



**They don't care? Paternal Involvement in  
Early Childhood Development:  
Perspectives of low income fathers in  
Metropolitan São Paulo, Brazil**

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## **Abstract**

This research paper deals with the involvement of low income fathers' with children under six years old having the metropolitan area of Sao Paulo as its territory. The objective is to examine the ways in which they practice and engage with early childhood development, and describe the main factors defining father's involvement. For that, I tease out and explore fathers' perceptions and how their involvement is framed and understood taking into consideration the broader landscape of cultural norms, policies and services. This was a qualitative research project, and the semi-structured interviews were used aiming to give voice to men's, in opposition to mainstream research which collects data of their involvement from mothers. The provocative research title has an answer, men do care and are involved with their children. However, their involvement should be considered under a more nuanced and flexible spectrum rather than a binary, which does not consider the set of vulnerabilities and constraints low income men face. These constraints are not only economic, but also cultural, social, and institutional norms which are mutually reinforced by the existence of strict gender norms that shape fatherhood in Brazil.

## **Relevance to Development Studies**

This research paper offers a different approach to the discussion of early childhood care and development in Brazil by taking into account the perspectives of low income fathers' in the metropolitan area of São Paulo. To promote structural change, our policies and programs aimed to improve the lives of the most vulnerable families and children need to explore involvement and care as nuanced attitudes and behaviours shaped by many hegemonic elements.

## **Keywords**

Fatherhood, Early Childhood Care and Development, Low-income Fathers, São Paulo, Brazil.

# Chapter 1 Introduction

In broad terms, this research project explores fatherhood in low income locales of the metropolitan area of São Paulo, Brazil. This introductory chapter is divided into two parts. Firstly, I provide the background to the study and to the research problem, followed by the research question, sub-objectives and the research justification. I conclude the chapter with the overall organization of the paper.

## 1.1 Background of the Study and Research Problem

Fathering comprises of a diverse array of activities such as conceiving, feeding, provisioning, protecting and rearing another individual (Lamb 1986:32) and its lived experience is influenced and determined by “policies, structural influences, social barriers, and cultural norms” (Heilman et al. 2017:35). Fathers are important for children, mainly “not because they are men, and not because they have a unique contribution to child development and well-being, but because children need nurturing caregivers” (Levtov et al. 2015:31). One, or more, additional caregiver is always important. Many men are fathers<sup>1</sup>, will likely become one at some point in their lives and/or are current part of the social environment where children are being reared, therefore to increase and to strengthen men’s participation helps children to thrive. Additionally, increased involvement is also good for men themselves, with many studies showing the positive impact on men’s happiness and health outcomes (Levtov et al. 2015:45; Barker and Verani 2008:39). It also has a broader contribution towards the promotion of gender equality since women are still doing the majority of unpaid care, holding their economic, educational and leisure opportunities (Levtov et al. 2015:43, Barker and Verani 2008).

### 1.1.1 Fathering in Brazil

In Brazil, the normative assumption of men’s contribution to the household is that of financial providers while women are assumed to take care of the domestic arena, despite their increased participation in the labor force and access to education in recent decades (*Instituto de Pesquisas Econômicas Aplicadas* 2010:3). As presented by Lamb et al. (1987:119), the dominant view albeit changing, is still that “direct paternal involvement is a discretionary activity, whereas provisioning is mandatory”. This connects two important aspects that I will raise in my research: the gendered nature of parenting and the unrealistic expectations placed on men to fulfil a normative role that assumes a homogeneous economic capacity and thus ignores economic constraints lower income men face.

Studies have shown the level of father’s involvement is increasing, and there are important transformations in regard to their, expected, roles within the families (Bastos et al. 2013, Heilman et al. 2017, Promundo-Brasil 2016), nonetheless we still do not have a proper understanding of the practices of men, how they are involved, how they perceive involvement and how they want to be involved (Promundo-Brasil 2016:19, Barker and Verani 2008:54).

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<sup>1</sup> The one who takes the fathering roles, could be uncle, grandfather or friend for example, regardless of their biological or legal status to the child (Verani and Barker 2008:8).

Different authors highlight the lack of information and research specifically on low income fathers (Levtov et al. 2015:33, Barker and Loewenstein 1997:98), which comprise an important population group in the metropolitan area of São Paulo. They face numerous interrelated deprivations (Munene and Okwany 2016:3), marginalization and exclusions, defined not only by their income but their general access to public services, infrastructure, labor market, social-cultural and economic opportunities (Rede Nossa São Paulo 2017). Another characteristic of this urban spatial segregation in this area is the role of race and ethnicity, as the percentage of black and brown citizens' as well as migrants and their descents from the Northern parts of Brazil increase towards the peripheral and more segregated areas of the city (Villça 2017). This is the main driver of social stratification and stereotypes regarding behaviors, abilities and capabilities of men in these contexts.

Fathers are not all the same and do not belong to a homogeneous group, in fact fathering is "complex and diverse, varying widely with the father's socioeconomic condition and educational level" (Bastos et al. 2013:229). São Paulo is the biggest city in Brazil, one of the most unequal countries of the world (Skoufias et al. 2017:2), and as of 2017, its metropolitan area encompasses 39 cities with a population that exceed 20 million people in total (Emplasa 2018). As the capital city of the state with the same name, São Paulo accounts for 17.6% of the country Gross Domestic Product, hosts an important industrial, commercial and financial park (Emplasa 2018), yet is marked by its unequal income distribution and urban segregation (Marques 2015).

Father's involvement is not exclusively associated with their social economic strata, however, those who are part of the lower strata are men who, in addition to gender constructed norms, are likely affected simultaneously by this set of different exclusions and vulnerabilities that potentially constrain their lives, generating important spilling over effects on their children and their families (Bastos et al. 2013:29).

In Brazil, the public debate on fatherhood started from its absence, on how many men were supposedly not fulfilling their roles and just literally disappearing from families. Recent data has shown over 5 million children do not have their father's name on their birth certificate, for some a mass abdication of fatherhood re-actualizes old patriarchal practices (Promundo-Brasil 2016:24, Bastos et al. 2013:231). Absence can take place in different levels and forms, not only legally but also physically and emotionally, and most of the research conducted so far in that topic is about the consequences for families and children. However, according to Bastos et al. (2013:230-231), we need to explore and tease out our understandings of absence, what are the causes that have lead this to manifest in its different forms and to create more mechanisms that facilitate men's presence and participation. In recent years important efforts to promote fathering and the right of fathering as a life experience were created, such as the National Comprehensive Healthcare Policy for Men (*Política Nacional de Atenção Integral da Saúde do Homem*) in 2009, have been implemented. Nonetheless, they are still the exception rather than the rule, and more research is necessary to explore different perceptions and fatherhood behaviors and attitudes for and with children under six years old. Science contributes to building bridges enabling policy and cultural environments (Ribeiro et al. 2015:3596) where they are considered as important actors supporting child development, the reason why this study is relevant.

Although social class is not the main driver of father's involvement (Bastos et al. 2013:229), the stigma around low income fathers creates additional obstacles and challenges for their fathering experience. Low income fathers are considered those men part of families



with a per capita income of up to R\$ 441 *reais*, around €100 euros per person<sup>2</sup> (Gasparin 2013). The poverty line in Brazil is defined by the Federal Government, and current is the monthly per capita income of between R\$89.01 and R\$178 (roughly €42), which is used as the basis for eligibility for social protection programs, such as *Bolsa Família* (Ministerio do Desenvolvimento Social 2018).

Fathering in lower income locales normally revolves around not only absence, but assumptions around men's lack of responsibility, their violent behaviors and their assumed preference to spend money on alcohol or drugs rather than with family needs for example. Poverty, for many groups of the society, is still perceived as lack of individual will to have a better life and not the consequence of structural inequalities and a perverse socio-economic system. Under this assumption, low income men insufficient economic means and overall living conditions can make them 'poorer' or incompetent fathers by default (Nascimento et al. 2007: no page). These assumptions became important arguments, along with those related to women's empowerment, to promote the mother as the holder of the cash transfer benefit *Bolsa Família*<sup>3</sup> for example. This not only increased the female burden for unpaid care but is a concrete example of how fathers' involvement and caregiving can be constrained by policies and social norms.

The debate over father's involvement has many elements, one has to do with the concern with the validity of assessments of paternal involvement (Pleck 1997:69), because men have not been asked about their involvement, and most of the data still comes from mothers, the way they are involved with care and how they perceived fathers involvement (Bastos et al. 2013:238). There is a hypothesis on a possible gap and contrast of the narratives of fathers and mothers, and what is said and what is actually being done by both (Bastos et al. 2013:236-240), which does not undermine the need to listen father's own perception on these matters, as I do in this research.

### 1.1.2 Gender Discourses Shaping Fatherhood in Brazil

Fathering is highly influenced by culture, social forces and strict gender norms, which encourage and legitimate certain behaviors and attitudes (Hennigen and Guareschi 2002:63, Barker and Loewenstein 1997:168). In Brazil it is influenced by the legacy of colonialism and patriarchy, as "the patriarchal father held distinct powers (legal, political, and religious), and occupied the vacuum left by the distant Portuguese rulers as the central socializing agent in the newly colonized hands" (Bastos et al. 2013:230). Although the authors said this cannot be generalized, men used to own his family as he owned land or other assets, when they were available, and was the moral authority responsible for familiar respectability, discipline, and transmission of moral values and rules, whilst the mother was expected to assume the dimension of caregiving (2013:244). The social construction of masculinity in Brazil is also shaped by *machismo*, an exaggerated form of masculinity (Barker and Loewenstein 1997:169) that influences the expected behaviors of fathers.

The men, individually or as a group, still dominate women in public and private sphere which has given them material, cultural and symbolic privileges (Welzer-Lang 2011:461). In

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<sup>2</sup> Conversion rate of October 7th, 2018: R\$1= €0.23. <https://www4.bcb.gov.br/pec/conversao/conversao.asp>

<sup>3</sup> Monthly cash transfer program to families with pregnant women and children under 18 years old in poverty and extreme poverty with conditionalities in the areas of health and education. The criteria for eligibility is based on overall family income, however the program intentionally focus and promote women as the holder of the benefit.

general, the hegemonic masculinity understands manhood as something men earn, and involves the denial and distancing of all traits that could associate them to the female realm and is based on references such as money, honor, power, control and virility (Bastos et al. 2013:232, Barker and Loewenstein 1997:169, Schwarz and Machado 2012:2581, Welzer-Lang 2011:462-465). Therefore, behaviors related to affective care for oneself and others, showing vulnerability and emotions, and expressing feelings are still understood as belonging to the female terrain, and in the hegemonic framing, it should not be done by men (Barker and Loewenstein 1997:171). The (new) behaviors associated to fathering are not perceived as belonging to the hegemonic masculinity, therefore are non-normative, especially in the case of caring for young children where nearly everywhere in the world is seen as a women's responsibility (1997:171). However, the reality is more nuanced since many men are involved and do care for children, through caregiving and households' activities.

For different groups of men, violence also plays an important role validating their masculinity and to gain prestige, since can be a way to express their lack of choice and opportunities within society (Nolasco 2001:14, Barker and Loewenstein 1997:172). In Brazil, as elsewhere, men are over-represented as perpetrators and victims of violence (Nolasco 2001:12), what Barker (2005:3) calls "a male social pathology". This phenomenon is a negative coping mechanism used by men to overcompensate their living circumstances which are reinforced by socially constructed hegemonic masculinities, which can be exacerbated for men in lower income locales.

There are many ways of being and acting "like a man" (Nolasco 2001:15), and not all men have the same power and privileges, which is when other social dimensions such as social class, age and race play an important role in building hierarchies amongst them (Henningen and Guareschi 2002:53). Males from upper classes represent the powerful-rich authority in the Brazilian society (Barker and Loewenstein 1997:168), and low socio-economic strata men are subjugated and constantly being framed under accusatory and derogatory manners (Nolasco 2001:16). Their masculinity is perceived to be at stake when they cannot fulfil what is expected from them, especially when they come from communities where their opportunities are limited, which can directly influence their fathering experience.

The process of becoming a father is an "ongoing, plural and open enterprise, involving tensions between individual and culture" (Ribeiro et al. 2015:3595), especially in the context of contradictory social demands on parents. Men are expected to share the responsibilities within the household and caregiving and to play a bigger role in the promotion of gender equality but many men, especially those in economically constrained spaces, have often not being given the right tools, institutional and social support for that. Social norms and systems "still prescribe and enforce - often in narrow terms - what they can and cannot do as men" (Barker and Loewenstein 1997:168). Fatherhood is then, an entry point to challenge the normative masculinity and to promote a culture where affection, equal distribution of domestic and childcare responsibilities are perceived as responsibilities to all members of society, despite their gender (Promundo-Brasil 2016:16).

This research hopes to contribute to the policy arena by highlighting the perspectives of men from low income locales on their involvement and caregiving for children under six years, welcoming their views and critically engaging with theory supporting gender equality and fatherhood as a rightful experience for men.

### 1.1.3 Policy Arena

Early Childhood Development is on the spotlight in Brazil. In March 2016 the National Congress approved the Legal Framework for Early Childhood, a law that encompasses all the principles and guidelines for policies and programs targeting or affecting care, development and education of children under six years due to its specificity and relevance for human development more broadly (*Marco Legal da Primeira Infância* 2016). Among other important elements, it states the duties and responsibilities in raising and providing for children should be shared between caregivers, especially between mothers and fathers'. It also formalizes the State role in supporting children and families through integrated policies and programs. In October 2016, the Brazilian Government launched the Happy Child Program (*Programa Criança Feliz*) an initiative aimed to promote full development for children under six years old mainly through home visits<sup>4</sup>. Led by the Ministry of Social Development and having the first lady Marcela Temer as its ambassador, the program aims to reach over 3 million children by 2020 which makes itself "one of the largest-scale efforts of its kind in the world" (Bernard Van Leer Foundation n.d.).

The initial years of life, or Early Childhood Care and Development (ECD), is a multifaceted stage that "encompasses physical, socio emotional, cognitive and motor development" (World Health Organization 2016). This phase of human development has also been called by other terms such as 'early childhood care and education' and 'early childhood development', all referring to similar processes. As highlighted by a recent publication, The Lancet Series on ECD, different studies have shown it sets the foundations for important aspects of well-being and children outcomes with lifelong effects in areas such as health and education (Engle et al. 2013, The Lancet ECD Series 2016). It is also a sensitive period for brain development, where the architecture of the brain is being built and can shape its capacities, a process that is influenced by three elements: genetics, environment and experience (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child 2007:2). The latter two elements are related to the context in which the children are raised and how care is perceived and provided; being the environment the physical and emotional conditions available and the experiences being how the child effectively interacts with his/her environment (2007:2).

Brazil is not alone, many international organizations (i.e. Inter-American Development Bank, World Bank) and national governments (i.e. Chile, Colombia, Peru) are investing in ECD. However, one key - and crucial - variable is still not given the proper attention: the fathers (Promundo-Brasil 2016:127). In Brazil, despite their formal mention, whether biological or social fathers, men seem to be invisible in the actual practice or early childcare reflecting some cultural beliefs and norms present in the Brazilian society that tend to perceive and reinforce caring for young children as feminized and therefore, a responsibility of women (Bastos et al. 2013:234). For example, the National Public Health System historically has focused in the mother-child binomial, and it was not until very recently that the government started actively to engage men in the prenatal and postnatal care and recognized their crucial role for child development (Promundo-Brasil 2016:17). In the formal sector, the maternity leave is four months while paternity leave, in most cases, is only five days. And to conclude, a more recent example is the home visits within Happy Child Program being led mostly by female professionals during 'traditional' working hours, two important elements

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<sup>4</sup> Home Visit is service-delivery strategy to support families, where "trained home visitors come to families' homes to deliver curricula designed to promote socio-emotional, motor, language, and cognitive development" (Leer et al 2016:2).

that have been pointed out as limitations for father involvement in other contexts (Child and Family Research Partnership 2013).

### **1.1.4 Research Problem**

As presented, father's involvement is important for children, for the families and for the men themselves. In the Brazilian culture there are strong assumptions that men are not involved, do not want to be involved and/or are not good in caring for young children, which is accentuated for low income fathers who are also affected by exclusions and socioeconomic constraints. They are therefore often framed as not caring hence the provocative question in the title "They don't care?". This research aims to challenge this general simplistic assumption, and the analysis teases out the complexity of paternal involvement to show the concrete challenges and complexities of the fathering experience of low income men.

On the one hand there are different socially constructed mechanisms that, on an extreme situation, can deprive men of their fatherhood experience (Bastos et al. 2013:234). On the other hand, we see different practices and policies influenced by cultural and gender norms that keep perpetuating the feminization of care. Fathers have potential conditions and abilities to be involved, execute the exact same tasks and provide the same nurture care – and many are already doing so, therefore why the discourse and policies remain as if they were absent? What are they doing that we do not see/are not paying attention? My research aims to address the need for more knowledge on specific ways men are involved and what are the possible factors defining their involvement with children under six years old in a context affected by the interplay of different vulnerabilities and exclusions.

The selection of low socioeconomic strata fathers in the urban metropolitan Sao Paulo is due to this group proportional predominance in terms of the overall population and how the relationship between fathers and children "are structured by the material, socio-cultural and spatial context inherent in urban poor locales" (Munene and Okwany 2016:6). The focus on this specific region of the country is due to its relevance for the country and diverse population, allowing the research to access plural views and experiences. While the intent to get men's perspective echoes other researchers' effort to "focus on fathers relying on them, instead of getting data from women" (Roggman et al. 2013:189).

To approach the issue of fathers' involvement, I will mainly focus on specific aspects such as the perceptions, attitudes and behaviors of fathers regarding their own experience with children under six years old and as well as other parents in their families and communities. Through the exploration of some of the cultural ideas of father's roles, their participation on children's life and possible intergenerational distinctions and similarities, this research aims to contribute to the knowledge production on fathers' involvement in lower socioeconomic locales with a specific focus on Brazil.

The fact we do not know how different groups of men are involved and perceive their involvement in early childhood development can be seen as one of the reasons why we do not engage or target them in social policies and programs promoting early childhood development and parenting, in a never-ending cycle of invisibility and exclusion. Therefore, this research project addresses this particular problem, the reduced knowledge about the ways in which low incomes fathers are involved with young children.

## **1.2. Research Question, Sub-objectives and Justification**

Based on the background presented and the problem stated, my research question is:

*How low income fathers are involved with children under six years old in the metropolitan area of São Paulo and what are the factors defining their involvement?*

To answer the main question, a range of research sub-objectives guided this research, each of them addressing different aspects of the main question. They are:

- To examine how low socioeconomic strata fathers from metropolitan São Paulo understand involvement.
- To identify internal and external factors that define their involvement.
- To explore the practices with which low socioeconomic strata fathers engage in the lives of their children.

### **1.2.1 Relevance and Justification**

The main contribution of this research for the development of policies and knowledge related to father's involvement in early childcare is to provide up-to-date and field-based information from the practices and perceptions of some fathers, triangulated with mothers and professionals working with the topic. This will allow future policies and programmes to address the phenomenon on a more comprehensive way, including fathers' voices, which have been poorly considered in the development of children related actions so far.

A few years ago, the National Council of Justice launched a report saying over 5 million Brazilian children did not have their father's name on the birth certificate, which for Bastos et al. (2013:244) are the persistent and pervasive consequences of male absence, especially in low income strata households. This data has been used by many in order to justify and homogenize a behavior that is not representative of the totality of men, and even worse impairs the exploration of the new ways men are practicing their fatherhood.

In many cases absence has been the starting point to the discussion of low-income fathering, under a narrow view referring to the physical absence of nonresidential fathers. However, this paper aims to investigate their presence in children lives and understanding absence as a more nuanced experienced from the perspective of fathers themselves. Fathers are important throughout the life of a child, nonetheless the focus of this research on their involvement with children under six years old is, firstly, due the public policy arena focus on child development, risking to jeopardizing its outcomes due to the poor attention given to fathers. The second element is the normative assumption that care is expected to be provided by women, and thirdly, how different studies show the earliest fathers are engaged more likely their engagement will continue in the course of a child's life (Levtov et al. 2015:232).

A very prominent doctor and author in Brazil, Drauzio Varella, in a recent interview when talking about life opportunities noted: "nowadays the Brazilian families do not have a father; you go to the periphery (slums), and you only see women in the house" (BBC Brazil 2018). He shares the view of the absence of fathers, a very recurrent way of framing the men's relationship with children, not only in Brazil (Bastos et al. 2013:244). However, understanding fathering and paternal involvement require multiple levels of explanation and analysis, since it is experienced through an interplay of individual, cultural, religious and family aspects. The experience of fathering is complex and involves different activities based on things that fathers do to, for and with their children (Lamb et al. 1987:111). This research aims to contribute and plays its relevance in the provision of more knowledge on a different level of analysis, in this case, lower income father's perspective.

### **1.3 Organization of the Paper**

This research paper has an additional four chapters. In chapter two I present the analytical lens from which I conceptualize and analyze my research topic. In chapter three I explain how I have collected the data, the processes around and its possible limitations. The analysis of the findings are in chapter four, and this paper finishes with the considerations and concluding thoughts on chapter five.

## Chapter 2 Conceptual Lens

To answer the research question, the concepts of father's involvement, care and the ecological view of fatherhood are used composing the conceptual framework of analysis for this research paper.

### 2.1 Involvement

Lamb' et al. (1987) construct of paternal involvement is the most common definition, and it is based on three components: interaction, availability and responsibility of a father to, for and with his child(ren). Its relevant since was aimed to explore new dimensions of fathering, which before was limited to whether a father was living in the same house of his child(ren) (Pleck 2010:59). For that same reason, he argues the construct does not include financial support as one element of father's involvement.

Interaction refers to the effective time spent and interacting, which happens through direct contact such as with caretaking and shared activities (1987:125). Availability, or accessibility, refers to the potential physical or psychological availability of a father to interact, either in person or using other means (1987:125). Responsibility is related to the "role the father takes in ascertaining that the child is taken care of and arranging for the resources to be available for the child" (1987:125), assuming a role towards his child's well-being and care. As an example, in a home setting a father is interacting when he plays with his child; he is available when he is in the same room, and his child knows he can be approached to talk, to play or to be affectionate; and by actively participating in a decision of taking his child to a hospital when something is wrong he is practicing his responsibility.

This construct has been critiqued for missing the "contextual factors affecting father involvement" (Nyamukapa 2018:5) since as noted by Pleck (1997) men are embedded in ecosystems that throughout the life course can promote, encourage or discourage their involvement in different aspects and levels (1997:102). For distinct groups of fathers' involvement can mean different things, therefore being a responsible father in one community can mean the exactly the opposite thing as in another one since there is not a universal fathering template. It is also multiple determined, and the factors defining it can operate in different ways (Pleck 1997:95).

Another important critique is that on Lamb et al.'s initial definition of father involvement the variable of quality was not considered since involvement was perceived as a matter of quantity. Nonetheless Pleck (1997:67, 2010:61) argues that discussing involvement nowadays should also consider the level in which the activities to, for and with the child can promote child development, plus the positive outcomes it can generate in both the father, the child and other important members of the household, such as the mother and siblings. Some researchers are calling for the term positive, active and responsible paternal involvement (Brown et al. 2007, Pleck 1997:68), however the focus of this research is not the on the concrete developmental outcomes of children but exploring the perceptions, behaviors and attitudes of fathers for young children that could potentially influence these outcomes<sup>5</sup>. Moving towards that direction, the definition used by the MenCare initiative can be useful, where

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<sup>5</sup> Despite not aiming to categorize fathers' involvement it is important to recognize the existence of violent, abusive and other types of toxic behaviours; which are not compatible with any type of parenting. This research will intentionally not engage in this discussion since is aiming to contribute to the field by exploring their involvement and overall contribution to child development.

involvement is “a father’s influence on, and interest in, his children’s lives” (Levtov et al. 2015:224).

Paternal involvement does not come from a vacuum, according to Pleck (1997:76-84), there are four sources of it: 1- motivation, 2- skills and self-confidence, 3- social supports, and 4- institutional practices or factors. Motivation is influenced by their own individual developmental history, personality characteristics and beliefs, in which the fathering he received from his own father or main male reference plays an important role. Skills have to do with a men’s self-perceived confidence, competence and ability to interact with children as well as what he understands his contribution to children development could be. Social support is related to the people around a father, how they interact to each other and their characteristics, for example, the marital status or the child’s mother employment status. Institutional factors and practices are those potentially influencing men’s concrete opportunities to dedicate time to their families (Lamb et al. 1987:133). In a research in Zimbabwe about father’s involvement in early childhood care and education Nyamukapa (2018) identified three major factors that influenced men’s level of involvement: desired or perceived outcomes, sociocultural values and economic statuses.

There are different factors that can shape and define father’s involvement functioning as enablers or hinders: concrete experiences such as parenting classes, their own personality, self-perception of the possible outcomes of their involvement and child’s gender (Lamb and Lewis 2013:120). The marital relationship of the parents and the quality of the relationship between main adults in the children’s life can also play an instrumental role in the involvement of fathers (Lamb and Lewis 2013:130), as well as the residential status of the father and the health and developmental status of the child (Fitzgerald and Bocknek 2013: 177).

Many authors and researchers are exploring what are the drivers and definers of involvement, but there seems to be a consensus: involvement is multiple determine and a consequence of the interplay of different factors, which can affect men in distinct ways (Pleck 1997:95). For my research I understand involvement as the different ways low income men perceive their relationship with their children under six years old, aiming at guaranteeing the appropriated support for their development and well-being, under the broad socio, cultural and economic context where they are based.

## 2.2 Care

Care is part of the reproductive work, comprised of biological reproduction of species, labor force reproduction as well as reproduction and provision of caring needs (Bakker 2007:1). It is a set of different practices and activities related to household maintenance, rearing and general well-being of people that can happen within the household or more broadly in communities. Appropriate care, despite being a context specific definition, requires the existence of many resources. In the household level, is related to time and to the material/income dimension, and in the state level, to the public provision of infrastructure, policies and social services (Razavi 2011:888-893). The unpaid care work benefits from kinship and community ties does not involve monetary exchange and, in the case of this research, refers to the activities that happen within the family that are crucial for young children survival, growth and development (Budlender 2010:5).

Globally we see a gender gap in regard to how much additional time women spend with unpaid care work in comparison with men (Budlender 2010:18), which in Brazil is currently over 10 hours difference (Promundo-Brasil 2016:49). This happens despite women’s entry into the paid workforce, which means they have kept the primary responsibility for care along with providing income for the household, solely or not. The presence of children in the household is an important factor since it affects the time spent with unpaid care work, and



as the youngest the children, more time is demanded in the provision of specialized care (Budlender 2010:34).

Paternal sensitivity or responsiveness is the “parent’s abilities to respond warmly and consistently to the cues of their children (particularly in infancy and early childhood)” (Brown et al. 2007:200) and is one key element of parenting. The fact some men might not be as responsive or perceptive to the needs of the child can be related to the fact some may have had fewer opportunities to improve their skills by not be involved in caregiving activities throughout their lives (Lamb and Lewis 2013:120). Despite not justifying absence or unequal distribution of reproductive work, socialization patterns should be taken in consideration when we analyze how care is practiced since it is related with how men understand their role within a specific cultural context (Promundo-Brasil 2016:20).

The concept of mothering also tends to define and set the blueprint of how care should be provided and helps to strengthen its innate embeddedness to women (Sayao 2005:165), which supports the assumption care is a feminized activity and defined in feminine terms (Folbre 2001:17). Generally, when we think about early education and care, “females are disproportionately assigned the roles of nurturers, early stimulators or primary child carers’ within the household and in the community” (2001:17). At the same time, the role of men is “rendered invisible and factors that facilitate or constrain their roles remain unaddressed” (Munene and Okwany 2016:6). Care for young children has its own specificities because it requires much time, energy, skills (Fontana and Elson 2014:466) and tends to be even more feminized since it is perceived as an extension of childbearing and breastfeeding. During this phase of life, gender roles are especially pronounced (Doucet 2013:306) being justified many times under the arguments of a maternal instinct (Bastos et al. 2013:234, Sayão 2005:166).

The activities and practices related to childcare can be done interchangeably despite the gender (Levtov et al. 2015:223), but this is still not the case in most places, including Brazil. This happens due to cultural norms, and also institutional and labor market factors. A good example is the Brazilian cash-transfer program, *Bolsa Família*, mentioned before. As of 2017, 93% of women are the holders of the benefit meaning the ones who should guarantee the conditionalities are being fulfilled in order for the benefit to continue (Bandeira 2017).

The 2017 State of the World’s Fathers Report identified two major barriers in regard to the distribution of care work besides social norms and gender socialization: economic and workplace realities and laws and policies (Heilman et al. 2017:35). The first barrier supports a culture where active parenthood is not enabled, encourages men to prioritize paid work and his normative breadwinning role, which in turn, is one contributing element to an unacceptable gender pay gap. The existence, or lack, of laws and policies can strengthen the perpetuation of unequal caregiving, uneven distribution of household’s activities, and also ignores the shared responsibility of the state and other actors to promote fatherhood and early childhood development (Levtov et al. 2015:54). A good example is free public daycare centers<sup>6</sup>, which can allow both parents to have equal opportunities to participate in the labor market if they desire so. Not all families in Brazil can provide the same care to their children, and that is not only based on their individual choices since the provision for care is highly

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<sup>6</sup> In Brazil there is a free public education scheme that includes early education for children under six years old comprised of daycare centres for children from 0 to 3 years old, and primary schools. However the coverage is still not universalized (i.e. daycare centres is less than 30%). This adversely affects low income families which cannot afford private alternatives and might not count with family support since most likely they are also working to survive. (*Observatório da Criança* 2017).

influenced by what happens in the broader context. Structural underpinnings, such as economic and social inequality, patterns of discrimination and insufficient provision of services and infrastructure reduce the coping mechanisms for low income families (Razavi 2011:899), which have to use their own, already scarce, resources in order to care for their children with the risk of affecting the quality and possible outcomes of the care provided.

For this research care is understood as the practices of a father that supports children's well-being and overall development, being one concrete expression of involvement and one element of parenting.

## 2.3 Ecological View of Fatherhood

Fatherhood is an experience affected and influenced by other aspects rather than the father as an individual focus of analysis (Super and Harkness 1986:550), whether he 'does' or 'does not' behave in a certain way. Two frameworks created to understand the broad ecosystem in which child development takes place if combined, can actually serve as theoretical hooks for the analysis of the father's involvement in this research: the ecology of human development and the developmental niche.

Bronfenbrenner (1979) says development happens within an ecological environment resulting from a set of nested structures. Microsystem is the smallest and immediate environment that a father is located, for example, his household or workplace; Mesosystem is the interaction between the different microsystems that fathers are part of as active participants, for example, the flexibility of job schedules and the level of influence in his participation in the house activities; Exosystem is external settings or influences affecting the father, when he is not an active participant on it, for example, the national policies for parental leave; Macrosystem refers to the cultures, subcultures, belief systems and ideology the father is embedded in, for example, the macho culture where men are perceived as not equally able to take care of children (1979:22-26). The author also adds that a father's interest or ability to actively engage with his child is inspired by his exposure to other people doing that (1979:6). This model is explained as an analogy with a Russian doll, *matryoshka* (1979:3), where the different levels are influenced by external elements, allowing us to observe the experience of fathers on their actual settings of life being informed by the expectations for roles and behaviors they may undertake (1979:5).

The developmental niche comes as a critique from two mainstream ways of understanding human development: anthropological approaches that only look at the socialization processes, and psychological approaches that only consider what happens at the individual level (Super and Harkness 1986:545). It is comprised of three components; the first is the physical and social settings where the child lives, meaning the settings of daily life (1986:552). The second is the customs of child care and child rearing, which are the physical aspects of the setting, for example, access to clean water, which is mediated by the cultural adaptations and customs influencing child care practices, for example how often the child is bathed and where that takes place (1986:555). The final is the psychology of the caretakers (1986:545), which refers to the belief systems that influence how the needs and involvement goals are assessed (1986:556). This framework allows to understand the cultural structuring, effects, and also the developmental processes that take place over the course of a life, that are embedded on a larger environment that molds and creates particular patterns of behavior (Super et al. 1986).

Both frameworks highlight the same point: fathers' attitudes are shaped by social meanings and highly influenced, and inspired, by their social and physical environments. In this paper, I will explore the broad ecosystem that goes from the individual set of beliefs to na-

tional policies, elements that underpin and concretely affect individual decisions and opportunities at different levels. Exploring low income father's involvement with children should take these broad environments into consideration, or we risk missing important elements defining their fathering experience.

These lenses collectively allow me to explore and analyze the complexity of low income men's perceptions, behaviors and attitudes to, for and with their children considering the influence of the broader environment where they are located. In the next chapter, I will present the methodology used to analyze the complexity of fatherhood in low income locales.

## Chapter 3 Methodology

This was a qualitative research project, an approach that allows the provision of description and interpretation of what is happening as regards fathers' involvement with children under six years old (Vaismoradi et al. 2015:100).

The methodology and methods were selected considering the research explores how different men are involved with early childhood development, being mainly interested in the particular experiences of men rather than aiming to measure and generalize behaviors (King and Horrocks 2010:27). This particular approach contrasts with the ways in which mainstream research on fatherhood research the topic. The academic production around father's involvement has grown significantly in recent decades, however they seem to be more focused on the specific outcomes on child development and/or around their physical and emotional absence, especially regarding low income fathers.

In Brazil, similarly, not much was found that included father's voice in regards of their involvement with young children, which also influenced the methodological choices of primary data to be around opportunities to explore perceptions and experiences of fathers by themselves and other key professionals that work with the topic (King and Horrocks 2010:26).

### 3.1 Techniques for Data Generation

This research project involved a first stage of literature review and exploratory conversations with program developers in Brazil, followed by one month of fieldwork conducted in two cities, São Paulo and Osasco, both part of the metropolitan area of São Paulo in Brazil, and a second round of virtual interviews with policy makers and program developers.

The literature review included scholarly articles, reports and materials related to fathers' involvement and early childhood development as well as Brazilian national policies targeting men and families. It had an initial focus on materials produced in and about Brazil in recent decades, nonetheless it was inevitable to go broader and explore authors from other regions that conducted research with low socioeconomic strata fathers and early childhood.

The fieldwork with the fathers and mothers was conducted in July 2018 through individual semi-structured interviews in Portuguese, recorded on a smartphone, activity allowed by the participants. This method allowed elucidation of different perspectives and experiences of fathering for young children within the dominant discourse and practices in Brazil, such as father physical absence and paternal leave (McIntosh and Morse 2015:3).

As part of the methodology I planned to conduct at least one focus group as another data collection strategy, either in the beginning of my fieldwork to verify how men were, for example, engaging with the questions, or even in the final stages, to explore some of the results of the individual interviews (Bernard 2011:173). However, time constraints, difficulties in contacting possible participants, and security and logistical constraints related to conducting research in São Paulo made unfeasible to conduct a focus group. In exchange, some of the initial results were tested via remote interviews.

The research focus in the metropolitan area of São Paulo was based on three main reasons: economic, cultural and social relevance and influence of the region for the country; the existence of policies and public services with high coverage; and for practical reasons, since I used to live and work there, meaning I had familiarity with the city, knowledge of key actors and free accommodation. Regarding the good coverage, for me this is relevant since



which I have got from the literature review, my own experience with the topic and from the exploratory conversations (McIntosh and Morse 2015:5). The types of questions asked followed the categories suggested by Patton (1990) which allowed to hear, for example, specific experiences but also what they think about certain situations and norms: background/ demographic, experience/behavior, opinion/values, feeling, knowledge and sensory questions (King and Horrocks 2010:37).

For the mothers, I used the same guide as the starting point but made adjustments since I wanted to explore how they saw the fathers and men role, involvement, and well as the norms and social environment elements that could hinder or enable it.

I ran the interviews with a friendly openness, showing my real interest in what they had to say. For the parents I made clear I was not judging their behaviors or looking for a specific type of answer, but instead, I was looking forward to hearing their lived experiences and impressions regarding fathering. I explained my research using the examples of current policies and programs that target mainly the mothers, such as the maternity leave and the Happy Child Program, which could have created a bias from the beginning since they were aware I probably wanted men to be included in actions supporting parenting.

### 3.2 Participants Selection

The selection of parents comprised of seventeen men and three women purposively selected because of their particular experiences and perspectives of being lower income inhabitants of metropolitan São Paulo with child(ren) under six years old (McIntosh and Morse 2015:8). Out of that, seven were invited through contacts with organizations, two were consequence of a snowball sampling and the remaining I accessed through personal and professional networks. In just one case I was able to interview both partners, meaning the mother and father of the children.

**Table 1: List of Parents Interviewed**

<i>FATHERS</i>					
	<i>Profession and/or current employment</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Number of children<sup>7</sup></i>	<i>Number of children's mothers</i>	<i>Number children he lives with</i>
Mo.	Security guard	21	1	1	1
A.	Insurance salesman	22	5	1	all
Jo.	Gatekeeper	22	1	1	1
R.	Automotive industry	23	3	1	all
We.	Street vendor	24	4	1	all
W.	Gatekeeper	27	3	2	2
B.	Unemployed	28	2	1	all
E.	Gatekeeper and driver	29	4	1	all
R.	Truck fleet supervisor	29	3	1	all
J.	Plasterer	30	2	2	none

<sup>7</sup> Children of all ages, biological or not, according to how the man framed the children's relationship to him. It also includes pregnancy during the fieldwork.

M.	Salesmen	37	2	1	all
Ed	House painter	38	3	1	all
P.	Bar attendant	45	2	2	1
L.	N/A	>30	2	1	1
El.	Pastor	>40	12	3	7
Je.	Recyclable material collector	n/a	3	2	2

#### ***MOTHERS***

	<i><b>Profession</b></i>	<i><b>Age</b></i>	<i><b>Number of children</b></i>	<i><b>Number of children's fathers</b></i>	<i><b>Number children she lives with</b></i>
Ro.	Maid	34	2	2	2
Ra.	Stay-at-home mother	≈20	3	1	3
Ad.	Stay-at-home mother	≈18	1	1	1

The selection criteria were parents who live in metropolitan São Paulo, have children under six years old and have a monthly income up to three Brazilian minimum wage per family, which places them in the lower income classes according to national ranks (Carneiro 2018). I was looking, as much as possible, for diverse type of fathers meaning: social and biological, the ones who live with their children and those that do not, children with more than one partner and men with different types of engagement with their children according to their own criteria.

In the case of the mothers, one was a single mother, and the other two became mothers when they were teenagers and were still with the father of the child. I added women in order to explore their perception of men's involvement, cultural norms and the possible definers of it, allowing a view from another perspective.

Except for the first four fathers whom I did not schedule the interview in advance, I gave the parents a small bag of Brazilian chocolate in appreciation of their time. For parents whom I have met in their lunch break, I offered to pay their lunch or gave the equivalent amount in money, a fixed amount of R\$20 reais (roughly €4.50<sup>8</sup>).

Initially, the goal was to have all men from a smaller territory within the metropolitan area of São Paulo, for example, a specific neighborhood, allowing me to explore the influence of social environment and perhaps to use other data collection tools. This turned out not feasible for three reasons: the majority of organizations worked in a broader territory; most of the public daycare centers were closed for winter break during the fieldwork; and limited time for the fieldwork since all projects focused on mothers and to access fathers I had to go through a lot of people. I have kept the territory as metropolitan São Paulo instead of only the two cities where the participants are from because their common denominator is their low income in urban spaces which can be representative of the dynamics of all municipalities' part of this conglomerate. By the dynamics I refer to the availability of services and infrastructure, as well as labor and housing opportunities, main drivers of socio-spatial mobility within and across the metropolitan area (Ingram 1996, Nieuwenhuis et al. 2017).

The discussion of race in Brazil is very complex and I have not asked the participants their race in the demographic part of the interviews. Brazilian population is extremely mixed

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<sup>8</sup> Conversion rate of October 7th, 2018: R\$1= €0.23. <https://www4.bcb.gov.br/pec/conversao/conversao.asp>

and homogenous and despite, the fact all the parents were either black/brown - according to my point of view - and/or migrants from the Northern parts of Brazil or the first generation born in São Paulo - as mentioned in the interviews - the main variable considered in this research was social class (Barker and Loewenstein 1997:181).

The interviews with policy makers and program developers were conducted remotely via voice calls from July to October. They are professionals with direct experience with early childhood and/or fatherhood which are or were in leadership positions in strategic areas influencing programs and policies, in both the public and nonprofit sector, as shown in the table below.

**Table 2: List of Professionals from the Public and Non-Profit Sectors Interviewed**

Current and/or previous role	Gender
Director, Daycare Center in São Paulo ran by a charity organization for low income families	Female
Consultant, Fatherhood and Care	Female
Civil Servant of São Paulo Municipal Health Department, led a pioneering initiative for men	Female
Executive Director, International Non-Profit Organization working with masculinities and fatherhood	Female
Legislative Advisor, Specialist in Early Childhood	Male
Independent Consultant at Masculinities, Gender and Health, involved in the Brazilian Comprehensive Healthcare Policy for Men	Male

The diverse study participants allow different contributions from different socioeconomic and cultural perspectives and enrich the exploration of father's perceptions, attitudes, behaviors and the ecology around them.

### 3.3 Methods of Data Analysis

The collected data was analyzed through thematic analysis in a constructivist method, where "broader assumptions, structures and/or meanings are theorized as underpinning what is actually articulated in the data" (Braun and Clarke 2006:13). I followed the six phases suggested by Braun and Clarke to guide this process: familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report (2006:16- 24).

I transcribed all the information capturing the commonalities of what was said (Bernard 2011:171) and analyzed the data using *Atlas.ti* software. My coding was based on eleven initial codes that captured important aspects of, and were driven by, my research question and sub-objectives. Next, they became six themes: experience with their fathers/ grandfathers/ step-fathers, normative role of financial provider, absence, involvement, hinders, and enablers. These themes were analyzed within the framing of the research sub-objectives.



### 3.4 Ethical Considerations and Positionality

The sensitivity of the topic was an important ethical consideration throughout this research. I have read or provided an overview of the most important elements of the participation term, containing the goals of the research, the anonymity and confidentiality of the data and informing they could skip questions and stop the interview at any time. All participants received a printed copy of the same term. I also added the options of receiving a copy of my research paper and to meet again so I can share my findings once I am back in São Paulo.

One driver of this research was the opportunity to contribute to knowledge production that could enhance the lived experiences of fathers as well as the lives of their children and families. Fathers were talking about very personal experiences, both the one they had when growing up and the current one with their children, as well as their views on men's role, which are permeated by social norms and values. It required my full awareness, flexibility and empathy towards their emotions, behaviors and experiences. In few cases, I was able to see how the memories and feelings were affecting them, especially when asked about whether they considered themselves a good father. When applicable, I would share my own experiences as a daughter and research or said comforting words, such as 'there is no universal way of being a good parent'. I had concerns about possible delicate information being raised, such as domestic violence or cases where they have done something illegal, however that did not happen. Initially I was worried about three fathers who work where I used to live, but I felt they were very open and engaged in the conversation.

In regard to my positionality, "Who am I to the participants and to myself?", since Brazil is a country where higher education is a privilege of a few, not to say in another country, I did not mention to parents I was studying abroad unless they asked where I studied. From my initial presentation of the research topic, I felt men were sympathetic to my efforts to understand what they go through and many mentioned how important my research was.

I do not have children, but I have experienced the topic as a daughter. My parents got divorced when I was around 5 years old and my mother had my custody, meaning, in general, I only saw my father on weekends and vacations. This arrangement was facilitated by the fact they have kept a good personal relationship, even when both remarried. As a typical middle-class family in Brazil with both working parents, I grew up with domestic workers and going to private school, and in that context, I remember my father doing or being able to do the exact same tasks as my mother in regards caregiving. In fact, certain normative gender roles were implemented exactly the opposite, as my father being more affectionate and emotional than my mother. I never felt that my father, as a middle-class man, was assumed to be a bad parent since he was not physically present in my daily life, on the contrary, people used to praise him for being so caring towards me and interested in my life.

My previous experience working with the topic of early childhood development and with housing movements in metropolitan São Paulo makes me question general assumptions that men are not involved in childcare or they have less ability to do so, especially lower income groups, who have to deal with additional criminalization and stereotypes. Further complexities arise when we look at young children since it is assumed as a period where care and involvement are feminized, meaning they are expected, and promoted, to be performed mainly by women in Brazil.

### 3.5 Scope and Limitations of the Study

As the researcher, I have a higher degree of power and control over the research process than the participants, so the effort to understand and identify some of my biases and limitations in this journey were aimed to minimize its influences in the overall results. I am a young female researcher with no children, so my experience with the topic was based on personal and professional experiences around parents, and of my own as a daughter.

As much as I wanted to explore father's perceptions and experiences, one key aspect was the effort to not romanticize men's involvement, despite not engaging in measuring or quantifying what involvement actually means. Although considering involvement a multifaceted construct, women still spend more time caregiving and household activities and I believe men do have certain levels of agency that could be put in practice, and some decide not to.

This research aims to contribute to the discussion and knowledge production regarding fatherhood, and its differential is the fact men's own voices were a crucial element in the process. However, some men might have answered the questions in certain ways to suit the research topic and according to certain expected behaviors and ideals around parenting in Brazil. Since it was self-reported, there is also the issue of accuracy in regard to personal behaviors and attitudes, such as the frequency which they perform certain activities (Bernard 2011:184).

In regard to the scope of the questions and overall exploration of the involvement, I focused on the initial construct proposed by Lamb et al. (1987) which does not contemplate the new discussions of involvement quality and its influence on different child outcomes.

One limitation of the sampling was the focus on heterosexual two-parent family typology, excluding therefore other important parental groups. This was not an intentional choice but was driven by the families I was able to access. The research is focused on urban locales, and the social, economic and cultural dynamics influencing fathering in rural areas are likely different. As a variable, social class was more important than race or ethnicity for this research, however as suggested by Baker and Loewenstein (1997:181) would be interesting to explore further whether there are differences in the way specific groups perceived involvement. I did not interview any professional from the private sector, which could have been interesting in this context of new paternity leave policies and the requirement for parenting classes. As much as I believe the life dynamics of the research participants can be representative of many other low income men in metropolitan São Paulo, the extent to which this can be generalized is still limited due to the sample and explorative aim of this research.

## Chapter 4 Findings and Analysis

The new social realities that influence what is expected from fathers and what should be the 'ideal' paternal behavior are not free from contradiction, conflict and negotiation within the household, paid labor responsibilities and society in general. All fathers who participate in this research were aware of this and seemed to have coping strategies to navigate around these changing roles that influence the concrete practices and activities they may undertake. The aim of this chapter<sup>9</sup> is to connect and reflect on what the research participants<sup>10</sup> have said and on what the theoretical framework aims to explain in the light of the research question. It is divided into three broad parts each of them addressing one of the research sub-objectives<sup>11</sup>.

### 4.1 Participants' Understanding of Involvement

As a relevant result, involvement came up as diverse attitudes and behaviors aligned with responsibility, availability and interaction, Lamb et al. (1987) construct. Some mentioned specific activities while others understood involvement as participating in children's life more broadly, for example, J. father of a five months girl who said "I try to stay as much as possible with her" (Personal Interview, July 2018). In some cases, it was hard to separate what participants have said in only one of these domains since they are intertwined. For the research participants, involvement was understood mainly as interaction, or the concrete practices in daily life, leading to the decision to have a separated section on it. This goes along with Pleck (2010:60) since accessibility and responsibility are harder to investigate and did not come as often in participants' comments.

#### 4.1.1 Responsibility

For the participants, fathers share equality with the mothers the responsibility towards their children, however responsibility was understood and operationalized in different ways. When asked about their perceptions of male involvement in their communities all study participants stated that men are expected - and pressured - to be the source of livelihoods, to work and pay the bills, making sure there is nothing missing in the household, fulfilling the normative male role of economic breadwinner (Promundo Brasil 2016:24). Generally, they would follow that by saying money is not enough, the presence of the father in the child's life is something money could never buy. A. a young father of five children said the community forgets the affectionate and loving role a father can have and his contribution in other aspects of young children's life.

The most frequent answer from both fathers and mothers was to provide financially, to be present and to participate in the child's life. A. said responsibility is about being present,

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<sup>9</sup> The analysis includes data collected from Personal Interviews conducted in Brazil in July 2018, and to avoid repetition, unless is a direct quotation from a participant, I will not mention the source.

<sup>10</sup> Most of the findings came from the interviews with the fathers, which are also mentioned as men. Parents refer to the participants from both sexes.

<sup>11</sup> Some of the elements explained are cross-cutting and contribute to the discussion of the three parts, however in order to avoid repetition they were mainly addressed in the topic I believe they are more relevant to.

not only physically but to help them on daily activities and to be aware of what is happening. This process was explained by Ed., a father of three girls who said the caregiving responsibilities at his household are equally distributed, as being the building blocks of a house, which you do brick by brick. He was raised by a single mother and said he is living proof of breaking the cycle of male absence and was the most emphatic participant in regard to the importance of constant presence and participation. Although many criticized the social pressure to provide economically, they still reproduced this expectation believing is the men's role not to let anything to be missing in the household - a literal translation of a very recurrent Brazilian expression '*não deixar faltar*'.

To give love and to care for children is also perceived as a responsibility of a father. Some men defended a greater responsibility of the mother for caregiving, especially when the children are infants, due to breastfeeding. Others said the society has this expectation from women however, men could do all activities, except breastfeeding, if only they could stay more at home and had more opportunities to practice it. The assumed mother's love and maternal instinct as something unique and different than the love of a man towards his child were criticized by half of the participants, as noted by Ed. "who said that a real father has no fatherly instinct either? You protect a child with your life, without thinking, with nothing" (Personal Interview, July 2018).

Responsibility in the paternal involvement construct refers to the process of making sure children are being taken care of and the indirect care influencing rearing (Pleck 2010:65). The first is related to the division of labor and to take initiative and monitoring what is needed, which aims to challenge the perception and, perhaps culture, of men as helpers rather than co-responsible. As shown before, some participants still share this view, but when they were asked about decision-making all said it is a shared responsibility and based on dialogue with the mothers. Indirect care are "activities undertaken for the child, but not involving interaction with the child" (2010:65), and comprises of two categories, the material and child-related work and the indirect social care. The later refers to "promoting the child's community connections" (2010:66), so monitoring who is the children's surroundings and negotiating their insertion on social institutions for example. In the research, many fathers shared their concern about the areas they live, the lack of public spaces and prevalence of violence and drugs related behaviors. Low income fathers are in disadvantage since they depend on the offer of public services, for example, availability of daycare centers and public playgrounds, and tend to have less bargain power to advocate for better services for their children.

It is important to point out that Pleck (2010:65) justifies the deliberate exclusion of economic support in the construct as it was aimed to explore new dimensions of fathering. However, this decision seems contradictory because the indirect material care also involves purchasing and arranging goods for the children, which normally involves a financial element.

#### **4.1.2 Availability**

Availability came up as a synonymous for presence in most cases. Ed. believes the daily physical contact is what makes involvement possible, saying a father who lives in a different house can have a special relationship, be a friend, but not a present father. The fathers who did not live with their children were aware of the impacts of missing daily contact and tried to minimize that by talking on the phone and being informed frequently of what is happening. The interview with W. was the most touching for me since he was very upset from not being able to live with his daughter, who stays with her mother in another state and, for economic reasons and due to her young age, only allows them to meet once a year. W. said he recently gave her a cellphone to promote daily interaction not mediated by her mother

which for him was key to not “be depressed” after they have divorced. This resonates with Lamb et al. (1987:125) definition of availability, which encompasses the potential availability for interaction by effectively being present and also accessibility without direct contact. The fathers’ participating in this research are aware of the importance of availability and are practicing different strategies, either by being at the house with the child or available through other means, such as a cellphone.

#### **4.1.3 The Joys of Fatherhood**

Many said the experience of becoming a father was watershed in their lives in terms of maturity levels, responsibility and love. Some participants mentioned they had achieved maturity when they became fathers which pushed them to change certain aspects of their lives. R. said he gave up his dream to become a soccer player for a higher paid job when his girlfriend got pregnant with their first daughter when they were 16 years old. Others mentioned they stopped going out with friends as much as they did before. The joys of fatherhood came up in different ways, especially regarding the intensity of their love towards their children since it came in a unique way never experienced before: “fantastic”, “no words to describe it”, and “so intense that is even scary”. Ed. said the best part of his day is when he meets his daughters after work, while W. and J. said is priceless to be able to walk to their children rooms before going to bed, small things they miss doing daily after they got divorced and became nonresident fathers. M. works on a night shift, which despite being challenging allows him to spend some hours with his son during the day. He mentioned his happiness to be able to get home and have breakfast with his son, or how sometimes he goes to his son’s bed and sleep with him for some time. J. said he finds amazing how she recognizes his voice when he enters the door and starts talking to her.

#### **4.1.3 Absence**

I addressed absence during my interviews as a starting point for the discussion of involvement since it is a recurrent way of framing low income father’s, based on a narrowed conceptualization of physical presence. This allowed exploring the expectations and perceptions around being and becoming fathers as well as on factors influencing absence or absent behaviors.

For the parents interviewed, absence was related to not participating in children's life and not supporting them economically. In their perception reporting about other men in their communities, the leading factors of fathers’ absence were related to individual choices or behaviors, or the result of external factors. For the first group, some men are absent because they lack maturity, have not learned how to be a father or have not felt like a father yet. The other group perceived absence as the consequence of the bad relationship between the child’s parents and, specially, the difficulties to meet the expectations society places on fathers. About the later, A., who lives on a slum in São Paulo, said absence is a result of assumptions that poor fathers could not provide a better life for their children, therefore “by being condemned, having fingers pointed towards him, prevents this guy from showing he could be different” (Personal Interview, July 2018). He shares this view with other fathers who believe absence can be a consequence of unreal expectations on fathers, for example when they are criminalized for not being able to get jobs, when in fact the causes might be in the overall economic system. Even in the cases where men were individually blamed for their decisions of not being present, the examples always involved social practices, for example, men who fall into peer pressure for partying or drinking instead of being home, behaviors understood as not suitable with fatherhood responsibilities for the participants.

All fathers perceive absence in their communities, expressed concerns with the long-term impacts for the children and in many cases gave examples of people around them who grew up in this situation. Fathers are seen as an important variable to keep children out of the 'bad pathway', meaning drugs and violence, which are so prevalent on low income areas in Brazil or to avoid children to be a 'troublemaker' or 'rebellious' - on their own words. They also believe they serve as the role model/example for their children, what E. father of three girls (and expecting a fourth one) said "much of what someone becomes is what they have lived, people who are closest to you will shape you" (Personal Interview, July 2018). In their perception, men have bigger authority and stronger hands to deal with these situations, however, on the other hand, they do not want to be only the authority in the house, believing dialogue regarding risks behaviors are important. In that case, the intimacy resulting from presence and closeness is a powerful tool.

There is a perception of their role as gendered with fathers being seen as having specific contribution to avoid violent or inappropriate behaviors of young men. Research on the specific outcomes of father presence in children's life, influenced by the quality of the interaction, especially at a young age has shown influence in many aspects from brain development to socioemotional development (Mustard 2006:571, Pleck 2007:197).

One single mother with two children that have not been registered by their fathers said she believes it is because they are not interested, and lack of resources is not the reason since both fathers work. She mentioned in the case of her son is because his father's new wife does not support his involvement. He was even arrested for not paying the child support, but at some point she gave up the legal process against him since she believes he should be naturally interested in their children<sup>12</sup>.

With regard to absence in their own experience as fathers, the ones who felt absent mentioned their work routine as the main reason. Their job - tiredness or stress - influences their available time, ability or desire to spend time with their children, a process that normally "comes in softly without one realizing it" as mentioned by A. (Personal Interview, July 2018).

The gap between the ideal fatherhood and reality came up with E. weekly routine as the only source of the income of this household. He works 16 hours a day in two jobs and misses spending more time with them, but he tries to compensate by doing small things with them when he has time. For the fathers who do not live in the same house as their children, they were aware of the impact of physical absence in their relationship and said is the natural consequence of a divorce and make an effort in figuring out alternative ways to be present.

The limiting view of physical absence ignores that not always it means men are not participating or involved in the activities at all (Levtov et al. 2015:37), and does not consider other expressions of it, such as emotional and psychological absence in different levels. Absence is nuanced, therefore should be understood under the structural factors and norms that reinforce men as the economic provider and certain types of behaviors that disengage them from household and caregiving activities. In the next section, I examine some of them.

### 4.3 Factors Defining Involvement

There are different factors defining involvement, from individual behaviors to policies and workplace realities shaped by cultural and social norms, in this section I will highlight four: maternal template, contextual factors, socialization patterns, and institutional support.

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<sup>12</sup> According to the Brazilian law if a parent entitled to receive child support does not receive for over 3 months it can start a legal process leading to prison as a coercive measure in certain cases.

### 4.3.1 The “Maternal Template”

One starting obstacle relates to the way we think about parental involvement being based on the activities that traditionally mothers do, so a “mother-defined fatherhood” (Pleck 1997:70) where caregiving is defined based on a “maternal template” (Palkovitz et al. 2014:408). That is the case of ignoring the important and necessary role of financial provision as one element of involvement, for example. Palkovitz et al. (2014:408) argue perhaps there are differences in the essence of mothering and fathering which could influence the styles, levels, and patterns of involvement. As long this template is prevalent we diminish the opportunities to identify other ways of performing caregiving, so we start the discussion with a bias.

### 4.3.2 Contextual Factors

Lamb et al. (1987) paternal involvement construct, and even the revised conceptualization by Pleck (2010), misses the contextual factors which systematically affects men right to fatherhood, since “without an enabling environment, individuals might want and attempt to change, but the broader climate might make change difficult or impossible” (Michau et al. 2014:6). Three contextual factors came up in the research: sociocultural environment, social supports and gatekeepers, and availability of time.

The sociocultural environment and availability of services and infra-structure was a concern for all parents. They have mentioned the lack or poor-maintenance of public spaces for children to play in their neighborhood, unsafe streets and in some cases, poor access or low quality of other public services and infrastructure. Low-income families have economic constraints that limit where they can live, which type of services they can access (since paid services may not be a feasible option) and what type of leisure activities they can afford. All except one man said they would rather live in some other area of their city, for reasons related to safety, location or access to services.

The second contextual factor is the social supports or gatekeepers, individuals who can encourage or hamper the involvement with their children. Their current partners and/or the mothers of their children are key since they are “influencing agents in father-child relations” (De Luccie 1995:115). W. said his current wife got mad at him for giving his daughter, who lives in another state, the cellphone and somehow does not appreciate his relationship with her. J, who is no longer with the mother of his children, said one of them is very authoritarian and controlling so he is very cautious with his behavior in order to avoid making her mad which would influence his access to his son. All the other mention their wives support and seem to facilitate their involvement, and referred to marital communication as a key element, aspect aligned with literature (1995:116). There are also other people, such as health professionals from hospital and community clinics, which in their opinion tend to not see their role as relevant as the mother. The two youngest fathers who are afraid of bathing their daughters and have not received training at the hospital, while their partners did for example.

Availability of time resulting from paid work is the third contextual factor and the main hinder for involvement for men, either because of the concrete time spent outside the house with commute and long shifts, but also the emotions and physical sensations that can arise from the workplace realities (Heilman et al. 2017:35), such as stress and tiredness. In the majority of the households from this research the men were the main or sole provider, and in the cases where their partner worked all, except one mother, worked less or had flexible hours allowing them to spend more time with the children or to be more available for routine activities.

### 4.3.3 Socialization Patterns and Gender Norms

The parents own rearing influence on how they engage with household chores came up with Mo. saying he can do everything since he grew up doing things in his house and R. saying the opposite, he had to learn by doing since he was the only male of the house meaning he never did household activities before getting married. This aspect can be linked to the socialization patterns, the "years of sex-differentiated socialization based on assumptions regarding the differential propensities and likely future roles of men and women" (Lamb et al. 1997:131). These social norms that link women's identities to reproductive work and caregiving reinforce and reproduce a naturalizing a behavior that is in fact socially constructed through customary practices (Gonçalves et al. 2017, Razavi 2011:899). Not all fathers seemed to be challenging the normative gender patterns, as some still have different expectations on the type of chores children could do in the household according to their gender. Two emphasized they do not allow their sons to play with their daughter's dolls, and although this is not deterministic of future parenting roles, stimulating gendered toys help to endorse normative gender-typed attitudes leading to "different developmental trajectories for social and cognitive skills in children" (Spinner et al. 2018:314/328).

When asked to reflect about differences between the relationships they can have with a son and with a daughter, all initially said there is not difference, but then few differentiators came up. For example, regarding the type of playing activities they do inside and outside the house, two fathers who weekly play soccer with their friends said they would not take a daughter there since the environment is not appropriated for women. Regarding when they started to be involved, most men had said from the beginning, which for some meant when the child was born and for others when the pregnancy was discovered. Only for We. it was different since his involvement started when he found out his second child was going to be a boy, justifying based on the existence of a special bond between a father and a son.

These strong gender norms support a cycle where men performing care and households activities are considered non-normative and, depending on the context, are either excessively praised or criticized. Men seem to be constantly praised for doing little or criticized for not doing enough, and in that income seems to be a divisive aspect. For example, around Father's Day, some marketing strategies are used promoting a discourse of Super-Dads, men who are able to conciliate many aspects of their lives with their children, which rarely considers the additional burdens, challenges and stigma around low income fatherhood.

### 4.3.4 Institutional Factors

The institutional factors, meaning the laws and policies are concrete hindrances for fathers' involvement, either through its formal scope or its effective implementation. The current parental leave policies in Brazil is a great example of how generally the society perceives the distinct roles of men and women in childcare. In the formal labor market, paid maternity leave is 120 days with a law being discussed in Congress to extend to 180 days; while paid paternity leave is 5 days with an additional 15 for employers of a small percentage of companies around the country under a specific condition that men should attend activities of responsible fatherhood. Despite being a significant advancement, the extension of the paternity leave does not acknowledge the full potential of shared responsibilities and equitable distribution of caregiving among parents and also include an underlying assumption of their natural lack of responsibility towards their children, since its requirement of special fathering training. Nonetheless is important to emphasize that these policies are only applicable for part of the parents in Brazil, as informality has increased and is currently around 37%, meaning the majority of low income fathers do not benefit from any type paid parental leave (Nunes 2018). All fathers who could benefit from paternity leave did so, however all agreed



the time is insufficient, both to support their wives recovery from childbirth, but also to enjoy and connect with their newly born child. Mo. the only ‘expecting’ father<sup>13</sup> during the fieldwork said he requested vacation time plus the paternity leave, allowing “35 days just for them”, in reference to his wife and daughter (Personal Interview, July 2018). According to this policy, the five days start to count from the day the baby is born, and E. said his wife and youngest daughter had to stay in the hospital for a few extra days so by the time they were released he had to go back to work. He said he fought with his insurance and employee to negotiate that, but there was no flexibility.

The program developers also gave other examples of the implementation of policies which were, in theory, gender neutral but its operationalization brought up a propensity to focus on women, especially when involves topics related to early childhood care and development. Many initiatives aimed to support families take place on traditional working hours, which as pointed out by A. makes unfeasible for working fathers to join. Other elements also came up such as the type of activities conducted, the format of the printed materials used, the decoration of the rooms, and available toys. The majority of the professionals from early education, social assistance and primary healthcare are also female, careers considered feminine (Sayão 2005:8), which can be additional factors influencing men’s perception of being at the ‘right place’, therefore welcomed and/or comfortable. Three fathers mentioned they had attended daycare meetings, being the only male present each time, and when asked how they have felt about it all said it was weird being the only man but they felt generally welcomed. L., on the contrary, said he had attended school meetings for his son and other fathers were present. However, none of them mentioned any type of efforts of the schools in engaging men in their activities.

In Brazil exists a prevalent bias towards legal guardianship for mothers in case of a divorce, which is justified by the lack of ability and responsibility of fathers. This practice means in most cases that men have to provide child support reinforcing his role as the source of economic provision (Pleck et al. 1987:118).

Ed. as well as some program developers said men experience with fatherhood is very lonely and their pressure for being strong and tough is still relevant. The initiatives that aim to engage and create a safe environment to support men embracing these new father ideals are still incipient and cultural and institutional norms that reinforce the breadwinner role and invisibility of aspects of engagement prevalent in Brazil.

### 4.3 Fatherhood Practices

Interaction is one of the components of the paternal involvement construct (Lamb et al. 1987) and was explored to tease out fathers’ concrete engagement with their children through rearing practices.

One of the starting questions was whether they had a male figure while growing up and what type of memories they had regarding their involvement, as suggested by Pleck (1997) as one component of men’s individual motivation to be involved with their children. This was important since it helps to identify intergenerational similarities or differences and to allow them to reflect from two perspectives, being a father and being a son/grandson/stepson (Levtov et al. 2018:44). One thing that stands out was the emotional absence, how many of them missed having a closer relationship with their father, even when they were physically present in the household and provided financially, fulfilling the so-called normative role. They tended to be very rigid and do not actively participative in their children daily lives, J.

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<sup>13</sup> His baby girl was due to be born by September 2018.

used the metaphor of his father being the police of the house, and his mother the human rights activist (Personal Interview, July 2018). This was to refer to an authoritarian behavior without any dialogue.

Regarding expressions of love and affection, E. who was raised having his grandfather as his father figure said, “he would never give a hug, a kiss, to say I love you” (Personal Interview, July 2018). It is interesting that all men acknowledged their father’s love towards them but felt there was a missing part of effectively demonstrating it through affection. Despite understanding this behavior under what was expected from fathers of older generations, they make (or want to make, in the case of the ‘pregnant’ father) differently under the belief fatherhood also involves the expression of love, along with other responsibilities.

All men who were asked how their fathering experience was in comparison to their fathers said they would love to have themselves as their fathers, particularly because they show affection, attention and participate in the children’s life. This goes along with Bastos et al. idea of generational gap where fathers position themselves in “opposition to the old model and seek increased closeness and commitment to their children” (2013:232). Three participants mentioned how their fathers, as grandfathers of their children, behave completely different now, have become more soft, present and affectionate. One participant even said how he wishes his father would treat himself like he treats his grandson. I was not able to find relevant literature with the possible explanations to it, and even the participants were not able to identify why this happens, but perhaps aging gives some men a safe-conduct to navigate around other behaviors.

The dominant mode of masculinity in Brazil is patriarchal and sexist and benefits from a cross-generational transmission of gender stereotypes (Doucet 2013:304) that places care and all reproductive work as a feminine responsibility and breadwinning responsibilities to men (Promundo Brasil 2016:16). Despite the dominant distinction<sup>14</sup> between men as the family men, meaning the sole breadwinner, and women as the housewife, meaning caregiving alone, the research participants were showing different, more nuanced, norms.

El. which is an evangelical pastor considers himself the father of six children his wife had with other men, said fatherhood is not just the biological or social role of a man who takes care, but the man who is able to transform a relationship into a father-son/father-daughter. He would not give more details on that, but the basis for him was respect, love and participation on each other’s life. He was not alone, as other participants made the distinction of the biological aspect of fatherhood and the concrete choice of fatherhood by engagement and participation, or what Pleck (2007:196) mentioned as the behavior and identity of fatherhood.

Two fathers, Je. and L., have the legal guardianship of their children, while Je.’s daughter lives with his mother, L. said his sister and his mother are the responsible for the main activities related to care for his son. As the African proverb says, “it takes a village to raise a child”, and relatives are in many cases the natural source of support especially when the state is absent and other paid alternatives are not feasible. However, the impression given by these situations was their emphasis in the narrowed view of involvement meaning financial provision, which was the driver of them having the guardianship in the first place.

All men recognize they have to contribute and have equal responsibilities in the household and caregiving tasks for young children. This is a movement that goes both ways, since the majority of the mothers were also working outside the house, some full time and others doing side jobs when they had the time or the opportunity.

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<sup>14</sup> However is important to reflect whether this division was ever simple like that because in many lower strata families women had side jobs to contribute with the household income.

For this research there are two broad types of activities, household and caregiving, and when asked an open ended question about concrete activities they carry out for or with their children under six years old the answers were diverse: leisure/playing, showering, cooking, taking to daycare, changing diapers, support breastfeeding at night, attending meetings, keeping up to date to what happens on daycare, taking to doctor's appointment, and to take to parks and plazas. Caring for young children is very specific since it is extremely time consuming and requires certain skills and emotional strength. This context summarized by Jo., father of a five months old girl: "it is very tough to tell you the truth. Too many things. Bath, change diapers every 2.5 hours, the crying, cramps. A cry that gets soaked in the ear" (Personal Interview, July 2018). He said at some point even considered sleeping someplace else since he had to work the next morning, but he realized taking care of a baby is very time consuming, which motivated him to help his wife.

Few men mentioned the importance to play with their children and how they intentionally engage with that, even if is to watch television together, while two spontaneously said they do not play as much as they think they should with their children. Three men with infants (<1 year) said they are afraid of performing certain activities like bathing and holding them. Jo. explained his wife was also initially afraid, however she learned with the nurses at the hospital and does it more frequently which helped her to get more habituated, while he does not, since by the time he gets home their daughter is already sleeping. This shows the role of women influencing the masculine norms in child care.

The importance of physical presence and engagement with routine came up at different times, however some placed their contribution with household maintenance activities and caretaking as a help rather than a duty, as stated by Jo. "To be present is to help, not only in upbringing but in women's tasks" (Personal Interview, July 2018). In many cases when asked to tease out what type of activities and tasks were their responsibility in the household, men referred to the women as the main person doing it. In those cases, it was either because the women had more time available, since she did not have a paid job or had flexible working hours, or more experience or ability doing so. The ability aspect was for some fathers related to the fact they carry the pregnancy and therefore were more apt to perform certain activities specifically when they are babies. Somehow the participants from both sexes still reinforce the notion of men "helping out" with the daily routine, despite all acknowledging they do more than in the past and their share should be 50% each (Levtov et al. 2015:37).

It was interesting to hear two groups of positions of women in regard to men doing or not doing certain activities within the household. One was the women who pushed and put pressure on them to do their part, for example, Ed. mentioned his wife always tells him that "you don't help, you live here so you should do as much as I do" (Personal Interview, July 2018). The other was women who understood the man tough work routine and eased their expectations. In both their own lives and their perception of other men behavior's in their communities who were not carrying out activities in the household, work routine was the most recurrent factor constraining their undertaking of responsibility, followed by divorce and/or complicated relationship with mothers.

Despite the critique to the distancing model of fatherhood, some answers given by men were paradoxical, for example, two fathers mentioned sometimes they feel lazy once they get home from work and prefer not to do some activities. They have this choice since their partners or other people in the household will do it. It resonates with Lamb et al. (1987) dominant view of fatherhood where direct activities are discretionary for some men, nonetheless this should be analyzed considering other factors that can impede engagement. For example, some men mentioned their wives have employees more likely to allow them to do certain things related to childcare and/or flexible working schedules, perpetuating the notion men are supporters and women are the primary caregiver.

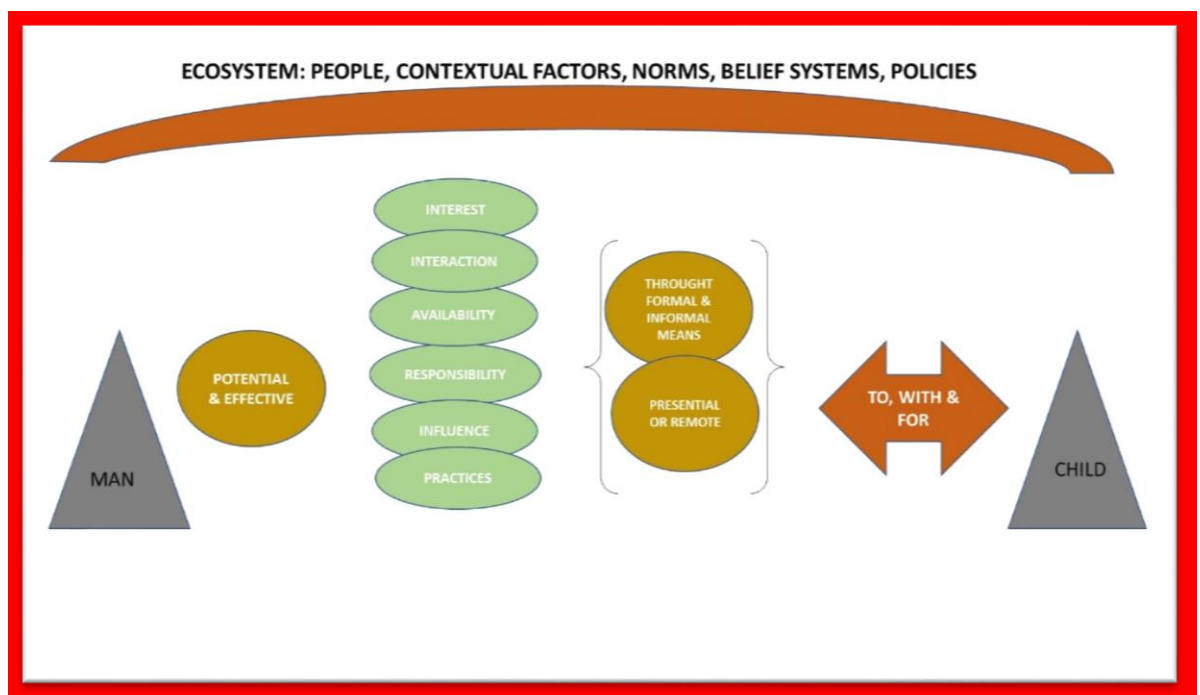
## 4.4 The Fatherhood 'Puzzle'

The findings of the fieldwork have shown how contradictory the expectations for fathers are nowadays in Brazil, where the dominant masculinity model and calls for gender equality in regard to involvement, and care, for young children seems to be struggling with each other. The common discourses on involvement for low income fathers tend to be related to their absence or even through attempts to quantify or qualify it, both inaccurate if done simplistically by not take in consideration the more nuanced aspects of fatherhood. Understanding fathering as a non-universal and homogeneous experience highly influenced by external factors allows us to create better policies and support systems that in consequence will influence positively their experience upbringing children and the overall outcomes for early childhood development.

The ideal fatherhood goals seem to be around balancing financial support to the family as well as showing affection, being present and having authority. The problem with this equation among low income men in São Paulo is their parenting being affected by additional external burdens such as poverty and economic instability meaning they are “more likely to spend more time and effort focusing on their roles as financial providers” (Levtov et al. 2015:45).

The visual representation below shows the complexity of father's involvement. The underlying understanding is that involvement is a non-binary definition, meaning the discussion is not simply whether men “are” or “are not” involved since there is not a universal template for involvement. Not only that, involvement for many low income men is based not only on their will and interest but influenced by the conditions of their environment. The interplay of different socioeconomic and cultural factors can actually define what type of choices fathers can make, leading to different involvement patterns with their children.

**Figure 1: The Fatherhood 'Puzzle'**



Source: Elaborate by the author based on Lamb (1987), Levtoy et al. (2015) and Nyamukapa (2018).

## Chapter 5 Reflection and Concluding Thoughts

In my research paper, I explored the main factors defining low income fathers' involvement, with children under six years old, the period called early childhood development, in the metropolitan area of São Paulo. Fatherhood is not a homogenous experience, and men in the lower socioeconomic strata face additional challenges as consequence of stereotypes and vulnerabilities. The focus on their involvement with young children was influenced by the Brazilian policy landscape which has been promoting an agenda where men's current, and potential, contribution for children development is not given the proper attention. This research contributes to knowledge production also because it has given voice to men, a strategy not often used to explore their attitudes and behaviors, as well as their perceptions of other men in their families and communities.

I presented some elements of Brazilian culture that promote and reinforce the male breadwinning model, and the general assumption females are naturally prone to caregiving and household activities. This is accentuated in the initial years of life, a period where care tends to be even more feminized influenced by the childbearing and breastfeeding experiences women go through.

The conceptual framework is composed of involvement, care and the ecological view of fatherhood. Lamb's et al. (1987) construct of paternal involvement comprising of interaction, responsibility and availability was crucial to explore different elements of father's relationship with their children. Care allowed to understand some of the concrete practices' men are undertaking that can promote children's well-being and overall development. The ecological view of fatherhood was important since it considers different elements in the environment of a father that affect and influence their involvement with young children.

In a dialogue with the title of my research, men do care for their children. They care by performing concrete activities and also through other ways making sure children are being taken care. Fathers can be involved and conduct the same activities as the mothers but not with the same proportion. As pointed out by one father, most of the activities related to housekeeping and childcare are still being done by women, and the majority of men placed their contribution as a help to the mother rather than a duty related to fatherhood. Part of the research participants seemed comfortable with this situation, and there are cultural and institutional practices that reinforce those gendered divisions. These divisions are strengthened through socialization patterns that assign different normative expectations associated with men and women, and the fathers do not seem to be challenging this in the upbringing of their own children.

Fathers from the research understand and define involvement as presence, participation, love and responsibility along with financial support to children. There is a generational gap between their experience as sons and as fathers, since before, in their perception, fathering was only about financial provision. However, the breadwinning role is still prevalent, and despite the consensus father's involvement should not be limited to money, involvement seems to have an element of individual choice while economic provision does not. Low income fathers in Brazil are penalized when they cannot fulfil this role even when the reasons are beyond their own control. As much as we should move beyond this restrictive view of breadwinning, men do play an important role supporting families economically and this should be considered as one important element of their involvement. In that sense, this paper promotes a discussion of involvement beyond the binary 'involved versus not involved', understanding involvement as a more nuanced experience which varies in a spectrum of ways.

Absence has been a recurrent way of referring to low income fathers, and I used this as an entry point for the exploration of fathering attitudes and behaviors. This allowed to tease out absence and the elements that can lead to absent behaviours, as absence is also extremely nuanced and context based. Fathering and paternal involvement require multiple levels of explanation and analysis that should consider what fathers do to, for and with their children beyond the maternal template of caregiving. The analysis should consider contextual factors, which shape profoundly low income fathers' involvement. For example, the influence of the dynamics of the Sao Paulo metropolitan area, that defines much of their access to services and infrastructure, such as daycare centres and playgrounds; and the time constraints they face due to their participation in the labor market. Availability of time due to their jobs is the main hinder for participation because influences the concrete physical time they can spend with their children, and also their emotional and psychological availability. Another important hinder is the relationship with other adults in the children's ecosystem, mainly their mothers.

Men are expected to share the responsibilities within the household and caregiving activities and pushed to play a bigger role in the promotion of gender equality but many, especially those in economically constrained locales, have often not been given the right tools, institutional and social support for that. It has been a very lonely experience for men, and while we have made many efforts to support mothers', the same is not true for fathers.

Some of the limitations of this research were related to its small sample focused on urban locales and heterosexual family typology. While me, as a middle-class woman with no children, could have affected the engagement with the discussions and some elements of it. This study is important since it brings arguments to keep pushing for policymaking and programs that promote fatherhood and the right of fathering as a life experience, since shows men are involved in the upbringing of their children and do care about it. Further research is still necessary to explore, for example, the specific outcomes for young children of the different involvement experiences fathers can have with them. Men are not strangers in early childhood terrain and therefore should be engaged and supported as key allies.

## Appendix: Interview Guide<sup>15</sup>

1. What is the age and sex of your child(ren)?
2. How often do you see him/her? (If you do not live in the same house)
3. Did you grow up with your father? (Whether or not father was present or not)
4. What are your memories of your father's involvement in your upbringing?
5. What are the obligations of a father to you?
6. Do you think it changes according to the age of the child?
7. From which moment did you become involved in the creation of your child(ren)?
8. In your family community how do people understand the role of the father?
9. What is the father's responsibility for you?
10. In your community what does a present father mean? Do you have an example of an "ideal father"?
11. (If you had a father) What do you think you do different from your father in the involvement and creation of child(ren)?
12. What motivates you to get involved in creating child(ren)?
13. In what ways do you participate in the creation of child(ren)?
14. It is common on this topic to hear about father absence. What do you think about that?
15. Have you ever feel absent? If so, why.
16. How are decisions made regarding your child(ren)?
17. Are you the father you would like to be? If not, what hinders you?
18. What motivates you to get involved in creating your child(ren)?
19. What facilitates your involvement in the creation of your child(ren)?
20. What are the biggest difficulties in getting involved in upbringing your child(ren)?
21. What kind of support would help you in creating your child(ren)?
22. Have you heard about paternity leave? (If not, explain)
23. Some countries offer the same time as paternity leave as maternity leave. What is your opinion about this?
24. At what moments in your child(ren)'s routine you are present?
25. What activities do you do with your child(ren) at house?
26. What activities do you do with your child(ren) outside the house?
27. Who are the people involved in raising your child(ren)?
28. Do you do different activities with your son and your daughter? If yes, why?
29. What is good and what is difficult about raising children in this neighborhood?
30. Has your involvement/participation changed by with your second child?
31. Being a father, do you think you can get involved in the same way as the mother/woman?
32. Where you were born and how old are you?
33. Where do you live?
34. What is your job/your profession?
35. If you are unemployed, how long have you been unemployed? What was the last job?
36. How many hours per week do you normally work?
37. What is your average commute time?
38. How many people live with you?
39. Of the people who live with you, how many work or receive a social benefit?
40. Is anyone staying at home?
41. What is the average income of your home? (1SM = R \$ 954)
42. Did you plan to have children?
43. Did I miss asking anything you consider important for my research?

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<sup>15</sup> This was a roughly translation from Portuguese to English. I provided few examples to contextualize some questions.

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