

Explaining Fathers' Involvement in Child Care: Recent Findings from Israel

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Abstract

The study aimed to examine variables that explain perceptions of paternal involvement in child care among 88 Jewish Israeli women with at least one child aged 2-6. The women's perceptions of paternal involvement in child care were examined in five domains: physical care, education, showing love, playing with the children, and punishment. Based on the family systems approach, we examined the extent to which the following sets of maternal variables contribute to explaining mothers' perceptions of paternal involvement in child care: gender role ideology, maternal gatekeeping, desirability of control, perceived support from the extended family, and mothers' satisfaction with their husbands' participation in child care. The predictor variables explained the mothers' perceptions of paternal involvement in the domain of showing love to the greatest extent.

Key Words: paternal involvement in child care, maternal gatekeeping, gender roles, desirability of control

Introduction

The main goal of the study was to examine the variables that explain mothers' perceptions of paternal involvement in child care among Jewish Israeli women with young children. Studies conducted in Western societies such as the United States (Waite & Nielsen, 2001), England (Brannen & Moss, 1992), Sweden (Sandqvist, 1992), Hungary (Clason, 1992), Germany (Lewin-Epstein, Stier, & Braun, 2006), Australia (Craig, 2006), and Israel (Gaunt, 2006) have revealed that men tend to participate in child care more than in the past. This trend has also been found in non-Western countries like India (Sekaran, 1992) and Turkey (Ozgun & Honig, 2005), albeit to a lesser extent. Consistent with these trends, studies conducted in the United States have indicated that whereas fathers were once expected to focus on providing for the family's economic needs, the "new father" is also expected to provide for his children's emotional and physical needs, and to be an equal partner to the mother in taking care of his children (Marsiglio, Amato, Day, & Lamb, 2000; Wall & Arnold, 2007). However, researchers have found that the extent of paternal involvement differs in accordance with the domain of child care. For example, Deutsch, Lozy, and Saxon (1993) found that fathers tend to be more involved in areas such as playing with their children, taking their children on outings, and disciplining their children than they are in feeding and soothing their children.

In light of the extensive research literature, which indicates that paternal involvement in child care has a positive impact on well-being and on family life (Cabrera, Tamis-LeMonda, Bradley, Hofferth, & Lamb, 2000), the main goal of the present study was to examine mothers' perceptions of paternal involvement in five domains of child care: physical care, education, showing love, playing with the children, and punishment. Toward that end, we adopted a symbolic interaction approach (Herbert, 1969) to examine the relationship between mothers' characteristics and paternal involvement in child care from the mothers' perspective. According to that approach, the meanings attributed to various situations are derived from social interactions that take place, and are then modified through individual interpretations. Thus, the consequences of these interactions turn out to be real for the people involved. Moreover, based on family systems theory, which argues that the behavior and perceptions of one family member affect the other members of the family, it was assumed that examination of the mothers' perceptions can contribute important insights on the determinants of paternal involvement in child care. More specifically, this article will focus on two main questions: What variables explain the mothers' perceptions of paternal involvement in child care, and are there differences in the mothers' perceptions of paternal involvement in different domains of child care? Those questions were examined in Israeli society.

The Family in Israel: Traditional and Modern Gender Roles

Israel is a multicultural society, which has absorbed massive waves of immigration from more than 70 countries around the world, and is characterized by a mixture of Jewish and Arab populations (Lavee & Katz, 2003). The present study focused on Jewish families, because the changes in gender roles – including changes in paternal involvement in child care – are more pronounced among that population (Kulik & Rayyan, 2005). One of the traditional characteristics of Israeli society is expressed in its familistic orientation. In Jewish society, the value of family life has been attributed to the combined influence of the Jewish religion and traditional culture, especially among families of Asian-African origin (*Mizrahim*). In keeping with these familistic trends, allocation of domestic tasks is still largely traditional in many Jewish Israeli families. That is, women bear the main responsibility for child care, whereas men are considered the main providers. Israel is also a child-oriented society, in that married couples are expected to have children, and childless couples are not common (Lavee & Katz, 2003). However notwithstanding the traditional, familistic characteristics that typify the Jewish population of Israel, there have been far-reaching changes in the direction of an egalitarian division of household tasks, as well as significant changes in women's attitudes regarding family earning patterns (Kulik & Rayyan, 2005). In that process, new patterns have appeared, such as dual-career families and families in which the wife earns more than her husband. Many women have become financially independent, and some can support themselves and their children on their own. The combination of modern and traditional familistic characteristics makes Israeli society a particularly interesting context for research on paternal involvement in child care. Examination of the variables that explain Israeli mothers' perceptions of paternal involvement in child care can provide insights that are relevant to other traditional familistic societies in which gender roles are changing. Toward that end, the present study adopted the family systems approach as the theoretical framework for exploring the unique contribution of the mothers' characteristics to explaining their perceptions of paternal involvement in child care.

The Theoretical Framework: The Family Systems Approach

The family systems approach views the family as a complex structure comprised of various smaller units or subsystems that together compose the larger family system (Minuchin, 1974).

Each individual family member can be thought of as a subsystem – the maternal subsystem, the paternal subsystem, and the child subsystem. Similarly, subsystems can be organized by gender, with the males in the family comprising one subsystem and the females comprising another, or each generation can be thought of as a subsystem within the whole. Moreover, when considering the interaction among family members, four primary subsystems are generally emphasized: (1) the executive subsystem – husband and wife interactions; (2) the parental subsystem – parent-child interactions; (3) the sibling subsystem – child-child interactions; and (4) the extra-familial subsystem – nuclear family interactions with extended family and networks of social, community, and professional support (Turnbull, Brotherson, & Summers, 1985). The parental subsystem (which is the focus of the present study) is involved with child rearing, and serves such functions as nurturing, guidance, socialization, and control.

Implicit in the discussion of the family as a complex structure is the idea that the individuals and subsystems comprising the whole system are mutually dependent on and mutually influenced by one another. The interrelationships between the overall functioning of the family system and the development of a person's feelings, perceptions, and behavior are emphasized in the current theoretical literature (Henry, Robinson, Neal, & Huey, 2006). In this context, even factors that appear to influence only one person have an impact on other family members. For example, the attributes of children, the developmental history of parents and their psychological make-up, and the broader social context of the family are determinants of parenting (Belsky, 2005).

Given the lack of comprehensive research on the role of mothers in shaping paternal involvement in child care, the present study focused mainly on mothers' perceptions of paternal involvement in child care, and on the maternal characteristics that impact the fathers' behavior. However, in light of Belsky's approach to parenting and based on the overall framework of family systems theory, other subsystems and elements of the family were represented in the present study. Those variables included background characteristics of the child and father, the mothers' satisfaction with their husbands' involvement in child care, and support from the extended family.

Maternal Characteristics

Maternal characteristics (reflecting the maternal subsystem) were represented in the present study by two aspects: a personality attribute and cognitive attributes.

The personality attribute

This dimension was evaluated on the basis of the mothers' desire for control. *Desirability of control* reflects a basic human need, defined as the extent to which people seek to view themselves as controlling events in their environment (Burger, 1992). People characterized by a low desire for control tend to be passive, indecisive, and non-assertive. They prefer to minimize their influence on the behavior of others, and often delegate responsibility for daily decisions. In contrast, people with a high desire for control tend to be assertive, decisive, and active. They invest considerable effort in responding to challenging tasks and tend to avoid delegating tasks to others because they view any admission of their inability to cope with those tasks as a threat (Berman, Gladue, & Taylor, 1993). Thus, women who encourage their husbands to participate in child care can be viewed as delegating authority and as relinquishing part of their maternal role. Consistent with that argument, Hoffman and Moon (1999) found that paternal involvement in child care can symbolize a loss of maternal autonomy and loss of maternal competence.

The cognitive attributes

The mothers' cognitive attributes examined in this study were gender role ideology and maternal gatekeeping.

- (a) *Gender role ideology.* Gender role ideology relates to a system of beliefs regarding activities, feelings, and needs that distinguish men from women (McHale & Huston, 1984). It has been argued that maternal attitudes regarding masculine roles have a strong impact on fathers' perceptions regarding involvement in child care (McBride & Rane, 1997). In families with a traditional gender role ideology, the division of labor is stereotyped and rigid: the father is responsible for supporting the family, whereas the mother cares for the needs of family members and is responsible for household chores. By contrast, in families with an egalitarian gender role ideology, the division of tasks among partners is flexible, and both the husband and wife contribute to all domains of family life (Gaunt, 2006).
- (b) *Maternal gatekeeping.* Scholars have defined maternal gatekeeping as mothers' preferences and attempts to restrict and exclude fathers from child care (Madden-Derdich, Leonard, & Christopher, 2000). The term maternal gatekeeping can be described by likening the home and family to a maternal garden with a wall built around it and a latched gate, which ensures that the mother maintains her designated role as caregiver of her children (Allen & Hawkins, 1999). Maternal gatekeeping is affected by two conflicting forces. On the one hand, the mother would welcome help from her husband in order to make her own life easier; on the other hand, it is difficult for her to relinquish her traditional maternal role, and she consciously or unconsciously prevents her husband from being involved in child care (Gaunt, 2008).

The Spousal Dimension

Mothers' satisfaction with their husbands' involvement in child care refers to the spousal dimension, and therefore represents the executive subsystem. Although paternal involvement in child care can be regarded as a type of support for the mother, not every mother is interested in her husband's assistance. Given the mother's traditional role as primary caregiver for her children, there are women who are dissatisfied with their husbands' involvement in that domain because they perceive their husbands as less competent parents than themselves, and they view them as having low domestic standards (Fagan & Barnett, 2003). In those cases, mothers are likely to exclude their husbands from a range of family tasks, and to restrict their husbands' access to the children. In the same vein, DeLuccie (1995) argued that the mothers' satisfaction with paternal involvement in child care has a gatekeeping function in relation to the frequency of the husbands' involvement.

Perceived Family Support in Child Care

In this study, the extra-familial subsystem was reflected in the mothers' perceptions of support from members of their extended family. The extra-familial subsystem is one of the most important sources of informal support that mothers can receive in caring for their children, owing to the different ways that members of the extended family can provide assistance (Kulik & Rayyan, 2005). When family relations are evaluated as supportive, the family is accessible and family members are perceived as providing the individual with stability and assistance when needed (Vaux, 1988). Consequently, if the mother feels that she receives support from the family in raising her children, it can be assumed that she will need less assistance from the father, and that he will be less involved in child care.

Background Characteristics of Family Members

Research has focused on several background characteristics of family members and the impact of those characteristics on paternal involvement in child care (for a review, see Belsky, 2005). In the present study, we considered the background variables as control variables. As for mothers, the most salient background variables studied in relation to paternal involvement in child care were work-earning characteristics (Wood & Repetti, 2004). It has been argued that fathers take more responsibility for tasks related to the children when mothers are employed outside of the home (Sanderson & Thompson, 2002), and that when the mothers work a high proportion of hours, their contribution to the family income is substantial (Yeung, Sandberg, Davis-Kean, & Hofferth, 2001). As for fathers' background characteristics, findings have revealed that fathers tend to be more involved when they work fewer hours and have a more flexible schedule, and when they are employed in relatively low-stress occupations (Hofferth & Anderson, 2003). Moreover, studies have found that the younger the father and the higher his level of education, the more involved he is in child care (Russell, 1982).

Regarding the children's background variables, existing research has focused primarily on children's gender and age. As for gender, findings on differences in paternal involvement in care of sons versus care of daughters are inconsistent. For example, Snarey (1993) found no differences in the amount of time that fathers devote to care of sons versus daughters. However, Barnett and Baruch (1988) found that fathers prefer to be involved in care of boys.

Although fathers can participate in child rearing at various stages of the child's life, research has revealed that their involvement peaks when the child is in preschool and kindergarten, between the ages of 2 and 6 (Pleck, 1983). Hence, the present study focused on mothers who had at least one child in that age group, and focused on their perceptions of paternal involvement in the following domains of child care: physical care, educational activities, playing with the children, showing love, and punishment.

Research Hypotheses

1. The greater the mothers' desire for control, the lower the level of paternal involvement as perceived by mothers will be.
2. The more traditional the mothers' gender role ideology, the lower the level of paternal involvement as perceived by the mothers will be.
3. The higher the mothers' level of gatekeeping (i.e., the more negative their attitudes are toward paternal participation in child care), the lower the level of paternal involvement as perceived by mothers will be.
4. There will be a positive relationship between mothers' satisfaction with their husbands' involvement in child care and levels of paternal involvement as perceived by mothers.
5. The greater the extent of perceived support from the extended family, the lower the level of paternal involvement as perceived by mothers will be.
6. Background variables of the family members will be related to paternal involvement in child care as perceived by mothers.
7. There will be differences in paternal involvement, by the specific domain of child care.

In addition to testing these hypotheses, we examined the overall contribution of the predictor variables in the above-mentioned subsystems to explaining the mothers' perceptions of paternal involvement in different domains of child care. We based this analysis on the underlying premise of the family systems approach, which argues that the different subsystems in the family have multiple impacts on each other. Specifically, we assumed that the characteristics of the maternal subsystem, the executive subsystem, and the extra-familial subsystem are related to mothers' perceptions of fathers' involvement in child care.

Method

Sample and Data Collection Procedures

The sample consisted of 88 married women with at least one child between the ages of 2 and 6. The data were collected in 2006 and 2007 as part of a larger research project on various aspects of fathering, which was conducted at a university in Israel. Data were obtained from a convenience sample of mothers, who were reached from several sources throughout the country: preschools, pediatricians' clinics, and community centers. In addition to those data sources, the snowball method was used, where mothers who participated in the study recommended other women who met the sampling criteria. Questionnaires were distributed to mothers at pediatricians' clinics while they were waiting to see the doctor, or at preschools and community centers while they were waiting for the children to finish their activities. Other mothers completed the questionnaire at home. The mothers were asked to respond to the questions in reference to the child (or children) aged 2-6. Participation in the study was voluntary, and the participants were not compensated. The average amount of time required to complete the questionnaires was 20 minutes, and the response rate was about 80%.

As for the characteristics of the sample, the mean age of the participants was 34.2 years ($SD = 4.09$), and the average length of marriage was 8.72 years ($SD = 3.97$). The average age of the children was 4.11 years ($SD = 0.79$). Regarding level of education, 22% of the mothers had secondary education, and the rest had post-secondary (academic or other) education. The mothers worked an average of seven hours a day ($SD = 1.47$, range = 3 to 10 hours a day). With regard to level of religiosity, 57.5% of the women defined themselves as secular, and the rest defined themselves as traditional or religious. 52.4% of the women had two children, 24.4% had three children, and 23.2% had one child or more than three children. Regarding earning patterns (see description of this measure in the Instruments section, under the heading "Background Questionnaire"), in 72.4% of the families the husband earned more than the wife, in 15.8% of the families both spouses earned similar wages, and in 11.8% of the families the wife earned more than the husband.

Instruments

Perceived paternal involvement in child care

The instrument was based on a questionnaire developed by Ben-David (1990), and consisted of 18 items that measure the extent of the father's involvement in child care, as well as the father's relationship with his children. Mothers were asked to indicate the number of times a week their husbands engage in activities that involve child care. Responses were based on a 7-point scale, as follows: 1 (never), 2 (less than once a week), 3 (once a week), 4 (1-2 times a week), 5 (3-5 times a week), 6 (once a day), 7 (more than once a day). Two judges who are experts in the field divided the questionnaire into five content areas, which reflect the domains of child care examined in the study: physical care (7 items, e.g., "gives the child a bath", Cronbach's $\alpha = .84$); educational activity (2 items, e.g., "reads the child a story", Cronbach's $\alpha = .62$); playing with the child (6 items, e.g., "takes the child to the park", Cronbach's $\alpha = .76$); showing love (2 items, e.g., "tells the child how much he loves him/her", Cronbach's $\alpha = .68$); and punishing the child (one item). The final score for each area was derived by computing the mean of the responses to all of the items in that area: the higher the score, the more involved the father was in that area.

Desirability of control

This variable was examined on the basis of a 20-item questionnaire developed by Burger and Cooper (1979), which was translated into Hebrew by Hizkiyah (1995). The questionnaire in-

cluded statements such as “I enjoy making my own decisions”, and “When I am involved in a group project, I prefer that someone else serve as manager”. Participants were asked to indicate the extent to which they agree with each statement, on a scale ranging from 1 (*to a very low extent*) to 7 (*to a very great extent*). One final score was derived for each participant by computing the mean of the responses to all of the items: the higher the score, the greater the mothers’ desire for control. The Cronbach’s alpha reliability of the questionnaire used in this study was .81.

Gender role ideology

The original questionnaire developed by Singleton and Christiansen (1977) was translated into Hebrew by Kitaichick (2001). The questionnaire used in the present study included 20 statements (e.g., “A working woman who sends a six-month-old child to day care is not a good mother”). Participants were asked to indicate the extent to which they agree with each statement on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). One final score was derived for each participant by computing the mean of the responses to all of the items. Items with responses based on an inverse scale were reverse scored, so that higher scores reflected a more liberal gender role ideology. The Cronbach’s alpha reliability of the questionnaire used in this study was .83.

Maternal gatekeeping scale

The 9-item questionnaire was originally developed by Fagan and Barnett (2003), and translated into Hebrew by the researchers in the present study. The questionnaire aimed to evaluate the mothers’ attitudes toward limiting or encouraging the fathers’ participation in child care and in activities related to the children. Items included statements such as “If someone has to talk to my child’s preschool teacher, I think I should be the one to do it and not the child’s father”. Participants were asked to indicate the extent to which they agree with each statement, on a 5-point Likert type scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). The Cronbach’s alpha reliability of the questionnaire used in this study was .87. One final score was derived for each participant by computing the mean of the responses to all of the items: the higher the score, the higher the level of maternal gatekeeping, in particular the more the mothers were opposed to their husbands participating in child care and in activities related to the children, whereas low scores indicated that the mothers thought the father should engage in these tasks.

Mothers’ satisfaction with their husbands’ involvement in child care

This variable was measured on the basis of a questionnaire developed for the present study, which included three items relating to the mothers’ satisfaction with three aspects of their husbands’ involvement in child care: quality of child care, quantity of child care, and willingness to take care of the children. The three items were: “I am satisfied with the way my spouse cares for our children”, “I am satisfied with the amount of time my spouse devotes to child care”, and “I am satisfied with the extent that my spouse expresses willingness to participate in child care out of his own free will”. The scale of responses ranged from 1 (*not satisfied at all*) to 5 (*very satisfied*). One score was derived for each participant by computing the mean of the responses on all of the items in the questionnaire: the higher the score, the more satisfied the mothers were with their husbands’ involvement in child care. The Cronbach’s alpha reliability of the questionnaire was .87.

Perceived family support

The questionnaire was developed by the researchers for this study, and consisted of five items which examined the mothers’ evaluations of the assistance they receive in household chores and child care from the following family members (one item for each family member): their mother, their father, their mother-in-law, their father-in-law, and other family members (e.g., “to what extent do you receive assistance from your mother in household chores and child care?”). Responses were based on a scale ranging from 1 (*to a low extent*) to 5 (*to a great extent*). One score

was derived for the questionnaire by computing the mean of the responses on all of the items: the higher the score, the more the women perceived themselves as receiving support from the family in household chores and child care. The Cronbach's alpha reliability of the questionnaire was .82.

Background questionnaire

This questionnaire included background variables related to the father, mother, and children: parents' age; parents' origin – European-American, Asian-African (*Mizrahi*), or mixed; religiosity; and assessments of the spouse's relative income. Other background variables included number of children in the family, children's ages and gender, and the mothers' and fathers' hours of work per week.

Data Analysis

To test the research hypotheses relating to the relationship between paternal involvement and each of the explanatory variables, Pearson's correlations and one-way ANOVAs were conducted. To test whether there are differences in the perceived level of paternal involvement in the different domains of child care, one-way ANOVAs with repeated measures by domain of involvement were conducted. In addition, to examine the overall contribution of the independent variables to explaining the variance in mothers' perceptions of paternal involvement in the different domains of child care, stepwise regressions were conducted for each domain.

Results

Maternal Characteristics and Perceived Paternal Involvement (Hypotheses 1-5)

Some positive correlations were found between the mothers' gender role ideology and their perceptions of paternal involvement in child care: the more liberal the mothers' gender role ideology, the more they perceived their husbands as being involved in the domains of showing love and education (partially supporting Hypothesis 1, see Table 1). Moreover, maternal gatekeeping correlated negatively with most of the domains of paternal involvement as perceived by the mothers: the higher the level of maternal gatekeeping, the less the women perceived their husbands as being involved in the domains of showing love, education, playing with the children, and physical care (partially supporting Hypothesis 2).

The mothers' personality variable (desirability of control) correlated positively with their perceptions of paternal involvement in the domains of showing love and education: the higher the mothers' desire for control, the more they perceived their husbands as being involved in those domains (failing to support Hypothesis 3). Support from the extended family correlated with perceived paternal involvement in showing love and in education: the higher mothers' level of perceived support from the family, the more they reported that the father showed love to his children and the more they perceived him as being involved in the domain of education (partially supporting Hypothesis 4). Satisfaction with the husband's participation in child care correlated with perceived paternal involvement in all domains, except for punishment (partially supporting Hypothesis 5).

Table 1

Intercorrelations between the Main Research Variables: Means and Standard Deviations

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1 Physical care	4.11	1.17												
2 Education	5.33	1.16	.35**											
3 Playing	4.53	1.11	.36**	.13										
4 Showing love	6.30	1.07	.28*	.50**	.35**									
5 Punishment	2.44	1.37	.15	-.05	.10	-.03								
6 Gatekeeping	1.52	0.64	-.25*	-.32**	-.31**	-.50**	-.11							
7 Mothers' Education	15.1	1.40	.14	.05	.13	.32**	.05	-.34**						
8 Age of youngest child	6.80	3.76	-.17	.02	-.20	-.011	.28	*.17	-.18					
9 Gender role ideology	4.39	0.48	-.19	-.24*	-.20	-.32**	-.01	.61**	-.37**	.01				
10 Desire for control	4.73	0.69	.06	.33**	.22	.27*	-.13	-.20	.13	.07	-.51**			
11 Fathers' hours of work	10.25	1.57	-.20	-.023	-.32*	-.011	-.11	.07	.08	.10	-.11	.05		
12 Family support	2.32	0.82	.04	0.22*	.12	.23*	.00	-.23*	-.08	-.03	-.29**	.15	-.01	
13 Satisfaction with husband's involvement	3.48	1.04	.42**	.26*	.37**	.31**	.03	-.39**	0.10	-.10	-.12	.08	-.24	.07

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

Background Variables of Family Members and Perceived Paternal Involvement (Hypothesis 6)

The parents' background variables related to the father, mother, and children, such as parents' age, religiosity, origin (Mizrahi, European-American, "mixed"), income, education, and hours of work per week, as well as information regarding use of domestic help and help with child care (see Instruments section). Of the fathers' background variables examined in the study, significant correlations were found only between the father's hours of work per week and his involvement in playing with the children: the more hours the father worked per week, the less he played with his children (see Table 1). Of the mothers' background variables, significant correlations were found only between the mothers' level of education and their perceptions regarding paternal involvement in showing love: the higher the mothers' level of education, the more they perceived the father as showing love to the children. The children's background variables examined in the study were the children's gender, their age, age of the first-born child, age of the youngest child, and number of children in the family. Regarding the children's gender, T-tests revealed no significant differences in the mothers' perceptions of paternal involvement in care of sons versus daughters. Moreover, no significant correlations were found between the mothers' perceptions of paternal involvement in child care and the other background variables of the children. The only exception was the age of the youngest child: the older the youngest child was, the higher the level of paternal involvement in punishing the children as perceived by the mother.

To sum up all of the domains of paternal involvement examined in the study, punishment did not correlate significantly with any of the explanatory variables, except for the youngest child's age. Moreover, relatively few correlations were found between the explanatory variables and the mothers' perceptions of paternal involvement in physical care. However, a relatively large number of significant correlations were found between the predictor variables on the one hand, and paternal involvement in showing love to the children and playing with the children on the other.

Differences in the Extent of Perceived Paternal Involvement, by Domain (Hypothesis 7)

One-way ANOVAs with repeated measures by domain of involvement revealed significant differences among the five domains: $F(4, 400) = 169.21, p < .001$. Further Bonferroni post hoc analyses revealed that the highest levels of paternal involvement were in the domain of showing love as perceived by the mothers ($M = 6.30, SD = 1.07$). The levels of perceived paternal involvement in that domain were found to be significantly higher than in the domains of education ($M = 5.33, SD = 1.16$) and playing with the children ($M = 4.53, SD = 1.11$). In those two domains, the levels of perceived paternal involvement were significantly higher than in physical care ($M = 4.11, SD = 1.17$). The lowest levels of perceived paternal involvement were found in the domain of punishment ($M = 2.44, SD = 1.37$).

The Combined Contribution of All of the Predictor Variables to Explaining Perceived Paternal Involvement in Child Care, by Domains of Involvement

Hierarchical regression analysis was conducted to examine the combined contribution of the independent variables (background variables of the family members, maternal variables, paternal

variables, spousal variables, and family support) to explaining the mothers' perceptions regarding paternal involvement in each of the five domains of child care. The independent variables that correlated significantly with the mothers' perceptions of most of the domains of paternal involvement in child care in the bivariate analyses) see Table 1) were the ones that were entered into the regression equations. However, in some cases we also entered predictor variables that had a statistically significant relationship to only one of the domains of paternal involvement in child care. This was done in order to arrive at a uniform set of independent variables for comparison of the amount of variance that was explained in each domain of paternal involvement. Based on this criterion, the following variables were entered in each equation: mothers' level of education, age of the first born child, fathers' hours of work per week, mothers' desire for control, maternal gatekeeping, mothers' gender role ideology, satisfaction with the husbands' involvement in child care, and perceived family support. The research variables that were not entered into the regression equations were parents' age, origin, income, education, religiosity, mothers' hours of work per week, information regarding use of hired domestic help and help with child care, and children's sex (only girls, only boys, mixed).

Each group of variables was entered into the regression in separate steps, in the following order: Background variables were entered in the first step – mothers' level of education, age of the first-born child, and fathers' hours of work per week; We entered those variables in the first step in order to control their impact on the variables that would be entered in the subsequent steps. The research variables were entered in the regression equation according to the proximity of the specific subsystems to the mothers' perceptions of paternal involvement in child care. Following this rationale, variables representing the maternal subsystem were entered in the second step – mothers' desire for control (the personality variable), maternal gatekeeping, and mothers' gender role ideology (the cognitive variables). The mothers' satisfaction with their husbands' involvement in child care (representing the executive subsystem) was entered in the third step, and the mothers' perceptions of support from the family members (representing the extra-familial sub-system) was entered in the fourth step. The results of the regression equations for the different domains of paternal involvement in child care are presented below.

Regression Analyses

As shown in Table 2, the independent research variables significantly explained different percentages of the variance in the mothers' perceptions of paternal involvement in child care, by domains. The highest percentages of explained variance were found in the domain of showing love (37%), followed by playing with the children (32%), physical care (30%), and education (21%). The percentages of explained variance were especially low in the domain of punishment (13%).

Showing love

The background variables of family members explained 11% of the variance in showing love to the children. Of those variables, the only one that contributed significantly to the variance in that domain was mothers' education. The maternal variables that were entered in the second step explained an additional 21% of the variance in showing love, over and above the variance explained in the previous step. However, the only variables that contributed significantly to the variance were the mothers' desire for control and maternal gatekeeping. Satisfaction with the husbands' involvement in child care, which was entered in the third step, did not contribute significantly to explaining the variance in this domain. Notably, the bivariate analyses revealed a significant correlation between the mothers' satisfaction with their husbands' involvement in child care and their perceptions of paternal involvement in showing love to the children. However, the mothers' satisfaction with their husbands' involvement in child care also correlated significantly with maternal gatekeeping. When the contribution of mothers' satisfaction was

partialled out in the regression, its contribution was no longer significant. In the fourth step, perceived family support explained an additional 5% of the variance.

Table 2

Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Explaining Mothers' Perceptions of Paternal Involvement

Step	Variables	Physical Care		Education		Playing		Showing Love		Punishing	
		Beta	R ²	Beta	R ²	Beta	R ²	Beta	R ²	Beta	R ²
1	Mothers' education	.32*		.08		.15		.33*		.08	
	Age of first-born child	-.22		.07		-.28*		.04		.19	
	Fathers' hours of work	-.17	.21**	-.20	.04	-.29*	.21**	-.11	.11*	-.12	.07
2	Mothers' education	.22		-.01		.09		.29*		.08	
	Age of first-born child	-.21		.07		-.31*		-.04		-.13	
	Fathers' hours of work	-.16		-.13		-.26*		-.12		-.11	
	Mothers' desire for control	.06		.22		.27*		.25*		-.17	
	Maternal gatekeeping	-.24		-.39*		-.26		-.49**		-.17	
	Gender role ideology	-.04	.27**	.22	.20**	.18	.31**	.14	.32**	.06	.10
3	Mothers' education	.22		.03		.09		.26		.02	
	Age of first-born child	-.22		.08		.30**		.06		-.15	
	Fathers' hours of work	-.12		-.14		-.24		-.09		-.10	
	Mothers' desire for control	.04		.23		.27*		.24		-.19	
	Maternal gatekeeping	-.13		-.36		-.20		-.44*		-.21	
	Gender role ideology	-.04		.25		.19		.22		.01	
	Satisfaction with husband's involvement	.19	.30**	.11	.21**	.11	.32**	-.01	.37**	-.05	.13
4	Mothers' education	.19		.03		.12		.26		.02	
	Age of first-born child	-.22		.08		-.30*		.06		-.15	
	Fathers' hours of work	-.12		-.14		-.24*		-.09		-.10	
	Mothers' desire for control	.03		.23		.27*		.24		-.19	
	Maternal gatekeeping	-.16		-.36		-.20		-.44*		-.21	
	Gender role ideology	-.08		.25		.19		.22		.01	
	Satisfaction with husband's involvement	.19		.11		.11		-.01		-.05	
	Perceived family support	-.11	.31**	.11	.23**	.08	.33**	.25*	.37**	-.16	

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

Playing with the children

The background variables of family members combined to explain 21% of the variance in the domain of playing with the children. However, only the age of the first-born child and fathers' hours of work per week contributed significantly toward explaining the variance in that variable. Maternal variables explained an additional 10% of the variance in this domain. Of those, the mothers' desire for control was the only variable that contributed significantly. The contribution of the variables that were entered in previous steps (i.e., satisfaction with the husbands' involvement in child care and perceived family support) were not found to contribute significantly to explaining the variance in playing with the children. Notably, maternal gatekeeping and satisfaction with paternal involvement in child care correlated significantly with the mothers' percep-

tions of paternal involvement in this domain. However, in light of the intercorrelation found between those two variables (see Table 1), their effect was partialled out and their contribution to the regression equation was no longer significant.

Physical care

The background variables of family members explained 21% of the variance in the mothers' perceptions of paternal involvement in this domain. However, mothers' level of education was the only variable that contributed significantly. The maternal variables explained only an additional 6% of the variance in this domain – but their contribution was not significant; and satisfaction with the husbands' involvement in child care and perceived family support did not contribute significantly.

Education

The background variables of family members explained 4% of the variance in perceived paternal involvement in this domain. However, none of the variables contributed significantly. In the second step, the maternal variables explained an additional 16% of the variance, beyond the amount explained in the previous step – but only the contribution of maternal gatekeeping was found to be significant. Satisfaction with the husbands' involvement in child care and perceptions of family support each contributed 1% to the variance in the mothers' perceptions of paternal involvement in education. However, the contribution was not significant. The number of significant correlations between the independent research variables and the mothers' perceptions of paternal involvement in educating the children was greater in the bivariate analyses than in the regressions. As shown in Table 2, because of the significant intercorrelations between many of the independent variables, the contribution of those variables to explaining mothers' perceptions of paternal involvement in this domain was partialled out in the regressions and was no longer significant.

Punishment

All of the independent variables explained 13% of the variance in the domain of punishment. The background variables of family members explained 7% of the variance, the maternal variables explained an additional 3%, and the mothers' satisfaction with their husbands' involvement in child care as well as perceived family support also explained an additional 3%. However, none of those variables contributed significantly to explaining the variance in this domain.

In sum, the regressions reveal that none of the variables consistently explained the mothers' perceptions of paternal involvement in all of the domains of child care, even though certain variables contributed significantly to explaining the variance in more domains than other variables. The mothers' level education explained their perceptions of paternal involvement in physical care as well as in showing love; the age of the first-born child explained the mothers' perceptions of paternal involvement in playing with the children; the fathers' hours of work per week explained the mothers' perceptions of paternal involvement in physical care and in playing with the children; *desirability of control explained* the mothers' perceptions of paternal involvement in playing with the children and in showing love; maternal gatekeeping explained their perceptions of paternal involvement in education and showing love; perceived family support explained the mothers' perceptions of paternal involvement in showing love; and gender role ideology and satisfaction with the husbands' involvement in child care did not explain the mothers' perceptions of paternal involvement in any of the domains of child care.

Discussion

The main contribution of the study lies in its examination of paternal involvement in five different domains of child care as perceived by mothers. Before discussing the findings, it should

be emphasized that they were based on the mothers' perspective, and that they reflect the mothers' feelings and beliefs about the issues examined. In general, the findings of the present study reinforce the validity of family systems theory, which emphasizes the impact of the perspectives, characteristics, and background variables of each family member on the behavior of others (Olson & Gorall, 2003). Consistent with that approach, a large number of variables belonging to different family subsystems (the maternal subsystem, the executive subsystem, and the extra-familial subsystem) were found to be related to the mothers' perceptions regarding the fathers' involvement in child care (the child-father subsystem, as part of the parental subsystem). However, because the study focused only on the mothers' perceptions rather than examining the assessments of other family members, the findings do not provide a basis for conclusive generalizations about paternal involvement in child care.

The finding that the mothers' perceptions of paternal involvement in each of the domains of child care was explained by a different set of variables, consistent with the results of earlier studies (Allen & Hawkins, 1999). The only exception was maternal gatekeeping, which was related to all of the domains of perceived paternal involvement except for punishment (partially supporting Hypothesis 3). That is, mothers with low levels of gatekeeping tended to encourage paternal involvement in most of the domains of child care. Maternal gatekeeping can be viewed as one manifestation of the other cognitive variable, namely mothers' gender role ideology. However, whereas gender role ideology is a complex concept that encompasses a diverse range of social perceptions relating to masculinity and femininity, maternal gatekeeping is a more specific concept, which focuses specifically on the mothers' attitudes about raising their own children. In that context, when the mothers had a liberal gender role ideology, the fathers showed a greater tendency to be involved in the domains of educating and showing love to the children (partially supporting Hypothesis 2). The correlations found between gender role ideology and perceptions of paternal involvement in the different domains of child care are consistent with the findings of other studies, which have revealed that couples with a liberal gender role ideology tend to divide household tasks in a more flexible way, and that they are characterized by intensive paternal involvement in child care (Aldous, Mulligan, & Bjarnason, 1998).

Contrary to expectations, desirability of control (the personality characteristic), was found to correlate positively with the mothers' perceptions of the husbands' involvement in child care in two domains (failing to support Hypothesis 1). When the mothers reported a high desire for control, they perceived their husbands as being more involved in the domains of education and showing love. That is, despite their high desire for control, they enabled their husbands to be involved in those domains of child care. A possible explanation for this unexpected finding relates to the way that desirability of control was assessed in the present study. Examination of the items that assessed desirability of control indicates that the construct was presented as a positive, healthy variable, whereas negative aspects such as the tendency to be over-controlling were not presented in the questionnaire. As such, the aspect of desire for control presented here derives from the more general variable "locus of control", and can be considered as representing an internal locus of control (Rotter, 1972), which emanates from the sense of managing (and not dominating) events that occur in one's life. In numerous studies, internal locus of control has been associated with a sense of well being (for a review, see Krause & Stryker, 1984). By contrast, external locus of control reflects the feeling of loss of control over one's life and being dominated by factors that are external to the individual (Walker & Bates, 1992). Hence, individuals with an internal locus of control believe that they are masters of their own destinies, and they take responsibility for their own fortunes or misfortunes. Based on that perspective, it can be argued that the mothers with a high desire for control (i.e., a high internal locus of control) had a high desire to control the occurrence of processes and events in their lives rather than a high desire to control others. Thus, they encouraged their husbands to be involved in child care in order to attain a better sense of mastery in that area and to facilitate daily living. That would explain the positive correlation between the variable "desirability of control" and the mothers' perceptions regarding paternal involvement in two of the domains examined here. Nonetheless, to arrive at more definitive conclusions regarding the relationship between the mothers' desire

for control and their perceptions of paternal involvement in child care, there is a need for further research on the topic.

Contrary to expectations, family support (the extra-familial subsystem) correlated positively with perceived paternal involvement in two domains – education and showing love (failing to support Hypothesis 5). In light of this finding, it appears that family support encourages mothers to enlist others in child care, and that the mothers develop positive attitudes toward involving fathers in those tasks as a result of that support. It is also possible that mothers who were open to having others care for their children encouraged fathers and other family members to assist them with child care. Moreover, when the mother receives assistance from the extended family, the father is exposed to models that encourage participation in child care, including his own family. As expected, a relationship was found between the mothers' satisfaction with the husbands' involvement in child care and their perceptions of paternal involvement in the respective domains of child care (except punishment, supporting Hypothesis 4). A possible explanation for this finding is that when the mothers were satisfied with their husbands' involvement in child care, and when they were confident that their husbands cared for the children willingly, they also perceived the level of their husbands' involvement in child care as being high in all domains. However, owing to the correlative nature of the present study, an alternative explanation is that when mothers perceived the level of their husbands' involvement as high, they also expressed greater satisfaction. Hence, there is a need to examine the possibility that the correlation might be in the opposite direction (i.e., high levels of perceived paternal involvement in child care might impact the mothers' satisfaction).

Finally, several relationships between the background variables of family members (father, mother, and children) and the mothers' perceptions of their husbands' involvement in child care are noteworthy (partially supporting Hypothesis 6). Regarding the mothers' background characteristics, the only positive correlation was found between the mothers' level of education and their perceptions of paternal involvement in showing love to the children. This finding is consistent with Ozgun and Honig's (2005) study, which revealed that mothers' education had a positive impact on their perceptions of paternal involvement in child care. A possible explanation for this finding is that mothers with higher levels of education are more exposed to the concept of an androgynous father (Fein, 1978), and view expression of emotions as a positive and desirable aspect of the paternal image. Thus, it appears that mothers with higher levels of education are more likely to convey that expressing emotions does not detract from the husbands' masculinity and, consequently, they promote paternal involvement in showing love to the children. The youngest child's age correlated positively with the mothers' perceptions of their husbands' involvement in the domains of punishment and education. Evidently, as children grow older, the father feels a need to enforce discipline. Therefore, he devotes less time to playing and more time to discipline, as reflected in punishment and education.

The results of the present study support previous research findings on paternal involvement in child care, and contribute additional dimensions to existing knowledge on the topic. Further to Belsky's (2005) approach, we found that the mothers' perceptions of paternal involvement in child care were explained by several factors, which can be traced to systems and subsystems in the family. Moreover, despite the mothers' desire to relieve themselves the burden of child care and enlist assistance from their husbands, it is possible that they were, to some extent, the ones who prevented the husbands from helping. This situation is reflected in the findings related to the impact of mothers' levels of maternal gatekeeping and gender role ideology on their perceptions of paternal involvement in child care. Furthermore, analysis of the most prevalent domains of paternal involvement in child care as reported by the mothers participating in this study suggests that fathers are more involved in enjoyable domains such as playing with the children, and are less involved in unpleasant domains such as punishment. Moreover, it is noteworthy that none of the research variables significantly explained the mothers' perceptions of paternal involvement in punishment. This finding indicates that punishment can be considered a unique area of child care, and the explanation for paternal involvement in that domain might be found in a different set of variables than those examined in the present study.

Limitations of the Study and Recommendation for Future Research

Before concluding, some limitations of the study need to be mentioned. Because the sample focused mainly on middle-class, well-educated families that did not maintain traditional gender roles, it did not represent all dual-earner families with young children in Israeli society. Therefore, it would be worthwhile to expand the sample in future studies, and to examine populations from more heterogeneous socioeconomic backgrounds. Moreover, data were collected from only one family member, the mother. Therefore, to gain more comprehensive knowledge about paternal involvement in child care, there is a need to conduct further research among more representative samples, in addition to examining both parents' perspectives.

Furthermore, the research design was correlative, and the data on the outcome variable, i.e., mothers' perceptions of paternal involvement, were collected at the same time as the data on the predictor variables. Hence, there is no way of determining the causal relationship between the predictor variables and the outcome variable. That is, the women's perceptions of paternal involvement in child care might have influenced some of those variables, and not vice versa. To arrive at clearer conclusions regarding the causal relationship between the predictor variables and perceived paternal involvement, future studies should be based on a longitudinal design. Finally, following the finding regarding the impact of the fathers' hours of work on their involvement in child care, it would be worthwhile to explore workplace policies that encourage paternal involvement.

Practical Recommendations

Several practical recommendations can be derived from the results of the study. Specific attention should be paid to the factors that were found to correlate negatively with paternal involvement (e.g., the father works long hours, and high maternal gatekeeping). Assuming that paternal involvement in child care can mitigate the mothers' role conflict and help them cope with work and family demands while creating a pleasant family environment, practitioners should focus on assisting families characterized by low levels of paternal involvement. Toward that end, emphasis can be placed on raising awareness of barriers that prevent fathers from being involved in child care, and on provision of marital counseling aimed at lowering those barriers. Moreover, the finding that low paternal involvement can stem from factors related to the mothers as well as from factors related to the fathers indicates that professionals should address both partners in the counseling process. For example, practitioners can help the mothers become aware that resistance to involving the husband, as reflected in maternal gatekeeping, can often explain the fathers' lack of involvement in caring for children. With regard to intervention with fathers, practitioners can invest efforts in socializing them to become more involved in child care, with emphasis on the importance of paternal involvement in enhancing the well-being of all family members, including their children.

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