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Blending Traditional and Nurturing Fathering: Fathers of Children With Autism Managing Work and Family

Objective: *Against a backdrop of hegemonic masculinity, we contribute to understandings of how having a child with autism impacts fathers' navigation of work and family responsibilities.*
Background: *Parents of children with autism face distinct needs related to accessing health, education, and social supports for their children. In supporting their children, fathers may feel pulled between traditional financial provider roles and relatively nurturing, involved styles of fathering.*
Method: *Using a traditional masculinity theoretical orientation, we conducted a directed content analysis of narrative data from 26 fathers of children with autism collected as part of a broader project. We analyzed approaches to fathering reflected in fathers' descriptions of managing work and family and corresponding meanings fathers attached to work relative to family responsibilities.*
Results: *Fathering approaches included (a) traditional breadwinners, (b) caregiving breadwinners, (c) "tag-team" parents, and (d) caregiving fathers. Meanings of work included (a) financial power and security in the face of autism; (b) work as information, support, and reprieve; and (c) work strain contributing to guilt, sadness, and depression.*
Conclusion: *Fathers' responsibilities entailed a careful balancing between financial provision and caregiving for their children with autism. We identify theoretical and policy implications aimed at more fully understanding and supporting fathers of children with autism.*

Autism spectrum disorder is a neurodevelopmental condition characterized by heterogeneous social communication and interaction challenges and repetitive and restricted behavioral patterns, activities, or interests (Lai et al., 2014). The combined prevalence of autism spectrum disorder for children and youth, defined as 5 to 17 years old, is estimated to be 1 in 66 in Canada (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2018). Research aimed at understanding experiences of parents raising a child with autism contributes to the gathering momentum to understand and support families of children with disabilities. Within the literature about understanding demands of raising children with disabilities, parents of children with autism are highlighted as facing distinct needs given the communication and behavioral challenges associated with autism. Parents of children with autism report compromised quality of life and higher levels of stress than parents of typically developing children (Dodd

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et al., 2009; Glasberg et al., 2007; Gray, 2003; Li-Ching et al., 2008; Mancil et al., 2009) and children with Down syndrome (Sanders & Morgan, 1997). Disability-related needs, compounded by economic and societal stressors, can incline parents to adhere to traditional gender roles to allow for a "divide-and-conquer" approach. Mothers often assume the central role in managing their child's medical, educational, and disability programming needs, while fathers focus on generating income to pay for family needs and non–publicly funded disability programming and services (e.g., Cheuk & Lashewicz, 2016; Dodd et al., 2009; Dudley & Emery, 2014; Stoner & Stoner, 2014). Thus, fathers' paid work may take on heightened significance as the sole source of family income to cover relatively high childrearing costs (e.g., Carpenter & Towers, 2008; Lashewicz et al., 2016).

Fathering children with autism plays out against a backdrop of idealized masculine characteristics and changing trends in the work–family interface. Over the past 30 years, Western economies have restructured away from manufacturing economies and into knowledge economies. This shift creates job uncertainty and job precarity in traditionally male-dominated industries where employment was formerly stable and perceived as meaningful (Affleck et al., 2018). Alongside this shift, men's levels of educational attainment, occupational stature, earnings, and employment have declined or stayed the same over the past 30 years, while women have realized significant gains on the same measures (Autor & Wasserman, 2013). Some men may strive to distinguish themselves in difficult economic contexts by spending long hours in paid employment and embodying overwork as a modern-day "status symbol" (Bellezza et al., 2016; Gershuny, 2005).

Men's relationship to work and the traditional masculine breadwinner role thus have been destabilized; this has implications for fathers of children with autism who are inclined to prioritize both work and family responsibilities given parenting demands associated with autism that often include challenges in accessing health, education, and social supports for their children with autism amid prejudice, restrictive built environments, and waiting lists for supports (Braunstein et al., 2013; Jeanes & Magee, 2012; Shipton & Lashewicz, 2019). Indeed, traditional masculine characteristics, such as being problem-solvers, providers, and protectors, can be assets in raising children with disabilities (Beaton et al., 2012). Moreover, such characteristics may be amplified for fathers of children with autism who are propelled by their children's needs toward relatively nurturing, involved styles of fathering that include play and leisure, personal care, social activities, and helping to manage behaviour (e.g., Beaton et al., 2012; Lashewicz et al., 2016; Potter, 2017). The purpose of this article is to contribute to understandings of how having a child with autism influences fathers' navigation of work and family responsibilities. Using a theoretical orientation of traditional masculinity, we conducted a directed content analysis of narrative data from 26 fathers of children with autism collected as part of a broader project. We analyzed approaches to fathering reflected in fathers' descriptions of managing work and family responsibilities and the corresponding meanings fathers attached to work relative to family responsibilities. As such, we illuminate some of the ways in which fathers of children with autism blend traditional and nurturing elements of fathering.

Theoretical Approach

The theoretical orientation of this article is drawn from Connell's (1996; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005) work on gender relations and predicated on the corresponding belief that ideals of traditional masculinity permeate ideas about fathering, including in the context of disability. Definitions of masculinity vary across cultures and classes, as well as within micro-contexts such as work environments or peer groups, with some masculinities being "more honoured than others" (Connell, 1996, p. 21). As such, fathers occupy multiple roles and likely experience tensions between provider ideals of traditional fathering and contemporary ideals of involved, nurturing fathering (e.g., Kaufman, 2013); these tensions may be accentuated by demands associated with having a child with autism. Further, fathering, and the masculinities embedded in fathering, are dynamic and actively constructed and shaped by sociocultural context (Connell, 1996) or macro-context (Doucet, 2013). On a macro level, fathering is influenced by a "hierarchy of masculinities"—a "pattern of hegemony" influenced by the structural production of masculine

architypes that privileges some masculinities over others despite evidence that most men do not execute masculine characteristics to the standard set forth by the ideal (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 846). Accordingly, this article is an examination of the ways in which fathers of children with autism may place pressure on themselves to be traditional providers and protectors and may adhere to a problem-solving or "just deal with it" approach to disability (McNeill, 2004, p. 537). Moreover, this article illustrates how fathers of children with autism navigate work–family responsibilities, including working within and around structural barriers, such as lack of accommodating environments for children with disabilities and their families and funding constraints for disability support, in a society that reinforces normative standards of bodies and ability.

Fatherhood norms have shaped every era (Ball & Daly, 2012; Griswold, 1997; LaRossa, 1997). For example, fathers in colonial America played a central role in upholding education and instilling morality and discipline in their children, whereas breadwinning and occupational training were considered important for fathers during 19th-century industrialization (Griswold, 1997; LaRossa, 1997). The early 20th century fostered a new fathering image, often called contemporary fathering or "the new fatherhood" (LaRossa, 1997). Father–child companionship was emphasized; and the good father of contemporary times is expected to have emotional connections with children and be involved with care, homework, and play, concurrent with providing financially (e.g. Kaufman, 2013; Shaw, 2010).

Even as fathering ideals evolve, time and money remain fundamental resources for families (Ball & Daly, 2012). In tandem with the restructuring of economies over the past 30 years, parents' managing of financial security and the corresponding gendered division of paid and unpaid work have shifted (Ball & Daly, 2012). Boundaries between mothers as caregivers and fathers as breadwinners have blurred in light of more women in the workforce and an increased number of two-parent households with dual incomes (Ball & Daly, 2012). The "new fatherhood," or involved fathers, are those who are actively involved with their children (Kaufman, 2013). We use this distinction between traditional and contemporary masculinity to focus our examination of how fathers of children with autism describe balancing provider and caregiver roles.

Background

Although a considerable body of research has been developed on topics related to working mothers, working fathers have been studied far less often, and research about working fathers of children with autism is scarce. Research that has been conducted about working fathers, including working fathers of children with autism, illuminate some of the weighing and balancing fathers undertake as they negotiate provider and caregiving responsibilities amid shifting social contexts and workplace expectations for employee performance. Duckworth and Buzzanell (2009) examined how contemporary fathers of neurotypical children navigate the work–family balance and found men constructed fatherhood as a "web of responsibilities" to family, work, and community and spent considerable time problem-solving to balance work and family. Fathers of neurotypical children and children with autism have given evidence of aligning with the new fatherhood standards while incorporating emphasis on providing financially (Carpenter & Towers, 2008; Lashewicz et al., 2016).

Despite the new fatherhood standards and corresponding changes in gender division of unpaid and paid work, traditional masculine ideals remain prominent. Paid employment continues to be tied to masculine identity (Berdahl & Moon, 2013; Brandth & Kvande, 1998). A classically "ideal" worker is one who is hard-working and dependable, and who keeps the spheres of work and personal life from overlapping (Coltrane et al., 2013). Some researchers have shown that fathers may garner employment rewards known as the "daddy bonus," as employers may make extra efforts to accommodate work–family balance for male employees with children (Hodges & Budig, 2010). Yet, 200 such associations are far from straightforward and mediated by other status characteristics, such as race and education (Connell, 1996; Hodges & Budig, 2010). Characteristics aligned with traditional masculinity, such as being heterosexual, married, White, college educated, and employed in managerial positions or jobs that required higher cognitive skills, were correlated with the fatherhood bonus (Hodges & Budig, 2010) and underscore Connell's (1996)

assertion that multiple masculinities exist but some are afforded more power.

At the same time, fathers may be penalized for deviating from masculine workplace norms. Berdahl and Moon (2013) found evidence that men who disrupted traditional roles by caring for children outside of work experienced more "not man enough" harassment (e.g., were made fun of for being shy or soft-spoken) and general workplace mistreatment (e.g., humiliation, exclusion) than men who did not actively care for children outside of work. Berdahl and Moon (2013) attributed fathers' experiences of mistreatment to perceptions of these fathers as having violated traditional gender roles.

Distinct costs associated with having a child with autism tend to influence decisions about how to balance work and caregiving responsibilities. Factors such as gaps in government funded programs, health care needs, and lost income and productivity at work, can influence parent decisions about employment (e.g., Dudley & Emery, 2014; Stabile & Allin, 2012). Costs of autism include direct medical costs (health care, home care, equipment), nonmedical costs (respite, childcare) and indirect costs (lost income, lost productivity, switching jobs; Dudley & Emery, 2014, p. 9). Ganz (2007) used these classifications to estimate that in the United States, the per capita societal cost of autism is approximately $50,793 per year. Indirect costs incurred by parents are likewise significant including time spent on care, including personal care; times awake at night; indirect care; and loss of income or productivity (Dudley & Emery, 2014; Jarbrink et al., 2003).

Jarbrink and colleagues (2003) found that parents with a child with autism spent an average of 60 hours per week caring for and supporting their child. Parents' out-of-pocket expenses (e.g., games, equipment, therapists, assessments) totaled an average of $1,325 Canadian per week. Stabile and Allin (2012), as well as Emery and Dudley (2014), studied income earning decisions among parents of children with autism and illustrated a tendency for mothers to earn less and be less likely to be employed and also for these families to have total expenses that are higher than expenses incurred by families of children with other disabilities or children without disabilities.

Additional disability-related factors influence parents' decisions about balancing work and family. Families may prefer a parent at home to manage intervention and therapies for their child with autism or need a parent to be home because they cannot secure adequate out-of-home childcare (Curran et al., 2001; Houser et al., 2014). Some parents in the study by Houser et al. (2014) expressed not trusting or wanting someone else involved in the care of their child with autism. Thus, parents of children with autism may feel pushed into traditional roles and may perceive limited alternatives (Stoner & Stoner, 2016).

Researchers have examined the subjective experiences of parents of children with autism managing work–family responsibilities. Stoner and Stoner (2016) investigated the effects of career disruption on career-oriented parents (including two fathers) who transitioned to become primary caregiver for their child(ren) and justified their transition in terms of (a) having lower paying and less stable work compared with their spouse, and (b) feeling they had little choice but to decrease work or stop working altogether. Parents found themselves juggling the benefits of earnings against the active involvement with children that is often "equated with being a good mother/father" (Houser et al., 2014, p. 689). Fathers attempted to remain connected to their previous careers (Stoner & Stoner, 2016), thus supporting Doucet's (2004) claims that work is tightly woven into fathers' identities. Doucet studied 70 Canadian stay-at-home fathers (of typically developing children) and found fathers remained connected to traditionally masculine activities within home and community and often held part-time work to continue providing financially. One father commented that being a "stay at home dad was not 'work,'" underlining ideas that men's work should center on providing financially; yet other dads relayed raising a child was the hardest job they had had. Doucet concluded that masculinities are indeed multiple; and stay-at-home fathers occupy a distinct space to generate "new forms of masculinity … through delicate balancing acts of simultaneously embracing and rejecting both femininity and hegemonic masculinity" (2004, p. 296).

For employed fathers, time at work may represent reprieve from stresses of parenting. Stoner and Stoner (2014) found that employed fathers of children with autism described work as a form of respite from parenting demands. Fathers indicated that their child was their central focus and their job was a second priority, but they

also expressed reluctance to lessen their workload or take time off work because they did not want their child with autism to be a cause of or excuse for lowered job performance. Nor did fathers want to be perceived, relative to coworkers, as privileged for taking time off for their child unless under extreme circumstances.

Fathers' experiences raising a child with autism appear to yield a tension between work and family responsibilities (Stoner & Stoner, 2014). Indeed, the relatively intense demands for both hands-on parenting and providing financially may leave fathers of children with autism in a precarious position of balancing family and work. This article is an examination of potential tensions fathers of children with autism encounter as they blend work and family responsibilities, and we use a secondary directed content analysis of narrative data that encompasses fathers' descriptions of navigating work and family responsibilities in relation to having a child with autism.

Methods

Study Context

We present our methods as a directed content analysis of secondary data, and these data are part of a broader project aimed at reporting on the successes and challenges faced by a sample of 28 fathers raising children with autism (see Cheuk & Lashewicz, 2016; Shave & Lashewicz, 2016). Given the richness of data supplied by our sample, we conducted secondary analyses of these data for purposes beyond those initially intended. As such, we examined fathers' roles as protectors of their children with autism (see Lashewicz et al., 2016) and the meanings fathers assigned to their marriages as part of their experience raising a child with autism (see Lashewicz et al., 2018), and the ways fathers' carved out time and activities through which to embrace their child's "quirky" behaviors (see Mitchell & Lashewicz, 2019). In this article, we turn to focus on how fathers navigate family and work responsibilities, and our analysis is directed by how fathers described their traditional provider and work responsibilities versus their caregiving and family responsibilities.

Procedure

Our content analysis is directed by our use of the concept of traditional masculinity to structure our focus on how having a child with autism impacts fathers' navigation of work/provider responsibilities versus family/caregiving responsibilities (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Our data are secondary because they were not collected for the purpose of understanding how having a child with autism influences how fathers navigate their work and family responsibilities but rather were collected for a broader project about understanding and resourcing fathers of children with autism. The broader project was grounded in the principles of narrative inquiry and the corresponding interpretive tradition of qualitative research with an emphasis on relational engagement with participants and on experience as narrative phenomena or stories (Given, 2008, p. 541).

Data Collection

We collected and examined fathers' stories about their successes and struggles in raising a child with autism. Fathers shared their stories through semistructured, individual interviews with an experienced qualitative researcher who used an interview guide to structure data collection yet allow flexibility to follow leads and spend time on topics that fathers initiated or wished to discuss in detail. Interviews were an average of 90 minutes in duration and took place at times and locations chosen by fathers; locations included fathers' homes, fathers' places of employment, and coffee shops. Before commencing interviews, the informed consent form was reviewed with and signed by fathers. The voluntary nature of participation and freedom to withdraw at any point were underlined. Interviews were digitally recorded and manually transcribed verbatim. Field notes were taken during interviews. Pseudonyms were assigned to fathers and other persons named by fathers.

Participants

Fathers raising children with autism aged 2 to 12 years were recruited in an urban center in Western Canada. Calls for participants were distributed through communication channels of organizations serving children with autism and their families. Our age range for children with autism was set with the goal of encompassing fathers' perspectives during active parenting years across a variety of stages of child development. We defined active parenting as including,

but not limited to, going through steps of having one's child obtain an autism diagnosis, commence autistism-related interventions, begin or attend elementary school, attend summer camps, and prepare for middle school.

Our sample comprised 26 married fathers who contacted researchers in response to the call and self-identified as raising a child with autism. Of these 26 fathers, 25 (∼96%) were biological fathers, and one (∼4%) was an adoptive father. Twenty-three (88.5%) fathers had completed a 2-year diploma or a 4-year undergraduate degree, and 10 of these fathers 23 fathers (43.5%) also had completed one or more graduate degrees. Of the remaining three fathers, two had attended college or university but not completed a diploma or degree, and one father did not disclose his educational background. All 26 fathers were employed full time and worked in a variety of fields, including business, engineering, education, law, and trades. Although we did not ask fathers about their ethnicity, the majority were Caucasian. We did not ask fathers' their age.

Together, these 26 fathers were raising 52 children, 31 of whom had an autism diagnosis. Four fathers were raising more than one child with autism. In arriving at our sample of 26, we excluded one participant who was a biological grandfather raising his grandson with autism and one divorced father raising a daughter with autism because we believed these participants' experiences of navigating work and family would be different from those of married fathers. In Table 1, we summarize our sample by fathers' pseudonyms, marital status, relationship to child(ren), occupation, level of education, total number of children, and number of children with autism.

Interview Protocol

Interviews were opened with the question; "What is it like to be X's (child's name/children's names) dad?" We followed with questions about how their child's or children's needs, such as daily care, affection, educational, and financial, were met and by whom. We also asked fathers to compare their parenting experiences to that of their wives', their own fathers, and fathers of typically developing children. As fathers spoke of how their children's needs were met, they described their efforts to balance work and family, including comparison with the efforts of their wives. We concluded by asking fathers to share a favorite story about their child or children. Fathers of multiple children with autism were free to speak about whichever child came to mind in response to the topics of each question we asked.

Data Analysis

Berg (2001) described content analysis as "a passport to listening to the words of the text, and understanding better the perspective(s) of the producer of these words" (p. 238). Our analysis began with repeated listening of audio and reading of transcripts to gain familiarity with, and immersion in, the data. As we read, we looked for expressions of an idea or potential themes and occurrences of potential themes that were most often expressed as phrases, a paragraph, or a series of paragraphs (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2005). We generated themes as expected on topics of fathering successes and struggles, and these have been the topics of other articles, as described earlier. For example, we used fathers' descriptions of being thankful for their flexible work hours as part of the evidence for our claims about how fathers "carve out" time with their children with autism (Mitchell & Lashewicz, 2019); on the flipside, we used fathers' descriptions of the demands of their long work hours as part of the evidence to support our claims for the importance of practitioners' working around fathers' schedules in planning family support activities (Shave & Lashewicz, 2015). At the same time, we were struck by the many ways in which fathers described navigating work and family responsibilities. Although we used descriptions of navigating work and family to support our claims about other topics of fathering successes and struggles, here we turn to a full and separate examination of how fathers described their navigation of work and family responsibilities in relation to needs associated with having a child with autism.

Guided by the concept of traditional masculinity, yet retaining the language used by fathers, we began by organizing our data into broad themes of evidence of fathers as traditional providers or caregivers. Within these provider and caregiver themes, we generated themes of evidence about (a) fathers' approaches to fathering as reflected in their descriptions of managing work and family responsibilities and (b) meanings fathers attached to their work

Table 1. *Summary of Fathers' Marital Status, Relationship to Child(ren), Occupation, Level of Education, Total Number of Children, and Number of Children With ASD*

Father	Marital status	Father's relationships to children	Occupation	Level of education	Total no. of children	Total no of children with ASD
Jason	Married	Biological father to youngest son with ASD, step-father to older son without ASD	Consultant in public markets	Some university but no degree	2	1
Garry	Married	Biological	Public relations/ corporate communications	Degree in political science and diploma in journalism	2	1
Dan	Married	Biological	Professional musician	Master's in music performance	2	2
Isacc	Married	Biological	Engineering technologist	College diploma	2	1
Stan	Married	Biological	Transit supervisor; former truck driver	Minimal college; no certificate or diploma	3	3
Victor	Married	Biological	Psychiatrist	PhD	2	1
Gavin	Married	Biological	Technologist	Bachelor of arts music; diploma in industrial instrumentation engineering technology	1	1
Grant	Married	Biological	Sales	Postsecondary	2	1
Randy	Married	Biological	Corporate law firm	College diploma	2	1
Joel	Married	Biological	Senior desktop support analyst	College	3	1
Oliver	Married	Biological	Management consultant	MBA	2	1
Russell	Married	Biological	Consultant	MBA	1	1
Peter	Married	Biological	Information technologist	Bachelor of engineering	1	1
Tommy	Married	Biological	Marketing coordinator	Bachelor of science	1	1
James	Married	Biological	Self-employed	Two associate degrees	1	1
Benny	Married	Adoptive: International	Accountant	Bachelor of commerce	1	1
Ethan	Married	Biological	Lawyer	PhD	2	1
Tristan	Married	Biological	Social service agency	Postsecondary mathematics and computer science	4	2
Eli	Married	Biological	Investment banker; now a business executive	MBA	2	1
Blane	Married	Biological	Construction/fire protection	Degree in history	4	1
Marvin	Married	Biological	Business development/ government	Master's degree	1	1
Michael	Married	Biological	Business professor	PhD	3	1
Fred	Married	Biological	Professor/associate Dean	Bachelor of arts in accounting; MA and PhD in economics	2	1
Harry	Married	Biological	Plumber	Not mentioned	2	2
Nico	Married	Biological	Business analyst	Bachelor of commerce	2	1
William	Married	Biological	Lawyer	Bachelor of finance and economics; law school	2	1

Note. ASD = autism spectrum disorder.

responsibilities relative to raising a child with autism. For example, fathers' descriptions of themselves were coded with fathers' choices of words, such as *breadwinner* or *provider*, whereas descriptions of family responsibilities were given codes such as "time with him is important" or "career is number 2." Fathers' descriptions of meanings of paid employment were given codes such as "finances give stability." Codes were then arranged into subthemes, such as "traditional breadwinners" under the broader theme of how fathers approached

fathering, and work as information, support, and reprieve under the broader theme of meanings of employment.

Credibility Measures

The credibility of our analysis was enhanced by members checking, triangulating investigators, and memoing. Members checks occurred during interviews that included requests for clarifications and elaborations from participants as they shared their experiences. We later sent participants their interview transcript by email with the invitation that participants review their transcript and identify errors and omissions. One participant responded to thank us for the opportunity to share his experiences and to express wishing he had been more succinct in his descriptions. Email contact information and records of correspondence with participants is stored in a password-protected shared drive managed by the authors' university.

We triangulated investigators by having two authors involved in initial rounds of data analysis. These rounds were led by the first author conducting honors thesis research focused on the convergence of work, family, gender, and autism, and supported by the second author, who had previously analyzed these same data to generate findings about what fathers of children with autism need and how fathers see themselves as protectors. We came to our broadest themes of provider and/or caregiving fathering approaches as reflected in how fathers described balancing their work and family responsibilities. Authors 3 and 4 joined our analysis and correspondingly helped refine our theoretical framing and methodological decision-making. Authors 3 and 4 were well positioned to contribute to data analysis given that Author 3 had previously analyzed these data to generate findings about fathers carving out time and activities with their children (Mitchell & Lashewicz, 2015, 2019) and Author 4 had analyzed these data to generate findings about how fathers understood and navigated their marriages as part of raising a child with autism (see Lashewicz et al., 2018). Thus, through a series of author peer debriefing (approximately six sessions over 1 year), we discussed and reached consensus about the themes we were generating in light of the other findings we have produced from these data. We memoed a cumulative account of our discussions and consensus that we are offering a nuanced illumination of fathering approaches to managing work and family responsibilities including meanings fathers attach to work relative to family responsibilities associated with having a child with autism.

Results

We profiled approaches to fathering according to how fathers described managing work and family responsibilities into four themes as follows: (a) traditional breadwinners, which includes fathers who are sole financial providers and spend relatively little direct time with their children; (b) caregiving breadwinners, which encompasses fathers most of whom are sole financial providers, but who described actively protecting time to spend with their children or jumping in when needed for caregiving; (c) "tag-team" parents, a phrase coined by a participant, captures fathers who intentionally and equally share work and family responsibilities with their wives; and lastly, (d) caregiver fathers, which includes fathers who are the primary caregiver in their families or who share stories about actively prioritizing family over work. We then present themes of the meanings fathers attached to their work responsibilities relative to raising a child with autism. We organized meanings of work into three themes: (a) financial power and security in the face of autism related costs; (b) work as a source of information, support, and reprieve; and (c) work strain contributing to guilt, sadness, and depression. We link themes of *meanings of work* with themes of *fathering approaches* by identifying evidence for themes of meanings of work according to the fathering approach taken by each father who supplied evidence. The children named in the results are diagnosed with autism unless otherwise specified. Themes are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. *Summary of Themes*

Approaches to fathering	Meanings of work
1. Traditional breadwinner	a. Financial power and security in the face of autism related costs
2. Caregiving breadwinner	b. Work as information, support, and reprieve
3. Tag-team parents	c. Work strain contributing to guilt, sadness and depression
4. Caregiver fathers	

Fathering Styles

1. "Traditional" breadwinners. This group of fathers ($n = 11$, 42%) described spending considerable time at work and being otherwise away from everyday caregiving tasks with their child(ren) with autism. William, a lawyer and father to Brandon (age 10 years), aligned with traditional masculine ideals as he claimed to be the one "who wears the pants in my family." Fathers described themselves as provider, breadwinner, and protector, and indicated that their wives stayed home with the child(ren) and were in charge of "mother traditional" duties (William). These fathers spoke highly of their wives' unpaid labor. Oliver, a management consultant and father to Troy (age 3 years) stated, "it's fair to say my wife bears the majority of the day-to-day parenting tasks." Fathers reported that their wives stayed home to manage their child's medical, school, and home programming needs. Fathers also pointed to the gendered pay gap as part of their employment decisions. Gavin, an instrumentation technologist and father to Shaelyn (age 7 years), reflected on having children with high needs in light of men's earning power: "it gets pushed back to the more traditional roles of Dad being the breadwinner and Mom being the care provider … we're frankly able to earn more." Although wives of these fathers were well educated or had occupied good-paying jobs before having children (or both), fathers held higher earning power and spoke of the power of money in providing for their children despite restrictions this entailed to the time they were able to spend with their children.

Fathers spoke of being protectors of their child and noted that their children's disability had awakened their awareness of vulnerability. William reflected on protecting Brandon, "knowing that Brandon was going to be vulnerable, knowing that he was going to be judged and he was going to struggle … for a while." William expressed being strong for his wife and taking the lead in his family: "I'm the lion at the top of the hill. I'll fall on the sword before I'll let somebody else fall on it." Yet despite alignment with traditional fathering, fathers described multiple dimensions to their parenting and gave evidence of embracing alternative masculinities. Gavin, reflected on how having a child with autism had shaped his fathering as he expressed not needing parenting "support" yet recognizing the value of support: "actually it would be valuable … if we're falling into that more traditional role and we're working and how the hell do I fit in all this now? … I don't really have anybody that I can talk to about this stuff." Fathers in this group displayed vulnerability by describing their initial devastation about their child's diagnosis and their subsequent growth in having gained empathy, tolerance, and humility.

2. Caregiving breadwinners. These fathers ($n = 6$, 23%) described being financial providers but protecting evening and weekend time for family, particularly given the needs of their child(ren) with autism. Some of their wives stayed home, some worked part time, and one was a full-time student. Yet these wives remained chiefly in charge of house and childcare. Caregiving breadwinners classified child-focused labor as the "woman part" and provider responsibilities as the man's responsibility, yet, like breadwinner fathers, they recognized the value of unpaid labor and credited their wives for the smooth operations of their families in relation to the needs of their child(ren) with autism. Indeed, these fathers tended to value their wives' unpaid work because they had, at times, been highly involved in their children's care, including feeding, changing, bathing, and completing homework.

A desire to be highly involved with their children was a cornerstone for caregiving breadwinners who described themselves as hardworking and resourceful. Harry, a plumber and father to Xavier (age 3 years), highlighted working hard on his job yet aiming to spend as much time as possible with Xavier:

> most of my time is consumed with work … but from when I get home to when he goes to bed, I'm … his primary source of entertainment … but it's limited … I'm home at 5 o'clock or 6 o'clock, then you know he'll go to bed 8 or 9 so there's only two or three hours … so I like to spend that time with him.

Harry added context:

> I love being a dad and everything that comes along with that … I mean Xavier's a lot of work, but I'd rather be doing that work than not.

James, who is self-employed and father to Denis (age 5 years), fitted his employment schedule around Denis's needs. Beginning when Denis was an infant, James brought Denis to

work and did not hesitate to engage in care tasks and take Denis to meetings. James proudly noted being the second eldest of 12 children and having changed diapers since he was young. Yet in the same breath, James described himself as in change and "like most men, [doing] things [the personal care] systematically."

These fathers described themselves in terms such as being thick-skinned and protectors and spoke of roughhousing and playing with their children. Marvin, father to Lonny (age 3 years), who works in business development, explained having taken "a more natural role in terms of doing stuff with him and being active. I think that's maybe a dad role." As such, these fathers invoked or described parenting in terms of traditional gender expectations.

3. Tag-team parents. This group of fathers ($n = 5$, 19%) described sharing work and family responsibilities equally with their wives and used terms such as *tag teaming* and *job sharing* to convey having found a rhythm of working interchangeably with their wives in income earning and caregiving. This rhythm included scheduling paid work around caring for their child with autism and embracing the nurturing side of parenting. Victor, father to Kevin (age 7 years) job shares with his wife and commented about the benefits of job sharing: "You're much more active I think, probably a deeper relationship in part 'cause I'm home … I've been much more active than most dads." Yet even in "equal" arrangements, some division of tasks along traditional gender lines was evident, as Victor noted that his wife shopped for the children's clothes while he kept up with "the stereotype dad things" such as "mow[ing] the lawn, shovel[ing] the walks and tak[ing] care of home maintenance."

Fathers presented sharing childcare as tied to needing two incomes given their child's autism diagnosis. Grant, father to Jed (age 8 years) and who worked in sales, pointed out:

> It's [parenting] shared. Minerva and I both work full time … it all goes into one big pot and then out it goes, so it's a shared responsibility. Given what we've chosen to do with Jake's treatment, it is not an option for Minerva *not* to work full time. It's a real Catch 22 'cause she would love to spend more time and do more hands on, but the therapies, the evaluations, the training … it comes at an astronomical financial cost, and so it's a trade-off.

Nearly all fathers across our themes described having strong relationships with their wives, yet these descriptions were most pronounced in data from our tag-team fathers. In addition to their strong marriages, tag-team fathers referenced education, advocacy, and problem-solving as key to managing well. Grant, father to Jed (age 8 years), summarized:

> if you had a relationship where you differed on what we should do … I could see [it] being very, very challenging … so either by design or just luck, we've taken our tasks and chores and, and divvied them up where it's completely supportive. There's some overlap … and as I mentioned before there's just a lot more tasks to be done. … I mean I think of all the appointments we've gone to, all the hours of pouring through information … we kind of divvied up on what, where our strengths are and away we went.

4. Caregiver fathers.. These fathers ($n = 4$, or ~15%) described extensive involvement in, and prioritizing of, caregiving activities. Fathers in this group were all employed full time in work that afforded flexibility that was useful for working around care and appointment needs of their child(ren) with autism. Wives of the fathers in this group were also employed or enrolled full-time in post-secondary education (or both).

Caregiver fathers were involved in their child's fun and leisure activities, as well as their care and appointments. Tristan, who worked for a nonprofit organization, had two children with autism (15-year-old Duncan and 11-year-old Elliot) and reported having attended "all appointments and therapies with his children." Tristan had developed an extensive knowledge about autism programming and schooling, which he described as skewed toward mothers:

> I think a lot of social systems of support are built from the knowledge that's recorded on family functioning, which is predominately about the mother. I think systems aren't really designed to know the other half of the story. So, are we supporting families the right way if we're only supporting them from a concrete understanding of half of the story?

Fathers in this group described prioritizing family over work. Peter, who was an IT specialist and father to Christopher (age 5 years) said, "If I have to change a job, I will. [I think] how is

that going to affect Christopher?" Two fathers, Michael and Stan, had changed jobs to spend more time with their children. Michael, a teacher and father to Theresa (age 13 years), compared his current and previous jobs, noting that his current job afforded more free time with Theresa and that he only accepted this job after securing a school placement for Theresa. Likewise, Stan, a transit supervisor and father to three sons with autism, Darren (age 6 years) and twins Zack and Raphael (age 4 years), had been insistent about changing to a job that allowed him to be highly involved with his children:

> I've changed jobs because of my kids. I've tried to maximize my time with the kids. I try to visit their school. I don't take them for granted. Then I was able to land a new job, but from day one I vowed to be as involved as possible and to me that's important.

Meanings of Work Relative to Raising a Child With Autism

We now present three themes of meanings fathers attached to their paid work relative to fathering a child with autism: (a) financial power and security in the face of autism related costs; (b) work as a source of information, support, and reprieve; (c) work strain contributing to guilt, sadness, and depression.

Financial power and security in the face of autism related costs. Fathers, particularly traditional breadwinners, described the meaning of their work in terms of power to purchase services and enhance their sense of security for their families in response to autism-related needs. Such needs included care, programming, and managing appointments, and fathers in single-income households indicated that the parent who earned more was the income provider, while the parent with the lower income or income potential stayed home. For their part, fathers from two-income households, especially in the tag-team group, spoke of additional costs for their child with autism as requiring both parents to be employed. Although they qualified for publicly funded services, fathers purchased services privately for three reasons: (a) in the interim while they were waiting for publicly funded services to commence, (b) for needed services or resources not covered by publicly funded programs, or (c) as enrichment to publicly funded services.

Even before diagnosis, additional costs were incurred including for psychological, occupational, and speech assessments needed to obtain public funding. In describing opting to obtain assessment services privately, fathers referenced long waiting lists for publicly funded assessments. Nico, from our tag-team parent group (business analyst and father to Toby, (age 4 years), explained:

> You need that psychological assessment to get going. … If you go through the system, you're 6, 8 months to see these people so if your child … qualifies for a couple of years funding, it takes 6 months … if you don't have the cash to go and go privately, then you're waiting half a year.

Fathers reported feeling a sense of urgency to get services in place; several held the view that the window of optimal intervention for their child's brain development was narrow, and they needed to act quickly to engage services. Once families secure public funding, they face waiting lists to find service providers or professionals to work with their children. Russel, from our tag-team parent group, a consultant and father to Emmerson (age 4 years), said, "We weren't getting any services. We privately hired a speech therapist and [occupational therapists], which was expensive, but we didn't want to wait until we could get stuff going." Jason, from our caregiving breadwinner group, was a market consultant and father to Brett (age 4 years). Jason noted that they were "paying thousands of dollars literally out of pocket, just for testing on the biomedical side of things."

Even with publicly funded services in place, fathers from all parenting-style groups incurred ongoing costs. Community resources often do not accommodate for autism-related needs; thus, to participate in activities, children with autism need to be accompanied by support workers. Like public funding for respite care, funding for support workers is capped, leaving families to cover a portion of costs. Additionally, costs of attending activities specific to children with autism, such as summer camps, are often higher than public funding allotments, and this differential is covered by families. Costs related to special clothes, alternative therapies and special diets—such as supplements and gluten- and casein-free foods—were also incurred by parents. Isaac, from our traditional breadwinner group, was an engineering technologist and father to Reid (age 4 years). He described how

ongoing toileting issues, which caused Reid to soil his pants multiple times a day, got "pretty expensive" in terms of dry cleaners and cleaning the house. And in light of limits to public school preparedness to educate children with autism, some parents opted for private schools, an out-of-pocket expense that Grant father to Jed (age 8 years) from our tag-team parent group, noted comes with a "very long dollar."

Some fathers spoke of their power to purchase services as enhancing their sense of security in case they did not qualify for publicly funded services. Eli, from our traditional breadwinner group, was a business executive and father to Garrett (age 9 years). Eli highlighted:

> My job is to make sure the money comes in, and if we don't get funding [for in home programming], we'll keep it [programming] going. I mean we couldn't do half the stuff for Garrett if I didn't make as much money as I [do].

Other fathers spoke about financial power as affording a broad sense of security and stability. Isaac (from our traditional breadwinner group and father to Reid, age 4 years) contended: "I think the first rule of health care or having a kid with disability is, like, if you're poor, you're done, like you're at such a disadvantage." Likewise, William from our traditional breadwinner group (father of Brandon, age 10 years), explained:

> That's why I sacrifice as much as I do. Because I have come to the realization over the years that everything comes down to money … money may not necessarily make your life happier, but the one thing money does make is your life easier and you need an easier time of things to deal with something like autism.

Fathers described financial security in relation to obtaining support services over the long term. Ethan, from our traditional breadwinner group, was a lawyer and father to Noah (age 7 years). He elaborated on his drive to work hard in terms of unknowns of Noah's future:

> It's one of these wicked things where I have to work as hard as I do because although we hope the ending of the story is going to be a happy one and that Noah will be able to have a job and live on his own, we have to assume that he won't, so I have to work as hard as I do to make as much money as I can to save it for the future.

Like others, Ethan expressed fear and concern in relation to uncertain services and support needs and availability when their children reach adulthood.

Work as a source of information, support, and reprieve. As well as financial power and security, fathers from all but the caregiver parenting-style group described paid work as providing an environment for accessing information, receiving support, and taking a break from family responsibilities. Both Marvin from our caregiving breadwinner group father of Lonny (age 3 years) and William from our traditional breadwinner group father of Brandon (age 10 years) obtained earlier autism diagnoses for their children because of their work networks. William recalled that

> one of my former colleagues here, his wife is a speech therapist and [I] had been speaking to him and he had offered his wife to come and have a look at Brandon and so she came one evening. … She said I think he's exhibiting signs of autism and that was really the first time that we had really heard the phrase.

Further, fathers experienced work as supportive, particularly when flexible schedules and understanding bosses enabled them to attend to the needs of their children. William (from our traditional breadwinner group and father to Brandon, age 10 years) described long yet flexibly scheduled work hours that allowed him to set aside time with Brandon. Grant (from our tag-team parent group and father to Jed, age 8 years) appreciated being able to spend time at home given his workplace flexibility, while Isaac (from our traditional breadwinner group, father to Reid, age 4 years) could be active in Reid's home programming because his work allows him the first and third Friday of the month off. Nico (from our tag-team parent group and father to Toby, age 4 years) reported a positive relationship with his boss, including an understanding that Nico may "disappear for an afternoon" to attend to Toby. At the same time, Garry (from our caregiving breadwinner group who worked in public relations; father to Harlond, age 12 years) pointed out how work itself affords him a reprieve from caregiving stress. Garry noted: "I go to work so I, I get to escape it to some extent, where she you know has to drive him to school and, ah, you know just deals with him a lot more than I do." Jason (from our

caregiving breadwinner group, father to Brett, age 4 years) invoked the idea of work as reprieve by speaking of the constant demands his wife faced at home: "I know how trying it's been for her to be home every day." Similarly, Russell (from our tag-team parent group and father to Emmerson, age 4 years) spoke of taking over caregiving as soon as he arrives home: "By the time I get home, she is more than spent. So I say, go hide in the room, I'm doing dinner."

Work strain contributing to guilt, sadness, and depression. Fathers described the constraints to family life imposed by their work and corresponding feelings of guilt, sadness, and even depression. Although William from our traditional breadwinner group (father to Brandon, age 10 years) noted his dedication to work as part of a bargain for better care for Brandon, this kind of bargain could create guilt for fathers, who wanted to be more hands-on with their children. Ethan from our traditional breadwinner group (father to Noah, age 7 years) expressed guilt over his wife's stress; he perceived his wife as bearing "a tremendous, almost inhumane level of stress every day [being at home]." He noted sharing in the stress when he is at home, but at work, feeling a "tremendous sense of guilt." Fred from our caregiving breadwinner group who holds an academic position and is father to Trafford (age 12 years), noted that despite the relative flexibility of his work, he "missed a lot of the day-to-day stuff." Fred experienced corresponding guilt especially over the time when his family first moved cities and Fred was new in his position:

> At the time I moved here, I'm worried about tenure, I have to go to conferences, I have to work a lot and so I just wasn't home a lot … I wasn't there. Allison was and she didn't work for the first few years with Trafford, so I still struggle with a lot of guilt. … we don't have family here so we moved here because of my job so I wonder whether that was a good idea, you know I mean in my darker moments … that's how I feel.

The idea of missing out was echoed by Stan from our caregiver fathers group (father of Darren, age 6 years; and twins Raphael and Zack, age 4 years), who had previously worked as a truck driver. Stan expressed sadness over his lost connection with his eldest son for whom "mom was everything" following Stan's absences.

Tristan, from our caregiver fathers group (father of Duncan, age 15 years, and Elliot, age 11 years) reported feeling pressure not to display stress at work even though family stress was high. Tristan had previously worked in the computer software industry and commented that his job stress had been compounded by a having a child newly diagnosed with autism:

> The stresses on trying to maintain and keep functional in a professional career was very challenging. I found myself putting in probably 70 hours of work a week to try and make up for lack of performance, and I thought I was going to be constructively dismissed.

Tristan's stress contributed to his diagnosis of clinical depression. This diagnosis afforded Tristan time to rest; yet, Tristan's absence from paid work damaged his employability in the computer software industry. Tristan's transition to a career in human services resulted in a lower income, but his strain in juggling work and family was considerably less.

Discussion

In illuminating how having a child with autism affects fathers' navigation of work and family responsibilities, we conclude that fathers face distinct challenges and exemplify ideals of both traditional and contemporary fathering. The costs associated with autism, including assessments and therapy, private school fees, special diets, and respite, tended to influence how parents divided employment responsibilities. The pressures to begin early intervention for their child with autism created a distinct intensity about generating income to pay for intervention related activities not covered, or not expediently covered, by publicly funded programs.

A number of fathers indicated that the mothers stayed home to manage childcare and disability-related programming, while fathers acted as sole financial providers, often working long hours. Outcomes from such arrangements included fathers' emotional strain of missing hands-on childcare and activities, as well as managing the intense demands of work itself. At the same time, some fathers found work helpful as a source of information, support, and reprieve. Yet we are mindful of the ways in which fathers' accounts of nonfinancial benefits of work may have reflected their positions of relative privilege. Fathers described being part of supportive,

well-resourced environments where knowledgeable colleagues helped with accessing services and supportive bosses understood absences on short notice. Being able to work remotely and having flex days that allow fathers to attend a child's appointments reflected another layer of employee privilege. Experiences of strain, such as that associated with attempting to keep pace within the rapidly evolving field of technology, and corresponding mental health struggles, illustrated the consequences fathers can face in efforts to balance work and family demands. Yet we did not find evidence of "not man enough" treatment and general mistreatment of fathers for taking time off as reported by Berdhal and Moon (2013). Nor did fathers in our sample report being shamed or harassed or incurring other penalties for engaging in caregiving in ways reported by fathers in other studies, who described compromised earning power or being labeled as poor workers and ineligible for reward subsequent to requesting family leave (Coltrane et al., 2013; Rudman & Mesche, 2013).

While acknowledging that our secondary analysis precluded pursuing the topic of social mistreatment during the interviews, it is possible that our sample's relatively high-status employment or their child's autism diagnosis mitigated the treatment they received from employers and colleagues. We are left wondering whether fathers in our sample may have received "fatherhood benefit" relative to fathers without children with autism (or male employees without children). At the same time, supportive, flexible, self-directed employment experiences may be unlikely for fathers with lower paying jobs, ethnically diverse fathers, or fathers with lower levels of education or those in jobs that entail stricter adherence to a time clock (Berdhal & Moon, 2013; Hodges & Budig, 2010). Indeed, in our presentation of results, we illustrated how choices available to fathers (and parents) are embedded in a broader sociocultural context that is often restrictive or ill prepared in relation to disability experiences; however, we did not address factors such as race, culture, or sexual orientation. For example, studies of parents of children with autism who are part of ethnic minorities supply evidence of parenting strain owing to navigating health care that is not culturally responsive (Jegatheesan et al., 2010) or being part of a cultural subgroup where autism is viewed as a signifier of dishonor (Hwang & Charnley, 2017). Future theoretical and empirical work focused on intersections of disability, race, and dynamic family structures (single, gay, or nonresident fathers, to name a few) will enrich understandings of fathers and their balancing of work and family.

Our results contribute to theoretical work being done related to masculinities and fathering. The good provider role remains important (Christiansen & Palkovitz, 2001), and we highlight fathers of children with autism as experiencing distinct family responsibilities that require a careful consideration of trade-offs between work and family. Thus, we align with Doucet (2004) in concluding that most fathers in our sample neither "reproduce nor challenge hegemonic masculinity per se, but rather create new forms of masculinity that are enacted against a weighty backdrop of hegemonic masculinity yet incorporate varied aspects of femininities" (p. 279) and are further influenced by the presence of disability in the family. We elaborate on Doucet's work because fathers in our sample may be viewed as exemplars of modern-day masculinity in bringing together provider and caregiver responsibilities. Fathers' dedication to financial provision and planning is powerful in light of future uncertainties their child(ren) may face. Simultaneously, fathers' dedication to spending time caring for their child(ren) is amplified by their child's relatively high needs.

Correspondingly, while being intent on earning and exercising financial power, fathers were willing to expose themselves by sharing parenting fears and worries and speaking tenderly about their child's care needs and the intricacies of meeting them. Although our traditional breadwinner fathers used classic masculine rhetoric of leadership and protection, these fathers also described their struggles in coming to terms with their child's diagnosis. Further, descriptions of children's susceptibility to struggling and being judged, and fathers' commitment to protecting their children, demonstrate traditional masculinity tempered with compassion and nurturing and illustrate traditional masculinity as a resource. Indeed, although provider and breadwinner roles continue to be valorized in Western society, fathers of children with autism, like fathers of chronically ill children in the study by Beaton and colleagues (2012), may harness the provider and breadwinner characteristics as strengths. As such, we submit that the blurring of boundaries between mothers as caregivers and fathers

as breadwinners, which Ball and Daly (2012) argued has been driven by increasing numbers of mothers in the workforce, also can be driven by a potent desire to be part of the day-to-day nurturing of a child with relatively high needs, and this includes desire to lighten the load for the other caregiving parent.

Our results indicate that fathers are carving out space in realms that are traditionally masculine and traditionally feminine, but gendered pay gaps continue, and when opting for single-income households that leave a parent at home to manage autism related needs, fathers' income prevails. Indeed, disability researchers have demonstrated that fathers of children with disabilities are particularly likely to perceive their paid employment as key to their provision of support (e.g., Carpenter & Towers, 2008; Cheuk & Lashewicz, 2016). We add dimension to how paid employment can be intertwined with ideas about supporting children. For example, we found that the financial power accrued through work is described with particular force by fathers from the traditional breadwinner group, consistent with their decisions to dedicate themselves primarily to income earning. At the same time, the idea of work as a strain that leads to guilt, sadness, and depression was pronounced among traditional breadwinners in light of their long hours at work or away from family, as well as among caregiver fathers whose focus was on hands-on care for their children.

We see practical implications of our results for practitioners who support families of children with autism. First, professionals should redouble efforts to hear perspectives from both mothers and fathers, and this will likely entail working around fathers' availabilities and recognizing meanings of work for fathers, including how fathers such as William and Ethan pride themselves on being driven in their long hours of work toward securing their child's future. Second, programs that aim to educate day cares and day homes or provide training about needs associated with autism and other disabilities may ease parental discomfort with childcare and enhance the choices that parents perceive they have in making employment decisions and having greater freedom to spend time away from one's child. Finally, we argue the workplace policy implications of our results. Although fathers in our sample have relatively high-status employment that entails collegial flexibility and understanding, other researchers have highlighted that workplaces require improved policies to account for and respond to employees with children with disabilities (Stoner & Stoner, 2014). Flex time, family or medical leave, and greater access to benefits could ease the strain for parents making decisions about employment and caregiving. Employee and employer education through lunch-and-learns, webinars, or personal testimonials could further educate and break down misunderstandings and stigma that may surround disability.

Limitations

This study was limited to a small sample of fathers comprising heterosexual, two-parent families with relatively high socioeconomic status and cohesive marriages. We recognize that experience of work–family balance will likely differ for fathers from lower socioeconomic or extremely high socioeconomic backgrounds and for nonresident fathers, single fathers, or fathers in marital partnerships characterized by conflict. Additionally, our sample self-described as educated and resourceful. Thus, we offer little insight into experiences of fathers with limited knowledge about autism and accessing publicly funded resources.

Further, our study is part of a new-millennium surge in diagnostic discernment of, and response to, autism among Western countries. More specifically, our study was conducted in a region of Canada distinguished for best and promising practices in service provision for children with autism. Indeed, our provincial context has garnered media reputation as a hub for autism-related services with reports of families relocating to avail themselves of these provincially administered services. Thus, we offer little insight into experiences of fathers living in contexts where autism is not perceived as an important health and social policy issue.

Finally, given that our findings were generated through a secondary directed content analysis, participants were not directly questioned about their experiences navigating work and family responsibilities as fathers of children with autism. Instead, we analyzed descriptions fathers offered as they discussed parenting successes and challenges. Thus, descriptions of balancing work and family were largely initiated by fathers. Not all fathers spoke in terms of balancing work and family, and of those who did, some offered more detail than others. Although

this introduces bias into our findings, it also affords a distinct richness of themes generated without having been directly targeted.

Conclusion

The contemporary push for increased father involvement in day-to-day care for children is rooted in evidence of benefits both for children's development and for fathers' satisfaction. However, for fathers of children with autism, like those in our sample, the financial costs may not allow for a family arrangement in which they can both provide financially and spend large amounts of time at home. Thus, in understanding fathers of children with autism, we bear in mind that although hours spent with children may be limited, the quality of time spent with children and the meanings fathers assign to father–child time as they navigate work and family involvement are important (Christiansen & Palkovitz, 2001; Dollahite & Hawkins, 1998; Mitchell & Lashewicz, 2018). In all, we see evidence that demands associated with a child's autism diagnosis may propel fathers to carefully and creatively balance work and family responsibilities in ways that challenge narrow definitions of masculinity.

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