible, by Skype. The majority (94%) of families chose to be visited at home and interviews were conducted separately with the father, the mother and the child, followed by a 5-minute observational task with each parent and the child. The primary caregiver interviews lasted approximately 60 to 90 minutes each, the secondary caregiver interviews lasted approximately 45 to 60 minutes each, and the child interview lasted around 20 minutes. Questionnaire packs were also completed by parents. Overall 248 parent interviews were conducted, of which the main researcher (CJ) attended all the home visits and conducted 193 of these interviews (78%). The other 55 (22%)

⁸ See Appendix 1 for Study Information Sheet.

interviews were conducted by third-year undergraduate students and one MPhil student, all trained on the study techniques. CJ administered all the children's tasks (n = 118).

At the start of each home visit, both parents were given a hard copy of the information sheet, asked to read through it again and given the chance to ask questions about participating. Then, written informed consent⁹ to take part was obtained from each parent and written consent was also obtained from each parent for their child to be interviewed. The children were monitored for dissent throughout the interview. Each visit took around 2.5 hours to complete. The families were given £10 to thank them for their time and each child received a small toy. All the interviews were audio recorded in order to allow for verbatim transcription, following the removal of identifying information. In the majority of families, interviews with each parent were conducted alone with the researcher in a room separate to the rest of the family. Due to space constraints in some of the homes, occasionally other family members would remain in the same room during the interview process. The measures completed by the families and teachers are summarized in Table 2.3.1. Due to time constraints of the families who took part, in some cases not all the measures were completed. The percentage of data collected from mothers, fathers, children and teachers in each family type is summarised in Table 2.3.2.

⁹ See Appendix 2 for consent form.

Table 2.3.1. Summary of Measures Administered

	Measure	Mother	Father	Child	Teacher
Experiences of Parental Role	Parent Interview	X	X		
Parental Adjustment	Edinburgh Depression Inventory	X	X		
	Trait Anxiety Scale	X	X		
	Parenting Stress Index	X	X		
	Multidimensional Measure of Perceived Social Support	X	X		
	Conformity to Masculine Norms Inventory		X		
	Golombok Rust Inventory of Marital Satisfaction	X	X		
	Coparenting Relationship Scale	X	X		
Parent-Child Relationship and Family Functioning	Parent Interview	X	X		
	Observational Measure	X	X	X	
	Parental Acceptance Rejection Questionnaire	X	X		
Child Psychological Adjustment	Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire	X	X		X
	Pre-School Activities Inventory	X	X		
	Structured Child Assessment of Relationships in Families			X	

Table 2.3.2. Summary of Data Collected from each Family Type

	Family Type			Total
	Stay-at-home Father	Stay-at-home Mother	Dual-earner	
Mother Interview	40 / 41 (98%)	45 / 45 (100%)	41 / 41 (100%)	126 / 127 (99%)
Father Interview	41 / 41 (100%)	41 / 45 (91%)	40 / 41 (98%)	122 / 127 (96%)
Child Interview	37 / 41 (90%)	42 / 45 (93%)	39 / 41 (95%)	118 / 127 (93%)
Mother Observational Measure	29 / 41 (71%)	41 / 45 (91%)	37 / 41 (90%)	107 / 127 (84%)
Father Observational Measure	38 / 41 (93%)	30 / 45 (67%)	32 / 41 (78%)	100 / 127 (79%)
Mother Questionnaires	39 / 41 (95%)	43 / 45 (96%)	40 / 41 (98%)	122 / 127 (96%)
Father Questionnaires	40 / 41 (98%)	42 / 45 (93%)	40 / 41 (98%)	122 / 127 (96%)
Teacher Questionnaire	29 / 41 (71%)	34 / 45 (76%)	35 / 41 (85%)	98 / 127 (77%)

2.4. Measures

Stay-at-home parents' experiences

The reasons for becoming a stay-at-home father were examined through a section of the semi-structured interview¹⁰ that used open-ended questions and were analysed qualitatively. Further, stay-at-home fathers' experiences of their non-traditional gender role, and the stigma and support they experienced, were examined in the final section of the interview through open-ended questions. The interview method was chosen in order to examine the fathers' experiences as it helps extract detailed accounts from participants, hence enables an in-depth exploration of their narratives (Kvale, 2007).

One section of the interview was designed specifically to address the decision to become a stay-at-home parent and the participant's thoughts on, and feelings about, this decision. The stay-at-home fathers and mothers were asked to think back to when they were first considering becoming a stay-at-home parent and elaborate on this process (e.g. "What were the main factors leading you to this decision?"). Questions were also asked about how the fathers and mothers felt about arranging childcare the way they did, and how they think their partner felt. They were also asked about identity change ("Do you think it's changed how you see yourself?").

The stay-at-home fathers were also asked questions directly related to their role as a stay-at-home father. This section of the interview began with a general question asked of all the fathers in the study ("What does being a father mean to you?"). Then, the next few questions were targeted towards the fathers' insights into whether they believed there are gender differences in parenting, and whether they think society believes there are gender differences in parenting (e.g. "Do you think people expect stay-at-home dads to parent differently to a stay-at-home mum?").

¹⁰ See Appendix 4 for the full list of qualitative questions.

Information was obtained on the reactions the fathers usually experience when they tell others that they are a stay-at-home father, and whether their experiences are what they expected, or different. The fathers were then asked further questions regarding whether they had experienced any particular challenges due to being a stay-at-home father. The interview also covered suggestions for support (e.g. "What advice would you give to a dad who's just decided to become a stay-at-home dad?"). The interview finished by asking the fathers to reflect on their positive experiences ("What's the best thing about being a stay-at-home dad?").

Reflexivity

During the interview process, it was important that the participants felt at ease with the interviewer, and thus able to disclose their personal experiences. As Gaskell (2000) remarked, this is a unique situation and can be difficult for the participant, hence several measures were put in place in order to help the participant feel as comfortable as possible. Firstly, the more sensitive questions were placed towards the end of the interview schedule. This technique was adopted in order to first build rapport and a certain degree of connection between the interviewer and the participant. The interviewer made sure to adopt responses and use body language that denoted active listening and an interested, yet non-judgemental, stance. It was important to consider how the identity of the researchers could play a role in the responses of the participant. The main researcher (CJ) and the students who helped with data collection were female, were in their early- to mid-twenties and were not parents. While their status as a non-parent was not explicitly made clear to the participant, it was expected that due to their age and student status, the participants would assume that they were not talking to a parent. This was expected to help the participants feel that they were not being judged by another parent. Further, having women interview the fathers was presumed to help ease feelings of having to portray himself as keeping in line with masculine ideals, as men might feel with other men. Therefore, it was hoped that the characteristics of the researchers helped elicit trust from the

participants and enabled them to feel comfortable in opening up about their thoughts, feelings and experiences.

Quality assessment: Qualitative analysis

In order to assess the quality of the qualitative research in the present thesis, the confidence markers outlined by Gaskell and Bauer (2000) were chosen. The confidence markers are criterion against which to assess the quality of research and include transparency and procedural clarity, using data audits, triangulation of methodology and thick description. The confidence markers were chosen because they, firstly, move away from applying quality markers used traditionally to assess quantitative research, as this is considered inappropriate for qualitative work, and, secondly, because they outline a clear, concise set of criteria which have functional equivalence in terms of assessing the quality of qualitative research.

Transparency and procedural clarity were established in three ways; firstly, by using the Atlas.ti software in order to keep track of the codes and themes across the different transcripts¹¹. Secondly, by the researcher taking detailed notes of her approach to coding and outlining the process, such that another researcher could follow the same sequential stages and presumably code the data in a similar way. Finally, data audits were used as they are a useful way to ensure an external check of the quality of the data analysis process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Data audits involve in-depth discussions of the process of qualitative research with an auditor not directly involved in the data analysis. Thus, the researcher engaged in regular debriefing with another researcher experienced in using qualitative methods. Insights from the auditor were important in revising the presentation of the thematic network and the weight given to each of the different theories used to inform the qualitative work. Hence, the use of a data audit helped to provide confidence in the analysis and ensured transparency and procedural clarity.

¹¹ See Appendix 9 for the full list of codes.

To ensure further confidence in the analysis, triangulation was adopted; the data were, firstly, subject to thematic analysis through the process of coding and organising codes into themes, secondly, through refining themes and subthemes, and, thirdly, through thematic network analysis, through the creation of a map that represents not only the themes, but the relationships between them.

Confidence and relevance criteria were also met through the presentation of findings. Qualitative work should extensively report verbatim quotes from the transcripts, also known as thick description (Gaskell & Bauer, 2000). The following results include numerous quotes direct from the transcripts¹². Where the quotes were cut this has been indicated and was done so for clarity when the participants were not directly discussing the question at hand, or where speech was impeded by numerous pauses or stutters. A further confidence marker that was used was surprise; where responses diverged from what was expected in surprising ways, or accounts diverged from one another in unexpected forms, this was afforded attention.

Deviant case analysis.

There were eight fathers whose interviews were not quoted in the findings of the thematic analysis. As a quality check, these fathers' transcripts were re-read after the analysis to check if the thematic map represented their viewpoints. These fathers were found to have their narratives represented on the map in some way. It was found that these fathers' interviews were shorter in length than most of the fathers quoted in the results, thus were not chosen as example quotes. No deviant cases were identified through this quality check, suggesting that the analysis reflects, at least in part, the narratives of all the fathers who took part in the study.

¹² The techniques used for the transcribing process can be found in Appendix 8.

Parent psychological wellbeing

The Edinburgh Depression Scale

The Edinburgh Depression Scale (EDS; Cox, Holden, & Sagovsky, 1987; Thorpe, 1993) was administered to mothers and fathers to measure depression. The scale was originally devised to detect clinical levels of postnatal depression, however, is now widely used to assess depression more generally (Cox, Holden, & Sagovsky, 1987). It is a 10-item scale that the participant is asked to complete based on their experiences of how they have felt in the past seven days. There are four response options, ranging from 0 which is 'not at all' to 3, meaning 'most of the time'. Sample items are 'I have been so unhappy that I have had difficulty sleeping' and 'I have looked forward with enjoyment to things'. Once the relevant items are reverse scored, a total score is produced ranging from 0 to 30. Higher scores represent higher levels of depression, with a clinical cut-off point of 13 or higher (Matthey, Henshaw, Elliott, & Barnett, 2006). The EDS has been validated on a large community sample in the UK, and was found to be sensitive regarding the detection of clinical depression (Murray & Carothers, 1990). For the present sample, Cronbach's alpha for mothers' scores was .86 and for fathers' scores was .76, demonstrating good internal consistency.

Trait Anxiety Inventory

The State-Trait Anxiety Inventory Trait subscale (TAI; Spielberger, 1983; Spielberger, 2010) was used to assess anxiety amongst mothers and fathers. The original 40-item STAI was designed as a brief but reliable measure of self-reported anxiety in clinical and research settings. The Trait Anxiety subscale consists of 20 items which are rated on a 4-point Likert scale from 1 to 4, whereby 1 is 'almost never', 2 is 'sometimes', 3 is 'often' and 4 is 'almost always'. Sample items are 'I make decisions easily' and 'I wish I could be as happy as others seem to be'. After the relevant items have been reversed, the scale is summed to create a total score, with higher scores representing higher levels of anxiety. A score equal to or above 45 indicates clinically high levels of anxiety (Spielberger, 1983). The TAI has

good reliability and validity; previously reported test-retest correlations have ranged between .76 and .84, and the scale shows good discrimination between clinical and non-clinical populations (Spielberger, 1983). For the present study, Cronbach's alpha for the mothers' ratings was .92 and for the fathers' ratings was .91, indicating high internal consistency. Due to the high degree of correlation between scores on the EDS and the TAI for mothers ($r = .74, p < .001$) and for fathers ($r = .75, p < .001$), an aggregate score of mental health problems was created.

The Parenting Stress Index

The Parenting Stress Index Short-Form (PSI-SF; Abidin, 1995) was designed to evaluate parenting stress and is widely used by both clinicians and researchers. Mothers and fathers completed the questionnaire. The short-form consists of 36 items taken from the original 120 item questionnaire. There are three subscales based on a factor analysis of the full questionnaire; Parent Distress, Parent-Child Dysfunctional Interaction and Difficult Child. Sample items include 'It takes a long time and it is very hard for my child to get used to new things' and 'My child's sleeping or eating schedule was much harder to establish than I expected'. Higher scores reflect higher levels of parenting stress and total scores over 90 indicate clinical levels of parenting stress. In a large sample of parents, the mean score of the scale was 71 (Abidin, 1995). The PSI was tested for validity on a normative sample in the US comprising over 500 mothers and fathers (Johnson, 2015). The PSI is highly correlated with the Child Abuse Potential Inventory (Milner & Crouch, 1997) and the Beck Depression Inventory (Beck, Steer, & Carbin, 1988). For the present study, the Cronbach's alpha for mothers' scores was .89 and the Cronbach's alpha for fathers' scores was .89, suggesting good internal consistency.

The Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support

The Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS; Zimet et al., 1988) was administered to mothers and fathers to assess perceived support from family, friends and significant others. There are twelve items that are rated on a 7-point Likert Scale from 1 'Very Strongly Disagree'

to 7 'Very Strongly Agree', with the midpoint 4 representing 'Neutral'. The questionnaire has three subscales, Family, Friends and Significant Other, with each subscale comprising of four items. Sample items are 'I can talk about my problems with my family' and 'My friends really try to help me'. A total score of social support is calculated by summing all the items and dividing this score by twelve, with higher scores representing more social support. For the total score, scores between 1 and 2.9 represent low social support, scores between 3 and 5 are regarded as moderate support, and scores of 5.1 and above are regarded as high social support (Zimet et al., 1988). The scale has high test-retest reliability (Zimet et al., 1988) and good validity (Dahlem, Zimet, & Walker, 1991). For the present study, the Cronbach's alpha for mothers' ratings was .94 and for fathers' ratings the Cronbach's alpha was .92, indicating high internal consistency.

Conformity to Masculine Norms Inventory

Fathers completed the short form of the Conformity to Masculine Norms Inventory (Mahalik et al., 2003). The CMNI is used widely within research on men and masculinities (O'Neil, 2012) and assesses compliance with traditional male norms. The short form consists of 22 items that were selected from the longer inventory by using the highest loading items from a factor analysis of the full inventory. The participant rates the items on a 4-point scale from 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree'. Sample items include 'I like to talk about my feelings' and 'It bothers me when I have to ask for help'. To score the measure, relevant items are reversed and then all items are summed to create a total score. The higher the score, the more the participant conforms to traditional male norms. Previous research has demonstrated the reliability and validity of the inventory (Mahalik et al., 2003; Kivisalu, King, Phillips & O'Toole, 2015). For the present study, the Cronbach's alpha was .71, showing good internal consistency.

The Golombok Rust Inventory of Marital Satisfaction

The Golombok Rust Inventory of Marital Satisfaction (GRIMS; Rust, Bennun, Crowe, & Golombok, 1990) was used to assess the quality of the relationship between parents. Both parents in each family completed the questionnaire. The GRIMS is a 28-item questionnaire that can be administered to both married and cohabiting couples and has been used in research, clinical settings and demographic studies. Each item has the same four response options; 'strongly agree', 'agree', 'disagree' and 'strongly disagree'. A sample item is 'My partner is usually sensitive to and aware of my needs'. Half the items are positively scored and half the items are negatively scored to produce a total score of relationship quality, whereby higher scores represent greater marital difficulties. Scores above 34 indicate marital dissatisfaction. The GRIMS has high reliability, and high content and face validity (Rust et al., 1986; Rust et al., 1990). The questionnaire can be administered to men or women and has high reliability for both genders; .90 for women and .92 for men (Rust et al., 1986). For the present study, the Cronbach's alpha for mothers' ratings was .83, and for fathers' scores was .80, indicating high internal consistency.

The Coparenting Relationship Scale

The Coparenting Relationship Scale (CRS; Feinberg, Brown, & Kan, 2012) was used to assess the quality of coparenting within couples and was administered to mothers and fathers. The CRS is comprised of 35 items, and for the first 30 items, the informant is asked to rate on a 7-point scale how applicable each item is to how they feel they and their partner parent. The scale ranges from 0 'not true for us' to 6 'very true of us'. For items 31 to 35, the informant is asked to rate in a typical week, how often 5 different behaviours occur between themselves and their partner when their child is present. Each item is rated on a scale of 0 'never' to 6 'very often'. The total score and all seven of the subscales derived from the Coparenting Relationship Scale were used in the present study; Agreement, Endorse Partner Parenting, Support, Undermining, Closeness, Conflict and Division of Labour. Sample items from the full scale include 'I believe my partner is a good parent' and 'My partner

appreciates how hard I work at being a good parent'. For the total score and the subscale scores, mean scores are created. Scores range from 0 to 6 with higher scores representing more positive coparenting, with the exception of the undermining and conflict subscales, whereby lower scores reflect more positive coparenting. The CRS has good convergent and discriminant validity, and Feinberg, Brown and Kan (2012) reported very good internal consistency, with Cronbach's alphas falling between .91 and .94. For the present study, for total score, Cronbach's alpha was .92 for mothers' ratings and for fathers' ratings the Cronbach's alpha was .90. As the Division of Labour subscale is comprised of only 2 items, Cronbach's alpha could not be calculated. The average Cronbach's alpha for the six other subscales for mothers' ratings was .77 and for fathers' ratings the average Cronbach's alpha was .73, indicating good internal consistency¹³.

Parenting

Each parent was interviewed separately using an adaptation of an interview designed to assess quality of parenting (Quinton & Rutter, 1988), which has been used successfully in previous studies of modern family forms (Golombok et al., 2014; Golombok, Zadeh, Imrie, Smith, & Freeman, 2016). The interview has been validated against observations of parent-child relationships and a high level of reliability between the two measures was established (Quinton & Rutter, 1988). The interviewer uses flexible questioning in order to elicit sufficient information from the parent to rate their answers according to a standardised coding manual. The order and the wording of the questions were largely identical for all participants. However, due to the semi-structured nature of the interview, prompts were used if a participant's answer needed elaborating on. Also, if a participant started discussing a topic that was explicitly covered by another question, the order of the questions was altered in line with this, to help with the flow of the interview (Potter & Hepburn, 2005).

¹³ For the full list of Cronbach's alphas for each subscale, see Appendix 5.

The interviews were coded using a standardized coding scheme (Golombok, Cook, Bish, & Murray, 1995; Golombok, Murray, Jadv, MacCallum, & Lycett, 2004), which all researchers for the present study were trained on by a researcher with extensive experience of administering and coding the interviews. Before conducting the interviews, researchers familiarised themselves thoroughly with the measure. Separate interviews with each parent were conducted instead of interviewing the parents together because of research indicating that couples co-construct a narrative (Taylor & de Vocht, 2011), which risks a participant not disclosing some of their thoughts and feelings.

The interview questions were designed to allow for the following topics to be discussed in depth; the child's emotions and behaviours and the parent's response to them, the child's nursery/school life, peer relationships, sibling relationships, parent-child relationship quality, parent-child conflict, the parent's approach to discipline and rule setting, the parent's marital relationship, mental and physical wellbeing and division of domestic labour.

The following parent-child conflict variables were coded from the interview: (a) *frequency of parent-child conflict*, which measured how often the parent and child argued with each other, rated from 0 (never/rarely) to 5 (a few times daily); (b) *level of parent-child conflict*, which measured how far arguments escalated and how long they lasted for, which was rated from 0 (no battles) to 3 (major battles, lasting over 30 minutes); and (c) *resolution of parent-child conflict*, which assessed whether arguments had a definite end point or whether they were ongoing, which is rated from 0 to 2 (0 means a full resolution is found, 1 is a partial resolution, such as some silent treatment before blowing over, and 2 signalling no resolution so the underlying cause remains). The following variable about parental mental wellbeing was coded; *parent support for mental health*, assessing whether parents had sought support regarding mental health concerns, categorised into no support or support sought (including GP, outpatient and inpatient services).

As well as individual codes throughout the interview, the researcher rated each parent on several global variables, which take the whole of the interview into consideration, including the

parent's responses throughout the interview and non-verbal cues such as body language. The following global codes were rated: (a) *expressed warmth*, which captures a parent's tone of voice, facial expressions and gestures toward their child during their descriptions, their sympathy toward their child and spontaneous anecdotes involving their child (rated from 0 'no warmth' to 6 'especially high warmth'); (b) *emotional over-involvement*, measuring the degree to which the parent places the child in the centre of their family and personal life and is overprotective of their child, or inhibits age-appropriate activities (rated from 0 'little or no over-involvement' to 3 'enmeshed relationship with few boundaries between the parent and the child'); (c) *emotional under-involvement*, assessing whether the parent sees their child as an individual, is aware of the child's needs and desires, and balances these needs and desires with those of other family members (rated from 0 'little or no under-involvement' to 3 'detached / dismissive behaviours'); (d) *quality of interaction*, assessing the parent-child relationship as a whole, taking into account how much the dyad enjoys spending time together, expresses affection, engages in shared activities, such as playing, and the parent taking responsibility for their child (rated from 0 'very poor' to 4 'very good, highly affectionate and really enjoy each other's company'); (e) *sensitive responding*, measuring how the parent responds to their child, particularly when the child seeks parental help or is experiencing any difficulties (rated from 0 'no recognition of the child's problems' to 4 'very sensitive responding', when the parent not only differentiates their response but perceives when problems may arise and helps their child prepare for them, in order to best equip their child with appropriate coping mechanisms for any future difficulties).

To assess inter-rater reliability, one third of the primary caregiver parent interviews were coded by another researcher trained on the study techniques. For the parent-child conflict codes, the intra-class correlation coefficients¹⁴ average was 0.90¹⁵. For parent mental health, the intra-class

¹⁴ Single measures ICCs have been reported.

¹⁵ See Appendix 6 for the ICCS for individual codes.

correlation coefficient was 0.73. For the global codes, the average of the intra-class correlation coefficients was 0.72.

Parent-child relationships

Dyadic observational task

To assess the quality of parent-child interaction, fathers and mothers were observed separately with their child. Each parent-child pair was given 5 minutes to play with a play-doh pizza maker and were instructed to use the time to make the best pizza they could. This task was chosen after the piloting phase of the study as it fulfilled three criteria that were considered important; (1) the task was goal oriented, (2) it involved both the parent and child working together, and (3) the task was age appropriate for the sample of 3 to 6-year-old children. The play-doh task allowed for the pizza creation to be more or less elaborate depending on the ability and age of each child. It was randomized throughout the visits whether the mother or father would take their turn first. The interaction was video recorded with the permission of the parent.

The interaction task was coded using the Parent-Child Interaction System (PARCHISY, Deater-Deckard & Petrill, 2004) which assesses the levels of warmth and cooperation in parent-child dyads. The PARCHISY coding scheme was chosen due to its use in other studies of modern family forms (Golombok et al., 2014; Golombok et al., 2016). Furthermore, this coding scheme may be used with almost any structured or semi-structured game or task between parents and their children in either naturalistic or laboratory settings. The PARCHISY has been used in previous research with children in the same age range as the present study (Atzaba-Poria, Deater-deckard, & Bell, 2017) and also for free-play tasks, structured play, and tidying up (Hughes & Ensor, 2005), showing its wide application. The PARCHISY has demonstrated high levels of inter-rater reliability in different studies (see Funamoto & Rinaldi (2015) for a review). The PARCHISY has high reliability and the coding scheme's validity been

demonstrated by its ability to predict child outcomes and differentiate between high-risk and low-risk groups (Deater-Deckard & Petrill, 2004; Ensor, Spencer, & Hughes, 2011; Funamoto & Rinaldi, 2015).

In order to prepare for coding this measure, the researcher was trained on the PARCHISY by a trained researcher with extensive experience of the coding scheme. The training sessions were also attended by the coder who completed the reliability ratings.

The four items from the PARCHISY coding scheme measuring dyadic mutuality (Deater-Deckard & Petrill, 2004; Harrist & Waugh, 2002) were coded. The mutuality construct assesses the nature of an interaction between a dyad, particularly whether the pair shows evidence of cooperative behaviours and positive, warm interactions. For each parent-child dyad, the following variables were rated on a scale from 1 (no instances) to 7 (constant, throughout interaction): (a) *parent responsiveness*, which evaluated the degree to which the parent responded to the child's verbalisations as well as non-verbal cues and expanded upon the child's comments; (b) *child responsiveness*, which assessed the number of the parent's comments and actions the child responded to; (c) *dyadic reciprocity*, which assessed the extent to which the parent and child engaged in positive interactions at the same time, including joint eye contact, smiling at the same time, or laughing together, and (d) *dyadic cooperation*, which evaluated explicit parent-child agreement on how to proceed with the task and any decision-making regarding each other's role in completing the task.

To calculate inter-rater reliability ratings for the observational task, one third of the videos were randomly selected and were coded an independent researcher who was blind to family type. As the primary coder had been present at all the family visits, it was not possible for her to be blind to family type. The intra-class correlation coefficients averaged at 0.73¹⁶.

¹⁶ See Appendix 6 for ICCs for individual codes.

The Parental Acceptance Rejection Questionnaire

The short form of the Parental Acceptance Rejection Questionnaire (PARQ; Rohner & Khaleque, 2005) was used to assess the frequency of positive and negative parenting behaviours by mothers and fathers. The scale is comprised of 24 items which create four subscales; Warmth (8 items), Hostility and Aggression (6 items), Indifference and Neglect (6 items) and Undifferentiated Rejection (4 items). A sample item on the Warmth subscale is 'I care about what my child thinks, and encourage him/her to talk about it'. All items are rated on a 4-point scale from 'Almost always true' to 'Almost never true'. The 8 items in the Warmth subscale are reverse coded so the sum of the four subscales produces a score between 24 and 96, whereby higher scores indicate higher levels of rejection. A meta-analysis of 51 studies using the PARQ found considerable evidence for good internal consistency (Khaleque & Rohner, 2002); the weighted alpha coefficient was .84. Strong evidence has also been found for discriminant, convergent and construct validity of the PARQ (Rohner & Khaleque, 2005) and the scale has been successfully applied in different countries (Gomez & Rohner, 2011; Senese et al., 2016), indicating that the questionnaire is effectively measuring the same underlying construct of parental acceptance and rejection across different socio-cultural contexts. For the present study, the Cronbach's alpha for mothers' ratings was .82 and the Cronbach's alpha for fathers' ratings was .83, demonstrating good internal consistency.

Child adjustment

Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire

Children's behavioural and emotional adjustment was measured by the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ, Goodman, 1997), which was administered to both parents and a teacher (or someone in a similar position) to provide a multi-informant assessment of child adjustment¹⁷. Parents and teachers responded to each item according to whether they perceived it

¹⁷ See Appendix 3 for Teacher letter and consent.

was 'not true', 'somewhat true' or 'certainly true' in relation to their child. According to the coding manual (Goodman, 1994), after the necessary items had been reversed, a total score was calculated, comprised of the internalising (emotional and peer problems) and the externalising (conduct and hyperactivity) scales, with higher scores indicating greater problems. The cut-off point for clinical problems was 17 for parent-rated difficulties and 16 for teacher-rated difficulties. The SDQ has high inter-rater reliability, test-retest reliability, internal consistency, and concurrent and discriminative validity (Goodman, 1994; Goodman, 1997; Goodman, 2001; Stone, Otten, Engels, Vermulst, & Janssens, 2010). For instance, internal consistency has been demonstrated by an alpha of .73, as computed from a sample of more than 10,000 children in the UK (Goodman, 2001). The reliability and validity of this measure have also been demonstrated through a review comprising 48 studies of over 130,000 children (Stone et al., 2010). For the present sample, internal consistency was good for both the externalising (mother, Cronbach's alpha .72; father, Cronbach's alpha .72; and teacher, Cronbach's alpha .80) and internalising (mother, Cronbach's alpha .67; father, Cronbach's alpha .68; and teacher Cronbach's alpha .76) scales. The mothers' and fathers' scores for total difficulties were highly correlated, $r = .55$, $p < .001$, hence an aggregate score was created.

Pre-School Activities Inventory

All parents completed the Pre-School Activities Inventory (PSAI, Golombok & Rust, 1993), an assessment of children's gender role behaviour. The PSAI has been designed to differentiate within, as well as between, girls and boys. The PSAI is comprised of 24 items that cover toys, activities and personality characteristics that typically differ between boys and girls at a young age. The mothers and fathers in the present sample rated how often their child engaged in different gendered activities ranging from 'never' to 'very often'. A total score was calculated, with higher scores reflecting more masculine behaviours. The PSAI shows good reliability and validity and has been standardized on more than 2000 children across different nations (Golombok & Rust, 1993). In the present study, the Cronbach's alpha for mothers' scores was .83 and for fathers' scores the Cronbach's alpha was .80,

showing high internal consistency. Mothers' and fathers' ratings were highly correlated ($r = .86$, $p < .001$), hence an aggregate variable was created.

Structured Child Assessment of Relationships in Families

The children were administered the Structured Child Assessment of Relationships in Families (SCARF; Strachan, Lund, & Garcia, 2010). The SCARF is informed by attachment theory and explores the security of a child's relationship to each of their parents and perceptions of positive parenting behaviours by each parent. The measure was developed in response to a dearth of measures to obtain reliable and valid information from very young children.

The SCARF is a paper and stamp game; the paper booklet has a question on one side and the other side has boxes above which the child chooses a figure to represent each parent, and a picture of a bin. The researcher reads the question out to the child and the child then chooses whether they feel their mother, or their father, or both parents, do what the question is asking, and use the stamp to give their answer, or they stamp the bin.

The present study focused on the positive subscales of the SCARF; emotional security and positive parenting. Sample items from the emotional security and positive parenting subscales, respectively, are: 'Who do you like to hug or cuddle?' and 'Who makes you eat food that is good for you?'. These two scales are scored separately for the child's mother and father. Emotional security consists of items relating to security, closeness and emotional support, which are summed to create a total score out of 15 for each parent. Positive parenting comprises of items covering practical caretaking, fostering development, expectations and rules, limit setting and positive reinforcement, which are summed to create a total score out of 21 for each parent. For both subscales, higher scores represent more positive perceptions of parenting.

As the SCARF is a new measure, data about its psychometric properties is limited. However, Strachan, Lund, and Garcia (2010) presented preliminary data that indicated the SCARF has high

internal consistency and good construct validity. Further, similar internal consistency was found in a sample of children aged 4- to 6-years old compared to a sample of children aged 7-years-old and above, indicating that it is appropriate to use the measure to assess relationships across childhood. For the present study, internal consistency was good for both the emotional security (Cronbach's alpha for children's ratings of their mothers was .75 and .83 for fathers) and positive parenting (Cronbach's alpha was .66 for children's ratings of their mothers and .76 for fathers) subscales.

2.5. Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval for the study was granted by the Cambridge Psychology Research Ethics Committee.

As part of the process of designing the study, it was crucial to consider the ethical implications of interviewing children, particularly as they can be more vulnerable than adults in research settings (Alderson, Morrow, & Alderson, 2011; Greig, Taylor, & MacKay, 2013). The children's welfare remained at the forefront of all considerations whilst devising the battery of child measures.

A personal identification number was assigned to each family to ensure anonymity. As outlined in the information sheet, each family received £10 and a toy for their child as a token of thanks for participating and to compensate for the time taken to be interviewed. Another ethical consideration was reporting the findings to the families who took part in the study. If the parents consented to being contacted about the results, they will receive a report summarising the study outcomes at the end of the project. This report will only include general trends of the study; no identifiable information will be included, nor will the participants be able to find out who else was sent the study report.

3. Qualitative Results: Stay-at-home Fathers' Experiences

The qualitative results are presented in two sections. Firstly, the reasons motivating fathers to become stay-at-home parents are examined using qualitative content analysis in Section 3.1. Secondly, Section 3.2 presents a thematic analysis of the stay-at-home fathers' experiences of their role.

3.1. Reasons for Becoming a Stay-at-home Parent

Qualitative content analysis

Qualitative content analysis was used to examine fathers' and mothers' reasons for becoming stay-at-home parents¹⁸. Qualitative content analysis is an empirical method for exploring the experiences and narratives of a sample by creating categories to describe participants' responses, allowing for counts to be made of participants in each category. It applies the benefits of quantitative analysis to qualitative, text-based data (Mayring, 2015). Qualitative content analysis is a particularly useful approach if the material to be analysed is not highly open-ended; it is suitable for categorising responses on a similar theme, or which relate to a set question. While it does not develop theory nor allow for thorough description of phenomena, qualitative content analysis allows for a deeper description of a person's lived experiences than quantitative data (Neergaard et al., 2009) while remaining close to the data (Sandelowski, 2000). In line with the principles of qualitative content analysis outlined by Krippendorff (2004), the transcripts were first read through and initial codes were created from the primary reading of the texts. These codes were then refined into eight categories representing the reasons the parents gave for becoming a stay-at-home parent. Subsequently, the transcripts were rated in accordance with the codes, and frequency counts were made of each code

¹⁸ Data on this section of the interview is missing for the first two mothers in the study but there is no missing data for the fathers.

for both fathers and mothers. Previous research on modern family forms has also used this methodology to analyse participants' experiences of their family (Blake et al., 2010).

The relevant categories produced through qualitative content analysis that grouped the fathers and mothers are presented in Table 3.1.

Results

Stay-at-home fathers' motivations

Six reasons were given by fathers regarding the decision to become a stay-at-home parent. The most common reason for becoming a stay-at-home father was financial considerations (19 fathers). Within the wider category of financial considerations, there were two sub-categories; partner's employment circumstances (14 fathers) and cost of childcare (5 fathers). In terms of fathers stating that their partner's employment situation was the main motivation for becoming a stay-at-home parent, there were a variety of reasons provided, which included having a partner with a more stable job, higher salary or because they wanted to support their partner's career progression. The five fathers who reported that the cost of childcare specifically motivated them to become a stay-at-home parent, rather than wider family finances, said that outsourced childcare would be a financial burden on their family. In addition, some fathers acknowledged that, regarding their family circumstances, being self-employed was not compatible with paying childcare providers.

The second most commonly cited reason for becoming a stay-at-home father was experiencing stress at work and not enjoying their job (9 fathers). A few of these fathers cited experiencing critical levels of stress at work, as with the example given in Table 3.1. Other fathers explained that they did not have a healthy balance between the time they dedicated to working and commuting with the amount of time they spent with their family.

Seven fathers reported that they wanted to be the primary caregiver, and that this desire was the main motivation for becoming a stay-at-home father. Two of these fathers had been breadwinner

parents for their eldest children, and then having started a second family, had reconsidered their parental role and decided to be the primary caregiver. Other fathers mentioned that they had been thinking about being a primary caregiver for a number of years, and that being a stay-at-home parent was something they had begun to consider prior to beginning a family. In addition, three fathers said that the advantages of having one parent at home outweighed any other considerations, and for some of these fathers, this was influenced by their own experiences of growing up in a household with a stay-at-home parent. These fathers mentioned that they perceived it would be beneficial for their children's development to have one parent take on this role.

Regarding less commonly cited reasons, some of the fathers reported that the decision was influenced by two key factors, family finances and wanting to be more involved in caring for their children. For this reason, a joint category was formed, which reflected three of the fathers' decision-making process. These fathers put equal weight on the consideration of the high cost of childcare and a desire to be a highly involved parent. Lastly, the least common reason for being a stay-at-home father, as reported by only one father, was personal employment difficulties due to health reasons.

Similarities and differences between stay-at-home fathers' and stay-at-home mothers' motivations

Similar to the fathers' motivations, financial reasons were also the most commonly reported reason for becoming a stay-at-home mother (12 mothers). However, unlike what was found amongst the fathers, the high cost of childcare was the primary factor for more mothers (9 mothers) than their partner's employment circumstances (3 mothers). Amongst the mothers' narratives, several comments made throughout the interviews framed paying for childcare as the mother's responsibility, with some of the mothers stating that it would be *their* salary paying for the childcare. This was only inferred by one father.

The second most common reason for mothers becoming a stay-at-home parent was that they wanted to be the primary caregiver (11 mothers). Within the umbrella category of wanting to be the

primary caregiver, there were two sub-categories; a desire to be highly involved, and a belief that they would provide better quality of care than outsourced childcare. Regarding wanting to be a highly involved parent, mothers' and fathers' accounts echoed the same sentiment of feeling that it was a great opportunity for them to spend time with their children or that they had wanted to take on a primary caregiving role for several years. In contrast, whilst no fathers stated that they were motivated to be a stay-at-home parent because of wanting to provide higher quality parenting than childcare providers, six mothers mentioned this as influencing their decision, asserting that they had a specific parenting approach they wished to follow that they felt could not be offered by others.

There were several accounts where mothers' and fathers' reasons revealed similarities in the decision-making process. For instance, though only one mother reported workplace stressors as the leading factor, the reason behind making this decision was similar to fathers, as both types of parents mentioned that they were dissatisfied with their job. More mothers (5 mothers) than fathers (2 fathers) said that their decision was influenced by two key reasons that appeared to hold equal weight; family finances and a desire to have a greater involvement in childcare. However, the reasoning for both genders was alike; these parents described how time with their children was valuable to them, as well as considering the high cost of childcare if they did not take on the stay-at-home parent role.

Regarding parents who described the benefits of having a more involved parent as the deciding factor for their family, mothers' and fathers' accounts reflected similar ideals, acknowledging that their upbringing and ideas on parenting had led to a belief that having a stay-at-home parent was the 'right thing to do' in terms of their children's adjustment. In addition, three mothers stated that personal employment difficulties greatly influenced their decision, such as being made redundant at work. As with the fathers, this was the case for only a minority of stay-at-home mothers.

Some of the other reasons behind mothers' decisions to become a stay-at-home parent were not reflected in fathers' reports. For example, six mothers reported that it was not a decision *per se*; they always assumed they would stay at home. Although some fathers reported always being inclined

to take on the role of a primary caregiving parent, in all cases this was considered a decision. Further, in contrast to fathers, three mothers reported that they felt it was hard to excel both at work and at home, and therefore chose to be a stay-at-home parent. None of the fathers expressed the same viewpoint. These mothers expressed uncertainty about being able to balance the demands of work and being a primary caregiver and mentioned that they thought that finding a balance was particularly challenging for women.

Table 3.1. Reasons for Becoming a Stay-at-Home Parent, Count of Fathers and Mothers and Examples of Quotes

Main reason for becoming a stay-at-home parent		Stay-at-home parent		Examples of reasons
		Fathers (n = 41)	Mothers (n = 43)	
Financial	Partner's employment circumstances e.g. more stable job, higher salary, wanted to support partner's career	14 (34%)	3 (7%)	<p>"[Wife] was you know, in the full sort of throws of her career, it was going well for her, and so it was the obvious, it seemed to me, and I put it to her in those terms, it was the obvious choice to make, was that I would stay at home. Because, you know, my job was more precarious as well, being freelance, so there was greater risk." <i>Father</i></p> <p>"[Husband]'s job earns an awful lot more than mine does uhm so there wasn't, if it was one of us that was going to spend more time with the kids, it would have to be me because he can't give up his job." <i>Mother</i></p>
	Cost of childcare	5 (12%)	9 (20%)	<p>"I ran a [business]...it was urm getting a bit stupid that [child] was in nursery just over the road from where I was working, and it would feel like I was sort of only working there to keep her in nursery because of the high cost of it, so it was a case of, this is a bit silly, what am I doing this for?" <i>Father</i></p> <p>"Cost. Childcare for twins. So yeah, cost. I didn't think it was worth paying somebody else to bring up by children, cause I would be giving all my money to the child-minder." <i>Mother</i></p>
	Combination of financial factors and wanting to be more involved in childcare	2 (5%)	5 (12%)	<p>"Time with the children, um, money spent on childcare.... it didn't seem worth it for the amount of time we spent with the kids." <i>Father</i></p> <p>"We've always thought that you know when we have kids that one of us will have to take a kind of back step for a little bit and career development but then again we didn't realise we were going to have twins, so that made a big difference, because again it's expensive for childcare, um and also it's healthy for [Child] because she also needs some investment in emotional development." <i>Mother</i></p>

Main reason for becoming a stay-at-home parent		Stay-at-home parent		Examples of reasons
		Fathers	Mothers	
Workplace stressors e.g. pressure at work, lack of time with their children because of hours worked		9 (22%)	1 (2%)	<p>“Work-related stress, no way, no doubt about it really.” <i>Father</i></p> <p>“I really didn’t like my job so it was not a problem at all . . . so it was sort of a non-brainer that I would stay at home and that was fine.” <i>Mother</i></p>
Personal employment difficulties e.g. unable to work due to health, recent redundancy		1 (2%)	3 (7%)	<p>“Well I wasn’t working anyway . . . It just seemed the right way to do it anyway, because [Wife] is also got an alright job, she’s earning - she’s earning good money, you know. And I wasn’t doing anything.” <i>Father</i></p> <p>“I had to give up work when I was pregnant so I couldn’t continue working.” <i>Mother</i></p>
Beneficial for child development and quality of family life to have a stay-at-home parent		3 (8%)	2 (5%)	<p>“Probably we were both raised by one parent at home, so we wanted that for our children.” <i>Father</i></p> <p>“Both my husband and I were quite keen on doing that, just because we thought it was the right thing to do for our kids.” <i>Mother</i></p>
Wanted to be the primary caregiver	Desire to be highly involved	7 (17%)	5 (12%)	<p>“It’s something that’s always, I think I’ve always looked forward to having children. I don’t know if I really like conceived of the logistics of it, but I think I’ve always looked forward to being a dad and having that responsibility and been aware of the responsibility of that. And then it just seemed at the time something I wanted to offer.” <i>Father</i></p> <p>“It’s what I always wanted. [Partner] took one at me with [daughter] and said I can’t see how you’re ever going to go back to work because I just...I was just, as I still am, adoring every minute of being with her.” <i>Mother</i></p>
	Thought they would provide better care than outsourced childcare	0	6 (14%)	<p>“I’ve always worked with children, and when it came to looking after my own, there was no way I was gonna let someone else do it like this is what I’ve been working up for is to have my chance to bring up my children my way, and I wouldn’t want to miss it.” <i>Mother</i></p> <p>“I’d like them to be brought up in the way that [partner] and I wanted them to be brought up not to a nanny’s or a childminder’s way.” <i>Mother</i></p>

Main reason for becoming a stay-at-home parent	Stay-at-home parent		Examples of reasons
	Fathers	Mothers	
Always assumed they would stay at home; not an actively discussed decision	0	6 (14%)	<p>"I think we, we, it, we'd always, um it was always going to be like that, I don't think that was ever, we'd never discussed any other option... I always wanted to stay at home anyway, so there was really, there was every reason for me to stay at home and no real reason for me to go back to work." <i>Mother</i></p> <p>"It wasn't really a decision. It was just always what I was going to do to be honest. It was always the plan." <i>Mother</i></p>
Hard to excel both at work and at home	0	3 (7%)	<p>"I don't think it's possible for women at the moment, especially in jobs like [area of work], to do everything brilliantly... um... I don't think the work place is set up to enable women to excel at motherhood while excelling at [area of work], for example – I don't know whether it's the same in other areas so I just decided that rather than trying to manage two different things I would... throw the whole of my weight behind one." <i>Mother</i></p>

Conclusions

For many stay-at-home fathers and mothers, financial considerations played a large part in the decision to become a stay-at-home parent. There were also similarities in how a proportion of fathers and mothers expressed a desire to be highly involved and take on the primary caregiver role. However, there were some key differences, such as more mothers perceiving a stay-at-home parent to provide better parenting than childcare providers, mothers stating that it was not an actively discussed decision – an account not reflected in fathers' narratives, and mothers reporting that it is challenging for women to negotiate highly demanding careers and being a primary caregiver.

3.2. Stay-at-home Fathers' Experiences of their Role

Thematic analysis

Thematic analysis was chosen to explore the stay-at-home fathers' experiences of being a male primary caregiver with respect to (a) how they narrate their parental role; (b) the nature and extent of stigma experienced; (c) how stigma is tackled. Thematic analysis is a qualitative approach that combines elements from several distinct methods; narrative analysis, discourse analysis and grounded theory (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In particular, like grounded theory, thematic analysis combines inductive and deductive approaches and tries to be 'grounded' in the data, such that the data is used to inform an understanding of the sample studied, rather than being guided predominantly by theory. According to Braun and Clarke (2006, p.79), thematic analysis is: 'A method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data. However, frequently it goes further than this, and interprets various aspects of the research topic'. Once initial themes have been produced, they need to be refined; according to Attride-Stirling (2001) the themes must be both discrete from each other and broad enough to represent multiple codes in different sections of the text. High-quality thematic analysis should be systematic and rigorous, thus quality markers should be adopted and continually reviewed (see Section 2.4).

Although qualitative content analysis was used to examine the reasons for becoming a stay-at-home parent (see Section 3.1), in order to arrive at a holistic understanding of the father's narratives and what they mean, a more in-depth analytical approach was needed. Other qualitative approaches were considered, such as interpretive phenomenological analysis, due to the focus on meaning-making of a person's lived experiences. However, this approach, typically, uses a very small sample size (Larkin, Watts, & Clifton, 2006). For qualitative research, the current sample size of 41 fathers is substantial and, therefore, thematic analysis was considered a suitable technique for the present study. Further, a nomothetic approach, searching for the commonalities across the different

father' accounts, was sought, rather than an idiographic approach that focused on the specificities of each individual account.

Data preparation

Peer debriefing was conducted after research visits with more than one researcher in attendance, as outlined by Flick (2014). This was important for discussing incidents that may have arisen during the visit that were unusual, such as more than one parent being in the room while being interviewed, interruptions to the interview or having to split the interview up into more than one sitting. This helped ensure that, as much as possible, there was consistency across interviews. Also, peer debriefing was used to discuss the content of the open-ended section of the interview to be analysed using thematic analysis.

Occasionally, participants would email the primary researcher after the visit with additional thoughts on their answers to the interview. These were not added to the transcript as it would mean inconsistency across the participants, in that some would have had more time to consider their responses.

Data familiarisation

A large proportion of the transcripts were transcribed by the primary researcher, which assisted with familiarisation with the data. All other interviews were transcribed by the students attending the research visits. Before analysis, all 41 transcripts were read through; continual reading of the data is an important part of the qualitative analysis process (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). Repeatedly returning to the transcripts enabled the analysis to be data-driven and provided checks that the themes continued to be representative of the transcripts themselves. The researcher made notes during each reading of the dataset to keep a record of the evolving nature of the code generation process and the establishment of themes.

Conducting the analysis

The qualitative software Atlas.ti was used to track the codes and themes of the dataset. The analysis followed the steps of thematic analysis outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006)¹⁹. A total of 220 codes across interview transcripts were initially generated which were collapsed into 106 codes that grouped similar codes. Within the initial set of codes, there were both descriptive codes such as 'wants dad-specific groups' and analytic codes such as 'gender roles still ingrained'. Atlas.ti software was used to collate all the different incidences of each code and was also used to collapse similar codes into the same code. Subsequently, using the software, the sections of the interviews relating to each code were re-read and then the codes relating to the research questions, of which there were 49 codes in total, were collapsed into three themes and seven subthemes relating to the fathers' experiences of their role, stigma and support. The themes were then organised into a thematic network map as a visual representation of the relationships between these concepts.

Presentation of findings

In keeping with other qualitative work, specifically other studies of modern family forms (Doucet, 2004; Zadeh & Foster; 2016), the results of the thematic analysis are contextualised within previous research. The names presented with the quotes are pseudonyms.

¹⁹ See Appendix 7 for details of this process.

Results

Three themes were produced from the analysis; *meaning-making of their parental role*, *prejudice: spaces and places*, and *resilience*. The findings indicated that the stay-at-home fathers used several different strategies to make sense of their role. These strategies can be understood in relation to the first organising theme; *meaning-making of their parental role*. In terms of the stigma and the ways in which they dealt with stigmatising experiences, the fathers' experiences were understood through two further organising themes: *prejudice: spaces and places*, and *resilience*. Seven subthemes were identified to further describe the findings. The organising themes and subthemes are illustrated in thematic network map in Figure 3.2.

The map depicts the relationships between the themes and subthemes. The first organising theme, *meaning-making of their parental role*, is primarily associated with three key subthemes, termed *passive de-gendering*, *active de-gendering* and *to father and not to mother*. All of the fathers engaged in at least one of these strategies for meaning-making, and some fathers used more than one. Regardless of the different strategies the fathers used to understand their role as a primary caregiver, they described facing *prejudice*, the second theme, particularly in relation to the idea that certain spaces were more welcoming to mothers than fathers, and the suggestion that such spaces can serve to prevent fathers from feeling integrated and accepted. All the fathers reported at least one incidence of prejudice; for some fathers, this was rare, while other fathers' narratives were replete with stigmatising interactions. Stigma transpired in different, but co-occurring and inter-linking, ways that were categorised into the subthemes of *ambient stigma*, *actual stigma*, and *imagined stigma*. The relationships between these three key forms of stigma are portrayed as overlapping on the map, showing that each form of stigma is not distinct but instead influences and, sometimes, produces other forms of stigma, all of which have the potential to impact the father and thus his sense of self. However, in many of the fathers' narratives there were accounts of *resilience*; the third and final theme. The resilience many of the fathers described appeared to act as a buffer

against the different forms of stigma they experienced; the dotted line on the diagram visually represents this. Fathers' resilience also appeared to interact with their meaning-making of their role. Some fathers reported receiving excessive praise for showing capability as a male primary caregiver. This positioned these fathers as *a unicorn: (unwilling) gender warrior*, who sought gender equality, and could serve as examples for other men. Some of these fathers appreciated being seen as embodying this role, and thus used this depiction as a strategy to make sense of their role, hence the association between this subtheme and the first theme on the map. For others, this label was less appreciated, leading to their characterisation as *unwilling* gender warriors.

The following section presents findings from the analysis according to the three organising themes; the father's *meaning-making of their parental role*, *prejudice: spaces and places*, and lastly, *resilience*.

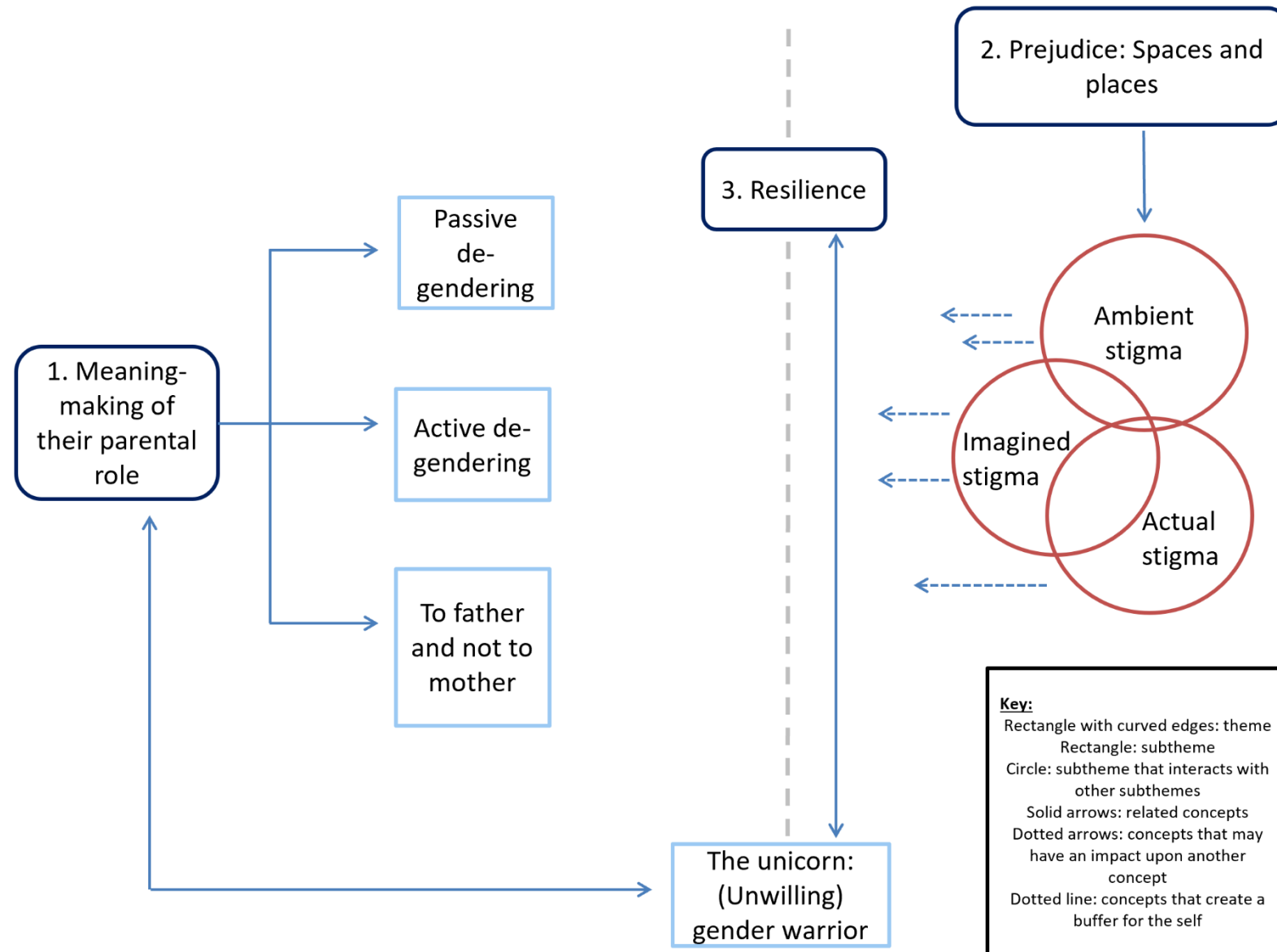


Figure 3.2. Thematic Map of Fathers' Experiences of Their Role.

Meaning-making of their parental role

The theme of *meaning-making of their parental role* relates to the ways in which the fathers narrated their role as a stay-at-home father, which reflect three key representations: *passive de-gendering*, *active de-gendering*, and *to father and not to mother*. Rather than these representations reflecting different 'groups' of fathers within the sample, fathers often adopted more than one strategy to make sense of their role, reflecting the complexity of their narratives. Occasionally, fathers demonstrated multiple meanings in their individual narratives, seeming to both want to reject traditional masculine ideals at the same time as upholding certain gender norms. This finding of ambivalence within the narratives of stay-at-home fathers has also been reported on by Lee and Lee (2016).

The majority of fathers engaged in some form of passive de-gendering, conceptualising mothering and fathering as not particularly distinct from one another. Yet some of the fathers described holding on to remnants of a traditional idea of fathering, such as wanting to continue to engage in some form of part-time work. Hence, while the fathers showed a complex navigation of different representations during their narratives, many did express the idea of moving towards a less binary idea of mother 'versus' father, perceiving their role as one of a parent, thus highlighting this as a popular strategy for making meaning of their role.

Passive de-gendering

When narrating their role as a male primary caregiver, the depiction most often expressed by fathers was based upon presenting the roles of mothers and fathers as indistinct, as well as describing a certain degree of fluidity between nurturing versus providing roles. More than half of the fathers stated that mothering and fathering were more similar than different. By consequence of not alluding to difference, these fathers conceptualised their role as a primary caregiving parent as genderless, or

as moving away from traditional gendered conceptualisations. For many, this seemed to be a largely passive process insofar as their narratives simply lacked an emphasis of gender differences.

Some fathers, such as Ollie, stated that they believed individual differences to exert a greater influence on parenting styles than gender: *"I think that, not only in parenting, there is more difference from person to person from man to woman"*. Others, such as Dominic, explained that the gendered distinction was unnecessary: *"You know I wouldn't kind of differentiate father and mother, which sounds really right on and stuff but genuinely just that, you know, I think that would be an artificial distinction."*

Some fathers also expressed fathering as embodying nurturing qualities, in line with the caring masculinities theory (Elliott, 2016), which posits that men can reshape their concept of masculinity in order to incorporate nurturing, caring qualities, and promote positive, dependent relations with others. In line with previous research on stay-at-home fathers (Lee & Lee, 2016; Solomon, 2014), in the present study, some of the men drew on the language of involved parenting, typically adopted by mothers, to describe their role as a parent. For example, Louis described being a father as *"making sure your children are happy and secure and loved"*, a sentiment also echoed by Toby, who said that, *"it's about being there for your children, nurturing them, wanting the best out of them and allowing them to grow and develop, but be part of their life"*.

Some fathers spoke about a societal shift in the role of the father. For example, the following conversation took place in Dominic's interview:

Dominic: *Are you aware of the film Mr. Mum?*

Interviewer: *Yeah?*

Dominic: *So, this is interesting, so that film is full of kind of stereotyped stuff, but I actually think that's kind of dropped away from society generally, so with it I don't think, I don't think people expect, I suppose the answer is broadly,*

particularly in our kind of world, our little kind of middle class bubble, where everybody's very conscious of not being too feminine, too masculine, or thinking about gender too much or whatever, I think expectations of maleness and femaleness have dropped away and with them the expectations of how a male or female parent will parent.

Another way in which some of the fathers seemed to show that they were de-gendering parenting was through describing that they felt comfortable in doing tasks typically undertaken by women, and with being called a stay-at-home father, as was the case for Archie:

I'm not anything except a stay-at-home dad and a house husband whose sorting out washing, cleaning the house, sorting out food, playing with the kids, taking them out, you know that's what I do on them days, nothing else. So yeah I'm happy, yeah, I'm happy to be labelled as that, as a stay-at-home dad.

Fathers further demonstrated de-gendering their parental role through directly referencing that work was not the only aspect of their identity, or indeed not an important part of their identity. For example, some fathers explicitly stated that work did not take a central role in their life, such as Ollie: *"I realised that work is not that important, never was."* Similarly, another father described how he had been reflecting on his identity since becoming a stay-at-home father:

I don't think I really define myself in any strong fixed way by my job or whatever...the way I see myself, at least to myself, (laughs) if that kind of makes sense, yeah I think it's it's it somehow it is all pinned together by all the aspects of my life. (Zachary)

A similar theme came up in Nicholas' interview, who explained that *"I have never defined myself by how much money I earned or you know what I do as a job"*. These accounts add to the evidence from previous research on stay-at-home fathers that it is possible for men to reconstruct their own notion

of masculinity to incorporate caregiving qualities (Lee & Lee, 2016; Solomon, 2014), and also that men are able to create meaning from their parental role outside of defining themselves as the provider.

Active de-gendering

Several fathers talked about distancing themselves from traditional notions of masculinity in an active, rather than exclusively passive, way. Some fathers endorsed deliberately socialising their children to not feel forced to conform to gender norms:

I've got daughters, so I think you know so both of us, you know, we want to raise them in a way that is not very gendered . . . when they were babies we would go out and try make sure that the girls wore kind of robot babygrows and dinosaur babygrows as well as kind of maybe pink babygrows from time to time. (Dominic)

Another father also reflected on addressing gender norms through parenting:

Giving the children more of a balance for future life, because our [daughter]'s become not an activist, but she likes learning about human rights and stuff like that. And I think just her seeing me being at home as opposed to the mum you know, kind of from an early age she's seen that. So I guess showing the children that you don't have to follow the norm or the rules. (Oliver)

These fathers' narratives show an awareness of the potential impact of their enactment, or non-enactment, of gender norms on their children. These men, in their role as male primary caregivers, seemed to wish they will influence how their children conceptualise gender norms and roles. Hence, this small subsection of the sample actively embraced challenging gender norms.

To father and not to mother

Some fathers saw themselves as fathering, and importantly, as not mothering, thus creating a clear distinction between these roles; indeed, many fathers described differences in the parenting approaches of fathers and mothers. These differences often fell along stereotypical lines, presenting

the father as more robust, outdoor-oriented and strict, and the mother as the softer, more nurturing influence:

I'm more sort of forceful with them but as I said to you before whenever they fall over come on, let's get on with it, erm, I kind of take that attitude with a lot of things so I don't let 'em... I don't mother them if that makes sense. It probably would, wouldn't it? Umm, I'm much stronger I think than mums would be. Yes there is cuddles, yes there is kisses but I think with mums it's probably a lot more than what it would be with me. (Alexander)

Alexander's narrative is shared by Theodore, who described himself as less lenient than mothers: *"Dads just don't take shit from their kids in a way that women take shit from their kids."* Interestingly, some fathers explained that such gendered approaches to parenting were in fact complementary, and beneficial to their children, as described by Jake:

This is not every man or woman right because everyone is different but I think men generally like doing more outdoorsy stuff but, um, stuff like that sports and running around and playing stuff and mums generally like doing - I don't know cooking and stuff and... I don't want to - it sounds very sexist and stereotypical but I think that's what [wife] likes doing you know baking stuff and arts and craftsy stuff and it works out we've got a good balance really because she likes doing that and I don't, and I like doing all the outdoor sportsy stuff so I think the kids, um... hopefully get all of it from both of us.

In relation to the distinction between fathering and mothering, a few of the fathers specifically discussed their approach to play, and in particular their 'more playful' engagement with their children, compared to mothers. For instance, Archie commented that, *"My expectation of dads is that they seem to play more . . . That the dads get down and dingy."* This notion is reflected in the wider parenting literature on the differences in parental approaches of mothers and fathers (Dickson, Walker, & Fogel, 1997; Lamb, 1977; Lamb & Lewis, 2010; Teti, Bond, & Gibbs, 1988). Although not

especially common across the interviews, a minority of fathers distanced themselves from mothering by evoking an essentialist stance in their narratives, describing how children still ‘need’ their mother in infancy. This is described by Edward: *“I do think there’s something, particularly in the earlier stages of a child’s life that I feel like they do actually need the mother.”* This essentialist stance was also taken by Lucas:

I don’t know if it’s necessarily a natural thing for blokes to stay at home, because there’s, there must be something kind of deep rooted in this connection with the mother and perhaps how men and women have evolved, so I wonder if maybe generally speaking dads are more comfortable going out, being away.

One father, Bill, made a clear distinction between the domestic chores of mothers and fathers, describing his perception of men as more equipped to engage in manual labour around the home, yet explaining that he lacks time to do so because of taking on more domestic chores while being a stay-at-home father:

Men are built differently to women and it’s, I feel sexist saying these sorts of things but generally speaking men are stronger than women, do those sorts of jobs and so I have, because of the virtue of not going to work, I have the domestic things to do, but I also have, by virtue of my physicality, I have the other jobs that I don’t get to do because I’m doing the childcare.

The desire to undertake household tasks typically completed by men reflects the accounts of the fathers in one of the early contemporary studies of stay-at-home fathers (Doucet, 2004), and represents one way in which some of the fathers in this study attempted to stay engaged in typically male activities.

Another common way for the fathers to differentiate between mothering and fathering was to refer to their unease in initially becoming a stay-at-home father, indicating that they felt it was not a role fathers ‘should’ adopt, and reflecting long-held societal views about men as providers and

protectors (Connell, 2000; Pleck, 1995). One father, for example, narrated his difficulty in the transition period because of “not having the certainty and the income. And the security for myself” (Evan). In relation to this, a minority of fathers noted the potentially emasculating status of being a stay-at-home father:

I think there is a you know if you're a stay-at-home dad there is some sort of risk about being you know emasculated do they call it so you know there is a bit of a, um... you know and I guess it does feel a bit like that if you're doing all the shopping and the cleaning. (Jake)

Relatedly, a few of the fathers explicitly referred to a need to stay involved in some form of paid employment in order to have that aspect of their identity still available to them, rather than ‘only’ defining themselves as a stay-at-home father:

I'm trying not to think of myself too much as a stay-at-home dad. And having another job makes that easier because I can, when people ask me ‘what do you do?’ then I can define myself how I like. (Benjamin)

I do describe myself as a stay-at-home dad but it's not all I do so, I've never had to just sort of put myself into that particular pigeon hole... um you know I've been a [profession] during that time, I've you know [profession] during that time and different things you know during that time that have given me... um, I don't know status in different spheres of influence and... so um, perhaps I'm typical of some stay-at-home dads in that that's... not the sort of be all and end all of my existence. (Isaac)

Another father, Toby, indicated how leaving his job felt like part of his identity was lost:

It's not about being a stay-at-home dad, I love that concept, but I almost lost my role. Because you're sort of defined by your job and your profession and because you know I was quite well known . . . It was suddenly I've lost who I am . . . I suppose it's just losing that role and losing who you are for a bit.

The emphasis these fathers placed upon being employed, a key feature of hegemonic masculinity (Crompton, 2006; Pleck, 1995), is also reflected in the strategy adopted by others; using workplace terminology when referring to their caregiving role. Through this strategy, fathers seemed to be curating an identity of being a working man, labelling their caregiving activities as *“the best job in the world”* (Declan) and *“a working day at home”* (Caleb). Amongst these fathers, the relevance of traditional masculinity, rather than the use of caregiving to shape a new form of masculinity, was clear. However, while for some fathers, such as Declan, the job of fathering was expressed positively, and involved renegotiating the meaning of work to include caregiving, for others, work-related terms were interwoven into descriptions of their role as a primary caregiver:

It’s hard work, it’s not, you haven’t opted out, you have chosen, not necessarily a harder path, but equally challenging occupation . . . you’ll be neglecting your children if you don’t go into it thinking this is a full time job, because it’s a full time job. (Bill)

For others, such references were subtler. For example, Logan described his role as *“...hard work, hard work but fulfilling.”* Fathers’ references to caregiving as work could be said to reflect the unease that men can experience when giving up paid work in order to become stay-at-home fathers. That some fathers remained connected to paid work, and others re-defined caregiving as work, highlights the difficulties several faced in straying from gender norms, as discussed in Pleck (1995). Distancing themselves from ‘mothering’ – and ‘working’ alongside, or indeed through, fathering – may thus be interpreted as a means through which some of the fathers in this study understood their role as male primary caregivers in a way that was congruent with their desire to conform to male gender norms.

Prejudice: spaces and places

The second theme, *prejudice: spaces and places*, refers to the forms of stigma that fathers faced, which often meant feeling rejected from mother-oriented spaces and places. The stigma fathers faced is characterised by three subthemes; *ambient stigma*, *actual stigma*, and *imagined stigma*, represented on the thematic map as intersecting and interacting with one another. Whichever strategies of meaning-making of their parental role they engaged in, all the fathers mentioned at least one form of stigma in their narratives.

Ambient stigma

The first form of stigma consistently referred to within the fathers' narratives was ambient stigma; the negative social gaze on stay-at-home fathers. Ambient stigma is reflected in the stereotypical view that mothers are equipped to be primary caregivers and fathers breadwinners, an idea that upholds dominant forms of masculinity (Connell, 2000; Pleck, 1995), and serves to stigmatise those that deviate from this norm. Throughout the interviews, fathers made consistent references to prevalent gender stereotypes; in fact, this was one of the most commonly occurring references across the sample. For example, some fathers, like Cameron, reported being made to feel the "*odd one out*" because he did not abide by gender norms, and Isaac felt that "*society looks at you like, well, you're a house husband*", highlighting the derogatory view of stay-at-home fathers. Relatedly, several fathers referred to the widely held view that fathers need to be providers and mothers primary caregivers:

There's an assumption that I would have a job and yeah, just in the same way that there may be more an assumption, although I think working mothers is a more established um idea, but still there may be more likelihood and assumption that a mother is at home. (Bob)

Similarly, Gabriel said, "*It's about that male idea of providing for your family rather than actually being with your family. And that's an attitude that's going to be very hard to shift.*" Some fathers, such as

Toby, explained that whilst these commonly held assumptions were undergoing change, they were still present:

I still think it's very clear that there's gender stereotypes around what the role of a dad is and what the role of a father is. I think they are changing, you know, but I think they're still very much there . . . There is a real focus on mums as the primary carer.

Fathers also frequently referred to widely held derogatory views regarding the capability of fathers as primary caregiving parents, such as Connor's suggestion that society views his parenting as "chaotic". Another father, Isaac, described the stereotype that a stay-at-home father would be constantly relying on their female partner for parenting advice and guidance: "*They expect them to kind of muddle through and be on the phone to the wife all the time trying to think 'how do I do this?' 'How do I move forward here?'*".

As well as describing the stigma felt as a result of mothers being seen as more suited to primary caregiving, a few fathers also mentioned the societal expectation that they would only willingly engage in the playful, fun aspects of parenting, rather than be a capable caregiver for their children. This was described by Oliver: "*So I do think that people assume being a stay-at-home dad is like being a weekend dad seven days a week, which it's not.*"

Many of the fathers' narratives suggested that a parenting 'space', i.e. an arena within which ideas about parenting are shared and discussed, was lacking for fathers, as were role models that fathers could identify with. Benjamin suggested this as a cause of men's lack of interest in caregiving: "*I think if we had more role models then naturally there'll be more young men who have an interest in caring for children.*"

Moreover, in further explaining this negative social gaze, one father commented that, "*...there's also a kind of societal thing where you know you watch, once you notice how Dads are on TV and stuff they're all basically feckless idiots, and that's the assumption*" (Theodore). Regarding the

media representations of stay-at-home fathers, one father discussed the imagery surrounding the bumbling, incompetent father:

Like the connotations of that is the film Daddy Daycare where I think it's like Arnold Schwarzenegger or whatever and he just like absolute makes a balls up of everything and it's like that connotation of like 'oh god, the dad's left in charge of the children, it's all going to go wrong!'. (Edward)

Other research has also highlighted the struggle of stay-at-home fathers to counter the negative depictions of fathers in the mass media (Stevens, 2015). Coupled with these previous findings, the present study seems to indicate the continued presence of ambient stigma, and suggests that the harmful image of fathers as incompetent is a long-established idea that is resistant to change.

Actual stigma

In addition to ambient social stigma, fathers also described more direct stigmatising experiences in face-to-face interactions with others. Some fathers recalled exchanges with others that involved gender pejoratives about their apparent incapability as primary caregivers. Notably, many of the incidents described involved interpersonal interactions with members of the general public who had insinuated that the father was babysitting his children:

They say 'oh so Tuesdays is Daddy daycare' and it makes me angry that phrase, I don't like it, because I think it demeans what I do. And of course it demeans anyone looking after a child too doesn't it. But you never hear the phrase 'mummy daycare' because somehow that's more 'natural', in inverted commas, you know? Whereas with dads then it's you know, it's something different somehow, it's not proper parenting, it's not properly looking after your child. (Gabriel)

Another father, Edward, reported experiencing a comparable interaction, also expressing his anger over the insinuation; *"Sometimes people say to me 'oh it's daddy daycare today?' And I'm like 'fuck off'."* Another father, Isaac, commented that he had experienced feeling that others saw him as

incapable, as reflected in the wider narrative around fathers in general, demonstrating the link between ambient stigma and actual stigmatising interactions:

Everyone I've experienced has assumed I just muddle through and I'm just doing it as a hobby almost. It's like 'oh I'll give it a go!' twenty-first century man! But the reality, yeah, I don't think society really understands what it's like or acknowledges that dads are just as capable.

Like the fathers in Zimmerman's (2000) study, Isaac described others' views of stay-at-home fathering as a temporary decision, rather than as a long-term childcare arrangement. Gender pejoratives were also highlighted in relation to interactions with older generations, indicating that stigmatising experiences were more frequent when the father was in conversation with someone significantly older than himself:

The only negative people are much older and don't know me that well. I've had a couple of guys around [location] offer me jobs, cos they assume I'm unemployed because I'm wandering around with, with children. (Ronnie)

Such negative experiences made some fathers wary of talking to older generations about their role:

I talk to a man or an older man, I'll sort of choose what I say in a different way because I know that will have a connotation of 'oh he can't find a job' or it's about my inability to provide for my family. (Benjamin)

In contrast, other fathers explained that it was those within their close friendship circle who made comments that, although meant in good humour, nonetheless belittled their role. This was especially the case for fathers who did not have friends who were stay-at-home fathers and for those living in parts of the UK where support networks for fathers are particularly poor. For example, Declan said that, "some of my friends call me Mrs Doubtfire, as a joke", while Harrison recalled that, "everyone was ribbing me at work" after he had first explained his decision to become a stay-at-home father.

In keeping with previous research (Rochlen et al., 2010), a further form of stigma that fathers raised was social isolation. Explicit references to feelings of loneliness were present in over half of the fathers' interviews. Some fathers had anticipated that loneliness would play a part in their experience as a male primary caregiver, and their experiences had re-affirmed this, such as Ryan who confided: *"I expected it to be completely isolating which it is."* Others, such as Lewis, felt less prepared with regards to feelings of isolation: *"The loneliness is something I didn't expect as well, you know you get points where you just kind of sit and think oh my gosh, there's no one to talk to."*

As well as describing general feelings of isolation and loneliness, several of the fathers identified specific areas in their lives that were the root of the isolation they experienced. For a number of fathers, social isolation occurred partly due to feeling excluded from mother-oriented parenting spaces, particularly stay-and-play groups and playgrounds:

Things are very, very ingrained still, even though the world's changing, things are still very, very ingrained. That this is mums you know the groups at school it's 'busy mums group', or 'moving mums group' for the ones, as a dad you don't feel, everybody's nice but you don't feel welcome. (Alexander)

This sentiment was echoed by Bill who described himself as a *"foreigner"* in the toddler group he attended. Likewise, Declan found stay-and-play groups a difficult experience, stating that, *"everyone's sort of like closed ranks"*, while Jake described his experience of such a group as a *"closed mum group"*, highlighting the difficulties fathers experienced in integrating into a space not typically occupied by men. Several of the fathers felt that this isolation was unique to stay-at-home fathers due to their gender, rather than a common experience for all primary caregivers, as divulged by Nicholas: *"I think the only real difference between stay-at-home dads and stay-at-home mums is the natural support network that you get from each other"*, a finding also apparent in other research (Zimmerman, 2000).

Other fathers in the present study described perceiving mothers as ‘gatekeeping’ in the primary caregiving domain, as described by Arthur: *“Women treat stay-at-home dads funny. Stay-at-home mums treat stay-at-home dads funny. What’s your problem? Is it measuring? Do you think that we’re trying to prove that it’s not hard?”*. In keeping with Arthur’s account, mothers preventing father involvement in caregiving has been discussed with regard to fathers in all families, not just men in primary caregiving roles (Allen & Hawkins, 1999; Parke, 1996). This viewpoint was not one expressed by many of the fathers in the sample, but their difficulties in feeling accepted, especially in playgroups, were nevertheless apparent.

Many of the fathers additionally reflected that mother-oriented support was not restricted to playgroups alone but was true of many sources of support. As Ryan explained, *“There’s the old systems made for mums really, not for dads”*. Relatedly, some of the fathers also spoke about the lack of baby changing units for fathers, showing the barriers fathers faced in parenting their children. One father (Declan) described the lack of changing facilities in male toilets as *“ridiculous”* and another (Isaac) as *“particularly bad”*. Isaac went on to explain that this problem is far-reaching as it is experienced by all fathers, not just primary caregiving fathers: *“I was talking to someone like ‘no changing tables?!’ Dads change their children too, regardless of being a stay-at-home dad.”*

A few of the fathers noted that it was easier to be a stay-at-home father in certain urban locations around the UK than in other, more rural, locations. Several fathers in urban locations said that their social milieu was accepting of their non-traditional gender role, and for these dads, integrating into parenting spaces was described with greater ease. For example, Ronnie observed that he felt his location in a highly educated place helped him to feel comfortable being a stay-at-home father:

I recognise that in [location] and in [location] ‘cos of the outlook of people in in general, the the generally graduate populations. . . It’s easy being a stay-at-home dad around here. Erm I know it’s not the case in other parts of the country.

In contrast, Evan reported feeling more different where he lives now: *"I think less in [place] because I think it is more cosmopolitan but more so round here because it isn't, just being a bit self-conscious of pushing prams."*

The idea of certain spaces and places upholding and reproducing stigma against stay-at-home fathers intersects with support, as some fathers recognised the lack of father-specific groups in their area. For example, Isaac said that, *"It would be nice if there was some coffee morning set up for dads here, you know once a week, once a month where I could actually go and make some friends."* This contrasts with a minority of fathers' accounts, who conversely explained that existent father-oriented spaces were not adequately catering for their needs: *"Just because you're another male doesn't mean you get along with them [other stay-at-home fathers]"* (Jude). This sentiment was also expressed by Caleb, who described feeling that when interacting with other stay-at-home fathers *"There's a pressure to build up a rapport when there's less choice."* Part of the unease with father-only spaces appeared to be rooted in the stereotypically male topics of discussion, despite being part of a group of men who had ostensibly moved away from traditional male roles. This was expressed by Harrison who commented, *"It's a bit weird because all the dads just, I don't know, hang about talking about cars and football and you're like 'mmm ...it's not meant to be like this'."* This dichotomy between supporting father-only spaces and the fact that some fathers felt that these spaces were unhelpful attests to the heterogeneity in fathers' reports, and perhaps indicates that there is not one appropriate source of support for all. However, the sense of wanting more spaces in general in which to integrate – *"Just places where it's just you know it's just accepted, just normal"* (Lewis) – was reflected in several fathers' interviews. Such accounts indicate the overall 'othering' that fathers felt not only for taking on a non-traditional role but also for being a minority, and their desire for a sense of belonging as a male primary caregiver.

Beyond describing the stigmatising experiences they faced, fathers also suggested sources of support that would help them to feel more accepted and integrated, many of which also centred upon

the concept of spaces and places. In particular, fathers repeatedly referred to the need for greater representation of fathers in the social sphere. It was suggested that this should be implemented in several different ways, for example through more fathers taking on the primary caregiving role and thereby fostering a sense of solidarity with fathers in a similar position, as explained by Jake: *“The best support would be if more people did it really, so sort of peer support.”* Other fathers, such as Declan, articulated the need to make visible the fact that parenting spaces welcome both mothers and fathers, a form of recognition that is currently lacking: *“Even the signs, we noticed, most signs for changing facilities have a mum and a baby, but obviously it’s not just mums and babies.”*

Further, some fathers recognised that fathers are treated differently to mothers by public services. Some of the fathers gave insight into how fathers could feel more accepted:

In terms of the health service and any sort of service that has interactions with mums and women, really I think could increase their fatherly participation. Whether that’s training midwives and health visitors to talk more to men . . . just having simple things that they can do to include men more in the conversation. (Benjamin)

Other fathers highlighted the potential role of women in opening up parenting spaces for men, by laying out the expectation that they are equal partners in providing care: *“Women have to basically be like no I expect you to spend real, quality time at home.”* (Theodore). Such findings reiterate the emphasis on maternal ‘gatekeeping’ of the parental domain, with some fathers suggesting that there was a need for mothers specifically to encourage equality in caregiving for real change to happen.

Imagined stigma

A few fathers reported anxiety around others’ perceptions of them. Such anxiety could be seen as a manifestation of the ambient stigma and negative representations of stay-at-home fathers in society. Insofar as the fathers described these worries about their role as unrelated to their actual

experiences, they constitute a form of 'imagined stigma'. For example, some fathers expressed concerns over how others would view their ability to work:

I would think... 'What are people thinking?' 'Oh, he's got no job', you know, erm, I didn't think they saw me as a stay-at-home dad, I think saw... I thought in my eye, they saw me as a guy who's got no job, erm and who's out with the kids, it was difficult, I must admit, it was difficult.
(Donald)

A couple of the fathers mentioned feeling extremely uncomfortable in their interactions with mothers in female-dominant spaces due to their perception that such conversations could be interpreted as a form of sexual advance. Alexander said, *"Some mums look at you like it's a nightclub and you're trying to come onto them and it's like look, as attractive as you think you are, I'm just bored and I just want someone to say hello to."* As a consequence, some fathers reported engaging with grandparents instead of other parents, as then their motives for friendship would be seemingly less ambiguous:

You can become a little bit isolated, mainly through gender I think, it's just not appropriate to be round people's houses for coffee all the time like women might do . . . there was a grandparent who did a lot of the childcare and so instantly there's no threat there in a sort of relationship sense and therefore more 'oh, come round for a cup of tea' whereas a lot of people you just don't hang out with each other quite so much because it's inappropriate, really.
(Connor)

By regarding male-female friendships as a potential source of tension, these fathers further experienced feeling distanced from the parenting space. It is possible that this added to their sense of isolation and feelings of being 'left out' of the available support networks.

Resilience

The third theme, *resilience*, relates to the finding that certain aspects of fathers' identities and their approach to navigating their role buffered these men against the stigma they experienced. As other scholars have noted, it is important to consider the intersections between different aspects of an individual's identity (Shields, 2008). In the case of stay-at-home-fathers, it is worth acknowledging that whilst some aspects of identity were described as resulting in stigmatising experiences, other aspects may have afforded these men considerable status. Some of the fathers explained that they did not align with typical depictions of a minority group. Moreover, many fathers' accounts described buffers against the stigma they experienced. In particular, amid the challenges they faced, some of the fathers indicated that they felt they had agency over their own resilience to stigmatising experiences, such that they were able to seek support for themselves, rather than wait to receive it. Bob advised other stay-at-home fathers:

Don't ostracise yourself. Don't feel like you're different or that mums, you can't get on with the mums for instance because you're just going to be around a lot of mums, that's just... or if you're taking your kid out, if you're doing groups or anything you're going to be surrounded by a lot of women and mums and don't enter into it thinking they don't want to know you, because they probably won't if you go into it with that attitude.

In a similar vein, Arthur recommended:

Don't change who you are... parent as you will... that will happen to you, you won't decide how you're going to parent, you will parent as you will. But don't be pretentious and don't... don't curtail, don't curtail. If you walk into a room and you think everyone looks at you 'cause they think are you mad? Look them back in the eye and be like 'What? What?'

A strategy some of the fathers adopted was to actively ignore the negative comments made against them by other social agents, and to downplay the influence of other people on themselves.

This was described by Anthony: *"I don't care what other people think to be honest. If they do, crack on, it doesn't bother me."* This approach was also echoed by Oliver: *"I think men are maybe looked down on because it's not manly to stay at home . . . views like that still exist, it doesn't bother me in the slightest."* Put bluntly, several of the fathers recognised negative perceptions of stay-at-home fathers, but like Theodore, they simply stated, *"I don't care."* This may in part reflect a defensive response to stigma but may also indicate fathers' ability to put down others' negative opinions of themselves, and thus position themselves as resilient to criticism, especially when such criticism was felt to be unsolicited.

Some of the fathers explicitly acknowledged the intersectional nature of their identities as on the one hand part of a minority, and on the other, part of a privileged majority:

Being a white male in the world is like playing a game on easy mode, and so on and so forth. And I never really understood that until I became a stay-at-home dad and became a minority in a different world really. I'm not persecuted, nobody's discriminating against me, or anything like that, but I do realise that I'm different, and I don't have possibly the support systems that naturally coalesce around a mum in this situation . . . I've never really felt a minority before until I started doing this, and then you realise and then you think hang on, so yeah, but everyone's really nice, so no ones being nasty towards me, so I can't complain. (Alexander)

This awareness – that it is not typical for a man in their position to be in a minority – was also reflected in the narratives of some of the other fathers, such as Bill: *"It's a funny thing to find yourself as a middle-aged man in a minority, but I feel that I am."*

However, despite being aware of the social advantages afforded to men, other fathers, such as Dominic, perceived that it would be easier for a woman to be in this role:

It's never nice to hear a man complain about how hard it is for men kind of thing because it's ridiculous, but I think it is a little kind of microculture in which probably there are elements of

it that are a bit more difficult for men than for women because there are fewer of them doing it.

Interestingly, some fathers alluded to a heightened sense of empathy toward others due to their experiences of their role, particularly due to their experience of being part of a minority group of parents:

I'm probably a bit more understanding of other minorities and their causes than I used to be...

I sort of understand what it is to be side-lined and feel very lonely in a situation. (Alexander)

It's made me sort of much more sympathetic to women who have like whose childcare has a really detrimental effect on their career, I'm definitely much more sympathetic towards them than I otherwise would have been. (Edward)

These experiences may have further added to the fathers' resilience through their ability to have experienced stigma yet come through with, as described by the fathers, an added level of empathy and understanding.

Overall, these fathers seemed to suggest that despite facing more challenges than women adopting a primary caregiving role, they had benefitted from the status afforded to many other aspects of their identity.

The unicorn: (unwilling) gender warrior

Finally, a few of the fathers described reactions from others that demonstrated approval, being impressed at their ability to parent, and a level of praise that appeared to be excessive. Although fathers generally recognised that people were surprised that they had taken on the role of primary caregiver, some fathers explained that they were considered role models for other men with regards to being engaged, involved parents. For example, Jake reported, *"I think they're surprised, but at the same time I think they're very encouraging and they say to me they think it's a good thing"*, while

Zachary explained, *"Some people are very encouraging, actually, I was just chatting with somebody the other day and just sort of seemed to be kind of saying very much admire what I was doing."*

However, such positive reactions were also described by fathers as at times overdone and disproportionate, leading them to recognise that the gender bias toward expecting mothers to be good, involved, incredibly caring parents could result in the over-praising of fathers who show some of the same characteristics:

I got lot of positive, too much positivity in fact! . . . I remember the antenatal lady said 'Oh what you're doing is such a great thing! It's such a great thing!' like you know, and I get comments like that on the street like if I was feeding my baby a bottle then people would say 'Oh what a great dad you are!' and I'm like can you imagine a stranger going up to a mother feeding her baby a bottle and saying 'What a great thing you're doing!', no, she'd be judged for not breast-feeding or something. So there was, yeah a lot of praise for what I was doing. So that, you know, it's nice anywhere you go of course to get compliments, it's also not fair.
(Bob)

Some fathers described this amount of praise in a way that appeared to reflect discomfort, suggesting that they unwillingly experienced this form of positive discrimination:

I think there's lots of positive discrimination that goes with being a stay-at-home dad. You know mums and, mostly mums, give you lots of positive feedback and I don't think it's always that - just because you know obviously men and women both take care of children, it's a hard job, but men get lots and lots of good discrimination for doing it . . . I feel like it really becomes a gender thing and them saying that it's good that I'm doing it is really a description of my gender doing something and not a description of me. (Benjamin)

Relating to the 'gender warrior' concept, Benjamin's account highlights a feeling shared amongst some of the fathers, that they were regarded as representing their gender in a positive way. These fathers

recognised that taking on the role of primary caregiver can at times come with excessive volumes of praise. In the present study, Joseph referred to a 'unicorn-like' status: *"There must be stay-at-home dads all over the country but they feel like a unicorn, that they're really rare."* Similarly, Benjamin described that stay-at-home fathers are *"...a bit of an enigma or a novelty. I feel like because there's not really many more stay-at-home dads that I know, I feel a bit like a representative of a population."* The use of the words 'enigma', 'novelty' and 'unicorn' seem to indicate fathers' sense of being seen as rare creatures, and is reflective of the general idea that people expect fathers not to parent as well as mothers.

In the thematic map, this present subtheme is not only linked to resilience (insofar as such positive reactions seemed for some fathers to serve as a buffer against a broader, negative social gaze), but also to fathers' meaning-making of their parental role. In relation to the latter, some of the fathers described the high level of praise they received as positive, and had used this to inform their own meaning-making of their role:

"It's kudos, but you know people say 'oh you're a stay-at-home dad, oh what a nice guy you must be!' you know so I kind of liked that part of it, enjoyed being seen as like the really nice guy whose a stay-at-home dad". (Edward)

Conclusions

With regards to meaning-making of their non-traditional gender role, the fathers simultaneously conformed to and rejected hegemonic masculine ideals. The fathers' narratives were heterogeneous and attest to the conflict they experience in that whilst they are often exposed to stigma, they also receive positive reactions from others, yet these are often over-done and reflective of the perception that it is rare for a father to be a highly involved parent. Many of the fathers showed a degree of resilience against these stigmatising experiences, yet overall there was a very high level of stigma.

4. Quantitative Results: Wellbeing, Parenting and Child Adjustment

This chapter presents a quantitative analysis of parent psychological wellbeing, parenting and child adjustment between stay-at-home father, stay-at-home mother and dual-earner families.

4.1. Data Reduction

Due to the considerable number of variables produced by the interviews, questionnaires and observations, factor analysis was used to reduce the number of variables. Factor analysis is a useful tool for data reduction as it organises variables into a factor based on a shared underlying construct which can be scored to give a more reliable measure.

Confirmatory factor analyses (CFA) were conducted using *Mplus* Version 8 (Muthén & Muthén, 2012) to create composite measures of parenting quality and parent-child interaction. The sample size for the present study of 248 parents was considered to be on the smaller side for factor analysis, yet still appropriate, and a maximum likelihood approach is considered to be relatively robust with regards to small violations of the underlying assumptions of CFA, including sample size (Brown, 2015). In the following section, standardised factor loadings for the indicators are presented. Standardised factor loadings are recommended to be above 0.3 (Brown, 2015). In order to evaluate how well the factor specified fits the data, the model must firstly be over-identified with sufficient degrees of freedom. Subsequently the indices of model fit can be assessed to examine the quality of the statistical models.

Model fit indices

Model fit was assessed using the criteria outlined by Brown (2015) of a non-significant Chi-square value, a root-mean-square error of approximation (RMSEA) of $< .08$, a comparative fit index (CFI) of $> .90$, and a Tucker–Lewis index (TLI) of $> .90$.

The Chi-square (χ^2) test is used to assess whether the model and the data are significantly different. If the p-value for the χ^2 test is not significant, this suggests the model fits the data well. This is a stringent test of model fit and is sensitive to changes in sample size.

The root mean square error of approximation (Steiger & Lind, 1980) is an 'error of approximation' index as it evaluates whether a model fits approximately well for the given data, rather than fitting exactly to the data. RMSEA values can range from 0 to 1, whereby lower values are indicative of better model fit and a value of less than 0.08 is desirable.

The Comparative Fit Index (Bentler, 1990) has a range from 0 to 1 and values closer to 1 are indicative of better model fit. The fit of the model is considered good if the CFI is above 0.9. The CFI is generally less stringent than the other indices of model fit, yet has been found to be more consistent than other indices (Brown, 2015).

The Tucker Lewis Index (Tucker & Lewis, 1973) is similar to the CFI such that it is considered to behave in a consistent way (Brown, 2015) and higher values are indicative of better model fit. Model fit is considered good if the TLI is above 0.9. Unlike the CFI, the TLI significantly decreases if the model includes freely estimated parameters that do not contribute to good model fit, thus it is a more stringent test and the TLI value is generally slightly lower than the CFI value.

Measurement invariance

Analysis of measurement invariance was used to examine whether the same factor structure could be applied to data from fathers and mothers, so that in further analyses fathers' and mothers' scores from the factors can be directly compared. To determine measurement invariance, increasingly constrained models are compared with a baseline model, and the differences between these models are examined (Van De Schoot, Lugtig, & Hox, 2012). The first stage is creating a baseline model, whereby the maternal and paternal factors are entered into the same model in *Mplus*. If the model fit is acceptable, this demonstrates configural invariance. Then, the corresponding factor loadings for

mothers and fathers are set to equal to examine metric invariance. A χ^2 difference test is then used to evaluate whether there is a significant decrease in model fit. The χ^2 difference test is the most frequently used test to examine differences in model fit across sets of nested models (Cochran, 1952). If the χ^2 difference test is not significant, this indicates the factor loadings are equivalent across groups and the more restrictive loadings fit well, comparable to the less restricted model. Subsequently, more equality constraints are imposed on the parameters to test for strong factorial invariance, whereby indicators are set to equality across mothers and fathers. The χ^2 difference test is then used to establish whether the most restrictive model fits the data well.

Parenting Factors

CFA was pursued to produce two factors assessing parenting. Based on previous work on new family forms (Imrie, Jadvá, Fishel, & Golombok, 2019), a similar approach was adopted to produce (a) a representational measure of parenting, labelled quality of parenting, and (b) an observational measure of parenting, named parent-child interaction.

Quality of parenting factor

Confirmatory factor analysis, rather than exploratory factor analysis, was chosen on the basis of previous research that used similar measures to the present study to create factors assessing parenting quality (e.g., Imrie, Jadvá, Fishel, & Golombok, 2019; Golombok, Ilioi, Blake, Roman, & Jadvá, 2017). In the present study, both the interview variables and the Parental Acceptance/Rejection Questionnaire (PARQ) measured parents' representations of their parenting and relationship with their child, and hence were used to produce the first factor.

Initially, the following variables from the parent interview were entered into the analysis: Warmth, Over-Involvement, Under-Involvement, Quality of Interaction, Sensitive Responding, and the Parent-Child Conflict variables (Frequency, Level and Resolution). The PARQ total score was also entered into the same factor analysis. After examination of model fit, the factor was reconsidered, and the final quality of parenting factor with the best model fit was comprised of: Warmth, Involvement (the reverse score of the Under-Involvement variable so that higher scores reflected more involvement), Quality of Interaction, Sensitive Responding and the PARQ score (reversed so that higher scores reflected greater acceptance).

As illustrated in Table 4.4.1, the correlation coefficients between the five variables for both fathers and mothers indicated sufficient positive associations to pursue CFA for both fathers and mothers. As shown, the quality of parenting variables for fathers were all significantly positively associated except for Sensitive Responding with the PARQ. For mothers, Warmth was significantly and

positively correlated with the other four variables. Quality of Interaction was also significantly correlated with the other variables. The PARQ was not correlated with Sensitive Responding or Involvement. Taken together, it was deemed appropriate to enter these variables of parenting quality as loadings into a confirmatory factor analysis.

Table 4.1.1. Pearson's Correlations Between Parent Variables Used to Compute the Quality of Parenting Factor

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
	<i>r</i>	<i>r</i>	<i>r</i>	<i>r</i>	<i>r</i>
1. Warmth	-	.26**	.56***	.34***	.33***
2. Involvement	.51***	-	.38***	.25**	.12
3. Quality of Interaction	.51***	.40***	-	.25**	.32***
4. Sensitive Responding	.42***	.39***	.24**	-	.15
5. PARQ	.35***	.34***	.20*	.14	-

Note. Mother scores above the diagonal, father scores below the diagonal

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Confirmatory Factor Analysis was run in *Mplus* Version 8, separately for fathers and mothers, specifying that the five parenting variables loaded onto one factor, with warmth set as the first lead indicator. This single-factor model showed good fit to the data. For fathers, the model was over-identified with 5 degrees of freedom, with $\chi^2(5) = 5.87$, $p = .32$, RMSEA = 0.04 (90% CI = 0.00 – 0.14), CFI = 0.99 and TLI = 0.99. Standardised factor loadings ranged from moderate to high, from 0.44 to 0.82, averaging at 0.61 (See Figure 4.4.1).

For mothers, the single-factor model also showed good fit to the data (See Figure 4.1.2). The model was over-identified with 5 degrees of freedom. The model fit was good,

with $\chi^2(5) = 5.93$, $p = .31$, RMSEA = 0.04 (90% CI = 0.00 – 0.13), CFI = 0.99 and TLI = 0.98. Standardised factor loadings ranged from moderate to high, from 0.40 to 0.76, averaging at 0.55.

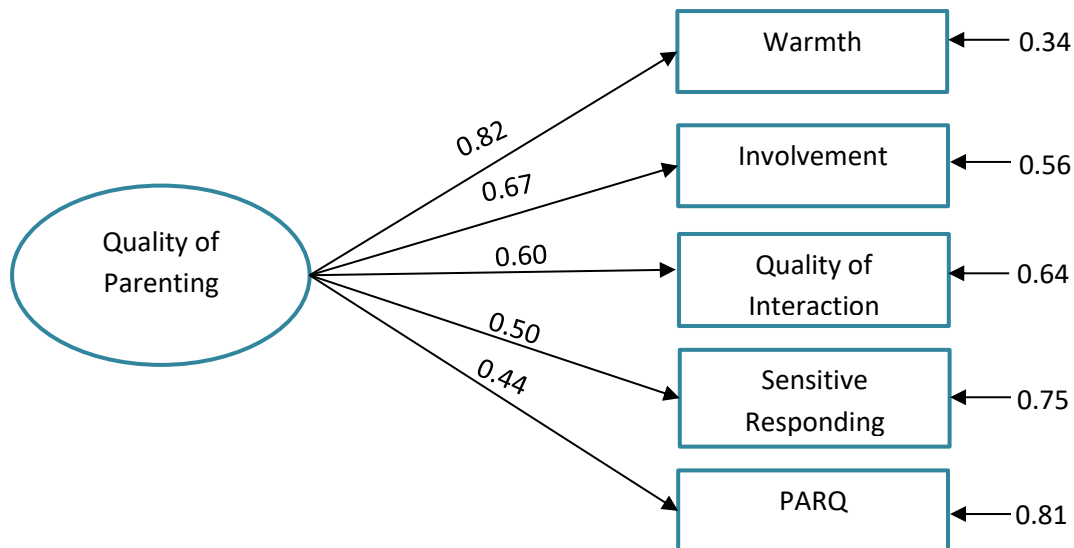


Figure 4.1.1. Standardised Estimates and Error Variances for Paternal Parenting Quality Model

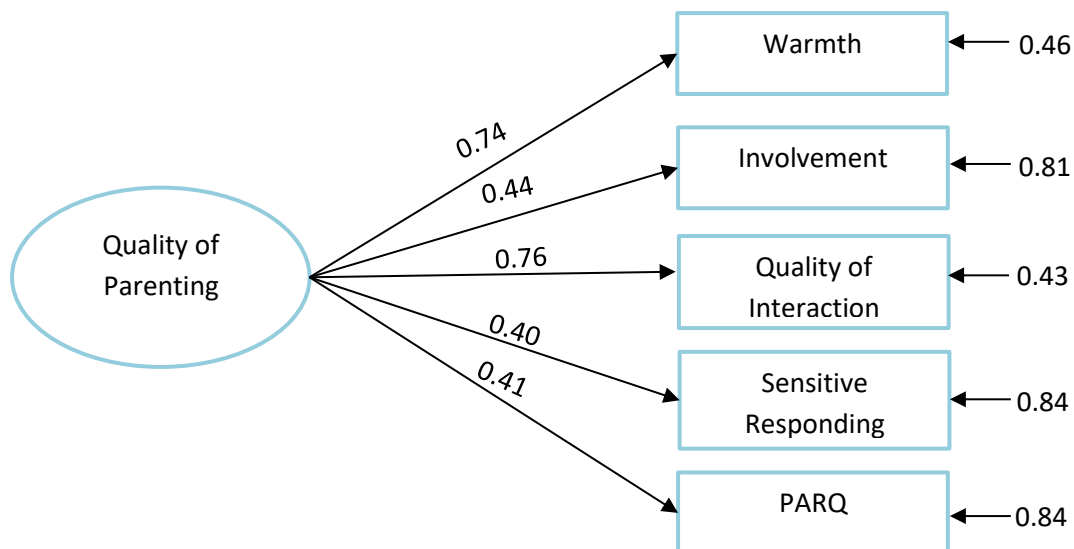


Figure 4.1.2. Standardised Estimates and Error Variances for Maternal Parenting Quality Model

Does parenting quality show measurement invariance between mothers and fathers?

To examine measurement invariance of the Quality of Parenting factor between mothers and fathers, firstly the baseline model was evaluated. For the baseline model, model fit was acceptable; $\chi^2(34) = 46.75$, $p = .07$, RMSEA = 0.05 (90% CI = 0.00 – 0.09), CFI = 0.95 and TLI = 0.93. Next, metric invariance was examined using a χ^2 difference test and was established. However, there was not support for strong factorial invariance. Thus, partial measurement invariance between mothers and fathers was established, and the factor was considered appropriate for use in group comparisons between fathers and mothers. In subsequent analyses the equality-constrained Quality of Parenting factor was used.

Parent-child interaction factor

A second CFA was conducted to create a composite measure of parent-child interaction based on the observational codes scored from the parent-child interaction task. Four key codes from the PARCHISY coding system were used in the present study: Dyadic Cooperation, Dyadic Reciprocity, Parent Responsiveness and Child Responsiveness (Deater-Deckard & Petrill, 2004). Taken together, previous research has labelled these four variables as mutuality. Based on evidence that in other studies these four items load onto the same factor (Deater-Deckard & O'Connor, 2000) and research showing that the mutuality construct is highly reliable (Deater-Deckard & Petrill, 2004), the present study sought to examine whether the same four variables would load onto one factor. Hence, confirmatory, rather than exploratory, factor analysis was also used for the parent-child interaction factor.

Correlations between the four mutuality codes were conducted prior to the CFA. The correlation matrices for fathers and for mothers indicated sufficient correlations to pursue CFA for both mothers and fathers (See Table 4.1.2), as all the variables were correlated except for Parent Responsiveness with Dyadic Reciprocity. Dyadic Cooperation was specified to be the lead indicator.

Table 4.1.2. Pearson's Correlations Between Variables used to Compute the Parent-child Interaction

Factor

	1.	2.	3.	4.
	<i>r</i>	<i>r</i>	<i>r</i>	<i>r</i>
1. Dyadic Cooperation	-	.34***	.34***	.19*
2. Responsiveness	.29**	-	.21*	.16
3. Child Responsiveness	.39***	.25*	-	.24*
4. Dyadic Reciprocity	.24*	.06	.30**	-

Note. Mother scores above the diagonal, father scores below.

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

CFA was carried out for the four mutuality observational codes, specifying a single factor. For fathers, the model fit was good, $\chi^2(2) = 2.51$, $p = .29$, RMSEA = 0.05 (90% CI = 0.00 – 0.21), CFI = 0.99 and TLI = 0.95. Standardised factor loadings were moderate, from 0.39 to 0.66, averaging at 0.51 (See Figure 4.1.3). For mothers, the same factor was specified and model fit was good, $\chi^2(2) = 1.29$, $p = .52$, RMSEA = 0.00 (90% CI = 0.00 – 0.17), CFI = 1.00 and TLI = 1.07. Standardised loadings were moderate, ranging from 0.34 to 0.66, averaging at 0.50 (See Figure 4.1.4).

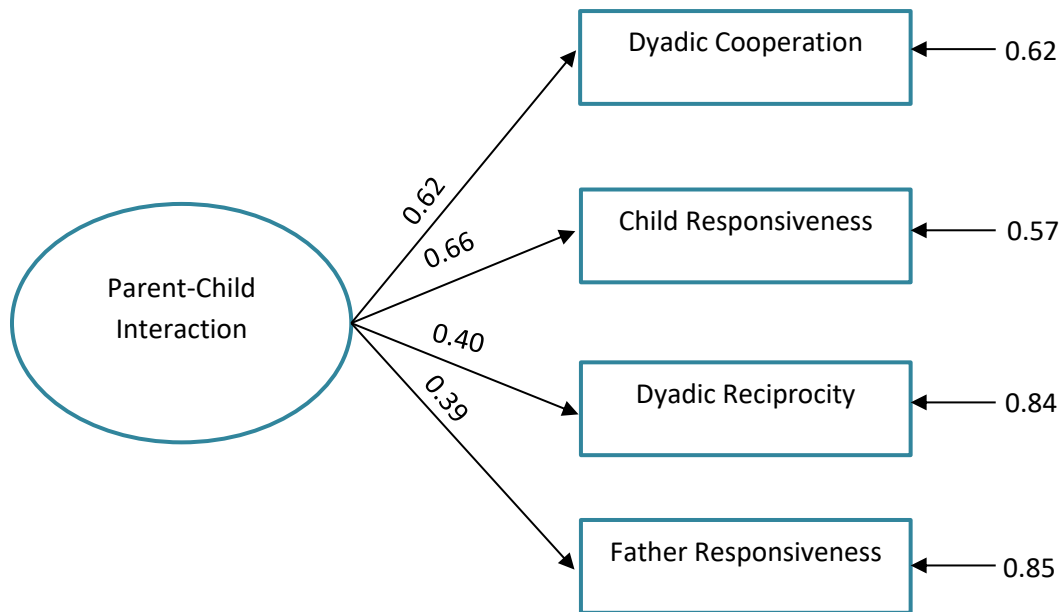


Figure 4.1.3. Standardised Estimates and Error Variances for Paternal Parent-child Interaction Quality Model

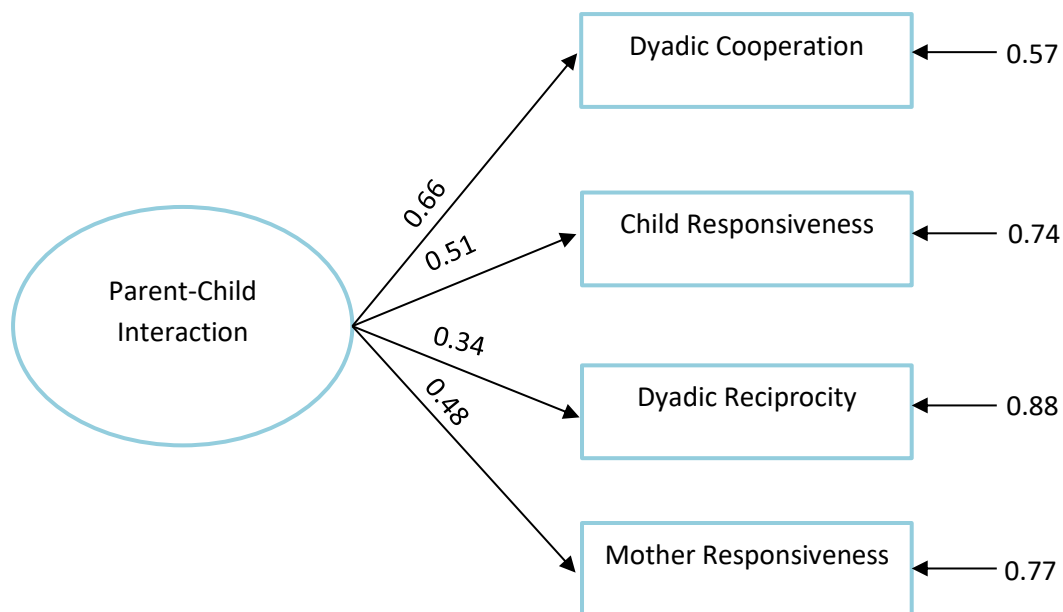


Figure 4.1.4. Standardised Estimates and Error Variances for Maternal Parent-child Interaction Quality Model

Does parent-child interaction quality show measurement invariance between mothers and fathers?

To establish the degree of measurement invariance of the Parent-Child Interaction factor between mothers and fathers, firstly the baseline model was evaluated. Model fit was acceptable for the baseline model; $\chi^2(19) = 24.49$, $p = .18$, RMSEA = 0.05 (90% CI = 0.00 – 0.10), CFI = 0.94 and TLI = 0.91. Secondly, a χ^2 difference test was used to examine metric invariance and metric invariance was established. However, the assumptions for strong factorial invariance were not met. Therefore, partial measurement invariance was established for the parent-child interaction factor between mothers and fathers. This indicates that the factor was suitable for group comparisons between fathers and mothers. In subsequent analyses the equality-constrained Parent-Child Interaction factor was used.

Analysis Plan

Group comparisons

Data for the group comparisons were analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics version 25.

For the group comparisons, stay-at-home fathers, stay-at-home mothers and dual-earner mothers were categorised as primary caregivers. Within the dual-earner family, even though both parents worked comparative hours, questions during the interview ascertained that almost all the mothers were more involved in parenting than the fathers. Hence, breadwinner fathers (the partner of stay-at-home mothers) and dual-earner fathers were categorised as secondary caregivers.

Group comparisons of parent psychological wellbeing and parenting

Firstly, the psychological wellbeing and couple relationship quality of stay-at-home fathers was compared to both breadwinner fathers and dual-earner fathers, in order to examine whether parental involvement had an effect on fathers' adjustment and marital relationship. MANOVAs and ANOVAs were used to test for differences between the three types of fathers on parental psychological wellbeing and couple functioning variables. When differences were found, additional contrasts were run to evaluate whether there were significant differences between (a) stay-at-home fathers and dual-earner fathers and (b) stay-at-home fathers and breadwinner fathers.

The same procedure was run for the group comparisons of primary caregiver parents (stay-at-home fathers, stay-at-home mothers and dual-earner mothers), and then additional contrasts were run to determine whether there were significant differences between (a) stay-at-home fathers and stay-at-home mothers, and (b) stay-at-home fathers and dual-earner mothers. When several dependent variables were tested, such as with the coparenting measure with multiple subscales, MANOVAs were carried out to reduce Type I errors. When the MANOVAs were significant, ANOVAs were conducted on each individual dependent variable.

Parental psychological wellbeing was also examined using the number of parents in the different family types who scored above the clinical cut-off point on the measures of psychological adjustment. To assess this, and for other analyses with categorical data, Chi-square tests were used.

For the Quality of Parenting, Parent-Child Interaction and Parent-Child Conflict variables, MANOVAs or ANOVAs were used to examine differences between family types, and when differences were found, contrasts were run to assess whether there were significant differences between (a) stay-at-home fathers and dual-earner fathers, and (b) stay-at-home fathers and breadwinner fathers. The same procedure was used to examine whether male and female primary caregivers differed on the two parenting factors, and also on the Parent-Child Conflict variables, with contrasts evaluating whether there were significant differences between (a) stay-at-home fathers and stay-at-home mothers, and (b) stay-at-home fathers and dual-earner mothers.

Group comparisons for child adjustment

Firstly, ANOVAs on parent and teacher rated SDQ scores were carried out comparing children in the three family types. A Chi-square test was used to evaluate whether there were any differences in the number of children scoring above the cut-off for difficulties across the different families. MANOVAs and ANOVAs were also conducted on the two other measures of child adjustment; the PSAI and the SCARF, with additional contrasts carried out if the tests were significant.

P-values and effect sizes

Exact p-values have been reported in line with APA guidelines (APA, 2010). Also following the APA guidelines, effect sizes were calculated and reported, by calculating partial eta squared (η_p^2). This is a widely used and cited measure of effect size (Richardson, 2011). A η_p^2 value equal to or above .14 is considered a large effect, equal or above .06 a medium effect, and equal or above .01 a small effect.

Testing for assumptions

ANOVAs and MANOVAs are considered robust tests even when the data shows small deviations from normality or homogeneity of variance, particularly when group sizes are equal or nearly equal, as with the present data set. However, data were first examined to explore whether they met the assumptions related to the statistical analyses used; homogeneity of variance and normally distributed data. Homogeneity of variance was assessed using Levene's test. Several different methods were used to assess the normality of the data, including examining histograms and normal Q-Q plots, and by examining the z-scores for skewness and kurtosis for each variable at a group level.

Covariates

Due to the significantly older age of mothers and fathers in stay-at-home father families compared to stay-at-home mother families, correlations were carried out between mothers' age and fathers' age, and the dependent variables in order to consider whether age should be used as a covariate in the analyses. If the correlation was significant, mothers' or fathers' age was entered into the analysis as covariates. When covariates were used, this was stated in the reporting of the findings.

Multi-level modelling

The final part of the quantitative analysis explored associations between child adjustment and other variables, including demographic variables and those assessing parental psychological wellbeing and parenting, in order to examine predictors of child adjustment difficulties. To do so, a multi-level model was run in *Mplus*. Multi-level modelling was considered appropriate as it allows for inclusion of data from mothers and fathers on the same outcome, so it is valuable for examining data collected from dyads who are not independent of each other. Due to non-normal distributions on several of the variables, a robust maximum likelihood estimation was used for the model (Muthén & Muthén, 2012). Grand mean centering was used to center the variables that were continuous data. A full information approach was adopted so all eligible families were analysed (Enders, 2001). To assess the fit of the

model to the data, Brown's (2015) criteria were used. In order to estimate the proportion of variance in SDQ scores explained by the predictor variables, Snijders and Bosker's (1999) measure was used, which is considered to be comparable to R^2 .

Initially, in order to explore predictors of child adjustment, Pearson's correlations were carried out to explore associations between father- and mother-rated total SDQ scores and possible predictors of adjustment. The predictors included variables measuring parent psychological wellbeing, parenting, parent-child relationship quality and child gender. Then, predictors which were significantly correlated with SDQ scores and made theoretical sense, were entered into a multi-level model with two levels; the first level, the within-family level, examined differences between the parents' scores within each dyad, and the second level, the between-family level, examined differences between the scores of each family.

Results

4.2. Parent Psychological Wellbeing

Does the psychological wellbeing of primary caregiver fathers differ from secondary caregiver fathers?

To assess whether there were differences in psychological wellbeing between stay-at-home fathers, breadwinner fathers and dual-earner fathers, a MANOVA was conducted with family type as the between subjects factor, with fathers' scores the Edinburgh Depression Scale (EDS), Trait Anxiety Inventory (TAI), and Parenting Stress Index (PSI) as dependent variables. Pillai's trace was significant, $F(6, 232) = 2.24, p = .04, \eta_p^2 = .06$, however an examination of univariate tests revealed no differences between the fathers. ANOVAs were run separately on fathers' scores on the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS), Conformity to Masculine Norms Inventory (CMNI) and the Golombok Rust Inventory of Marital Satisfaction (GRIMS). There were no significant differences between stay-at-home fathers, breadwinner fathers and dual-earner fathers on any of the variables (see Table 4.2.1). The fathers across the three family types generally showed positive psychological wellbeing and high relationship satisfaction.

Table 4.2.1. Means, *SD*, *F*, *p* and η^2 Values for Comparisons of Psychological Wellbeing between Fathers

	Fathers						ANOVA			
	Stay-at-home		Dual-earner		Breadwinner		<i>F</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>	η^2
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>				
Depression (EDS)	6.13	3.51	5.25	3.54	5.83	3.81	0.60	2, 117	.55	.01
Anxiety (TAI)	41.30	9.24	37.30	8.72	38.83	8.71	2.04	2, 117	.13	.03
Parenting Stress (PSI)	70.70	14.15	72.13	14.13	77.35	16.13	2.23	2, 117	.11	.04
Social Support (MSPSS)	5.56	1.08	5.73	0.83	5.50	0.96	0.61	2, 118	.54	.01
Male Norms (CMNI)	22.35	8.13	25.46	6.11	24.07	4.98	2.26	2, 118	.11	.04
Marital Quality (GRIMS)	21.48	10.27	21.23	8.65	22.42	10.80	0.17	2, 119	.85	.00

To further explore the psychological adjustment of stay-at-home fathers to fathers in other family types, Chi-square tests were conducted to examine the proportion of fathers in each family type above the clinical cut-off on the EDS, TAI and PSI, and the proportion with low/moderate social support on the MSPSS. As can be seen in Table 4.2.2, significantly more stay-at-home fathers reported clinical levels of anxiety compared to both dual-earner fathers and breadwinner fathers, $\chi^2 (2) = 7.19$, $p = .03$. There were no differences in clinical depression or parenting stress between family types. For social support, fathers' scores across the three family types were mostly in the high category of social support and there were no differences between stay-at-home fathers, dual-earner fathers and breadwinner fathers in level of social support.

Table 4.2.2. χ^2 and p Values for Depression, Anxiety and Stress Cut Offs and Level of Social Support between Fathers (% within family type)

		Fathers			Chi-Square		
		Stay-at-home	Dual-earner	Breadwinner	χ^2	df	p
Depression (EDS)	Above cut off	2 (5%)	0 (0%)	3 (7%)	(Fisher's Exact, p) .37		
	Below cut off	38 (95%)	40 (100%)	38 (93%)			
Anxiety (TAI)	Above cut off	17 (43%)	7 (18%)	9 (22%)	7.19	2	.03
	Below cut off	23 (57%)	33 (82%)	32 (78%)			
Parenting Stress (PSI)	Above cut off	3 (8%)	2 (3%)	7 (17%)	3.69	2	.16
	Below cut off	37 (92%)	38 (97%)	34 (83%)			
Social Support (MSPSS)	Low/moderate	9 (22%)	5 (12%)	10 (24%)	2.07	2	.36
	High	31 (78%)	35 (88%)	31 (76%)			

Professional support for mental health concerns

A Chi-square test was used to compare support-seeking behaviours of the three different types of fathers based on their responses on the parent interview. A significantly higher proportion of stay-at-home fathers reported that they had accessed professional support, $\chi^2(2) = 7.11$, $p = .03$, reflecting a difference between stay-at-home fathers and dual-earner fathers, with stay-at-home fathers being more likely than dual-earner fathers to seek support. Stay-at-home fathers did not differ significantly in their help seeking behaviours compared to breadwinner fathers. Overall, the majority of fathers in the three family types did not report having received professional help regarding their mental health.

Table 4.2.3. χ^2 and p Values for Fathers Seeking Support (% within family type)

	Fathers			Chi-square		
	Stay-at-home	Dual-earner	Breadwinner	χ^2	df	p
Support sought	10 (24%)	2 (5%)	4 (10%)	7.11	2	.03
No support sought	31 (76%)	37 (95%)	37 (90%)			

Coparenting

In order to assess whether stay-at-home fathers, dual-earner fathers and breadwinner fathers differed in their coparenting approach, fathers' total scores on the Coparenting Relationship Scale (CRS) were entered into an ANOVA (See Table 4.2.4). There were no significant differences between family types.

Due to interest in how parents support each other in parenting, and the emphasis of Family Systems Theory as a theoretical framework of this thesis, analyses were also conducted on the subscales of the CRS. Fathers' scores on the seven subscales were entered into a MANOVA. As Pillai's trace was significant, $F(14, 226) = 1.93, p = .02, \eta_p^2 = .11$, this indicates there are significant differences in coparenting between fathers. Hence, univariate tests were carried out to determine which coparenting dimensions differed between family types. There was a significant difference in coparenting support, $F(2, 118) = 3.28, p = .04, \eta_p^2 = .05$, showing that stay-at-home fathers rated their partner as significantly more supportive of their parenting approach than breadwinner fathers ($p = .01$). There were no significant differences between how supportive stay-at-home fathers and dual-earner fathers rated their partners. There was also a significant difference in the division of labour, $F(2, 118) = 3.03, p = .05, \eta_p^2 = .05$. Contrasts showed that stay-at-home fathers rated their partner lower in doing their share of household tasks compared to breadwinner fathers' ($p = .04$), and dual-earner fathers' ($p = .03$), ratings of their partners. For the remaining five subscales, there were no significant differences between the three types of fathers.

Table 4.2.4. Means, *SD*, *F*, *p* and η^2 Values for Comparisons of Coparenting Subscales between Fathers

	Fathers						ANOVA			
	Stay-at-home		Dual-earners		Breadwinners		<i>F</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>	η^2
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>				
Coparenting Total (CRS)	4.98	0.65	4.90	0.52	4.95	0.66	0.15	2,118	.86	.00
Coparenting Agreement	4.84	0.95	4.62	0.94	4.72	0.96	0.53	2,118	.59	.01
Endorse Partner Parenting	5.12	0.80	5.26	0.57	5.42	0.53	2.08	2,118	.13	.03
Coparenting Support	4.93	1.00	4.62	0.92	4.34	1.06	3.28	2,118	.04	.05
Coparenting Undermining	0.92	0.83	0.95	0.79	0.79	0.93	0.43	2,118	.65	.01
Coparenting Closeness	4.77	0.88	4.52	0.81	4.62	1.04	0.78	2,118	.46	.01
Exposure to Conflict	0.85	0.88	0.97	1.14	0.87	0.82	0.15	2,118	.86	.00
Division of Labour	4.78	1.36	5.31	0.89	5.29	0.94	3.03	2,118	.05	.05

Does the psychological wellbeing of primary caregiver fathers differ from primary caregiver mothers?

To examine whether there were differences in wellbeing between primary caregivers, a MANOVA was conducted on stay-at-home fathers', stay-at-home mothers' and dual-earner mothers' scores on the EDS, TAI and PSI. Pillai's trace was not significant, $F(6, 238) = 1.14, p = .34, \eta^2 = .03$, showing no significant differences were found. ANOVAs were run separately on primary caregivers' scores on the MSPSS and GRIMS. As can be seen in Table 4.2.5, there were no significant differences between stay-at-home fathers, stay-at-home mothers and dual-earner mothers, indicating that male and female primary caregivers report similar levels of psychological wellbeing and relationship quality. The primary caregiver parents in the three different family types showed overall positive psychological wellbeing and scores on the GRIMS suggested high relationship quality across the sample.

Table 4.2.5. Means, *SD*, *F*, *p* and η^2 Values for Comparisons of Psychological Wellbeing between Primary Caregivers

	Parents						ANOVA			
	Stay-at-home Fathers		Stay-at-home Mothers		Dual-earner Mothers		<i>F</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>	η^2
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>				
Depression (EDS)	6.13	3.51	6.88	4.51	6.45	4.04	0.37	2,120	.69	.01
Anxiety (TAI)	41.30	9.24	39.14	9.00	39.73	8.80	0.63	2,120	.53	.01
Parenting Stress (PSI)	70.70	14.15	72.07	16.48	71.93	14.52	0.10	2,120	.90	.00
Social Support (MSPSS)	5.56	1.08	5.87	1.16	6.04	1.14	1.84	2,120	.16	.03
Marital Quality (GRIMS)	21.48	10.27	22.43	10.80	21.63	9.93	0.10	2,119	.90	.00

To further assess whether there were differences between psychological wellbeing reported by male primary caregivers compared to female primary caregivers, Chi-square tests were run to examine whether stay-at-home fathers differed from stay-at-home mothers and dual-earner mothers regarding scores on the EDS, TAI and PSI that indicated clinical levels of depression, anxiety and parenting stress, respectively. No differences were found between stay-at-home fathers, stay-at-home mothers and dual-earner mothers regarding the proportion of parents who scored above the clinical cut-off for these variables. Across the three types of primary caregiving parents, the most common mental health problem appeared to be elevated levels of anxiety, with 33% of primary caregivers scoring over the cut-off for clinical levels of anxiety. A Chi-square test was also used to explore any differences in the proportion of parents who reported low/moderate social support on the MSPSS. No differences were found between the three types of primary caregivers.

Table 4.2.6. χ^2 and p Values for Depression, Anxiety and Stress Cut Offs and Level of Social Support between Primary Caregivers (% within family type)

		Parents			Chi-Square		
		Stay-at-home Fathers	Stay-at-home Mothers	Dual-earner Mothers	χ^2	df	p
Depression (EDS)	Above cut off	2 (5%)	5 (12%)	3 (8%)	1.25	2	.54
	Below cut off	38 (95%)	38 (88%)	37 (92%)			
Anxiety (TAI)	Above cut off	17 (43%)	12 (28%)	12 (30%)	2.28	2	.32
	Below cut off	23 (57%)	31 (72%)	28 (70%)			
Parenting Stress (PSI)	Above cut off	3 (8%)	9 (20%)	4 (10%)	3.78	2	.15
	Below cut off	37 (92%)	34 (80%)	36 (90%)			
Social Support (MSPSS)	Low/moderate	9 (22%)	10 (23%)	3 (7%)	4.36	2	.11
	High	31 (78%)	33 (77%)	37 (93%)			

Professional support for mental health concerns

The support-seeking behaviours of the three different types of primary caregiver parents were examined based on the proportion who had sought professional support for mental health concerns. A Chi-square analysis showed that there were no significant differences between stay-at-home fathers, stay-at-home mothers and dual-earner mothers regarding whether they had sought professional support (See Table 4.2.7), with the majority of primary caregiving parents reporting that they had not sought professional help.

Table 4.2.7. χ^2 and p Values for Primary Caregivers Seeking Support (% within family type)

	Parents			Chi-Square		
	Stay-at-home Fathers	Stay-at-home Mothers	Dual-earner Mothers	χ^2	df	p
Support sought	10 (24%)	10 (23%)	7 (17%)	0.62	2	.73
No support sought	31 (76%)	34 (77%)	33 (83%)			

Coparenting

An ANOVA was used to compare stay-at-home fathers', stay-at-home mothers' and dual-earner mothers' total scores on the Coparenting Relationship Scale (CRS). There were no significant differences between the three types of primary caregivers (See Table 4.2.8). To further analyse the coparenting approach of the parents, and to examine whether male and female primary caregivers differed regarding individual coparenting constructs, a MANOVA was carried out on the primary caregivers' scores on the seven CRS subscales. Pillai's trace was significant, $F(14, 222) = 2.54, p < .005$, $\eta_p^2 = .14$, hence ANOVAs were conducted on each subscale. Univariate tests revealed a significant difference between the three types of primary caregivers for coparenting undermining, $F(2, 116) = 6.35, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .10$. Contrasts between the family types found that stay-at-home fathers rated their partner as significantly more undermining than stay-at-home mothers ($p = .02$), and dual-earner mothers ($p < .005$), with a medium effect size ($\eta_p^2 = .10$). On the six other subscales, there were no significant differences in coparenting between stay-at-home fathers, stay-at-home mothers and dual-earner mothers.

Table 4.2.8. Means, *SD*, *F*, *p* and η^2 Values for Comparisons of Coparenting Subscales between Primary Caregivers

	Parents						ANOVA			
	Stay-at-home Father		Stay-at-home Mother		Dual-Earner Mother		<i>F</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>	η^2
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>				
Coparenting Total (CRS)	4.98	0.65	4.98	0.81	5.03	0.64	0.08	2,116	.92	.00
Coparenting Agreement	4.84	0.95	4.87	1.25	4.65	1.02	0.51	2,116	.60	.01
Endorse Partner Parenting	5.12	0.80	4.91	1.01	5.12	0.86	0.69	2,116	.50	.01
Coparenting Support	4.93	1.00	4.89	1.07	4.94	0.90	0.02	2,116	.98	.00
Coparenting Undermining	0.92	0.83	0.56	0.78	0.39	0.38	6.35	2,116	.00	.10
Coparenting Closeness	4.77	0.88	4.77	1.03	4.82	1.00	0.03	2,116	.97	.00
Exposure to Conflict	0.85	0.88	0.98	1.02	1.12	1.40	0.53	2,116	.59	.01
Division of Labour	4.78	1.36	4.65	1.43	4.96	1.43	0.50	2,116	.61	.01

4.3. Parenting and Parent-Child Interaction

Do primary caregiver fathers differ from secondary caregiver fathers on quality of parenting and parent-child interaction?

Fathers' scores on the Quality of Parenting and Parent-Child Interaction factors were analysed using ANOVAs to compare the three family types (stay-at-home fathers, dual-earner fathers and breadwinner fathers). There was a significant difference between fathers on the Quality of Parenting factor, $F(2, 124) = 5.35$, $p = .01$, $\eta_p^2 = .08$, with a medium effect size. Contrasts revealed a significant difference between stay-at-home fathers and breadwinner fathers ($p < .005$), such that stay-at-home fathers showed higher quality of parenting. The contrast between stay-at-home fathers and dual-earner fathers was not significant. Regarding the quality of Parent-Child Interaction factor, as the difference between fathers approached significance, $F(2, 97) = 2.86$, $p = .06$, $\eta_p^2 = .06$, additional contrasts were run. There was a significant difference between stay-at-home fathers and breadwinner fathers, ($p = .02$), showing that stay-at-home fathers had higher quality parent-child interaction. Stay-at-home fathers did not differ significantly from dual-earners on quality of parent-child interaction.

Table 4.3.1. Means, *SD*, *F*, *p* and η_p^2 Values for Comparisons of the Quality of Parenting and Parent-Child Interaction Factors between Fathers

	Fathers						ANOVA			
	Stay-at-home		Dual-earner		Breadwinner		<i>F</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>	η_p^2
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>				
Quality of Parenting	0.24	0.65	0.00	0.73	-0.23	0.61	5.35	2,124	.01	.08
Parent-child Interaction	0.16	0.45	-0.04	0.62	-0.13	0.51	2.86	2,97	.06	.06

Do male and female primary caregivers differ on quality of parenting and parent-child interaction?

To examine parenting quality between primary caregivers, ANOVAs were run comparing stay-at-home fathers', stay-at-home mothers' and dual-earner mothers' scores on the Quality of Parenting factor and the Parent-Child Interaction factor. There was no significant difference between the three groups of parents on Quality of Parenting (see Table 4.3.2). For the Parent-Child Interaction factor, differences between the three types of parents approached significance, $F(2, 113) = 2.78$, $p = .07$, $\eta_p^2 = .05$, hence additional contrasts were run. Stay-at-home fathers scored higher on quality of parent-child interaction in comparison to dual-earner mothers ($p = .03$), with a small effect size. Stay-at-home fathers and stay-at-home mothers did not differ.

Table 4.3.2. Means, *SD*, *F*, *p* and η_p^2 Values for Comparisons of the Quality of Parenting and Parent-Child Interaction Factors between Primary Caregivers

	Parents						ANOVA			
	Stay-at-home Fathers		Stay-at-home Mothers		Dual-earner Mothers		<i>F</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>	η_p^2
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>				
Quality of Parenting	0.24	0.65	0.03	0.55	-0.03	0.56	2.51	2,124	.09	.04
Parent-child Interaction	0.16	0.45	-0.05	0.62	-0.13	0.58	2.78	2,113	.07	.05

Relationships between quality of parenting, parent-child interaction and parent adjustment

Bivariate correlations were conducted to explore associations between parental adjustment and both the Quality of Parenting and Parent-Child Interaction factors, for fathers and mothers (see Table 4.3.3).

For fathers, the Quality of Parenting factor was significantly negatively correlated with parenting stress ($r = -.54, p < .001$) and marital problems ($r = -.35, p < .001$), such that higher parenting stress and greater marital difficulties were associated with lower quality of parenting. The quality of parenting factor was significantly positively correlated with total support ($r = .32, p < .001$), coparenting ($r = .43, p < .001$), and the Parent-Child Interaction factor ($r = .33, p < .01$), reflecting that higher social support, higher quality coparenting and higher quality parent-child interaction were associated with higher quality of parenting.

For mothers, the Quality of Parenting factor was significantly negatively correlated with parenting stress ($r = -.44, p < .001$) and marital problems ($r = -.24, p = .01$), showing that higher parenting stress and greater marital problems were associated with lower quality of parenting. The Quality of Parenting factor was positively correlated with total support ($r = .18, p = .05$) and coparenting ($r = .27, p < .01$), such that greater support and positive coparenting were associated with higher quality of parenting. For mothers, unlike fathers, the Quality of Parenting factor was not significantly correlated with the quality of Parent-Child Interaction factor ($r = .12, p = .22$).

Table 4.3.3. Pearson's Correlations between Quality of Parenting, Quality of Parent-child Interaction and Parental Psychological Wellbeing Variables

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.
	<i>r</i>	<i>r</i>	<i>r</i>	<i>r</i>	<i>r</i>	<i>r</i>	<i>r</i>
1. Parenting Quality Factor	-	.12	-.17	-.44***	.18*	-.24*	.27**
2. Quality of Interaction Factor	.33**	-	-.06	-.07	.12	-.13	.16
3. Parent Mental Health (EDS and TAI)	-.12	-.01	-	.54***	-.37***	.30**	-.24*
4. Parenting Stress (PSI)	-.54***	-.15	.45***	-	-.28**	.36***	-.33***
5. Total Support (MSPSS)	.32***	.20	-.42***	-.42***	-	-.62***	.48***
6. Marital Quality (GRIMS)	-.35***	-.15	.34***	.41***	-.54***	-	-.54***
7. Coparenting (CRS)	.43***	.18	-.29**	-.44***	.62***	-.80***	-

Note. Mother correlations are above the Diagonal and Father correlations are below the diagonal.

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Do primary caregiver fathers differ from secondary caregiver fathers on parent-child conflict?

To further examine the quality of parent-child relationship between fathers in different family types, Parent-Child Conflict scores from the parent interview (Frequency, Level and Resolution) were entered into a MANOVA. Pillai's trace was not significant; $F(6, 232) = 0.42, p = .87, \eta^2 = .01$, revealing that there were no significant differences between fathers on Frequency of Parent-Child Conflict, Level of Parent-Child Conflict, and Resolution of Parent-Child Conflict (see Table 4.3.4). For all three families, fathers typically experienced conflict with their children 2-3 times a week, with conflict generally lasting around 5 minutes.

Table 4.3.4. Means, *SD*, *F*, *p* and η^2 Values for Comparisons of the Parent-Child Conflict between Fathers

Conflict	Fathers						ANOVA			
	Stay-at-home		Dual-earner		Breadwinner		<i>F</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>	η^2
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>				
Frequency	3.20	1.27	3.48	1.04	3.43	1.08	0.67	2,117	.51	.01
Level	1.38	0.49	1.33	0.57	1.40	0.55	0.20	2,117	.82	.00
Resolution	0.23	0.48	0.15	0.36	0.15	0.36	0.46	2,117	.63	.01

Do primary caregiver fathers differ from primary caregiver mothers on parent-child conflict?

A MANOVA was run on primary caregivers' scores on the three parent-child conflict variables; Frequency of Conflict, Level of Conflict, and Resolution of Conflict. Pillai's trace was not significant; $F(6, 238) = 0.94, p = .47, \eta_p^2 = .02$, showing that no significant differences emerged between stay-at-home fathers, stay-at-home mothers and dual-earner mothers (see Table 4.3.5). Similar to the fathers, conflicts generally occurred 2-3 times a week between primary caregivers and their children, and these episodes were mostly regarded as minor conflicts, lasting around 5 minutes.

Table 4.3.5. Means, *SD*, *F*, *p* and η_p^2 Values for Comparisons of the Parent-Child Conflict between Primary Caregivers

Conflict	Parents						ANOVA			
	Stay-at-home Father		Stay-at-home Mother		Dual-earner Mother		<i>F</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>	η_p^2
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>				
Frequency	3.20	1.27	3.68	1.16	3.46	1.19	1.68	2,120	.19	.03
Level	1.38	0.49	1.48	0.59	1.36	0.58	0.56	2,120	.57	.01
Resolution	0.23	0.48	0.16	0.37	0.18	0.39	0.27	2,120	.76	.01

4.4. Child Adjustment

Children's emotional and behavioural adjustment

One-way ANOVAs were conducted on parents' and teachers' total scores on the SDQ to compare the emotional and behavioural adjustment of children in stay-at-home father, stay-at-home mother and dual-earner families. As shown in Table 4.4.1, total difficulties scores did not significantly differ by family type for either parents' or teachers' reports, and the children were generally well-adjusted.

Table 4.4.1. Means, *SD*, *F*, *p* and η^2 Values for Parent- and Teacher-Reported SDQ in Stay-at-home Father, Stay-at-home Mother and Dual-earner Families

		Family Type						ANOVAs			
		Stay-at-home Father		Stay-at-home Mother		Dual-earner		<i>F</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>	η^2
		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>				
SDQ Total Difficulties Score	Parent	7.33	3.78	8.65	4.05	8.06	3.85	1.19	2,120	.31	.02
	Teacher	5.57	5.34	6.82	5.09	5.94	4.12	0.56	2,95	.57	.01

With regard to total difficulties scores outside of the average range, there were no significant differences in the proportion of children with elevated scores between children in stay-at-home father, stay-at-home mother or dual-earner families as rated by parents, $\chi^2(2) = 0.58$, $p = .75$, and teachers $\chi^2(2) = 1.18$, $p = .55$. The proportion of children scoring above the SDQ cut-off for psychiatric disorder for parents' ratings in stay-at-home father, stay-at-home mother and dual-earner families, respectively, were 3%, 2% and 5%, and for teachers' ratings were, 3%, 9% and 7%, respectively. This shows that a relatively small proportion of children in all family types were experiencing clinical levels of difficulties.

Children's gender role behaviour

Scores on the Pre-School Activities Inventory (PSAI) were entered into ANOVAs for girls and boys separately to examine whether gender role behaviour differed between children in stay-at-home father, stay-at-home mother and dual-earner families. As shown in Table 4.4.2, no significant differences were found between the different family types for girls or boys.

Table 4.4.2. Means, *SD*, *F*, *p* and η_p^2 Values for the PSAI across family types by Gender

	Family Type						ANOVAs			
	Stay-at-home Father		Stay-at-home Mother		Dual-Earner		<i>F</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>	η_p^2
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>				
Girls	36.27	9.55	36.18	8.86	39.98	11.38	1.11	2,70	.33	.03
Boys	58.24	9.76	53.88	9.76	58.02	6.72	1.40	2,47	.26	.06

Children's perceptions of fathers' emotional security and positive parenting

In order to examine whether children's perceptions of Positive Parenting and Emotional Security by their fathers differed between children with stay-at-home fathers, dual-earner fathers and breadwinner fathers, a MANOVA was conducted on the two subscales of the SCARF with family type as the between-subjects factor. Pillai's trace was significant; $F(4, 230) = 5.34, p < .005, \eta_p^2 = .09$, indicating a difference between family types. Subsequently, the univariate tests were explored. As can be seen in Table 4.4.3, there was a significant difference in child-rated Positive Parenting, $F(2, 115) = 10.06, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .15$. Contrasts revealed that children with a stay-at-home father rated their father significantly more positively than children with a breadwinner father ($p < .005$), with a large effect size. There were no significant differences between children's ratings in stay-at-home father and dual-earner families for Positive Parenting. Regarding Emotional Security, there was a significant difference between family types, $F(2, 115) = 4.32, p = .02, \eta_p^2 = .07$, but on examination of the contrasts between family types, there were no significant differences between children in stay-at-home father families compared to the other two family types.

Table 4.4.3. Means, *SD*, *F*, *p* and η_p^2 Values for Comparisons of Child-Rated Emotional Security and Positive Parenting between Fathers

	Fathers						ANOVA			
	Stay-at-home		Dual-earner		Breadwinner		<i>F</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>	η_p^2
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>				
Positive Parenting	14.41	4.02	15.00	3.52	11.48	3.83	10.06	2,115	.00	.15
Emotional Security	10.00	3.82	11.44	3.32	9.00	4.02	4.32	2,115	.02	.07

Children's perceptions of primary caregivers' emotional security and positive parenting

A MANOVA was also run on the two subscales of the SCARF for children's ratings of their primary caregivers with family type as the between-subjects factor. This was to assess whether children rated stay-at-home fathers as similar or different on Positive Parenting and Emotional Security to stay-at-home mothers and dual-earner mothers. Pillai's trace approached significance; $F(4, 230) = 2.26, p = .06, \eta_p^2 = .04$, indicating there might be differences between the family types, hence the univariate analyses were explored. As can be seen in Table 4.4.4, there was a significant difference in child-rated Emotional Security to their primary caregiver; $F(2, 115) = 4.69, p = .01, \eta_p^2 = .08$, with a medium effect size, such that children rated stay-at-home mothers higher on Emotional Security compared to stay-at-home fathers ($p = .01$). Similarly, children rated dual-earner mothers higher on Emotional Security than stay-at-home fathers ($p = .02$). For Positive Parenting, there were no significant differences in how children rated stay-at-home fathers, stay-at-home mothers and dual-earner mothers.

Table 4.4.4. Means, *SD*, *F*, *p* and η_p^2 Values for Comparisons of Child-Rated Emotional Security and Positive Parenting between Primary Caregivers

	Parents						ANOVA			
	Stay-at-home Father		Stay-at-home Mother		Dual-earner Mother		<i>F</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>	η_p^2
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>				
Positive Parenting	14.41	4.02	15.79	3.06	15.51	3.65	1.61	2,115	.21	.03
Emotional Security	10.00	3.82	12.12	2.67	11.80	3.28	4.69	2,115	.01	.08

Predicting child adjustment

In order to assess whether parenting and parent wellbeing were associated with differences in child adjustment, as assessed by the SDQ, predictors of child adjustment were examined. As there were no significant differences between the three family types on SDQ scores, predictors other than family type were explored.

In the first instance, correlations were conducted between demographic variables and the total SDQ scores for mothers and fathers separately. Child gender was significantly correlated with mother-rated total SDQ difficulties ($r = .24, p = .01$), indicating greater difficulties for boys, and was significantly negatively correlated with father's age ($r = -.18, p = .05$). For father-rated SDQ scores, these correlations were not significant for either child gender ($r = .15, p = .11$) and father's age ($r = -.90, p = .35$). Correlations were then conducted between father and mother rated SDQ scores separately with parental psychological wellbeing variables (Mental Health, PSI, MSPSS, GRIMS and CRS), the two parenting factors (Quality of Parenting and Parent-Child Interaction) and the interview variables on Parent-Child Conflict (Frequency, Level and Resolution). The correlations are displayed in Table 4.4.5.

SDQ scores were positively correlated with the PSI for mothers ($r = .49, p < .001$) and fathers ($r = .56, p < .001$), and Frequency of Parent-Child Conflict for mothers ($r = .25, p = .01$) and fathers ($r = .25, p = .01$), showing higher parenting stress and higher conflict was associated with greater child difficulties. SDQ scores were also positively correlated with Mental Health for mothers, whereby higher levels of child adjustment problems were associated with higher levels of parental mental health problems ($r = .26, p < .01$), and lack of Resolution of Parent-Child Conflict ($r = .27, p < .01$), such that more conflicts going unresolved was associated with greater child adjustment problems. For fathers, SDQ total difficulties were negatively associated with the Quality of Parenting factor ($r = -.33, p < .001$), and were negatively correlated with the MSPSS ($r = -.20, p = .03$) and

CRS ($r = -.25$, $p = .01$), showing that lower quality parenting, lower social support and lower coparenting quality were associated with higher levels of child difficulties.

Table 4.4.5. Pearson's Correlations between SDQ Total Difficulties scores, Parental Wellbeing Variables, Parenting Variables and Parent-Child Relationship Variables for Fathers and Mothers.

	Father-rated SDQ	Mother-rated SDQ
	<i>r</i>	<i>r</i>
Parenting Quality Factor	-.33***	-.11
Quality of Interaction Factor	.03	.14
Mental Health (EDS and TAI)	.09	.26**
Parenting Stress (PSI)	.56***	.49***
Social Support (MSPSS)	-.20*	-.00
Marital Quality (GRIMS)	.11	.01
Coparenting (CRS)	-.25*	-.01
Frequency of Parent-Child Conflict	.25**	.25**
Level of Parent-Child Conflict	.01	.17
Resolution of Parent-Child Conflict	.12	.27**

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

A multi-level model using fathers' and mothers' data was then conducted to further explore predictors of child adjustment. Predictors were chosen theoretically and empirically only if they were significantly correlated with total SDQ scores for either mothers or fathers. Therefore, the Quality of Parenting factor, PSI, Parent Mental Health, Frequency of Parent-Child Conflict and Resolution of Parent-Child Conflict were included alongside child gender.

At the within-couple level, father and mother rated total SDQ scores were regressed on to the Quality of Parenting factor, Parenting Stress (PSI), Parent Mental Health, Frequency of Parent-Child Conflict and Resolution of Parent-Child Conflict, and child gender at the between-family level. The Quality of Parenting factor was permitted to covary with Parent Mental Health, Parenting Stress, and the Frequency of Conflict, and Parenting Stress was permitted to covary with Parent Mental Health and Frequency of Conflict. The model showed acceptable fit, RMSEA = 0.07, CFI = 0.97, TLI = 0.89. As illustrated in Table 4.4.6, Parenting Stress, Standardized Estimate [95%CI] = 0.65 [0.51, 0.78], was significantly positively related to children's adjustment problems, and Frequency of Parent-Child Conflict, Standardized Estimate [95%CI] = 0.13 [0.02, 0.24], was marginally positively related to children's adjustment problems. The model indicated that variables at the within-couple level explained approximately 37% of the variance in children's total difficulties scores on the SDQ. At the between-family level, child gender was not found to be a significant predictor of total SDQ scores and only explained 3% of the variance in children's adjustment problems. Overall, this indicates that parents who reported higher levels of stress and greater parent-child conflict, irrespective of their gender or level of involvement in parenting, were more likely to have children with higher levels of adjustment difficulties.

Table 4.4.6. Multi-Level Model Parameter Estimates

	SDQ Total Difficulties		
	Est.	S.E.	Std. Est.
Within Couple			
Quality of Parenting Factor	0.44	.45	.08
Parenting Stress (PSI)	0.15	.02	.65***
Parent Mental Health (EDS and TAI)	-0.03	.02	-.12
Frequency of Parent-Child Conflict	0.37	.19	.13*
Resolution of Parent-Child Conflict	1.12	.68	.12
Between Couple			
Child Gender	0.90	.61	.18

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

5. Discussion

This thesis firstly set out to examine stay-at-home fathers' experiences of their non-traditional gender role, to better understand fathers' motivations for their role, and their experiences of stigma and support. Secondly, the thesis aimed to examine the functioning of stay-at-home father families, through exploring parent psychological wellbeing, parenting, and child adjustment in comparison to families with a female primary caregiver, to provide insight into the influence of parent gender and caregiver status on parents and children.

5.1. Stay-at-home Fathers' Experiences of their Role

The initial question that this thesis sought to address was what motivates fathers to become stay-at-home parents. Personal reasons as well as external circumstances contributing to the decision were examined. There were many similarities across the accounts of stay-at-home fathers and stay-at-home mothers; financial or employment considerations, and the desire to be highly involved in the everyday caregiving for their children, were found to be important for fathers and mothers alike. However, subtle differences emerged between fathers' and mothers' reasons, representing the lasting influence of gendered expectations on parent roles.

For fathers, the most common reason for becoming a primary caregiver related to economic considerations, such as their spouse having a higher earning potential or more stable employment circumstances, or the high cost of childcare. This reflects the findings of an early study of stay-at-home fathers, which showed that economic considerations were the leading factor in becoming a stay-at-home parent (Davis, 1986). The present findings are also in line with the largest US study of stay-at-home fathers, which reported that economic issues, such as their partner's higher earning potential, were influential in the decision-making process of these fathers (Rochlen et al., 2010), and wider research on stay-at-home fathers which cite family finance reasons as the primary motivation for

becoming a stay-at-home father (Chesley, 2011; Doucet, 2006; Kramer, Kelly & McCulloch, 2015; Latshaw, 2011; Zimmerman, 2000). As with the present sample, previous studies have indicated that the assessment of which parent has greater earning potential is important in the decision of which parent should be the main wage earner, and which parent should be the primary caregiver (Kramer & Kramer, 2016). Together, these findings indicate that, for many stay-at-home father families, there is a complete role reversal from the traditional family in which the father is perceived as more suited to be the breadwinner.

Several interpretations are offered to explain the finding that some fathers become stay-at-home parents due to economic reasons. On the one hand, this may seem to suggest greater gender equality, and a lessening of the gender pay gap. On the other hand, such findings could also reflect inadequate governmental childcare provision in the UK, in that the onus is on families to provide childcare for their children, unlike in Scandinavia where the state plays a bigger role in terms of heavily subsidised childcare and some of the highest government budgets for spending on families and children in Europe (Stanfors & Larsson, 2014). The role of poor state provision of childcare has also previously been identified as an important issue to consider in research on stay-at-home parents (Doucet & Merla, 2007). Due to the current system of expensive childcare in the UK whose cost is rising above the rate of inflation (Rutter, 2015), and the findings of the present study, it is possible that it will continue to be necessary for a large number of families to have a stay-at-home parent to provide requisite levels of childcare. The finding that stay-at-home father families are entering this role due to financial necessity is important, as it could be suggestive that more government provided childcare could help families address their caregiving arrangements to better suit their preferences.

The second most commonly cited reason for becoming a stay-at-home parent for fathers was workplace stressors. This attests to the difficulties many parents face with balancing work, and work-related stress, with their family commitments. Parents experiencing difficulties in establishing work/life balance have been increasingly documented and have received academic interest in recent

years (Fleetwood, 2007). That these fathers left the employment market in order to establish a more desirable balance suggests that greater attention should be paid to the wellbeing of parents in the workplace.

That the desire to be highly involved in caregiving was reported as the most important reason for seven of the fathers (17%) in the present study is interesting. This reason was identified as the most frequently cited in Fischer and Anderson's (2012) study of 35 US stay-at-home fathers. That these men – across two studies, in two different countries – explain their motivation to be a primary caregiving father as a desire appears to reflect changes in the wider discourse on fathering, and the rise of the new image of the nurturing father (McGill, 2014). Further, such findings may be said to be reflective of an increased social acceptability, over the past few decades, of fathers being highly involved parents, and the concomitant increase in mothers working full-time. In keeping with recent research (Lee & Lee, 2016; Solomon, 2014), the findings of the present study seem to suggest that at least some of the men who choose to take on primary caregiving responsibilities are willing to openly discuss their wish to be a highly involved parent, rather than a financial provider.

The present study sought to directly compare stay-at-home fathers' and stay-at-home mothers' motivations for becoming a primary caregiving parent. This stands in contrast to much of the previous research on stay-at-home parents, as only a few studies have compared stay-at-home fathers to stay-at-home mothers (Zimmerman, 2000; Kramer, Kelly & McCulloch, 2015). It is noteworthy that, in the present study, there were fathers and mothers who reported always wanting to be the primary caregiver, though a slightly higher proportion of mothers (26%) than fathers (17%) said this was a leading factor in their decision. This appears to be in line with gendered assumptions of caregiving roles that are pervasive in society (Pleck, 1995). Yet, the present findings differ from Zimmerman's (2000) study, which found more notable differences between the accounts of stay-at-home fathers and mothers, insofar as all the fathers cited financial considerations as the reason for taking on the stay-at-home parent role, whereas stay-at-home mothers reported that religious and family

considerations influenced their decision. In contrast to Zimmerman's research, comprised of two separate samples, the present study was designed to be comparative at the outset. The comparison groups of this study were similar with regards to demographic characteristics, and in terms of the length of time stay-at-home parents had been in their role. As such, these findings provide a more robust insight into the similarities, and indeed differences, between stay-at-home mothers and fathers than previous research has allowed.

In the present study, many fathers reported having had discussions with their wives about parenting roles, highlighting their active decision-making about primary caregiving. It is interesting that a few of the mothers reported that, for their family, the decision for her to be a stay-at-home parent was not one that was actively discussed. Instead, these mothers stated that they felt it was always assumed that they would take on the primary caregiver role. In contrast, none of the fathers stated that their adoption of this role occurred without active discussion within their family. It is conceivable that as parents in stay-at-home father families are disrupting the traditional division of household labour, they have longer, more in-depth conversations about the reasons for taking on their chosen parental roles. This is noteworthy considering the high level of adjustment these families show, despite taking on a non-traditional gender role, a finding that may perhaps reflect the careful consideration family members take in their discussions of which parental roles to adopt. However, this decision-making process is not portrayed in media representations of stay-at-home fathers, and instead primary caregiving men are often depicted as having no choice in the matter (Stevens, 2015), representing a juxtaposition between the lived experiences of stay-at-home fathers and the ways in which public discourse portrays these experiences.

The influence of gendered expectations of parenting roles appeared more clearly in the accounts of the mothers in the present study compared to the fathers. A few of the mothers expressed a tension between excelling at being a mother, and excelling in the workplace, hence they made the decision to resign from paid employment. This can be understood within the framework of intensive

mothering ideology, as theorised by Hays (1996), such that the same standards of being a highly involved mother, and the more involved parent, continue to apply to all mothers, regardless of their employment status. This is echoed by Stone and Lovejoy's (2004) study of stay-at-home mothers who previously had highly successful professional careers, which also pointed to a 'double bind' between being an involved parent and a successful, career-driven employee. Using Stone and Lovejoy's typology, the three mothers in the present study, who reflected on the tension between their successful jobs and trying to be a highly involved mother, could be described as 'new traditionalists': mothers who had planned and chosen to become stay-at-home parents during the midst of their progressing professional careers. These mothers, and so their families, present a very different image to that of the role-reversal families with stay-at-home fathers. As such, these findings highlight the ongoing social expectation that mothers are expected to be highly involved in caregiving.

In another application of intensive parenting ideology, several stay-at-home fathers and mothers reported that they chose to take on the role due to perceiving it to be beneficial for their family, and in particular, for their children's development. These findings suggest that the view that having a highly involved parent is valuable for child development is persuasive to stay-at-home fathers, not just stay-at-home mothers. Corroborated by previous work on stay-at-home fathers which reported fathers' narratives to include references to intensive parenting ideology (Solomon, 2014), this finding perhaps reflects a further change in ideas about fatherhood and paternal involvement.

Regarding stay-at-home fathers' experiences of their non-traditional gender role, thematic analysis was used to explore the ways in which the fathers described their role as a male primary caregiver and the way they narrated their experiences. The analysis revealed that the fathers often used multiple strategies of meaning-making to describe and understand their role.

The strategies adopted by the fathers included considering their role as one of a parent, rather than focusing on fathering specifically, which was thematised as *passively degendering* their parental role. This finding is of significance because the strategy of seeing themselves as a parent, rather than

a father, can be likened to the process of undoing gender (Deutsch, 2007). According to 'doing gender' theory (West & Zimmerman, 1987), gender scripts are constantly enacted by an individual's behaviours, yet individuals also have the ability to move away from gendered expectations, as demonstrated by some of the fathers in the present study. By not emphasising the differences between their role and the role that could be occupied by a mother, fathers' meaning-making arguably leads to a lessening of 'gender polarisation' (Bem, 1993, p. 194), thus decreasing the divide of men and women into public and domestic spheres, respectively. Language has social and political meaning, thus the finding that some fathers used more gender-neutral definitions of parenting in their narratives, or described themselves as adopting what is typically thought of as the maternal role (i.e. the 'symbolic feminine', Friedman, 1993), arguably contributes to a wider movement toward fluidity in parenting roles in parallel with greater fluidity in gender roles. These findings are in line with research on fathers beyond the topic of stay-at-home fathering, which has reported that fathers are embracing more nurturing qualities in their characterisation of fatherhood. For example, first-time Finnish fathers were found to consistently refer to nurturing when asked to articulate their parenting role (Eerola, 2014), and likewise, US fathers in dual-earner households have been found to redefine fatherhood due to experiences of care (Coltrane, 1996). The present study, alongside previous research, indicates that highly involved fathers across different parenting contexts are adopting more nurturing definitions of fatherhood.

From a caring masculinities perspective, some of the fathers in the present study appear to be rejecting dominant forms of masculinity in order to incorporate their role as a caregiver into their masculinity. This is, in part, reflective of the qualitative content analysis which reported that a subgroup of fathers in the present study explicitly stated their desire to be the primary caregiver. Elliott (2016) theorised that there are three key ways in which men are considered to subscribe to caring masculinities; rejecting domination, embracing emotional care and incorporating caring qualities into a new conceptualisation of masculinity. In addition to the fathers who engaged in the strategy of *active degendering*, involving for instance raising their children with gender-neutral values,

several of the fathers drew on the language of involved parenting to describe their experience of fathering, highlighting the importance of being loving, nurturing and enabling development. These fathers also placed less emphasis on the importance of paid work for their identity than the group of fathers in the present sample who emphasised fathering over parenting. This suggests that these fathers are embracing emotional care and using these experiences to create a new masculine identity that reflects their nurturing approach to parenting. In this way, the majority of the fathers in the present study showed some rejection of hegemonic masculinity, which complements previous literature on the fluid nature of masculinity (Connell, 2000). The breaking down of the binaries of femininity/masculinity and caring/providing has also been demonstrated in previous research on stay-at-home fathers and examined through the use of caring masculinities theory (Lee & Lee, 2016; Riggs, Hunter, & Augoustinos, 2017). Hence extant studies and the present findings are suggestive of a general movement toward more nuanced definitions of masculinity that incorporate qualities which are not traditionally masculine.

The present group of fathers, however, cannot be labelled as 'postgender', to coin a term adopted by Cowdery and Knudson-Martin (2005), as there was still evidence of subscribing to gendered discourses on fathering within their narratives. This is shown through one of the other strategies for meaning-making used by some, but not all, of the fathers, which was to highlight the ways in which they perceived their role to be specifically a *father*, rather than that of a parent of any gender. There were several fathers who evoked essentialising depictions of mothers and fathers and suggested that children 'need' a mother. This echoes the findings of Doucet's (2004) study, whereby the majority of fathers described differences between mothers and fathers that, in particular, highlighted the importance of biological processes, such as pregnancy and breastfeeding, to nurturing parenting, which can be seen as a strategy fathers used to avoid being perceived as feminine. A similar strategy was adopted by some of the fathers in the present sample, portraying how some men still subscribe to stereotypical ideas on mothers and fathers. The parallels between these two studies are striking, considering the two different socio-cultural contexts and the length of time between the

studies, and could be said to reflect the ongoing tension men can often feel with 'needing' to conform to hegemonic masculine ideals (Connell, 2000).

Some of the fathers in the current study presented caregiving as work, through the work-related terminology they used in their descriptions of their parental role. These fathers appeared to weave the status symbol of working into their depictions of what it is like to be a stay-at-home father, thereby evoking consideration of gender role strain theory (Pleck, 1995). As outlined previously, this theory suggests that transgressing gender norms can cause psychological strain on an individual. In particular, it is theorised that negative feelings stemming from gender role strain can elicit gender deviance neutralisation, which occurs when a person believes they are transgressing gender norms and therefore compensate for this deviance by adopting a more traditional approach to a different aspect of their gender identity (Evertsson & Nermo, 2004; Kurian, 2018). The present findings suggest that some stay-at-home fathers legitimise their role as a stay-at-home parent by emphasising their maintenance of a connection to the 'masculine world', and specifically by deeming care work as similar to paid work. This is corroborated by previous research, which has found primary caregiving fathers to emphasise their involvement in forms of unpaid, stereotypically male forms of work, such as house improvements (Doucet, 2006), in order to curate an identity as a working man. Furthermore, in Lee and Lee's (2016) study, several fathers described being a stay-at-home father as a full-time job, further reflecting the desire to stay connected to paid work, and relatedly, to use workplace terminology to articulate their role. Notably, there was a lack of such references in the narratives of female primary caregivers in Garey's (1999) work. It is arguable that the use of this strategy for meaning-making may be characteristic of the types of men who take part in research on stay-at-home fathers; as Christiansen and Palkovitz (2001) stated, economic work is particularly important for identity construction amongst middle-class fathers. Therefore, more socially diverse groups of primary caregiving men may engage with different strategies for making sense of their role. Nevertheless, in the decade and a half since Doucet's (2004) seminal study, the narrative of working is still evident amongst some stay-at-home fathers.

It could be interpreted as somewhat concerning that a subsection of the fathers narrated their experiences of caregiving within the framework of hegemonic masculinity, as Hunter, Riggs and Augoustinos (2017) argue that constant references of caregiving as masculine may serve to isolate men who do not feel strongly about holding a traditional masculine identity. Additionally, the emphasis on the differences between mothers and fathers may serve to prevent both parents being viewed as equals. However, multiple interpretations can be conceived from the duality of fathers either rejecting, or conforming to, traditional notions of masculine fatherhood. That the fathers in the present study used these multiple strategies, often interchangeably, could perhaps be seen as a reflection of them being awarded freedom to subscribe to either traditional or non-traditional forms of masculinity, and, as Lee and Lee (2016) describe, a lack of 'strict allegiance' to gender roles. In this way, it could be argued that it is not necessarily problematic that some elements of hegemonic masculinity remain, as it could simply reflect that fathers have chosen the parts of hegemonic masculinity they feel are meaningful to adhere to. Overall, the analysis aimed to examine whether gender is an important aspect of fathers' experiences of primary caregiving. It seems so – either in trying to act in line with gendered expectations or move away from them, the influence of gender is ubiquitous.

The thematic analysis also sought to explore the fathers' experiences of stigma, which were found to be commonplace; all fathers reported at least one incidence of prejudice. The findings of this study regarding stigmatisation therefore corroborate evidence of the experiences of stay-at-home fathers in several early, in-depth studies whereby social isolation was a recurrent theme (Robertson & Verschelden, 1993; Smith, 1998). The present findings also reflect those of Farough (2015), whose research showed that stay-at-home fathers experience suspicion from, and are ostracised by, stay-at-home mothers, as well as research showing that stigma is felt particularly in child-focused public places such as playgrounds (Ammari & Schoenebeck, 2016). Feelings of isolation were also reported by both stay-at-home fathers and mothers in Zimmerman's (2000) study and also in Lee and Lee's (2016) research on stay-at-home fathers. Together, previous research and the current findings

highlight the pervasive nature of stigma against stay-at-home fathers, due to occupying a non-traditional gender role, across different countries and socio-cultural contexts.

Importantly, the present findings offer a new interpretation of stigmatising experiences. The fathers' accounts suggested that stigma acted at several different levels, which were termed *ambient*, *actual* and *imagined*, and that these different forms of stigma appeared to reinforce one another. Several of the fathers described the relatively common occurrence of gender pejoratives, such as being labelled as a babysitter. Such findings emphasise how gendered expectations play out on an interactional level (West & Zimmerman, 1987), such that gender differences are reinforced through social relations and exchanges, a reflection of *actual* stigma. A further site of stigma commented upon by the fathers was the media, regarded as *ambient* stigma. As Stevens (2015) discussed, gendered discourses in the mass media influence gender roles and behaviours, and the image of the father solely as a secondary caregiver is a harmful one. The negative images of fathers constantly portrayed by the media as less competent than their female counterparts are widespread (for example, *Incredibles 2*, *Mr Mom*, *Mrs Doubtfire*, *Daddy Daycare* and *Motherland*). The fathers in the present study felt the weight of these negative expectations, in line Dermott's (2008) assertion that it is difficult for fathers to fully embody a new, involved, 'intimate' father role whilst primacy is still given to motherhood, through social attitudes and discourse. These findings deserve attention as they point to a clear source of support that the fathers would benefit from; more positive media representations. Moreover, beyond being of interest to stay-at-home fathers, the current findings suggest that more research is needed to explore how parents in other non-traditional gender roles, such as single fathers and gay fathers, can best be supported in order to feel valued and appropriately represented.

The findings of the present study additionally highlight the importance of Snitker's (2018) identification of 'places' being an important barrier to integration for fathers. With regards to the finding that the different forms of stigma (ambient, actual and imagined) centred around the idea of different spaces and places that are more welcoming to mothers than fathers, Snitker (2018) also

described how parenting groups designed for mothers play a key part in the experiences of stay-at-home fathers. These parallels are of interest considering the differences between the two samples of the studies; Snitker's (2018) study involved fathers who were part of the National At-Home Dad Network in the US, which may have produced heightened experiences of stigma, as these fathers elected to be part of a support group specifically for stay-at-home fathers. The present study elaborates on the findings of previous research by investigating experiences of prejudice amongst fathers who are not part of an extensive support network, yet simultaneously reaffirms previous scholarship outlining the high volume of stigma these fathers experience.

Several of the fathers in the current study received excessive praise and were positioned as *gender warriors* by other people, who regarded them as role models for other men. Some fathers described the positive discrimination they sometimes received, and some of the terms the fathers used to describe their role; 'unicorn', 'enigma', and 'novelty', reflect the status afforded to them by some members of the public. This echoes the findings of Solomon's (2014) study of stay-at-home fathers, which found that some of the fathers took pride in their caregiving role, and described the high volume of support they had received. In particular, one father was quoted to have felt like a 'rockstar'. In one interpretation of the current findings, such experiences reflect a form of privilege, insofar as the praise and feedback fathers receive is not that which mothers have been shown to typically experience, as the latter are expected to 'naturally' be good at parenting. In a second interpretation, such reflections on their 'rarity' seemed to be a means by which some fathers engaged in meaning-making about their parental role; understanding themselves as gender warriors who counter hegemonic masculine ideals and ingrained gender roles. At the same time, the fact that some fathers expressed unease over the idealised view of them perceived to be held by some members of the public attests to their meaning-making as 'unwilling' warriors of a new gender-egalitarian agenda in parenting. The dichotomy of representations of stay-at-home fathers as, on the one hand, seen as progressive, versus those who are stigmatised for not adopting a traditionally masculine role, has been previously commented on by Doucet (2006). The narratives of the fathers in the present study

highlight that although social praise may be given for occupying a non-traditional role, this position can sometimes be uncomfortable, and one that arguably 'others' stay-at-home dads. Instead of regarding praise as the opposite to stigma, these two concepts can be interpreted as different ways of expressing the fundamental social attitude that it is unusual for fathers to be highly involved parents and that mothers are considered better at caregiving.

The stay-at-home fathers in the present study were mainly white (90%) and well-educated (68% had a BA degree or had also completed postgraduate studies), hence had a status that is not afforded to everyone. Some of the fathers thought about how their social position may have affected their experience of their role. In keeping with this, Lorber (2005) emphasised the importance of the intersectionality between gender and other social categories in feminist thought, and arguably the application of intersectional considerations is highly relevant to the study of men in primary caregiving roles. Previous research has highlighted that while stay-at-home fathers face stigma, they also experience gender privilege, economic privilege and heterosexual privilege (Medved, 2016; Rushing & Powell, 2014; Snitker, 2018), which also appears to be true for the present sample. These gender, economic, and heterosexual privileges are reflective of the fathers' socio-economic position.

The idea that the fathers' high socio-economic status, alongside the status afforded to men, influenced the fathers' experience is one that warrants further exploration. Regarding privilege, Snitker (2018) discussed how, in the narratives of US stay-at-home fathers, it appeared that the privilege associated with being a white educated man influenced their experience of stay-at-home fathering, by affording them the ability to shape the extent to which they wanted to resist, or conform to, masculine identities. The present study furthers Snitker's (2018) important initial insights in two key ways. Firstly, the benefits of the fathers' socio-economic position arguably extend even further, in terms of creating a barrier to help fathers be resilient to the stigma they face. Fathers in the present study reported feeling able to ignore criticism and several fathers highlighted how they felt it was their agenda to seek out support (serving as evidence of their perceived agency), experiences that are likely

shaped by educated men's status in society. Secondly, the findings of the present study – that stay-at-home fathers overall show a high level of wellbeing – seem to indicate that there is a probable relationship between the stigma experienced, the fathers' socio-economic position (which acts as a buffer), and subsequent adjustment. This points to the possibility of establishing a more nuanced understanding of these fathers' experiences by considering the benefits of their socio-economic position. Nonetheless, as the present data only affords an exploratory investigation of this issue, future research is needed to establish the nature of this relationship and whether this holds true for other studies of stay-at-home fathers.

The proposed relationship between stigma, the fathers' socio-economic position and adjustment can be considered within the context of Risk and Resilience theory (Masten & Reed, 2002). Resilience, meaning to 'bounce back', describes individuals showing positive adjustment despite adversity. While some fathers in the current study described pervasive experiences of stigma, as also found in previous qualitative research (Ammari & Schoenebeck, 2016; Rochlen, McKelley, & Whittaker, 2010; Zimmerman, 2000), it is noteworthy that the present study and previous quantitative studies have shown stay-at-home fathers to report high levels of wellbeing (Rochlen, McKelley, et al., 2008). This indicates that the fathers appear to demonstrate resilience against the risks posed against their wellbeing. A possible hypothesis that future research needs to test is whether the fathers' socio-economic position affords them resilience. Stay-at-home father research has almost exclusively used masculinities theories, such as Gender Role Strain, Doing Gender and, most recently, Caring Masculinities, to guide research. Although these theories are critically important for the study of experiences of men, the use of other theoretical standpoints, and the use of more integrated methodologies, could help guide research on primary caregiving fathers as a means to understand these parents' complex and multi-faceted experiences.

An alternative explanation comes from Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Instead of resilience being afforded by the individual characteristics of stay-at-home fathers (e.g.

gender, sexuality), microsystem influences, such as supportive spouses, family and friends, may be more influential in the development of resilience to stigma. The quantitative analyses of the present study showed stay-at-home fathers to experience high social support and high marital quality. It is likely that the strong support within the family system and immediate social circles helped fathers cope with stigma. Support for this explanation is provided by research on social capital. Social capital, comprised of social support, social networks, and social trust (Ferlander, 2007), provides individuals with the means to cope with adverse experiences and has positive knock-on effects for mental health (Veenstra, 2001). This may also explain the high level of adjustment in other family forms subject to stigma (e.g. single mothers by choice and same-sex parent families, see Golombok (2015) for a review). Thus, a consideration of stay-at-home fathers' social capital may offer an explanation as to why the fathers' narratives were replete with experiences of stigmatisation, yet they generally showed positive wellbeing.

Overall, although the fathers experience a certain degree of status and power, and therefore are not as stigmatised as parents who experience greater 'difference' from the norm, the findings nevertheless indicate that any parent who does not fit into gendered expectations may struggle due to stigma and social isolation. That these fathers all experienced some form of stigma, whether it was subtle or overt, indicates that much more work needs to be done in terms of increasing the visibility of parents who feel they do not conform, and providing greater support for these groups.

5.2. Parental Wellbeing

The second over-arching aim of this thesis was to examine family functioning in stay-at-home father families. This was first addressed by analysing the psychological adjustment of stay-at-home fathers in comparison to parents in other family forms.

Similarities and differences between primary caregiver fathers and secondary caregiver fathers

While stay-at-home fathers were hypothesised to show a higher level of mental health difficulties than men who are not primary caregivers, due to the potential of experiencing stress and stigma from deviating from gender norms, very few differences emerged between stay-at-home fathers' reports of their mental health compared to the other fathers. There were no significant differences between stay-at-home, dual-earner and breadwinner fathers for depression, and only two stay-at-home fathers had scores which reflected a clinical level of depression. The low levels of depression amongst the fathers in all of the family types could be due to under-reporting of psychiatric disorders by men (Addis & Mahalik, 2003). However, the current findings are in line with those of Rochlen et al. (2008), whose survey of US stay-at-home fathers reported moderate to low psychological distress amongst the fathers. Rochlen et al.'s study used a generic questionnaire of wellbeing, comprising items covering, for example, being happy in one's personal life. In contrast, the current study used reliable and valid measures of specific mental health constructs, such as depression and anxiety, and explored both the prevalence of mental health problems and the number of parents whose scores were above the cut-off for elevated difficulties. As little research exists on the mental health of stay-at-home fathers, the present study adds to the understanding of the wellbeing of men taking on non-traditional gender roles.

Regarding the other measures of psychological wellbeing, although there were no differences in the total anxiety score on the TAI between fathers, more stay-at-home fathers obtained scores above the clinical cut-off compared to both dual-earner fathers and breadwinner fathers. It is probable

that the stigmatising experiences reported in the qualitative analyses may have played a role in the elevated levels of anxiety reported by stay-at-home fathers, as associations have been previously reported between stigma and mental health (Price-Robertson, Reupert & Maybery, 2015), self-esteem (Crocker, 1999; Link, Struening, Neese-Todd, Asmussen, & Phelan, 2001) and quality of life (Rosenfield, 1997). For example, previous research has found that gay fathers who reported greater stigma sensitivity also experienced elevated parental stress (Tornello et al., 2011), indicating a likely relationship between stigma associated with minority identities and poorer mental health. As such, it is possible that the fathers in the present study who experienced stigma due to their status as a stay-at-home father could have felt more anxious as a result. The present study adopted an in-depth qualitative approach to explore fathers' experiences of stigma. For this reason, a quantitative measure of stigma was not administered. In order to investigate whether the stay-at-home fathers who had the highest levels of anxiety experienced more stigma than stay-at-home fathers with lower anxiety, a useful addition to future research would be to use both quantitative and qualitative approaches to examine stigma. These findings suggest that whilst stay-at-home fathers generally showed positive wellbeing, there are some aspects of their mental health that the fathers are struggling with, and attention in policy and research should be afforded to this issue²⁰.

There were no differences in parenting stress between fathers in different family types for both the total score and the number of fathers scoring above the cut-off. Across the sample, the mean level of total stress for each group indicated scores that fell within the normal range of parenting stress, as reported by Abidin (1995). The mean score for stay-at-home fathers in the present sample is also comparable to scores for gay fathers in Tornello, Farr, & Patterson's (2011) study of same-sex parents, indicating normative levels of parenting stress in the present sample, and that these scores are in line with wider research on male primary caregivers. These findings are promising as they suggest stay-at-home fathers are coping well with the demands of their primary caregiver role

²⁰ See section 5.5

regarding parenting stress. Furthermore, as there are no previous reports on parenting stress within stay-at-home father families, the present study adds to the small body of literature on stay-at-home fathers' psychological wellbeing.

With regards to social support, fathers across the three family types did not significantly differ in terms of whether they were categorised into receiving high or low/moderate social support, and most fathers reported high social support. In light of the isolation reported by fathers in the qualitative analysis, it is interesting to note that there were no differences in the level of perceived social support between fathers. One explanation could be that the MSPSS (Zimet et al., 1988) is comprised of questions relating to significant other, family and friend support. In the thematic analysis, findings revealed that the most negative interactions were with members of the general public. Hence, even though the fathers reported negative social interactions with those less socially close to them, it appears that their partners, family and friends are providing them with the support they need. In terms of the generally high level of social support reported by stay-at-home fathers in the present sample, this finding diverges from that of Rochlen et al. (2008), who found that stay-at-home fathers received significantly less social support from friends than college men. However, college-aged men are usually at a very different life stage than stay-at-home fathers. In contrast, the present research used analogous groups of men to compare to stay-at-home fathers, as they were also fathers with children in the same age range. Hence, the present study offers a more appropriate control group.

When fathers' reports of seeking professional help for mental health concerns were explored, stay-at-home fathers were significantly more likely to seek psychological support than dual-earner fathers, yet this was not significantly different from breadwinner fathers. This finding makes sense in the context of the elevated levels of anxiety reported by stay-at-home fathers, in that this group appears to be recognising the difficulties they face and seek support. Further, this finding could in part explain the overall positive wellbeing reported by the fathers despite their elevated anxiety, as they have support networks in place for them – this is reflected through, firstly, the high social support

scores and, secondly, the apparent willingness to seek professional support compared to dual-earner fathers. This runs counter to the findings of research showing that men are significantly less likely than women to seek help from healthcare providers for mental health concerns (Addis & Mahalik, 2003; Vogel, Wester, Hammer, & Downing-Matibag, 2014), and may suggest that men who occupy non-traditional gender roles may be more willing to seek help compared to men in traditional roles. This assumption warrants further investigation in future research.

Stay-at-home fathers did not differ in their conformity to masculine norms in comparison to fathers in dual-earner or stay-at-home mother families. This is in line with previous research; no significant differences were found using the same measure on a larger sample of stay-at-home fathers when comparing their scores to men in full-time employment (Rochlen, McKelley et al., 2008). Further, Fischer and Anderson (2012) reported that stay-at-home fathers show similar levels of masculine characteristics compared to men in full-time employment. These findings, taken together, suggest that stay-at-home fathers still adhere to many gender norms despite their non-traditional caregiving role. Interestingly, the thematic analysis revealed that the provider status was the part of the male gender role that the fathers appeared to feel most tension with, which contributed to experiences of gender role strain. In contrast, the CMNI short-form questionnaire (Mahalik et al., 2003) is comprised of items covering, for example, winning, sexual orientation and risk-taking, and does not include items on being a financial provider. This is important for several reasons; firstly, it demonstrates the worth of exploring male norms both quantitatively and qualitatively as in the present work, and, secondly, shows how fathers in non-traditional gender roles simultaneously reject some aspects of masculinity while conforming to others, a finding which is recurrent within research in this field (Doucet, 2004; Medved, 2016; Snitker, 2018).

Primary and secondary caregiver fathers reported low levels of relationship problems and no differences emerged between family types. Similarly, when comparing the total score on the CRS between fathers, no differences were found, and fathers across the family types generally reported

high levels of positive coparenting. However, there were significant differences on two of the subscales; coparenting support and division of labour. The finding that stay-at-home fathers rated their spouse as more supportive of their parenting approach than breadwinner fathers may reflect the higher quality of parenting of stay-at-home fathers compared to breadwinner fathers. As a result, the wives of stay-at-home fathers may feel more confident in their partners' parenting compared to families with fathers with lower involvement in caregiving. Previous qualitative research has documented that breadwinner mothers feel happy with their partner's parenting (Rushing & Powell, 2014), hence the present study is consistent with these findings, yet offers a new empirical insight into the coparenting approach of these families. Regarding the division of labour, the finding that stay-at-home fathers reported that their partner did not contribute as much to household tasks compared to how the other two types of fathers rated their partners, diverges from the 'domestic hand-off' effect found by Latshaw and Hale (2016). The domestic hand-off refers to stay-at-home fathers handing over domestic chores to their spouse when they return from work. This did not appear to be true for the present study, as stay-at-home fathers rated themselves as contributing more to domestic chores. This is reflective of the process of undoing gender (Deutsch, 2007), through the fathers adopting responsibilities typically taken on by mothers and may be indicative of gradual change within the domestic sphere. Another possible explanation is that, as it is relatively unusual for fathers to contribute to the same degree as mothers in terms of household labour, they may be over-rating their relative contribution.

Similarities and differences between primary caregiver fathers and primary caregiver mothers

Contrary to the hypothesis that primary caregiving fathers would be at risk for poor wellbeing compared to female primary caregivers, due to their non-traditional gender role, no statistically significant differences on measures of depression, anxiety, parenting stress, social support and marital quality were found.

Regarding parents scoring above the cut-off for probable depression, no differences were found between stay-at-home fathers, stay-at-home mothers and dual-earner mothers. Amongst both men and women in the present study there were few parents struggling with depression. Further, while fathers might have been expected to report lower levels of social support, given that they occupy a role which is often stigmatised, and previous research has found men receive less social support compared to women (Zimet et al, 1988), this was not the case for the present sample. Overall, these findings indicate that stay-at-home fathers are well-adjusted and that they report similar levels of wellbeing to female primary caregivers across multiple measures. It is, however, important to note that the demographic composition of the sample may have contributed to the positive wellbeing; it is difficult to establish whether fathers showed positive wellbeing because of feeling comfortable and happy in their role, or whether external circumstances, such as a lack of financial pressure, contributed to their positive adjustment.

Marital quality, as reported by the three types of primary caregiver parents, was high, and no differences were found between stay-at-home fathers' scores and those of the primary caregiver mothers. Similarly, on the coparenting exposure to conflict subscale, there were no differences between family types, and very low levels of conflict were reported. Previous research has found that stay-at-home fathers families feel happy in their marriage (Zimmerman, 2000), and report moderate to high levels of marital satisfaction (Rochlen, McKelley, et al., 2008). Hence, the findings of the present study are aligned with contemporary studies of stay-at-home father families, indicating that these fathers have high marital satisfaction and report their relationship quality is akin to couples who do not adopt non-traditional gender roles. These findings are pertinent because relationship quality has been documented to affect child adjustment in samples of children at a similar age to the present study (Howes & Markman, 1989; Papp, Goeke-Morey, & Cummings, 2004), and later in childhood (Low & Stocker, 2005; Siffert, Schwarz, & Stutz, 2012), hence is a risk factor for family functioning. Therefore, the high level of marital quality in the present sample indicates positive family environments, conducive to positive adjustment for parents and their children.

Regarding experiences of anxiety amongst primary caregiving parents, there were comparable levels of clinically high anxiety scores for stay-at-home fathers, stay-at-home mothers and dual-earner mothers, even though studies generally report much higher levels of anxiety amongst women (Lieb, Becker, & Altamura, 2005). The finding that the sample as a whole reported a moderately high level of anxiety, with 41 primary caregiving parents (33%) scoring at or above the cut-off point for clinical levels of anxiety, is somewhat troubling. To put the anxiety scores into context, a lifetime prevalence rate of 28.8% has been reported for anxiety disorders, which have also been found to be the most prevalent type of disorder across the lifespan (Kessler et al., 2005).

Several explanations are offered as to why both fathers and mothers who adopted the primary caregiver role experienced elevated levels of clinically high anxiety and, in some cases, sought professional help for mental health concerns. These include factors that may have been present in the parents' lives before becoming a stay-at-home parent and the potential impact that their experience of being a primary caregiver may have had on their mental health. Firstly, the parents' anxiety may be partially due to the high expectations placed on parents and indeed set by parents themselves. It could be argued that, although parents in any role could face worries over living up to expectations placed on parents, parenting in the primary caregiving role could amplify such concerns. In the same vein, previous research has found that mothers worry about being judged as a parent and that mothers who felt they were not living up to high standards of parenting struggled with feelings of guilt and shame (Liss, Schiffrin, & Rizzo, 2013). Additionally, intensive parenting beliefs were associated with maternal depression and stress (Rizzo, Schiffrin, & Liss, 2013). Hence, it is possible that the anxiety reported by primary caregiver parents in the present sample could also reflect difficulties in feeling satisfied with whether they are living up to expectations of parenting shaped by intensive parenting ideology.

Other considerations include the potential negative impact of the demands of being a parent, often of more than one child, and negotiating work-caregiving arrangements. In line with this, a small

study of US stay-at-home mothers found that the mothers struggled with justifying taking time for themselves, to pursue their interests and hence look after their wellbeing (Bean et al., 2016). It is likely that the parents, both fathers and mothers, in the present study, also struggled with finding time to take care of their wellbeing, which could have been a contributing factor to the level of anxiety reported by stay-at-home parents. In another interpretation, factors in the wider family system may have played a part in the level of anxiety experienced by primary caregivers. For example, as previously discussed, many of the stay-at-home fathers and mothers placed emphasis on family finances in their decision to become a stay-at-home parent. However, this decision does not necessarily alleviate all financial worries, and parents may feel guilt over not contributing an income, in line with previous research highlighting stay-at-home fathers' unease over this (Chesley, 2011; Doucet & Merla, 2007). Hence, some of the anxiety experienced by stay-at-home fathers may have arisen from not feeling entirely comfortable with their caregiving and employment situation, even though it was decided on as the most financially appropriate choice. These speculations warrant further studies exploring mental health amongst primary caregiver parents to draw firmer conclusions about the root of their anxiety.

It is possible that factors present before the parents adopted the primary caregiver role may have led to greater feelings of anxiety whilst in their role. The workplace stress reported by some of the stay-at-home fathers may not have only motivated these fathers to take on the stay-at-home parental role and leave the workplace but may have also led to increased levels of anxiety that have not been addressed. As Teasdale (2006) outlines, critical workplace stress can have a significant impact on wellbeing. With this in mind, these fathers should consider seeking support to deal with any residual stress leftover from their previous employment situation. It is important to note that to elucidate whether factors present prior to becoming a stay-at-home parent, such as workplace anxiety, contributed to the prevalence of stay-at-home parents scoring above the cut-off for clinically high anxiety, a prospective, longitudinal design would have been necessary. Overall, it is concerning

that a significant proportion of the sample received a score that indicated likely clinical levels of anxiety, and suggests more support needs to be offered to all parents.

Interestingly, the relatively high level of parents scoring at or above the cut-off for clinical levels of anxiety was the only aspect of mental health that the present sample struggled significantly with. As previously outlined, the other indicators of wellbeing, such as depression and stress, were within normative ranges, and examinations of social support and marital quality revealed the parents perceived they were well-supported and experienced few marital difficulties. The 'preventative buffer' model of social support may offer a useful framework for understanding these families. Social support is often conceptualised as a preventative buffer from stressors (Vangelisti, 2009) and can help reduce the impact of physical and mental health concerns (Berkman, 1995; Dalgard, Bjork, & Tambs, 1995). Hence, although parents in the present sample reported a moderate level of anxiety, which was particularly true for stay-at-home fathers, social support, and high relationship quality, may have prevented spillover effects into other aspects of their wellbeing.

In comparisons of stay-at-home fathers', stay-at-home mothers' and dual-earner mothers' ratings on different aspects of coparenting, the parents reported high levels of positive coparenting, and only one significant difference was found; stay-at-home fathers perceived their partners as more undermining than both stay-at-home mothers and dual-earners mothers. It is conceivable that breadwinner mothers felt significant social pressure to live up to the expectation of being a highly involved mother and took on a disproportionate volume of caregiving (Allen & Hawkins, 1999; Parke, 1996), and may have tried to contribute to parenting decisions that the fathers perceived as their responsibility. However, the level of undermining behaviours was at the low end of the scale, which makes sense in the context of the other, more supportive, coparenting behaviours reported in these families. These findings contribute to an understanding of how parents in non-traditional parenting roles negotiate caregiving and household labour, and the ways in which non-traditional families may still enact some parenting practices reflective of gendered roles and assumptions.

Overall, the findings indicated that male and female primary caregivers report similar psychological wellbeing. As there were no differences between fathers and mothers in primary caregiver roles scoring above the cut-off point on the TAI, but there were differences when considering the number of fathers in the different family types scoring above the cut-off, this may suggest that it is not being a stay-at-home father that causes anxiety *per se*, but instead the primary caregiving role for men and women may lead to increased anxiety. This suggests that there is little evidence that adopting a non-traditional gender role negatively impacted wellbeing. Instead, it is conceivable that the pressure of being the main caregiver for a large proportion of the week, and the change in role from working full-time in paid employment to being the parent who takes on the majority of the childcare, led to greater feelings of anxiety amongst fathers and mothers. This is not surprising considering the qualitative analyses revealed that stay-at-home fathers felt that more societal support was needed, thus it is likely a similar need would be expressed by mothers in the same position. Hence, gender had little impact on primary caregivers' psychological wellbeing, and it appears that all primary caregiver parents could benefit from greater support in their role. Notably, as parental mental health did not predict child difficulties at this stage, it appears that the elevated anxiety reported by stay-at-home parents had not negatively impacted their children's emotional and behavioural adjustment. However, it is possible that, over time, the anxiety may manifest and impact parenting or other aspects of family functioning, in line with previous research findings reporting that father anxiety early in childhood can predict later child anxiety (Ahmadzadeh et al., 2019), thus highlighting the need to study these families longitudinally.

5.3. Parenting and Child Adjustment

The long running issue of whether fathering differs from mothering, and if so, whether this is simply a product of lower father involvement in caregiving, remains contested. Therefore, one of the primary aims of this thesis was to examine parenting quality and parent-child interaction in stay-at-

home father families compared to stay-at-home mother and dual-earner families, to better understand the relative influence of caregiving role and parent gender on parenting.

With respect to parenting quality, the data were partially supportive of the hypothesis that stay-at-home fathers would show a higher quality of parenting than the fathers in other family types, as stay-at-home fathers were found to show significantly higher quality of parenting than breadwinner fathers. This indicates that, amongst fathers, caregiver status did have some influence on quality of parenting. These findings are in keeping with the limited number of studies in this field of research. Reflecting on her large qualitative study of male primary caregivers, Doucet (2004) commented that a sample of self-defining stay-at-home fathers are likely to be very nurturing, sensitive caregivers. Previous literature has found that stay-at-home fathers report reasonably high levels of confidence in their parenting, have comparable levels of parenting self-efficacy to mothers in similar studies (Rochlen, McKelley, et al., 2008), and are highly satisfied with their role as the primary caregiver (Rochlen, Suizzo, et al., 2008). Yet, these studies included stay-at-home father families only and used affective rather than behavioural measures of parenting. Unlike the present study, comparisons between the quality of parenting displayed by stay-at-home fathers and other caregivers have rarely been conducted.

Dual-earner fathers' scores on quality of parenting fell between the two other types of fathers, and there were no significant differences in parenting between dual-earner fathers and stay-at-home fathers. Previous research has shown that dual-earner fathers, especially those who do not work full-time, are more involved in parenting than breadwinner fathers who are expected to work full-time (Craig et al., 2014). However, it is important to note that spending more time with one's children does not necessarily translate into more positive parenting, and instead the quality of interactions during the increased time spent together matters more for parenting than just the quantity of time together (Lamb & Tamis-LeMonda, 2004; Palkovitz, 2019). With this in mind, fathers caregiving for their children alone, known as 'sole responsibility' (Russell, 1983) or 'solo care' (Wilson & Prior, 2010) may, in part,

explain the differences found between fathers in the present study. Scholarship suggests that when parents engage in solo care this gives them the chance, as the only parent available to the child, to be sensitive in their parenting and respond to their child's signals and needs, regardless of gender or primary/secondary caregiver status (Wilson & Prior, 2010). As stay-at-home fathers and dual-earner fathers are expected to engage in a high volume of solo care, this may have contributed to the higher quality of parenting demonstrated by these fathers compared to breadwinner fathers, who, in comparison, spend significantly more time in the provider role.

In terms of the quality of parenting shown by primary caregivers, parenting quality did not differ between stay-at-home fathers, stay-at-home mothers and dual-earner mothers. Primary caregiver fathers in the present sample, like the primary caregiver mothers, demonstrated high-quality parenting, characterised by warmth, sensitivity and acceptance. These findings corroborate other work on primary caregiving fathers which reported that involved fathers have the same opportunity for high-quality, sensitive parenting as mothers (Pruett, 2000). The findings of this study are also in line with research on same-sex parent families demonstrating that gay fathers show high parenting quality (Farr, Forssell, & Patterson, 2010; Golombok et al., 2014; Golombok et al., 2017; Ryan, 2007), suggesting male primary caregivers are equally capable at parenting compared to mothers. However, the circumstances of gay fathers are somewhat different to that of heterosexual primary caregiving fathers, as gay fathers may feel less pressure to conform to masculine norms and may more readily embrace nurturing qualities (Bigner & Bozett, 1990; Stacey, 2011). Thus, the present findings, showing that regardless of gender, primary caregiving parents show similar quality of parenting, add further confidence to the view that parent gender is not directly related to parenting quality (Lamb, 2012). That dual-earner mothers had comparable scores to stay-at-home mothers and fathers, despite less time in the primary caregiving role across the week, may be due to mothers in employment remaining highly involved in caregiving, as demonstrated by previous research (Chesley, 2011), and the pervasive influence of an intensive mothering ideology, regardless of working status

(Johnston & Swanson, 2007). This suggests that, amongst primary caregiver parents, neither gender nor being in paid employment influenced parenting quality.

The present study also compared the quality of parent-child interaction across family types, as examined through the parent-child observation task. Few previous studies have directly compared the interaction quality of parent-child dyads between families with primary and secondary caregiver fathers. Furthermore, research overwhelmingly focuses on mother-child observations, rather than including observations of both mothers and fathers interacting with their children (Volling et al., 2019). When examining parent-child interaction between fathers, differences emerged between stay-at-home fathers and breadwinner fathers, revealing a higher quality of parent-child interaction in stay-at-home father families. It is likely that the highly involved fathers were able to be more responsive and warm to their children during the play task due to the amount of time they spend interacting with their children alone. This difference between stay-at-home fathers and breadwinner fathers mirrors the parenting quality findings. Further, the findings complement Lewis et al.'s (2009) study which reported that primary caregiver fathers and their infants scored higher on emotional tone during playful observations than secondary caregiver fathers. Yet, it is important to note that the effect size of this difference was small, and no differences emerged between stay-at-home fathers and dual-earner fathers. The lack of differences between families may be, in part, attributable to the clustering of scores at the top end of the scale of the observational task, which is not surprising given the high level of functioning demonstrated by most families in the study.

In terms of parent-child interaction quality amongst primary caregivers, there were no differences between stay-at-home fathers and stay-at-home mothers. However, there was a difference between stay-at-home fathers and dual-earner mothers, with fathers showing slightly higher parent-child interaction quality. The first finding indicates that stay-at-home parents, regardless of gender, show comparable interaction quality with their children. These findings diverge from some of the other research on primary caregiving fathers, which presented mixed results, such

as mothers showing more affection during observations of parent-child interaction at 16-months than primary caregiving fathers (Frodi et al., 1983), or that primary caregiver fathers were more affectionate than primary caregiving mothers in observations with their infants (Geiger, 1996). The current study examined parent-child relationships in a group of highly involved fathers who had been primary caregivers for a longer period (on average 4 years), and also at an stage where interactions between parents and their children are both verbal and, to a much greater extent than during infancy, reciprocal. In the context of research on primary caregiver fathers in same-sex families, the present research mirrors the findings of Golombok et al.'s (2014) study, which reported few differences in parent-child interaction between gay father, lesbian mother and heterosexual parent families, with the differences that were identified favouring gay father families.

The lack of differences between mothers and fathers in stay-at-home parent roles in the present study is relevant to the theoretical debate on whether fathers and mothers are more similar than different and shows that parent gender did not predict parent-child interaction quality. Notably, the findings are in line with the body of research showing that there has been a convergence in the roles of mothers and fathers, and, consequently, very similar parenting behaviours are now observed between the two (Fagan et al., 2014; Lamb & Lewis, 2010; Lewis, 1997; Tamis-LeMonda, Shannon, Cabrera & Lamb, 2004).

In terms of the difference found between stay-at-home fathers' and dual-earner mothers' scores, this is likely to be due to stay-at-home fathers spending more time in the primary caregiver role across the week, which may have resulted in them feeling more attuned to their children in interactions. Due to the small effect size of this finding, more research on this topic is necessary to elucidate the nature of this difference between parents. Overall, that no differences were found between primary caregivers regarding parenting quality, but differences emerged regarding interaction quality, attests to the worth of using multiple measures of parenting; both representational and behavioural.

Taken together, the findings suggest that primary caregiving fathers and mothers are equally capable of showing high quality parenting and parent-child interaction. The assumption that mothers are better equipped to parent is deeply rooted in both early attachment theory (Bowlby, 1951), other theories of child development, and social attitudes. The presumption, that mothers are more competent primary caregivers prevails (Biblarz & Stacey, 2010; Silverstein & Auerbach, 1999), despite empirical reports on the similarities between the parenting approaches, and roles, of mothers and fathers (Fagan et al., 2014). Hence, it is pertinent that the parenting of highly involved fathers is afforded more policy and research attention, as the current findings suggest that fathers and mothers should be regarded as equally capable at primary caregiving. This is further discussed in section 5.5.

The Ecological Systems Theory and Family Systems Theory framework underpinning the present work encouraged an analysis of the associations between the quality of parenting and aspects of parent wellbeing and couple functioning. Consistent with the theory that different elements of a family's microsystem dynamically influence one another, parenting stress, social support, marital quality and coparenting were found to be correlated with quality of parenting. This is in line with research on the importance of the couple relationship on parenting behaviour (Cummings & Davies, 2002; Davies & Cummings, 1994; El-Sheikh & Whitson, 2006, Reynolds et al., 2014), particularly coparenting (Cabrera, Fitzgerald, Bradley, & Roggman, 2014; Feinberg, 2002), and reaffirms the use of Ecological Systems Theory and Family Systems Theory in research on primary caregiving fathers. The lack of associations between the parent-child interaction factor and parent wellbeing is surprising but may be due to the clustering of scores at the top end of the scale. In addition, interactional quality was measured by observations of a playful task. In contrast, parenting quality assesses broader and more enduring aspects of parenting, hence it makes theoretical sense that the parenting quality factor was associated with parental psychological adjustment.

The present study afforded attention to the issue raised by Doucet (2006) that measures assessing parenting are often matricentric, also echoed by Volling et al. (2019), who asserted that it is

imperative to test whether parenting constructs are similar across mothers and fathers. This was addressed through examining the extent to which the two parenting latent constructs were alike across mother and father data. The moderate level of measurement invariance found across mothers and fathers for the quality of parenting factor is important as this is in line with Fagan et al.'s (2014) assertion that, as the roles of mothers and fathers are increasingly similar, it is appropriate to apply the same parenting construct to study mothers and fathers. It also corroborates the growing body of research testing for measurement invariance of parenting constructs that has found parenting factor structures are largely similar across mothers and fathers (Finley, Mira, & Schwartz, 2008; Van Leeuwen & Vermulst, 2004).

Child adjustment

No differences were found in children's adjustment based on parent or teacher reports, and across the sample the children showed a high level of adjustment. In addition, there were no differences between families regarding parent-child conflict. These findings did not support the hypothesis predicting that children in stay-at-home fathers would show more positive adjustment than children in dual-earner families. Instead, the findings indicated that child adjustment in primary caregiver father families is similar to families with stay-at-home mothers and families with parents who are both in paid employment. Across the three family types, 3% of children had SDQ scores that indicated clinical levels of difficulties according to parent ratings, and 6% according to teacher ratings. Both of these are below the UK general population norms, according to which 10% of children have clinical levels of difficulties (Goodman & Goodman, 2012). The present study, together with previous research examining children's adjustment in primary caregiving father families (Gronseth, 1978; Pruett, 1987; Radin, 1982; Russell, 1983), indicates these fathers are providing a home environment conducive to positive psychological adjustment in children, analogous to the adjustment shown within the wider population.

The finding that children raised by primary caregiver fathers did not differ from children in families where the mothers were the primary caregivers has previously been found in research on same-sex families. A growing body of studies have reported that children in gay father families show no differences in adjustment compared to families with a female primary caregiver (Baiocco et al., 2015; Farr, Forssell, & Patterson, 2010; Goldberg & Smith, 2013) or when differences are found, these favour children raised by gay fathers (Golombok et al., 2014; Green, Rubio, Rothblum, Bergman, & Katuzny, 2019; Golombok et al., 2018). Further confidence in the current findings is provided by the high reliability and validity of the SDQ (Goodman, 1994; Goodman, 1997; Goodman, 2001; Stone, Otten, Engels, Vermulst, & Janssens, 2010), and also because the SDQ does not show threshold effects at either the high end, or as with the present sample, scores on the low end (Goodman & Goodman, 2009). In addition, the SDQ has been successful in elucidating differences in child adjustment in other studies of modern family forms with male primary caregivers (e.g. Golombok et al., 2014).

The children's responses to the SCARF task showed that children rated stay-at-home fathers significantly higher than breadwinner fathers on the positive parenting scale, yet no differences were found between children with stay-at-home fathers and dual-earner fathers. These findings are likely to be attributable to the greater involvement of stay-at-home fathers in their children's lives compared to breadwinner fathers, and attests to Lamb's (2012, p.101) assertion that parenting skills are learnt 'on the job'. The lack of differences between children's perceptions of stay-at-home fathers and dual-earner fathers likely reflects that the children in dual earner families perceive that their fathers are highly involved in their practical caretaking. The 'second shift' literature (Coltrane, 2000; Doucet, 2001; Hochschild, 1989) predicts that mothers in such families would contribute disproportionately more than fathers to caregiving. However, this did not appear to be the case for the present study, and suggests that equality between parents has been reached to a reasonable degree in these families. Regarding children's perceptions of emotional security, there were no differences between children with stay-at-home fathers compared to those with dual-earner and

breadwinner fathers, indicating that caregiver status did not have an impact on how emotionally available a child saw their father.

Regarding differences between primary caregivers, the children's responses to the SCARF task found that stay-at-home mothers and dual-earner mothers were rated higher on emotional security than stay-at-home fathers. Three possible explanations are proposed: (1) all mothers are more emotionally available hence children show greater emotional security to them, (2) stay-at-home father families are 'doing gender' (West & Zimmerman, 1987) when the breadwinner mother is at home, such that the mother then becomes the primary parent for emotional support, (3) the children rated their mothers higher due to their understanding of gendered parental roles.

With respect to the first explanation, these findings could indicate a general gender effect that fathers are not as emotionally available, or as in tune with their children's emotional needs, compared to mothers. Although some research has demonstrated more sensitive parenting by mothers, particularly with regard to emotional support (for a review see Jaynes, 2016), which could lead to children preferring their mother as the provider of emotional support, other studies have found that children seek out their fathers and mothers equally and demonstrate comparable attachment behaviours towards them (Lamb, 1977a; Lamb, 1977b; Carone, Baiocco, Lingiardi, & Kerns, 2019; McConnachie et al., 2019). This finding also stands in contention with the high quality of parenting and parent-child relationships demonstrated by primary caregiver fathers in the current study. Hence, other explanations need to be considered, too. As previously discussed, gender is often seen as interactional, so mothers and fathers are theorised to enact gendered scripts, i.e. they 'do gender' (West & Zimmerman, 1987), such that mothers are socialised to take on more emotional work in their relationships with their children, even in families where the father contributes significantly more to caregiving. Hence, when breadwinner mothers are at home, the emotional load may be switched from the father to the mother. This may contribute to the fathers' lower perceived emotional security and is in keeping with previous research on stay-at-home father families (Chesley, 2011), which has

identified the joint importance of doing gender and intensive mothering on the behaviours of mothers in stay-at-home father families. The third explanation considers children's understanding of their parents' roles. As the SCARF measures children's perceptions, rather than observed parental behaviours, attention needs to be paid to the children's viewpoint. Children show acute awareness of gendered expectations of parenting roles from a very young age (Reid, Tate, & Berman, 1989; Sinno & Killen, 2009) and are cognisant of their family set-up (Pruett, 2000). Children across the three family types scored their fathers very similarly, despite the non-traditional role adopted by stay-at-home fathers. Hence, it is plausible that the children answered the task in a way that reflects their culturally acquired knowledge of the traditional roles of mothers and fathers.

Regarding children's perceptions of positive parenting, no differences were found in children's ratings of stay-at-home fathers, stay-at-home mothers and dual-earner mothers. These findings diverge from Strachan, Lund and Garcia's (2010) study on the SCARF, which reported that, on some of the subscales within the positive parenting scale, children rated their mothers significantly higher than their fathers. The findings of the present study may be due to stay-at-home fathers' high level of involvement in everyday caregiving. That positive parenting did not differ between the primary caregivers fits well with the Lamb-Pleck conceptualisation (Pleck, 2010) of father involvement, placing stay-at-home fathers as engaged with their children, accessible to them, and responsible for them. Overall, these analyses encourage studies on stay-at-home fathers to move beyond a reliance of parent-only reports as the present study indicates children are able to contribute meaningfully to research, in line with other studies of modern family forms that have also included the perspectives of children (e.g. Blake et al., 2010; Zadeh, Freeman, & Golombok, 2017).

As hypothesised, no differences were found between family types for parents' reports on gender-typed behaviour for boys and girls. There is a lack of empirical studies investigating gender development of children with stay-at-home fathers compared to other family types, yet research on other family forms with male primary caregivers is relevant. Consistent with research on children in

gay father families (Farr et al., 2010; Goldberg, Kashy, & Smith, 2012; Golombok et al., 2014), having a male primary caregiver did not appear to influence children's gender play behaviours and preferences, as they showed similar gender-typed behaviour to children with female primary caregivers. This suggests that gender development is multi-faceted and is not determined simply by family structure or time spent with same-sex or opposite-sex parents. Instead, children engage in the process of self-socialisation into gendered role behaviours (Martin et al., 2002) and there is evidence to suggest this occurs as young as two-years-old (Halim et al., 2018; Zosuls et al., 2009). This finding also fits well within the context of Ecological Systems Theory, such that there are many competing and dynamic influences on development, including gendered play behaviours, beyond the familial microsystem.

In terms of the specific family processes influencing child adjustment, parenting stress accounted for a significant proportion of the variance between families, and frequency of parent-child conflict also influenced child adjustment. There is ample empirical support for the hypothesis that parenting stress influences child adjustment outcomes, and in particular a link has been found between parenting stress and externalising behaviours (Barry et al., 2005; Feldman, Hancock, Rielly, Minnes, & Cairns, 2000). The transactional model is particularly useful in elucidating this relationship (Qi & Kaiser, 2003), such that child adjustment is theorised to be influenced by reciprocal relationships, hence elevated levels of child behavioural difficulties can increase parenting stress, which then can feed back into child difficulties. Research on gay father families has also found that family structure did not influence child adjustment, yet parenting stress did (Farr et al., 2010; Golombok et al., 2014). This finding has also been replicated in other forms of modern families, such as single mothers by choice (Golombok et al., 2016). Similarly, the significant influence of frequency of parent-child conflict can be understood within the transactional model. As parent behaviours and child adjustment are frequently conceptualised as reciprocally influential (Burke, Pardini, & Loeber, 2008), parent-child conflict may not only increase child behavioural problems, but behavioural problems themselves may trigger more confrontation between caregivers and their children. The use of multi-level modelling of

dyadic data allowed the present study to situate child adjustment within the context of the family system, as the influence of one parent on child adjustment cannot fully be understood without considering the influence of the second parent (Cabrera et al., 2018).

Taken together, the analyses of parenting and parent-child relationship indicate that primary caregiver fathers interact with their children in very similar ways to primary caregiver mothers. This suggests that gender is not predictive of parenting quality. As some differences emerged between stay-at-home fathers and breadwinner fathers regarding quality of parenting and parent-child interaction, favouring stay-at-home fathers, this suggests that time in the primary caregiver role helped stay-at-home fathers parent more sensitively and have parent-child interactions characterised by greater mutuality. In terms of children's adjustment, the study findings suggest that being raised in a stay-at-home parent or dual-earner parent family has little influence on child adjustment compared to family functioning processes, such as parental stress. Therefore, the present findings regarding this non-traditional family form contribute to scholarship on the superior influence of family processes on children's adjustment than the structure of a family (Golombok, 2015).

5.4. Strengths and Limitations

There are certain limitations of the present study that should be noted. One of the most challenging aspects of the present study was the difficulty faced trying to recruit the sample. Previous research has also identified difficulties in recruiting fathers to research (Barker et al., 2017). Although great progress has been made in interviewing fathers themselves instead of relying on mothers to report on fathering, many challenges remain in involving fathers in research, particularly with regards to recruitment (Mitchell et al., 2010). Unlike in the US, there is not, at present, a UK national network of fathers who are stay-at-home parents (<https://www.athomedad.org/>); a resource which a number of previous studies on stay-at-home fathers in the US used to recruit participants (Ammari & Schoenebeck, 2016; Lee & Lee, 2016; Snitker, 2018; Solomon, 2014). Instead, families were recruited

using advertisements sent to schools, preschools, stay-and-plays, email lists of local parents, and on social media targeted at parenting communities. The wide recruitment strategy used comes with limitations, as it is likely that the families who chose to take part were comfortable with their family set-up and were not experiencing acute family issues. However, this is a strategy characteristic of research on stay-at-home fathers (Doucet & Merla, 2007), and by through recruiting a new sample in the UK – where very little research on stay-at-home fathers has been conducted – the present study explored a new group of fathers' experiences. Due to the predominance of US research studying stay-at-home fathers, reporting on data from a UK sample is a valuable contribution.

The recruitment strategy may have also led to certain biases and a lack of diversity within the sample. Firstly, the sample was highly educated. As Deutsch (1999) argued that lower income families subscribe to more traditional gender ideology than families with higher socio-economic status, the highly educated sample may not reflect the experiences of stay-at-home fathers in low-income households. This limitation is reflective of much of the current body of research on stay-at-home fathers (Kramer, Kelly & McCulloch, 2015; Solomon, 2014). Further, the largely white sample is a bias that is also present in much of the existing research on stay-at-home fathers (Doucet, 2004; Caperton, Butler, Kaiser, Connelly, & Knox, 2019; Fischer & Anderson, 2012; Rochlen, Suizzo, McKelley, & Scaringi, 2008). Hence, the present study, alongside previous research, highlights the need to focus on more diverse samples in future work. In particular, discrimination faced by primary caregiver fathers on the grounds of socio-economic status and ethnicity should be explored and indeed would need careful consideration due to the potential for fathers to face multiple forms of stigma.

It is difficult to ascertain why some families initially contacted the researcher yet did not reply once they had been sent the information sheet. There was no way of gaining information on whether these families were simply not eligible to take part, or whether there were other reasons motivating them to discontinue contact and not participate. It is plausible that families did not feel comfortable taking part in the research due to the sensitive nature of the topics covered. Further, it was likely that

due to the time commitment of several hours to do the interviews, which mostly resulted in the visits being conducted on the weekend, parents found it hard to find time after initially expressing an interest. The researcher sent additional emails to these families asking if they had any questions, yet often did not hear from the family again. Other research on stay-at-home fathers used similar recruitment methods for this hard-to-reach sample.

Collecting data was challenging for two components of the study; teacher reports on the SDQ and parent-child observations with secondary caregivers. 77% of teachers returned the questionnaire. It was found that interviewing children when they were about to transition from preschool to primary school was problematic, as the children interviewed over the summer holiday tended to be the part of the sample for which teacher data was not obtained. However, the inclusion of the teachers' reports was still valuable as they provided an external informant on child adjustment. To assess whether children who did not have a teacher's report differed from those with a teacher's report, a t-test was conducted on parent-rated SDQ scores between families whose teacher completed the SDQ and families whose teacher did not. As the t-test was not significant, $t(121)=0.13$, $p = .90$, this gives confidence that the teacher's reports reflect the whole sample. 72% of secondary caregivers took part in the observational measure, due to difficulties in scheduling interviews where both parents could be present for the observational task at the same time as their child, as sometimes parents in full-time paid employment requested to be interviewed in the evening. Hence, the proportion of the observations taken with both parents was lower than the proportion who completed interviews or questionnaires.

There were some demographic differences between the three family types; mothers and fathers in stay-at-home father families were significantly older than mothers and fathers in stay-at-home mother families. Interestingly, the stay-at-home fathers in Snitker's (2018) study were also older than average age for US fathers. However, in the present study, the parental age of stay-at-home father families did not significantly differ from that of dual-earner families and parental age did not

correlate with the parent psychological wellbeing variables. Further, due to the inclusion criterion permitting stay-at-home parents to engage in part-time or flexible work arranged around caregiving, 44% of the fathers were in part-time or flexible paid employment, similar to the proportion of fathers engaged in part-time work in Doucet's (2004) study, and the hours worked per week were comparable to the stay-at-home fathers in Solomon's (2014) study. It is possible that findings would have differed had all the fathers not engaged in any paid work, although this may not be reflective of what it is to be a stay-at-home parent in an age where the internet has enabled working from home to become commonplace.

Another limitation was the modest sample of 127 families used for the quantitative analysis. Due to the size of the study, it could be argued that it lacks statistical power. According to Cohen (1992), to detect a medium size difference when running an ANOVA with three groups at $\alpha = .05$, group sizes of 52 are needed, and group sizes of 21 are needed to detect large differences. Hence, the group sizes of around 40 in each family type for the present study indicate that the sample size is sufficient to detect large differences between the three family types, but that the analyses are under-powered for detecting medium size differences. This constrains confidence in the analyses regarding the possible detection of smaller differences between groups, hence future studies should strive for larger samples. With regards to the Chi-square analyses conducted, then in line with Cohen's (1992) guidelines, a similar issue arises with sufficient power to detect large, but not medium, effects in the present sample. This suggests that there may be differences between groups that are present but were not found due to being under-powered, which could explain why few differences were often found between stay-at-home father, stay-at-home mother and dual-earner families. As such, the present findings encourage future studies to strive for a more extended recruitment period to help achieve larger sample sizes. This undoubtedly will come with challenges considering the recruitment difficulties experienced in the present study, however, it would provide increased confidence in the findings. With these considerations in mind, effect sizes were reported for transparency.

Further, all the quantitative analyses presented were cross-sectional. It would be of interest to conduct longitudinal studies on stay-at-home father families, to establish whether the impact of the involvement of the father changes over time. In contrast, for the qualitative content analysis, having over 40 fathers and over 40 mothers is a clear strength of the study, making it the largest qualitative study of stay-at-home fathers and stay-at-home mothers in the same project. For the thematic analysis, the sample was larger than most (Ammari & Schoenebeck, 2016; Chesley, 2011; Lee & Lee, 2016; Rochlen et al., 2008; Solomon, 2014; Zimmerman, 2000), although was smaller than Doucet's (2004) study on stay-at-home fathering in Canada. Different limitations exist regarding the qualitative analysis. It is possible the findings were influenced by the research design and the use of semi-structured interviews which may have limited the freeness with which the fathers felt comfortable in sharing their lived experiences of their role. The extent to which this impacted the results is impossible to discern. Instead, measures were put in place to encourage the fathers to talk openly and at length, including placing the open-ended questions towards the end of the interview schedule once rapport was built and allowing time for the fathers to elaborate on their answers.

There were some difficulties in establishing high inter-rater reliability for the global interview codes, as the interview was audio recorded and the scoring of these codes relied on both verbal and non-verbal responses. Although a video recording may have produced higher inter-rater reliability, participants would have conceivably been more self-conscious in opening up during the interview if they were filmed, particularly during the questions covering sensitive topics. Further, the parents' scores often clustered around the high end of the PARCHISY ratings on the observational measure, also hindering achieving high inter-rater reliability. However, the intra-class correlation coefficients for both measures indicated adequate reliability.

The design of the present study was carefully considered in order to offer new insights into the research area. Firstly, research studies on stay-at-home fathers which have included comparison groups have mostly adopted traditional families as the one comparison group (Lewis et al., 2009;

Zimmerman, 2000). The inclusion of dual-earner families, the most common family type in the UK, as a further comparison group allowed the traditional and non-traditional family types to be compared to the typical family configuration, of both parents contributing significantly to paid employment. Further, given that much of the current research on stay-at-home fathers explores adjustment from parent reports only, the present study provided new perspectives into the functioning of these families from teachers' and children's reports. The findings from the SCARF produced novel findings on children's perceptions of their parents in all family types, demonstrating the importance and worth of including children as informants in family research and giving attention to the bidirectional nature of parent-child relationships (Palkovitz, 2019). Collecting data from mothers, fathers, children and teachers, and adopting multiple methodologies, gives strength to the credibility of the findings. One part of the family system that was not considered were siblings; however, this was mainly due to practical reasons, as the siblings of many of the children in the sample were still in infancy, so it was not plausible for them to participate meaningfully in the study.

The inclusion of both parents in each family was an advantage of the study, not just to provide multiple perspectives, but also to reduce the effects of socially desirable responses. As a minority, and socially stigmatised, family type, the stay-at-home fathers may have tried to portray their family in a positive light. A second perspective from the mothers helped to ensure less biased responding. This issue was also addressed using multiple methods of collecting data as it is thought that observations are less likely to be subject to social desirability.

One of the key strengths of the present study was the combination of quantitative and qualitative methodologies, and the inclusion of two different forms of qualitative analysis. Despite historically being pitted against each other, contemporary literature has shown that qualitative and quantitative approaches can corroborate each other in investigations of parenting and using both approaches adds depth of understanding (Elliott, Parsons, Brannen, Elliott, & Phoenix, 2018). Hence,

the present study focused on drawing on the benefits of both forms of analysis for a fuller understanding of the families under investigation.

5.5. Policy Implications and Future Directions

Despite the limitations constraining the present investigation, the current study informs our understanding of stay-at-home families and the findings have several noteworthy implications. Firstly, the findings of the thematic analysis identified numerous barriers preventing fathers achieving parity with women as primary caregivers. A few of the fathers described how the services they interacted with, such as healthcare providers, needed to engage with fathers more. This shows that an increase in father involvement necessitates change in institutional settings and suggests that healthcare services need to adapt. The change needs to be initiated by the providers themselves, as to invoke widespread progress, institutions need to include fathers as equal coparents (Everingham & Bowers, 2006). Policy changes that enable fathers to feel more accepted, integrated and listened to in institutional settings can have knock-on effects; Eerola (2014) argues that policy has the chance to permeate into everyday caregiving practices. Thus, greater governmental investment in policies supporting fathers could, firstly, help primary caregiving men feel supported and, secondly, influence the volume of time spent caregiving by men.

A second way in which the fathers expressed needing more support relates to the concept of places; the parenting 'space' which includes playgroups, online forums and media content. The qualitative analysis revealed that stigmatising experiences were common in parenting spaces, and fathers found integrating into parenting groups challenging. All parenting groups should use inclusive terminology in the advertisement of their services, evoking an understanding that mothers and fathers are equally welcomed. Similarly, campaigns and retailers aimed at parents should not be specific to mothers (e.g. Amazon Mom, Mumsnet, Mothercare). Such barriers serve to dissuade fathers from engaging in primary caregiving due to the pervasive message that the parenting space is for, and

occupied by, mothers. This is also true of media content; the fathers in the present sample commented that TV programmes and films often play on the trope of the incompetent father. Although this will be hard to challenge, there is evidence that media providers may be receptive to change, with the Advertising Standards Authority recently banning advertisements that reinforce gender stereotypes (Sweeney, 2019). This is certainly a positive policy and that has the potential to help both mothers and fathers move away from the constraints of the traditional parental roles perpetuated by the media.

The study found that stay-at-home fathers had elevated levels of anxiety and sought more professional help for mental health concerns than dual-earner fathers. This highlights the need to strive for inclusion of men in conversations around mental health. In terms of family functioning, the stay-at-home fathers demonstrated high quality parenting and parent-child relationships, reflecting the benefits of time spent in the primary caregiver role. The most obvious policy to initially target to encourage greater paternal involvement is the take up of shared parental leave, which has been undeniably low (just over 1% of parents took shared parental leave from 2017-8, Birkett & Forbes, 2018). Birkett and Forbes (2018) found that little is known about the new policy by either employees or organisations. Some employees think that they will face prejudice for taking up the new entitlement. Moreover, the full length of leave is automatically given to the mother and needs to be requested to be transferred to the other parent, thus reinforcing the mother as the primary caregiver. These key issues need to be addressed in order to encourage more couples to share parental leave. Research conducted in Sweden found that fathers who took more paternity leave became more involved in caregiving for their children and were more satisfied with how much time they spent with their children (Haas & Hwang, 2008). For fathers in the UK, it is similarly expected that enabling fathers to be equal contributors from the outset will help facilitate a more equitable division of care between mothers and fathers throughout their children's lives.

Families who take on non-traditional gender roles contribute to gender parity through 'backdoor equality' (Dermott, 2008) by re-addressing the gendered balance of care. However, stigma

clearly remains regarding non-traditional gender roles. It will be challenging to tackle such stigma without giving a voice to the fathers who are stigmatized. Fathers not only in stay-at-home father families, but in other marginalised family types, such as fathers in same-sex relationships and single father families, need to be represented in wider political and policy debates in order to reflect the diversity of parenting experiences. Thus, the present findings highlight the need to listen to the perspectives of parents in minority family types, both in research and policy.

Future research needs to strive to recruit more fathers to research, and it is imperative that studies of primary caregiving fathers place diverse samples at the forefront of the agenda. In addition, cross-cultural comparisons could provide new insights on contextual factors which exert an influence on the experiences of stay-at-home fathers. Importantly, Liong's (2015) study of stay-at-home fathers in Hong Kong demonstrated how social attitudes in Hong Kong permeated into the father's narratives. For example, the men felt a need to emphasise that they had chosen to take on the role in order to gain respect, rather than due to external factors, such as financial circumstances. Therefore, it is necessary to examine stay-at-home fathers in other countries and cultural contexts.

The present research has theoretical implications. Firstly, as no differences in parenting were found between primary caregiving mothers and fathers, the findings are consistent with the view that mothers and fathers are much more similar than they are different. This is also supported by the partial measurement invariance found for both parenting factors, suggesting that gender need not interfere with parenting quality. In addition, the thesis integrated multiple theoretical standpoints to interpret the qualitative findings, with theory on families and masculinities informing the research, which allowed for a more in-depth understanding of the experiences of these men and their families.

From a Family Systems perspective, the current findings of primary caregivers showing sensitive, responsive parenting across the different family types may be understood to have been influenced by high marital quality and positive coparenting; feeling well-supported by one's spouse likely gave parents the resources to show high quality parenting, in addition to the time they spent in

the primary caregiving role. Furthermore, guided by Family Systems Theory, the study was designed to explore parent-child relationships from the child's perspective as well as the parent's perspective. By doing so, insight was gained into the quality of parent-child relationship that could not have been afforded from parent reports alone, insofar as while there were no differences between male and female primary caregivers on the parenting quality factors, a difference emerged on the emotional security scale of the SCARF, with mothers rated higher than stay-at-home fathers. This difference points to the usefulness of interviewing all family members, as relationships can be represented in different ways by different informants.

An explanation as to why stay-at-home fathers reported feeling socially isolated in the qualitative findings, yet mostly had positive close relationships with their partners and children, comes from Ecological Systems Theory. By examining the fathers' experiences beyond just their marriage and relationship with their child, the present findings suggest that the interactions they had with the public and the media portrayal of fathers resulted in experiences of prejudice. This suggests that without examining the exosystem and macrosystem, it would be hard to understand how the fathers experienced difficulties in feeling supported, integrated and understood. Thus, as asserted by previous research (Barker et al., 2017; Volling et al., 2019), it is imperative that the wider family and social context is considered in research on fathers.

5.6. Conclusions and Contributions of the Thesis

Stay-at-home fathers challenge deeply ingrained assumptions about parental gender. Relatively little is known about how this affects the father in terms of his experiences of his role, his wellbeing and the functioning of his family. The present study addressed a gap in the literature by contributing information on stay-at-home father families in terms of the adjustment of fathers and children in these families, as well as comparisons with 'traditional' families, and the most prevalent family type; dual-earner families. Including teachers' and children's reports added new perspectives

to research on families with a stay-at-home father. The present study offered insights into the different aspects of stay-at-home fathers' lives, through both quantitative and qualitative analysis. Overall, the stay-at-home father families showed a high level of family functioning, despite the challenges presented by not conforming to gender norms and the stigma the fathers reported. The positive wellbeing findings combined with the resilience depicted by the fathers in the thematic analysis further attest that the fathers are doing well. Although there are challenges, such as prejudice against stay-at-home fathers, overall, they are overcoming such difficulties.

Furthermore, this thesis has contributed to understanding on the importance of using Family Systems Theory and Ecological Systems Theory to study stay-at-home father families. Research needs to not only focus on fathers, but also the fathers' relationships with their partners and their children. In addition, the thematic analysis provided a level of detail of the fathers' experiences that could not be captured by quantitative work alone.

Despite the challenges faced by men in non-traditional gender roles, stay-at-home fathers in the present study showed high quality parenting and parent-child relationships. That the children were well-adjusted across the different family types strongly suggests that the gender of parents is less important to children's psychological wellbeing than the quality of their relationships with their children. Contrary to the assumption that men are less suited to parenting than are women, the findings of the present study show that fathers and mothers are equally competent at parenting in the primary caregiving role.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Study information sheet

Appendix 2: Consent form for parents and parental consent for child participation

Appendix 3: Information and consent for teacher participation

Appendix 4: Interview questions for the qualitative section

Appendix 5: Cronbach's alpha for coparenting subscales

Appendix 6: ICCs for observational task and interview variables

Appendix 7: 'Phases of thematic analysis' (Braun & Clark, 2006)

Appendix 8: Transcription details

Appendix 9: Full list of codes from thematic analysis

Appendix 1: Study information sheet



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CHILD DEVELOPMENT AND FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS STUDY

Thank you for your interest in our study of parents and children aged 3 to 6 years-old. We'd like to tell you more about the study and what taking part involves.

Why are we doing the study?

This study will examine child development and parent-child relationships in families with young children. We are asking different types of families to take part in this study in order to explore similarities and differences in parenting and family relationships. This study aims to look at stay-at-home fathers, stay-at-home mothers and families where both parents work. Few studies have given focus to families in which the father is the primary caregiver, which is why we have included stay-at-home fathers as one of the family types. We hope to add depth to knowledge of the role of parenting in children's development.

What are the possible benefits or disadvantages of taking part?

We hope that you will enjoy talking to us during the interview and will find it an interesting experience. We do not foresee any disadvantages, however if you feel upset at any stage during the interview you can stop the interview. You are not obligated to finish the interview. All families will receive £10 and a toy as a thank you for taking part.

What does taking part involve?

- You will be interviewed and asked to fill out questionnaires about your family life, the things you do together, and your child's development, which will take approximately an hour. The interview will take place at a location which is convenient for the family – at home, or at the Centre for Family Research.

- We'd also like to interview your partner and ask them to fill out questionnaires too.
- We will ask to complete a short interview with your child, which involves participating in a few games and should last approximately 15 minutes. Then, both parents will be asked to play a game with the child which we would like to make a video recording of.
- Finally we would like to ask your child's teacher or nursery school teacher to complete a questionnaire about your child's behaviour at nursery. This is not necessary in order for you or your child to take part in the study. We shall not contact your child's teacher unless you give the interviewer the teacher's contact details and permission to send the questionnaire. Teachers will be told that their pupil is participating in a study looking at family life and child development, no further details about the type of families being studied will be given.
- Before we begin the interviews we will talk to parents and children about what will happen during the interview and how we will protect the data we collect. We will ask parents to give written and verbal consent before taking part. We will make it clear to your child that he or she does not have to take part if they don't want to and may stop the interview or tasks at anytime, without giving reason - and this applies to parents too!

Will my taking part in this study be kept confidential?

Anything that you say during this research will be kept strictly confidential. This means that:

- We will be using any personal information you give us in order to undertake this study and the University of Cambridge will act as the data controller for this purpose. The legal basis for using your personal information is to carry out academic research in the public interest. We will keep identifiable information about you for as long as necessary for the study, after which it will be destroyed. Information entered onto the computer for data analysis will not include names/addresses or any other identifying information.
- Results are normally presented in terms of groups of individuals. If any individual data are presented, the data will be totally anonymous, without any means of identifying the individuals involved.
- Video and audio recordings will not be used or made available for any purposes other than the research project. All recordings will be destroyed after the project is completed.
- When the results of the study are published, you will not be identified as having taken part in the study. Neither will information which might make you identifiable be published.
- Confidentiality will be broken only in the rare circumstance that it was disclosed during the interview that your child was being harmed or if there are reports of domestic abuse in the household. In all other cases the privacy, anonymity and confidentiality of you and your family will remain intact.

What will happen to the findings of the research?

The findings will be written up into a PhD thesis, and the findings may be presented at academic conferences or published in research journals.

Who is doing this research?

The study is headed by Professor Susan Golombok, Director of the Centre for Family Research at the University of Cambridge. Susan Golombok has thirty years' experience of researching parenting and family life in different types of families. The interviews will be carried out by Kitty Jones, a PhD student at the Centre for Family Research.

This project has been reviewed by the Psychology Research Ethics Committee of the University of Cambridge and has received ethical approval.

Who should I contact if I want further information?

If you have any questions about the study please telephone, e-mail or write to Kitty Jones:

Kitty Jones

Centre for Family Research

Free School Lane

Cambridge

CB2 3RF

Tel: 01223 334513

Email: cmj44@cam.ac.uk

Appendix 2: Consent form for parents and parental consent for child participation

Director: Professor Susan Golombok

**CONSENT FORM FOR
PARENTS**



**UNIVERSITY OF
CAMBRIDGE**

CENTRE FOR FAMILY RESEARCH
Free School Lane, Cambridge CB2 3RF
Office: 01223 334513
Email: cmj44@cam.ac.uk

Delete as Necessary

- | | |
|---|--------|
| 1. Have you read the information sheet? | YES/NO |
| 2. Have you had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss this study? | YES/NO |
| 3. Have you received satisfactory answers to your questions? | YES/NO |
| 4. Do you understand that you are free to withdraw from this study at any stage without explanation? | YES/NO |
| 5. Do you agree to take part in this study? | YES/NO |
| 6. Do you agree to allow the interview to be tape-recorded? | YES/NO |
| 7. Do you agree to allow the tasks with you and your child to be video-recorded? | YES/NO |
| 8. May we contact your child's nursery teacher or playgroup leader to request that he/she completes a questionnaire about your child's behaviour in school? | YES/NO |
| (Please note that your own participation in the study is not affected by whether or not you agree to your child's teacher being contacted) | |
| 9. Would you like to receive a summary report of the key findings of the study once the research is complete? | YES/NO |
| 10. Do you accept that we will use your data in accordance with the Data Protection Act? | YES/NO |

11. May we contact you in future regarding the research? This YES/NO
would not commit you to take part in further studies.

12. If you change address, may we try to find your new contact YES/NO
details?

SignedDate.....

Name in BLOCK LETTERS.....

Director: Professor Susan Golombok

**CONSENT FORM FOR
PARENT FOR CHILD
PARTICIPATION**



**UNIVERSITY OF
CAMBRIDGE**

CENTRE FOR FAMILY RESEARCH
Free School Lane, Cambridge CB2 3RF

Office: 01223 334513

Email: cmj44@cam.ac.uk

- | | Delete as
Necessary |
|--|------------------------|
| 1. Have you read the information sheet? | YES/NO |
| 2. Do you understand that your child is free to withdraw from this study at any stage without explanation? | YES/NO |
| 3. Do you agree to allow your child to take part in this study? | YES/NO |
| 4. Do you agree to allow the interview/tasks with your child to be tape-recorded? | YES/NO |

Child's Name in BLOCK LETTERS.....

Signed.....Date.....

Name in BLOCK LETTERS.....



UNIVERSITY OF
CAMBRIDGE

CENTRE FOR FAMILY RESEARCH

Department of Psychology
Free School Lane, Cambridge CB2 3RF
Phone: 01223 334513
Email: cmj44@cam.ac.uk

Dear NAME,

Your pupil NAME and PRONOUN family are currently taking part in a university study looking at family life. They have supplied us with your contact details and have given their consent for you to answer a brief questionnaire about their child.

Teachers are sometimes asked to contribute to a study if one of their pupil's family is taking part. This provides us with an independent account of the child and also allows us to have information about how a child behaves at school.

Please note that the identity of teachers and their school is confidential. You and your school will not be identified as having taken part in this study. Further information about our confidentiality policy is attached.

We would be very grateful if you could complete the attached questionnaire, which relates exclusively to NAME.

Once completed please can you return this in the prepaid envelope provided. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me on either cmj44@cam.ac.uk or 01223 334513.

Many thanks for your support.

Warm regards,

Kitty Jones

STATEMENT OF CONFIDENTIALITY

If you are happy to take part in this project your results will be completely confidential. This means that:

- The information you provide will be held in a locked filing cabinet at the University of Cambridge with no identifying information attached. An identification number will be used in place of your and your pupil's name.
- Your personal information will be stored separately. The personal information that will be stored will be your name and your school's name and address only.
- Information entered onto the computer for data analysis will be in the form of numbers and will not include names, addresses or any other identifying information.
- When the results of the research are written up, you will not be identified as having taken part in the study. Neither will information which might make you identifiable be reported.
- We will protect the confidentiality of the information you provide within the limitations of the law.
- Confidentiality will be broken only in the rare circumstance that it was disclosed that your pupil was being harmed. In all other cases privacy, anonymity and confidentiality will remain intact.

The project has been reviewed by the University of Cambridge Psychology Research Ethics Committee and has received ethical approval.

ID NUMBER:

CONSENT FORM

*Delete as
Necessary*

1. Have you read the accompanying letter? YES/NO

2. Do you understand that you are under no obligation to participate in this study? YES/NO

3. Do you agree to take part in this study by completing the enclosed questionnaire? YES/NO

Your relationship to the child (e.g. teacher, sports coach)

.....

Signed

Name in Block Letters.....

Date.....

Appendix 4: Interview questions for the qualitative section

BEING A STAY-AT-HOME FATHER

I'd now like you to think back to when you were first considering becoming a stay-at-home father.

What were the main factors leading you to this decision?

Do you remember your initial feelings about arranging childcare this way? How did you feel?

How did your partner feel?

Do you think it's changed how you see yourself?

Did you take paternity leave after the birth of your child / children? How long for? Did this influence how you felt about being a SAHD?

FATHERING

I'd now like to just ask you a few open questions about your views of fathering.

1. What does being a father mean to you?

2. Do you feel as a man you parent your children in similar or different ways to mothers?

-In what way might it be similar or different?

3. Do you think being a stay-at-home parent affects what other people think about your parenting abilities?

- If so, in what ways?

4. Do you think people expect stay-at-home dads to parent differently to a stay-at-home mum?

-If so, in what ways?

5. How do people usually react when you tell them you are a stay-at-home father?

6. Are your experiences of being a stay-at-home dad different to what you expected?

7. What advice would you give to a dad who's just decided to become an at-home dad?

8. What do you think would help support at home dads?

9. What are some of the challenges you have faced being a stay-at-home dad?

10. Do you think more fathers would like to be stay-at-home fathers rather than being working fathers?

11. What's the best thing about being a stay-at-home dad?

Appendix 5: Cronbach's alpha for coparenting subscales

Subscale	Mother Cronbach's Alpha	Father Cronbach's Alpha
Undermining	.71	.61
Agreement	.67	.68
Closeness	.74	.70
Conflict	.87	.87
Support	.83	.84
Endorse partner parenting	.80	.70

Appendix 6: ICCs for observational task and interview variables

Code	ICC
Interview	
Frequency of conflict	.97
Level of conflict	.79
Lack of resolution of conflict	.96
Support for mental health concerns	.73
Warmth	.79
Emotional under-involvement	.59
Emotional over-involvement	.70
Quality of interaction	.66
Sensitive responding	.85
Observation	
Parent responsiveness	.70
Child responsiveness	.75
Dyadic reciprocity	.74
Dyadic cooperation	.71

Appendix 7: 'Phases of thematic analysis' (Braun & Clark, 2006, p. 87)

Phase	Description
1. Familiarizing yourself with your data:	Transcribing data (if necessary), reading and re-reading the data, noting down initial ideas.
2. Generating initial codes:	Coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code.
3. Searching for themes:	Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme.
4. Reviewing themes:	Checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts (Level 1) and the entire data set (Level 2), generating a thematic 'map' of the analysis.
5. Defining and naming themes:	Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells, generating clear definitions and names for each theme.
6. Producing the report:	The final opportunity for analysis. Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating back of the analysis to the research question and literature, producing a scholarly report of the analysis.

Appendix 8: Transcription details

In the interview	In the transcription
Pause <2	,
Pause >2	...
Omitted speech	...
Laugh	[laughs]
Text added for explanatory purposes	[text]
Information omitted to ensure participant anonymity	[location]

Appendix 9: Full list of codes used for qualitative content analysis and thematic analysis prior to collapsing codes

1. Accepting being at home makes it easier
2. Active choice to put career on hold
3. Advice - be present with your children
4. Advice - find support
5. Advice for other SAHDs - you've got to want to do it
6. Advises other SAHDs to adopt a routine
7. Advises parents to look after themselves to look after their children
8. Advises SAHDs to not be nervous about going to groups, even if you initially feel left out
9. Advises staying connected to PT work
10. America emasculates SAHDs more
11. Approval of parenting by others
12. Balancing empathy with not being too soft
13. Being a SAHD is hard
14. Being a SAHD is more about doing domestic jobs
15. Being a SAHD will help instill less gendered assumptions for his children
16. Being SAHD changed definition of fathering. Making sure of happiness not money
17. Believes babies need their mother in the first year of their life
18. Better quality of family life if either parent is at home
19. Can't find time to do the male typical jobs around the home
20. Can't work due to disability
21. Caregiving as work
22. Challenges are related to being a primary parent not a man
23. Changed how he thinks about parents
24. Closer bond with his children because of being a SAHD
25. Comfortable with being a SAHD
26. Confident about parenting
27. Dad and parent same thing

28. Dad focused groups talk about stereotypical topics
29. Dads are more engaged and play more than mums
30. Dads groups patronising
31. Decision was motivated by feminism and equality
32. Defensive about parenting abilities
33. Desire to stay at home - second time father so wants more time with kids
34. Desire to stay at home - support partner's career
35. Desire to stay at home - want to be the one doing the childcare
36. Desire to stay at home - work life balance
37. Different countries more accepting of SAHDs
38. Different from mothers - get up and move on attitude, less affection
39. Difficult not having the same goal oriented structure at work
40. Doesn't think men are hardwired into being primary caregiver
41. Doesn't think there are enough SAHDs to get council support
42. Doesn't see self as a typical man
43. Don't think there should be differences in parenting by mums and dads
44. Doesn't want to be forced into socialising with SAHDs just because they are also a dad
45. Easier to be a SAHD in some places than others
46. Empowerment then acceptance of being primary caregiver
47. Encourage others to have a balanced view on what it is to be a primary caregiver
48. Encourages being a SAHD as it's rewarding
49. Encourages open conversations about finance
50. Encourages other dads to keep interests
51. Encourages other SAHDs to leave the house
52. Encouraging other SAHDs to enjoy it and don't apologise for not working
53. Excited to be a SAHD
54. Expected he was going to be a SAHD
55. Father involvement beneficial
56. Fathering - being a role model
57. Fathering as being involved

58. Fathering as bringing up balanced individuals
59. Fathering as nurturing
60. Fathering as protecting and providing
61. Fathering is instilling good values
62. Fathers find socialising with other parents harder
63. Feels its the right thing for his family
64. Financial decision
65. Financial - childcare too expensive
66. Financial - partner's job more stable
67. Financial strain
68. Finds affection easy
69. Finds the domestic jobs easy
70. Found domestic jobs hard
71. Found it hard initially to be the primary caregiver
72. Friends joke about him being a SAHD
73. Gender gap prevents SAHDs
74. Gender role reversal
75. Gender roles still ingrained
76. Generally positive reactions from others about being a SAHD
77. Good and bad parts of parenting balance each other out
78. Grandparents are useful for support
79. Harder to be a SAHD than work
80. Having children changes your life in a positive, meaningful way
81. He is both mothering and fathering
82. Health problems spark negative reactions to being a SAHD
83. Helps if both parents have had experience with working and primary caregiving
84. Highly successful career before
85. Ignore people judging his parenting ability
86. Initially engaged in lots of DIY projects too
87. Initially found it hard not to be the provider but more accepting now

88. Initially lied about being a SAHD but more accepting now
89. Initially nervous about being a SAHD
90. Initially nervous as didn't expect to be a SAHD
91. Isolation
92. It's harder for dads to make this decision than mums
93. Lack of changing facilities for dads
94. Lack of recognition in the media
95. Lack of support
96. Less organised now, using brain less
97. Life and or self has improved since becoming a SAHD
98. Likes the option of defining self by part time work
99. Location matters for support
100. Loves watching his children develop
101. Make the most of being a SAHD as it might be temporary
102. Media sees dads as incompetent, less so for friends
103. Men are lazy
104. Men as less nurturing
105. Middle class movement away from gendered expectations
106. Might switch being the main earner in the future
107. Minority status
108. Mixed messages are confusing
109. Mixed reactions from others about being a SAHD
110. Mothers and fathers are different
111. Mothers and fathers different as fathers worry less about children hurting themselves
112. Mothers and fathers different because of experiences of their mothers and fathers
113. Mothers and fathers might be different but might be similar
114. Mothers and fathers parent differently - outdoor vs domestic
115. Mothers and fathers parent differently as dads are more strict
116. Mothers approve of having a primary caregiver
117. Mothers more welcoming to other mothers than fathers

118. Moving gave them the impetus to change their roles
119. Mothers and fathers parent differently due to individual differences
120. Need a new narrative of the SAHD
121. Need more representation of fathers
122. Need more support for parents in the transition back to work
123. Need more than one aspect of your identity
124. Negative about being a SAHD
125. No income means no feeling of security
126. Not the stricter parent
127. Now more empathetic towards mothers
128. Now more understanding of other minorities
129. Odd one out
130. Older generation negative reactions to being a SAHD
131. Opportunity to do freelance work
132. Others might see SAHDs as less ambitious
133. Others see being a SAHD as weird or not what he should be doing
134. Others think he is babysitting
135. Outdated thinking men have to go to work
136. Overcoming boredom
137. Parental leave key for gender equality for parents
138. Parenting differences due to personality
139. Parenting still aimed toward mothers
140. Paternity leave gave insight into being primary caregiver
141. Paternity leave important for child development
142. Paternity leave influenced decision
143. People assume SAHDs just do fun parenting all the time
144. People expect a SAHD to be doing it as a one off
145. Playing with his kids is really fun
146. Poor representations of SAHDs in media
147. Prefers being at home than the idea of working

148. Prefers quiet play than rough and tumble
149. Public expect SAHDs to be chaotic
150. Public see dads as less competent
151. Public see dads as less engaged
152. Re-evaluating gender roles
153. Reaction - no reaction
154. Reaction to SAHD - neutral
155. Reaction to SAHD - see it as hard
156. Reaction to SAHD - surprise
157. Receive judgement from others
158. Receives excessive praise
159. Relentlessness of being the primary parent
160. Reluctant to become a SAHD
161. Responsibility - being a father means
162. Routine helps with being a SAHD
163. SAHD can be emasculating
164. SAHDs are increasingly common
165. SAHMs and SAHDs have to do the same things
166. Same want to be a parent as a mother
167. Second time of fathering
168. Sees self as gentle
169. Services need to include men more
170. Shift in attitudes of fathers
171. Society doesn't see men as domestic
172. Some mothers are supportive
173. Stay-at-home mothers more resentful as it's not a choice
174. Stigma because of being a SAHD
175. Stigma needs to be tackled
176. Stopping his job meant he lost part of himself
177. Stress at work

178. Stress at work - redundancies coming up
179. Support fathers from the start
180. Thinks being a SAHD is a great opportunity
181. Thinks fathers are more honest with their kids
182. Thinks he has a higher level of education than other SAHDs
183. Thinks it's easier for a man to take a career break
184. Thinks its important to have a parent at home
185. Thinks men prefer work still
186. Thinks more dads want to stay at home
187. Thinks most men would find being a SAHD hard
188. Thinks mothers have more prescribed roles and expectations, fathers more free
189. Thinks mothers need to facilitate fathers caregiving more
190. Thinks other fathers couldn't cope with being a SAHD
191. Thinks others perceive it as an easy option
192. Thinks others see SAHD parenting as more regimented and male
193. Thinks people have positive reactions to being a SAHD without thinking about it properly
194. Thinks primary caregiving improves people's work ability
195. Thinks SAHDs need to not resent it
196. Thinks splitting the childcare equally would be better
197. Threat of being seen as approaching someone for romantic reasons
198. Tries to bring up his children without gender stereotypes
199. Tries to father like his father
200. Tries to give a lot of choice to his child
201. Tries to parent differently from his family
202. Unicorn status
203. Very few gender differences in parenting
204. Wants dad specific groups
205. Wants more places where its accepted
206. Wants more time to pursue interests and less time for housework
207. Whole family benefits from having a SAHD

- 208. Wife didn't want to stay at home
- 209. Wife feels like she has missed out
- 210. Wife gave confidence to be a SAHD
- 211. Wife initially nervous about not being primary caregiver
- 212. Wife is reassured by having husband at home
- 213. Wife makes more decisions in their relationship
- 214. Work isn't the only aspect of identity
- 215. Work not as important as their children
- 216. Worried about future employment opportunities
- 217. Worried others would just see him as a man without a job
- 218. Would like couples to make the decision on an individual basis
- 219. Would like financial help
- 220. Would like more support from others