Chapter 5

Fathers on Leave Alone in Quebec (Canada): The Case of Innovative, Subversive and Activist Fathers!

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5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, we present first the Quebec Parental Insurance Plan implemented in 2006, as well as some statistics on its use by parents to shed some light on the context for leave uptake for Quebec fathers, as the leave program and uptake are different from Canada. We then present a brief review of the literature on the question of fatherhood in Quebec and specifically on the social changes that brought fathers to become more involved with their families by sharing family responsibilities with mothers. We turn next to the portrait of respondents with whom we conducted interviews for this research on fathers taking leave alone with their child. Then, we focus on the experience of fathers who took parental/ paternity leave, alone with the child, on their relations with the child, family relationships, as well as the emotions experienced during this period (see also Tremblay and Dodeler 2015). Following our previous work on fathers and parenting (Tremblay 2003, 2012a, b), we wanted to study parenthood as experienced by fathers and look into the situation observed since the implementation of the new paternity leave reserved for fathers. Two main issues are central to our analysis: What have fathers experienced and felt while they were alone with their child at home during parental/ paternity leave? And how does this experience affect their life, their career and the gendered division of labour within the family?

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Table 5.1 Parental leave benefit plans, Canada and Quebec

	Canada Employment Insurance	Quebec basic plan	Quebec special plan
Eligibility	600 h	\$2,000 earnings	
Self-employed workers	Covered only since 2011 (6000 \$ minimum earnings)	Covered since 2006	
Basic replacement rate	55 % for 50 weeks	70 % for 25 weeks	75 % for 40 weeks
		55 % for 25 weeks	
Low income replacement rate	Up to 80 %	Up to 80 %	
Maximum insurable earnings	CAN\$45 900	CAN\$66,000	
Waiting period	2 weeks (per couple)	None	
Duration	15 weeks maternity	18 weeks maternity	15 weeks maternity
	35 weeks parental	32 weeks parental	25 weeks parental
	No paternity leave	5 weeks paternity	3 weeks paternity

Source: Adapted and updated from “Child Care Spaces Recommendations” Report from the Ministerial Advisory Committee on the Government of Canada’s Child Care Spaces Initiative, Government of Canada, January 2007

5.2 Quebec Policies for Parental Leave

As in many OECD countries, Canada has revised its policies on parental leave. In 2001 the Parental Leave Program of the federal government underwent two significant changes: one relates to the number of paid weeks that can be shared by spouses (from 10 to 35 weeks) and another to the elimination of the 2 weeks period of unpaid leave before the partner receives benefits (Marshall 2008).

Following the agreement signed with the federal government in 2005, as of 2006, Quebec has implemented its own benefit plan, namely the Quebec Parental Insurance Plan (QPIP). This plan differs in several respects from the federal program. Indeed, QPIP offers fathers the possibility to take 3–5 weeks of paternity leave (3 weeks with higher wage replacement rate, or 5 with lower benefits), which is non-transferable to the mother. Parents may choose to benefit from the “basic plan” or the “special regime”. The “basic plan” offers lower benefits but applies over a longer period and the “special regime” provides higher benefits over a shorter period. In addition, compensation rates for parental, paternity and maternity leave are higher than those offered by the federal government. Also, since 2006 self-employed workers have access to the benefits, a characteristic which has just been added to the federal scheme in 2011. Fathers are thus entitled to a paternity leave of 5 weeks which can be added to all or part of the 32 weeks that parents can share according to their preferences. Table 5.1 describes the two plans available to Quebec parents and compares them to the Employment Insurance Plan, which covers parental leave in Canada.

According to the Quebec Ministry of Family (Ministère de la famille et des aînés 2012) paternity leave has several objectives: to encourage fathers to take leave after

the birth of their child; to promote equality between men and women and to ensure that workplaces recognize the parental responsibilities of fathers. Along with these objectives, paternal involvement plays an important role in the policy (the ministerial language speaks for itself “*For equal rights to become de facto equality*”), with father involvement being linked to the achievement of gender equality, a major objective of the Quebec policy, also strongly supported by unions and women’s groups. While taking paternity leave is not yet a totally “taken for granted” event as in Sweden, Quebec has quickly moved in this direction as 80 % of fathers now take the leave, and 75 % of them take the 5 week paternity leave, many going on to share the parental leave. When they do share, they actually take on average 13 weeks of total leave (parental and paternity).

The QPIP program was a huge success since according to ISQ (2013 cited in CGAP 2013) Quebec had 88,500 births in 2011, including 75,800 “QPIP births”, that is births where benefits were paid to the parents. This represents a participation rate of 85.6 %. The difference between the number of births and the number of “QPIP births” represents people who were not eligible for coverage because they had an earned income of less than \$ 2,000 (CGAP 2013a, b). Note that among the 75,800 “QPIP births”, 67 % had benefits that were paid to both parents, 23 % to only the mother and 10 % to the father alone. In 2011, 77 % of fathers in the “QPIP births” took time at the birth of the child (CGAP 2013a, b). As noted above, parents can choose between the basic plan and the special plan; the choice may vary depending on whether both parents are eligible to the QPIP, if only the mother is or if only the father is (CGAP 2013a, b).

5.3 Brief Review of Research on Fatherhood in Quebec

While there has been a lot of interest on work-family measures in organizations and their take-up by fathers (Tremblay 2012a, b, 2003), there is less work on fathering, and in Quebec it tends to be concentrated in the psychology field. However, Pacaut et al (2011, p. 5) conducted a review of work on fatherhood in recent decades, noting that “if there are questions today about the place and the role of men in the family with children, it is primarily because the “traditional” model of the father is called into question, as is the case also in many developed countries.” (Our translation).

During the 1970s and 1980s there was mainly research on the reconstruction of fathering, including parenting skills of fathers and there was a growing affirmation that fathers possess skills and can take care of children, even when they are very young (Dulac 1997: 136 cited in Pacaut et al. 2011, p 5.). During the 1990s, Quebec research highlights the importance of the role of fathers in children’s lives both emotionally and psychologically, and also discusses fathers’ commitment to their children. In the years 2000 and beyond, researchers appear to be more interested in the diversity of family backgrounds and look at fatherhood in the context of union breakup and/or immigration; they also address the issue of parenthood and homo-

sexuality (Pacaut et al. 2011, p. 6). Fatherhood as an “identity project” is also an issue; indeed, according to Pacaut et al. (2011, p. 6), “Being a father is more than a social role, it is an identity project.” In this line of thought, according to Lacharité (2009, cited in Pacaut et al. (2011 p. 6), “It is not so much the realization of tasks, duties or obligations that defines the contours of fatherhood, but rather the fact that men accept (or more precisely, negotiate!) to engage themselves in the paternal role which constitutes its substance.”

Dulac and Lacharité (mentioned above) were amongst the first authors on fatherhood, but they mainly looked at the issue from an identity and psychological perspective. Research on work-family articulation long centered on women and mothers, until researchers started to look at fathers in the 2000s (Tremblay 2003). In Quebec, the work on Canadian fathers by Doucet (2006) is known by researchers in the field. However, there is a strong language barrier between Canada and Quebec, so that social debates are different and it is mainly Quebec authors, feminist groups and women’s committees in trade unions that animate debates on these issues of fatherhood and parenthood.

While we cannot say that in Quebec, paternity leave has come to be “taken for granted” as much as is the case in Sweden, it is surely more the case than in the rest of North America, where there is no such leave reserved for fathers. Also, the whole debate on work-family reconciliation has been extremely important in the last decades, with the Ministry of the Family being very active in supporting work-family programs. The Ministry which offers financial support to firms in order to develop such programs, has developed some web pages and published a “work-family best practice” guide, as well as a “work-family norm”. This “norm” is in fact more of a “label” or recognition that firms have followed a formal process to develop work-family measures and it is supported by the Normalisation Board, which also deals with ISO workplace norms. The debate on parental/paternity leave was thus very active in Quebec and any attempt by a government to change the regulation or benefits in the context of austerity measures, brings the “parental leave coalition” back to life. Indeed, Quebec unions and women’s groups formed a coalition which pushed this issue forward for some 10 years, until the new parental leave regime was adopted in 2006 (Tremblay 2012a; Doucet et al. 2009). In 2014, when the Liberal government just “hinted” at reducing QPIP benefits, there was immediately a very vocal opposition to any questioning of what is seen as an important social program and part of working parents’ rights.

The objective of this new parental and paternity leave was to favor a stronger participation of fathers in leave, as well as equality between men and women more generally. The traditional obstacles to men taking leave are still present, that is some workplace opposition, the fact that men still usually earn more than women, and that there may be resistance on the part of some mothers at the idea of losing part of “their” leave. This is precisely why there was a lobby for a non-transferable paternity leave. Interestingly, workplace opposition was apparently not important in the case of the fathers who participated in our research. There was little to “negotiate” as the leave has come to be seen as a “right” for most fathers, and relatively well accepted in the work environment, although there are surely workplaces that oppose

these leaves more actively, as we observed in large law firms (Tremblay and Mascova 2013; Tremblay 2013, 2016) and also in the nursing sector (Tremblay 2014b).

We now turn to the concept of father involvement (Dubeau et al. 2007, 2009), or participation (Barnett & Baruch 1987; Brugeilles & Sebille 2009, 2013), which is important for our research as it has been taken up in policy discussions in Quebec over the last 15 years or so, not only in the context of the QPIP implementation, but also due to the fact that the Chagnon Foundation (one of the very few private foundations to finance social science research in Quebec) has made children's well-being its major objective. They finance advertisements on TV where paternal involvement is highlighted, and also have a magazine (*Naître et grandir*, or "Being born and growing") which supports parental involvement in general, and paternal involvement in particular.

5.4 The Concept of Father Involvement

The concept of father involvement is difficult to define and several typologies exist. Some researchers define it in relation to the time spent with the child, others are interested in the nature of the relationship with the child (activities carried out with the child and care for the child on a daily basis), the quality of the relationship with the child, but it is less often discussed in terms of responsibilities assumed by fathers (Turcotte et al. 2001).

To define the concept of paternal involvement we have adopted the definition proposed by the team ProsPères cited in Forget (2009, p. 82) "Fathers' involvement refers to participation and ongoing concern of the father, biological or not, for the physical, psychological and social development of the child." According to Forget (2009, p. 82) this definition is based on "seven dimensions: the father as provider, the responsible father, the interacting father, the caring father, the loving father, the evocative father and the citizen father." This definition focuses on the continuing role of the father, who again may not be the biological father, who also may be away from the child, and this takes into account the new realities of the family. In any case, the concept of father involvement is put forward by many groups, and in this context, the ProsPères group and Chagnon Foundation being amongst the most important.

Pacaut et al. (2011 p 7) also define what being an involved father means:

"An involved father is a responsible father who is involved in the tasks and responsibilities for the child. He is also a loving father, available for the child: he offers his emotional and cognitive support, and actively participates in the physical care of the child, as well as having meaningful interactions with his child.

The material and financial contribution to the child's support and family well-being is also a sign of father involvement. The "evocative" father refers to the importance of the father's relationship with his child and the pleasure that this relationship provides, which can create what ProsPère researchers call "spontaneous responses." An involved father can finally be a "political" father, who participates in events to promote father involvement for example. (Pacaut et al. 2011, p. 7).

According to Quéniart (2002a, cited in Pacaut et al. 2011), there are three forms of paternal involvement, or types of fathers:

1. Providers and protective fathers: everything about the child relates to the mother, the father has the authority and the activities he offers to the child are usually male-type activities (sports, crafts). These fathers' work schedules are heavy and their wives are often stay-at-home moms. Their responsibility is related to the family.
2. Postmodern fathers: the relationship to the child is important, it brings satisfaction both at the personal and relational levels. Family and parenting duties are shared according to the affinities of the parents as well as their availability and not on the basis of gendered or genetic predispositions. Such fathers are most often found in the dual-earner homes.
3. Ambivalent fathers situate themselves in between the traditional paternal role and the post-modern father. These fathers are not really responsible for the child's care, but support the mother.

In her study of Portuguese fathers taking leave alone, Wall (2012) presented four profiles of fathers: the Constrained fathers, the Radical Break, the Innovative and Independent and the Innovative and Subversive fathers. The last two models are similar to some extent to the postmodern father mentioned above, while the first would be closer to the traditional model, the provider and protector, according to the previous typology.

5.5 Methodology

Building on previous work (Tremblay 2012a, b, 2010, 2003), we carried out research on the experiences of fathers who took paternity/paternal leave with their child in Quebec. The Quebec Ministry of Employment gave us access to the list of fathers who received a benefit under the QPIP in 2011 and 2012. The respondents come mainly from this list but we also used social networks, a university website and the media; we completed our list with the "snowball technique". The eligibility criteria were to have taken at least 4 weeks of paternity or parental leave, during which fathers were alone with the child, while mothers had returned to work. However, given the difficulties in recruiting respondents, we also included fathers who had taken leave with the mother. We considered these as a distinct group of fathers and in this Chapter we only include fathers who spent at least 4 weeks alone with the child.

The interviews were held mainly in our university offices in Montreal but sometimes by phone because of the geographical distance and time constraints of the fathers. As Table 5.2 shows, the fathers who took parental/ paternity leave alone with the child come from different professional groups: liberal professions (10) managers (3), white collar workers (7), blue collar workers (4) and self-employed (2). We wanted some diversity and this corresponds to the general portrait of fathers

Table 5.2 Portrait of fathers who took paternity/parental leave for at least four weeks alone with the child

Father	Age	Children	Type of leave	Man's employment situation and hours of work	Woman's employment situation and hours of work
1.	32	1 boy of 2	Paternity leave: 5 weeks Parental leave – 8 months alone	Liberal profession 28 h/w/4 days	Liberal profession 21 h/w/ 3 days
2.	33	1 boy of 7, 1 girl of 2	Other paid leave: 2 weeks: Parental leave – 6 months alone	Liberal profession 35 h/w (2 days from home)	Liberal profession 35 h/w (2 days from home)
3.	36	1 boy of 11 months	Paternity leave: 5 weeks Parental leave – 6 months alone	Manager 40/s	Liberal profession 28 h/w officially, but in fact 35
4.	35	2 girls, aged 3 and 1	Paternity leave: 6 weeks Parental leave – 5 months alone	Liberal profession 35 h/w	Liberal profession 35 h/s
5.	39	3 girls aged: 7, 6, 2	Paternity Leave: 6 weeks Parental leave – 6 months alone	Liberal profession 40 h/w	Liberal profession 40 h/w
6.	30	1 boy of 2, 1 girl of 4	Paternity Leave: 6 Parental leave – 6 months alone	Liberal profession 55 h/w	Liberal profession 35 h/w
7.	35	1 boy aged 1	Other paid leave: 2 weeks: Parental leave – 6 months alone	Liberal profession 40 to 45 h/w	Liberal profession 40 to 45 h/w
8.	25	1 boy: 14 months	Other paid leave: 2 weeks: Parental leave – 6 months alone	Employé 35 to 50 h/w	Self-employed: Hair Salon
9.	35	1 girl: 18 months	Paternity leave: 6 w Parental leave – 6 months alone	Liberal profession 35 h/w	Self-employed: Communications 40 to 50 h/w
10.	34	1 girl: 10 months	Paternity leave: 5 w Parental leave – 6 months alone	Liberal profession 40 to 50 h/w	Liberal profession 30 h/w
11.	37	2 boys aged: 5 and 18 months	Paternity Leave: 5 weeks alone	Manager 35 to 60 h/s	Liberal profession 24 h/w/3 days
12.	37	2 girls aged 10 and 6	Paternity Leave: 5 weeks Parental leave 3 months alone	Self-employed 50/w	Liberal profession 60/h/w
13.	40	1 girl 16 months	Paternity Leave: 5 weeks Parental leave 6 months alone	Manager 35 h/w	Self-employed 20 h/w

(continued)

Table 5.2 (continued)

Father	Age	Children	Type of leave	Man's employment situation and hours of work	Woman's employment situation and hours of work
14.	41	2 girls aged: 2 and 14 months	Parental leave 6 months alone	Liberal profession 35 h/w	Liberal profession 35 h/w
15.	37	3 girls: 11, 8 and 6	Parental leave – 2 months alone	Liberal profession 35 h/w	Full-time student
16.	33	1 boy aged 8 and 2 girls 4 and 2	Parental leave – 3 months alone	Blue collar worker 40 to 75 h/w	Employee 40/45 h/s
17.	34	1 boy aged 8 and 1 girl aged 2	Parental leave – 3 months alone	Employee 35 h/w	Employee 40 h/s
18.	35	1 girl 19 months	Parental leave – 3 months alone	Employee 30 h/w	Liberal profession 40 to 50 h/w
19.	33	1 boy aged 10 and 1 girl of 2	Paternity Leave: 5 weeks at the end of leave	Employee: 35 h/w, about 100 h/w in overtime a year	Liberal profession 35 h/w
20.	35	1 girl of 4 and 1 boy of 2	Paternity Leave: weeks Parental leave 6 months alone (end of the leave)	Employee 35 h/w	Employee 35 h/w
21.	41	2 boys: 12 and 14 months	Parental leave 6 months (from the 4 th to 10 th month)	Employee 40 h/w	Self-employed: hair salon 40 h/w
22.	34	1 boy of 2	Parental leave 6 months, from the 6 th month	Employee 40 h/w	Employee
23.	31	1 girl of 5 and 1 boy of 18 months	Paternity Leave: 5 w Parental leave 3 months alone	Self-employed 25 to 30 h/w	Self-employed 25 to 30 h/w
24.	34	2 boys: 4 and 15 months	Parental leave 3 months, from the 9 th month to 12th	Blue collar worker 36 h/w + 10 h overtime a week	Employee 40 h/s
25.	38	1 girl of 6 and 1 boy of 3	Paternity leave: 5 weeks Parental leave: 6 months	Blue collar worker 40 h/w + 10 h overtime a week	Employee 30 h/s
26.	31	1 boy of 4, 1 girl of 2	Paternity leave: 5 weeks Parental leave: over 4 weeks along	Blue Collar worker 36 h/w and 8–10 h overtime a week	Employee 30 h/w

taking leave, although there is no perfect representation (CGAP 2013a, b, 2011). In general, fathers in the liberal professions have partners in similar professions (8), others are self-employed (1) or full-time student (1).

Fathers are 25–41 years of age; they are married or in common law unions (25/26), and one father is separated (1/26). The number of children per household varies from one to three; nine out of 26 fathers have a child 10–24 months old; 14 out of 26 have two children, ages ranging from 1 to 12 years; in the other households there is at least one child aged between 1 and 3 years. In our interviews, we centered on leave taken for the youngest child.

As concerns the income of fathers and mothers, 14 fathers out of 26 say they have a gross annual income superior to their wives and 12 fathers say their wife's income is higher than theirs. The annual income of the fathers is within a range from 15 000 to 120 000 Canadian dollars (about 96 cents to the US dollar in 2014). Their partner's income is between \$ 5,000 and \$ 220 000 (three women earn between 200,000 and 220,000 dollars).

Table 5.2 presents the characteristics of fathers who took parental/paternity leave for at least 4 weeks alone with the child. Here we focus on fathers who took parental leave alone with their child, but we also met with fathers who have not taken leave alone. In general, they only took the paternity leave of 5 weeks, to help the mother immediately after birth. It is interesting to see that many fathers want to be present when they feel they can assume a greater paternal role, hence the deferral of a portion of parental leave, which they share with the mother, later on, when the child is a little older.

5.6 The Reasons for Taking Part of the Leave Alone

Many fathers took paternity leave with the mother at birth and then returned to work a few months before continuing with parental leave alone. Besides the fact that these fathers wanted to spend time with the child and to care for them, several reasons brought fathers to take leave alone and to do so when the child is already a few months old. For some fathers, breastfeeding has an impact in the sharing of the leave. As many mothers breastfeed during the first 6 months, fathers will take parental leave later on, when the nursing period is over. The quotes below show the most recurrent reasons presented by the fathers we interviewed, beyond the fact that the nursing period is often reserved for the mother. Many fathers prefer to take the leave later, considering it is easier to care for an older child.

I wanted to be near my daughter, and it was easier for me when she was at least 9 months. Since she is 9 months old I am very able to take care of her and spend time with her. (Brian, 35 yrs, professional)

Other fathers consider it is important to create a connection with the child from an early age:

It's tremendously important, it is as if there was really a trust, that is a whole other level of complicity, just getting to know the child 24 hours a day and then to see her reactions, more security and confidence. (Adam, 38 yrs, employee)

Many fathers also indicate they prefer to keep the child at home during the first years of life and not have to send the child to daycare, while others mention gender equality objectives, saying it is important to share leave between both parents because of the leave's impact on working life:

My wife and I separated the leave [...] it just seems that the price we both pay for this is less this way and thus more acceptable professionally. (Tom, 35 yrs, professional)

For some mothers it is clear that they want to share parental leave with their spouse, but others have felt the need to return to work earlier and that is when the father continues with the leave, then parenting alone. It is also in response to their own experiences with their father that some fathers want to distinguish themselves from their own father:

I had a very traditional father, who never cried, no matter if he lost a finger, who never missed a day of work, work was important for him. I'm trying not to be like that, to show my daughter that you can have emotions and we can let go a little. (Bob, 33 yrs, employee)

Sometimes the choice of the parent who takes parental leave may be related to instrumental reasons: the amount of compensation, a good collective agreement, or the relative income of each parent.

It's a question of finance. I won't hide the fact that my wife has a higher salary than mine and since the percentage of benefits is 75 % of your salary, it is better if the one who has the lowest salary stops working. (Jim, 33 yrs, professional)

As shown in the above quotes, the reasons for fathers taking the parental leave alone are based on different factors including the return to work of the partner, the desire to develop a connection with the child from an early age, the objective of gender equality considering the impact of the leave on a career, the loss of less income, and finally to differentiate one's behavior from that of one's own father.

5.7 Taking Paternity Leave Alone or with the Partner

Our interviews show a clear difference between the experiences of paternity leave taken with the mother and leaves taken by the father alone with the child. One father explains how he developed his independence and established his own routine: "From the time I was alone with the child, I felt I could give directions or new meaning, a little more personal orientations in education and relationship with my child. When you are second in line, you follow the pattern that has been already implemented by your spouse. She designed her routine, you follow this routine, and then when you are alone, you don't need to do things in the same way, you'll not go to the same park, you won't do the same activities."

Other fathers indicate that immediately after the child's birth, they pay more attention to the mother whereas later on in the parental leave, attention is focused on empowering the father vis-à-vis their child. In addition, during the period of parental leave, the child grows older, and fathers have to adapt, which allows them to take control and set up their own routine (care, activities, education, etc.). Some fathers, especially those with several children, expressed some difficulties when they could not be supported by their spouse during the period when they were alone at home with the children.

Fathers mentioned several differences between the two types of leave. When both parents are together, the mother often has control over everything concerning the child (health, education, etc.) and fathers are only "participants" in the routine established by the mother. If breastfeeding is seen as a benefit to the child by all fathers, it is nevertheless also considered a barrier that sometimes prevents them from getting closer to the child for a while. Fathers fill this gap by dealing with the household tasks usually performed by the mother. During this period most admit that they essentially "help" the mother. In contrast, when the father is alone with the child, he gains autonomy and accountability, he becomes the "captain of the ship" and establishes his own routine.

5.8 Fathers' Experiences Alone with the Child

For most parents, the choice to take parental/paternity leave alone with the child is related to the objective of gender equality. This objective of gender equality was important for most fathers in our research (20/26), all of which were part of dual-earner couples and who, when they were alone with the child, were involved in both the household tasks and in caring for children while the mother worked or attended university. While not all Quebec fathers share tasks equally, it is clear that this new fatherhood model has gained momentum, especially with younger generations.

Throughout the period of leave alone with the child, fathers reported experiencing strong emotions that have enabled them to acquire skills and attitudes they had not known they could master, such as: trust, adaptation, patience, stress management, letting go and so on. The language they use to talk about the time spent with the child is revealing of their emotions, feelings they had mostly never experienced until then for another person and they realize that the child is unique and now comes before their own person.

To be close, to feel the child's belly full, I was happy to feel fulfilled, it was nice; I was happy to see his toothless smile, his plump legs, it's a great love, a sense of attachment, pride, well-being, satisfaction, the feeling of being at the right place. (Bob, 33 yrs, employee)

Thus, as pointed out by O'Brien (2009), taking paternity leave fosters practical and emotional involvement of fathers in infant care and creates a connection with the child, while supporting the mother. If at the beginning of the leave the fathers

thought that the mother had sole power to comfort and reassure the child, many of them realized that their involvement with the child changed the situation. Indeed, as indicated by Lamb (1996) the father develops his capacity to react and respond to his child and the child will then turn as spontaneously to one or the other parent.

The impact of the caring experience on the fathers interviewed is apparently very important. They feel more responsible, more adult:

It changed my relationship with my family and the things that I allowed myself to do before, going out late for example, it's all over! Now I'm with my family and I often go out accompanied, especially on weekends. I have a responsibility to educate my children. (Alan, 38 yrs, worker)

It makes us more accountable, we develop a better ability to respond to stress, too; you live things that are not easy the first time and the next time you say it's going to be okay, and then you learn to let go. (Andy, 35 yrs, professional)

The impact of the experience of parental leave also has effects on the couple and it is interesting to note that many fathers resent the fact that people often consider that the leave is a gift from their spouse. Indeed, the distribution of parental leave is often viewed as the mother's decision:

Most people believe that the leave is mainly for women. When I talk with friends or colleagues, they often say to me: "your girlfriend is generous" to give you part of the leave. They don't see it as a family decision but a decision of the mother to give some of the parental leave to the father or not; is it not for us to share as we want? It's good for the five weeks of paternity, I'm really happy to have them, but parental leave for the 30 weeks after the 18 weeks of the mother, they can be shared also. (Mike, 25 yrs, employee)

With respect to the couple, most say that this experience has contributed to strengthening their relationship and increasing mutual trust.

We both invested in the project, it helped that my girlfriend wanted help, she felt that I was really there for her and for the child, we did this together and she was not alone. Yes, it has had an impact on the strength of our relationship, our support, our relationship, and trust for one and another. (Ned, 30 yrs, employee)

The experience of engaging in parenting during leave allows fathers to understand working mothers better:

The leave enabled me to have greater understanding, respect, greater admiration for the work she had done with our first girl and she also with the last. It was good for our relationship because the leave showed her that I fully took my responsibilities, it was good for our relationship. (Mitch, 37 yrs, independent)

Also taking leave alone allowed the fathers of this study to be recognized as taking full responsibility in parenting:

It clearly leads me to share the housework, even if it was never an issue really. I take my place in the children's education and can say "no, I do not agree, I can take up tasks and take my place. It's not just the classic scheme where the father is responsible for discipline, but I am also present in the relationship with the children. I can really assume my responsibility as a parent at an emotional level as well, not just being the income provider. (Tom, 35 yrs, professional)

Relationship issues around breast feeding were sometimes difficult for fathers to manage:

My wife started working part-time and regardless of the time she left, the last 45 minutes before she came home, it was always the crisis. It seemed that my daughter had a radar and knew when her mother was coming home`. It was extremely painful. When my wife came back I was crying, I felt totally helpless, incompetent, and from the time the baby accepted the bottle, then I could assume the primary need to feed and I felt better. (Brad, 40 yrs, administrator)

Fathers also want their role to be recognized and want people to see the important difference between fathers who “babysit” their child and those who really care for them:

She taught me all the care work, it was always me who also gave the bath and then we share the kids’ bedtime. It becomes very natural to care for children. We often laugh when we say that fathers who did not take leave just “babysit” when the mother has something to do, while I’m insulted if you tell me that I babysit my children...I am assuming my paternal responsibilities. (Jim, 33 yrs, professional)

It is revealing to see how the experience of parenting during leave also influenced the priorities of fathers in relation with work. Indeed, many fathers have revised their priorities and decided to change careers or return to school, or take on a new job that will allow them to continue to fulfill their parental responsibilities.

The leave was a trigger as it reduced my interest in my specific field of work. I’m going back to school in January and going for a total career change as my leave made me realize that I did not want to do that all my life. (Joe, 35 yrs, employee)

I do not want to be a father who is always in a hurry when I get to see my son at night and I will organize myself as much as possible so that it does not happen. So I’m going to reduce my hours, I’ll take a job that is less time-consuming, I will perhaps be identified as less involved in my work, but it was coming anyway, because I have a child, and what will happen with the second, third...You can be really dedicated at work, but then when you have kids, it changes. (Ryan, 36 yrs, administrator)

Fathers mentioned that their experience with children allowed them to develop “caregiver” qualities and competencies they also use in other areas such as work:

Yes I am more attentive to people in general and especially at work, people ask me questions and I am more inclined to answer. I see myself more as a caregiver here at work and even with my friends there are many people asking me questions and I answer them more than I used to. I used to be a little more distant from all that, I think it helped me to be a caregiver. (Mike, 25 yrs, employee)

Fathers’ leave experience even had impacts on different areas of life. Informants reported that the experience of being on leave also makes it possible for them to exchange more with women about work-life issues, with full knowledge of the facts, and they find it easier to engage in discussions on issues related to work as well as those linked with the house and children:

I see it in my discussions with women, it is important to be able to speak with the same interest of the things related to the family, the children, it is as important as work issues, it’s all at the same level. (Jim, 33 yrs, professional)

5.8.1 *Workplace Impact and Return to Work*

For many fathers returning to work at the end of the leave has been a more or less painful experience:

It was definitely not a relief at all but rather the opposite [...] I'm not back to work with a smile; I missed her when I came back to work. (Joe, 35 yrs, employee)

In our research, a single dad experienced big difficulties in relation with his career:

Now it's sure that after taking this leave, I was an absolute plague for my boss. They are going to relocate me somewhere else [...] when the boss hates you because you took paternity leave...she is determined and she wants to win over me [...] I see it like a sexual assault, even if it is not really that... (Joe, 37 yrs, administrator)

One also had a bad surprise when he returned to work as someone had been hired to replace him and this created conflicts when he returned:

It has had an impact; if I had not taken leave, the employer would not have hired someone to replace me. The person who replaced did not take my place but is not a good person. Nobody gets along with this person and here it creates conflicts. He will push me to leave my job, I'm sure. I have not really been victimized, but it is really difficult. (Ned, 30 yrs, employee)

One father also mentioned a sense of unfairness as there are always parties for mothers when they go on maternity leave, while the departure and return of fathers is not celebrated:

I'm in an environment where there are a lot of pregnancies and thus many departures and returns. Most of the time there are small parties for women's departure on leave and we are happy when they return. For men it is something original so there is no party...people are happy but it's not like the mother who leaves to spend time with her child,... he is the father. It's good that the company lets you take leave, it's cute even, everyone is happy but there was no party for my departure but every time it's a woman it's different. I was still given a gift but when it's a woman it is a buffet or we go to the restaurant, but nothing for men... (Jo, 39 yrs, professional)

These last quotes are revealing as they show clearly that while taking the leave *per se* is a right, and fathers in Quebec do not hesitate to take it, colleagues in the workplace apparently do not have the same celebratory attitude as they tend to display with female colleagues.

In terms of other workplace issues, it appears that all fathers do not completely give up work while on paternity leave. While some fathers really do cut ties with the employer during the period, others continue to spend a few hours working during the week, especially during the nap of the child, or even an entire day at the workplace for one father. In addition, some fathers took advantage of leave to do some DIY in the house although they saw very quickly that they would not have that much time to themselves. These patterns were also reported by Doucet and Merla (2007, p. 1) in research that focused on Belgian and Canadian stay-at-home fathers, in which they indicate that their sample of fathers only partially abandoned professional work to the benefit of child care; maintaining a link with the more traditional

masculine identity resources through part-time work, or DIY at home. Similarly, in another study, Magaraggia (2012) indicates that men's identities continue to be defined more in relation to professional activities than in relation to the care activities. While we had questions in our research protocol on the difficulty of negotiating leave with the employer, no father mentioned any difficulty on taking the leave per se. However, many reported small irritants related to people's attitudes in the workplace.

5.8.2 *Fathers in the Public Sphere*

In the public sphere too, fathers taking parental leave alone, often are reminded that they are not in their traditional gendered role. As pointed out by Doucet (2009), many public spaces where fathers can be found with their child (park, swimming pool, shopping centers, daycare, community centres and so on) are places where there are more women than men. These gendered public places sometimes make fathers uncomfortable or discourage them from returning (when there are women breastfeeding in community centres, for example). As some of our interviewees mentioned:

You know in the Community Health Centers (CLSC) workshops, there are plenty of interesting activities on work-life balance, stress management, diet, but there are just mothers! They would be good for fathers too as we have a role to play and need to be aware of that. At first it was not too bad, because the baby was sleeping but then when the baby was bigger and more agitated, I felt worse, surrounded by breastfeeding women, so we did the cardio-stroller and swimming lessons. Ha ... there we were two dads at the swimming lessons... you can find them but you have to really look for them. There are not many reactions, and when there are, it is more of a surprise from other men. (Tom, 35 yrs, professional)

I took baby swimming classes and there are not many men; the girls are surprised when you arrive, that's it, yes there I was very embarrassed. (Jim, 33 yrs, professional)

The dynamics of father versus the mother in the home is totally different; society is for stay-at-home moms. Places for strollers, baby yoga all this is a very feminine environment. I tried to find blogs of dads at home on the internet, there are a few. I went to see if there was a kind of club, things like that, there was even an article in the Quebec child magazine that was dedicated to fathers' activities in the home, there was an inventory, there was an activity that was in Trois-Rivières, there was another in Chicoutimi, it's very marginal. It is normal since stay-at-home fathers are still marginal. In that sense, yes there is a kind of solitude, I am a stay-at-home father but finding activities for fathers with a child is difficult. (Brad, 40 yrs, administrator)

Similarly, many informants experienced media outlets in the public sphere as unsupportive of their position as primary carer. The message that some media present does not help to change stereotypes was a recurring theme. As one father mentions:

I think we have the impression that women are better in childcare. On TV for example, women often seem to control things, they are better at doing things or laugh when their husbands have difficulties, but I think that all tasks can be learned and can become second

nature to everyone. I think parents may be biologically different but they are equally important and equally competent. (Eliot, 32 yrs, professional)

5.9 Emergent Types of Paternal Involvement

On the basis of the typology of father involvement developed by Quéniart (2002a, cited in Pacaut et al. 2011) which we presented above, we can already point out that no father involved in our research belongs to the category of providers and protectors. This does not mean that this model no longer exists in Quebec, but it is clearly less present in the younger generation of which this sample of fathers were a part. Fathers who took paternity leave with their partner are similar to the “ambivalent” category of fathers because as we have seen in the results they have essentially a supporting role to the mother. However, many fathers who have opted for a combination of paternity and parental leave, and thus took more time than normative in the Quebec context, including some time alone with the child, show a progressive move from “ambivalent fathers” to “postmodern fathers,” being more and more actively involved in parenting.

Comparing with Wall’s typology (2012) that provides four profiles of paternal engagement for fathers on leave alone (constrained fathers, radical rupture, innovative and independent fathers as well as the innovative and subversive fathers), in our research no father who took leave of one month or more, alone with the child, fits the profile of the constrained father. As for the model of radical departure, when fathers arrive at the stage where they take part of the leave alone, they no longer see themselves as supporting the mother. They see their role of father as representing significant change. In fact many fathers in our study appear to be innovators and independent fathers, as the quotes above show. Indeed, taking the 5 week paternity leave with the mother, they made sure they learned a lot about housework and child care to stay alone afterwards. Some fathers had already taken one or two leaves for their other children and therefore already had all the knowledge needed to care for the baby. They often go as far as changing the routine established by the mother, and assume both domestic tasks and care.

The profile of “innovative and subversive fathers” is very evident in our research. If fathers took parental leave alone with the child, it is often in order to allow their partner to accelerate in her career or to continue her university studies. Seeking gender equality and equal roles in private and professional sphere is important for these fathers. To complete the picture, we would add the profile of “innovators and activists” to the profiles of innovative and independent or subversive fathers. Indeed, our research shows that just as mothers, fathers were able to handle all domestic tasks and caring for the child. Moreover, some fathers are somewhat annoyed about their near-invisibility in the public sphere but also resent the insufficient positive media coverage on the father’s place in the home. Although this has increased over the years in Quebec, there are still strong stereotypes and these fathers would like to see them reduced and to have less gendered attitudes in public places. Thus, to the two more

modern profiles defined by Wall (2012), that is innovators and independent or subversive fathers, we would add a third profile, that of innovative fathers who are also strong activists for father's involvement and place in parenting. The Quebec fathers of this study thus fit one or the other of the following profiles: innovative and independent fathers; innovative and subversive fathers or innovative and activist fathers.

5.10 Conclusion

Quebec has been very innovative in terms of work-family interface in recent decades, as a number of policies have been adopted to increase the welfare of children and gender equality. Today more and more fathers are taking the non-transferable paternity leave of 3 or 5 weeks (80 % take the paternity leave, and 75 % take 5 weeks), and when they also take some parental leave, they take up to 13 weeks of leave on average.

From a normative point of view, the existence of the non-transferable leave and the fact that 80 % of fathers take this leave makes it easier or more legitimate for fathers to request and use other measures of work-family reconciliation and sends a strong signal to the employers, making them understand that family is important to today's fathers. The situation, here again, varies from one sector and type of organization to another (Tremblay 2012c).

As we have seen, many fathers in this study took a paternity leave of 5 weeks and a few months later, they took several months alone with the child. The first period of paternity leave is seen as a period of support for the mother, breastfeeding representing a certain barrier to the access to the child. For the majority of fathers who have opted for the combination of paternity and parental leave, when the mother returns to work and stops breastfeeding, this is the time for them to take up their full role of father and stay with the child alone.

We did not find evidence for Wall's (2012) category of constrained fathers, but of course this does not mean that they are not present in Quebec, and there are still considerable challenges for fathers who take parental leave (Tremblay et al. 2012, 2011; Tremblay 2012b, 2013, 2014a; Marshall 2008, 2009). However, with the emergence of non-transferable paternity leave and parental leave sharing, there has clearly been a movement towards more modern types of fathers, in comparison with the period before the introduction of this leave (Tremblay 2003).

While we found many innovative and independent or subversive fathers, we added the profile of the activist and innovators, as some Quebec fathers are real militants for the role of father and advocate for the recognition of a parenting role for fathers. Those who mentioned difficulties in the workplace, and more generally in the public sphere, were really very annoyed about the situation and tended to take on a militant attitude, hoping to change these realities.

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