BALANCE IN EVERYDAY LIFE: CONCEPTIONS OF MEN AND WOMEN IN DUAL-INCOME COUPLES WITH YOUNG CHILDREN

by

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Abstract

BACKGROUND: As the social justice movement has lessened the gender gap in occupational participation, the subject of balance in life is receiving enormous attention. A growing body of literature suggests that imbalance can increase individual's health risks. Although various theories about balance have been developed, it remains elusive as a concept. Understanding how people experience and perceive balance is essential to conceptualizing balance and promoting individual and societal health.

OBJECTIVE: To better understand the ways in which men and women in dual-income couples with at least one preschool-aged child perceive and experience balance in everyday life.

METHODS: The study was primarily informed by a phenomenographic approach. Fifteen heterosexual, dual-income couples living with at least one child under six years old were recruited from a metropolitan area. Each partner in each couple individually participated in two semi-structured interviews. The first interview was designed to explore participants' overall experiences of daily life, while the second interview aimed to elicit their experiences and perceptions of balance. Phenomenographic and critical discourse analyses were applied to the interview data. The quality of the findings was assured by peer-debriefing, reflexivity, and the verification of transferability.

RESULTS: Two key conceptions of balance were identified: *managing life* and *participating in a mix of occupations*. In elucidating these conceptions, parents associated the former with meeting *collective* needs and the latter with meeting *individual* needs. Trying to simultaneously satisfy these two conceptions/constructions of balance created tension. *Managing life* reinforced parents' intensive commitment to parenting and led to balance, but it limited their engagement in personal occupations, which led to imbalance. Conversely, *participating in a mix of occupations* allowed parents to meet their own needs and was associated with balance, but as it reduced the time they spent with their families, it led to imbalance.

CONCLUSION: Employed parents with young children live with two competing conceptions/constructions of balance, which can create tension and affect health. Developing health care and employment policies that help parents to attain a greater sense of balance by harmonizing collective needs of the family and their personal needs may mediate this tension.

Preface

A version of the *Review of Literature* (chapter 1) has been published. Wada, M., Backman, C. L., & Forwell, S. J. (2010). Theoretical perspectives of balance and the influence of gender ideologies. *Journal of Occupational Science, 17*, 92-103. I reviewed and analyzed literature on balance, and wrote the manuscript. The quality of the findings—balance perspectives—was assured by my doctoral supervisor Dr. Catherine Backman, and a member of my doctoral committee, Dr. Susan Forwell. It is anticipated that a version of chapters 3 and 4 will also be submitted for publication. I conceived the project described in these chapters, designed the study and analyzed and interpreted the findings with guidance from Drs. Catherine Backman, Susan Forwell, Wolff-Michael Roth, and James Ponzetti.

This research was approved by the University of British Columbia, Behavioural Research Ethics Board (Reference number: H09-01094) on August 21, 2009.

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CEO   Chief Executive Officer

FQoL   Family Quality of Life

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To parents who struggle for balance

&

my parents, who struggled and found it

1 Review of Literature[1]

1.1 Introduction

The social justice movement has broadened both the types of occupations in which individuals participate and their degree of participation; this is particularly true in developed countries. In Canada, men have become more involved in domestic occupations over the past two decades and women are now spending more time on paid occupations, although the gender gap in both paid and unpaid labour participation persists (Statistics Canada, 2006). Given these changes to involvement in various types of occupations, it is imperative for individuals, health care providers, and policy makers to understand how balance in everyday life is perceived and how it relates to health and quality of life. This understanding will help them to sustain and promote social health from the perspective of balance.

A growing body of literature suggests that a conflict or imbalance between paid work and other aspects of life can affect physical and emotional health and well-being. Conflict or imbalance increases the risk of cardiovascular disease (Berkman, Buxton, Ertel, & Okechukwu, 2010); aches and pains (e.g., head, neck, back, shoulder) (Hämmig, Gutzwiller, & Bauer, 2009; Hämmig, Knecht, Läubli, & Bauer, 2011); sleep disorders and fatigue (Bohle, Willaby, Quinlan, & McNamara, 2011; Hämmig & Bauer, 2009; Hämmig et al., 2009); anxiety and depression (Bohle et al., 2011; Hämmig & Bauer, 2009; Hämmig et al., 2009; E. A. Townsend & Polatajko, 2007); burnout (Allen, Herst, Bruck, & Sutton, 2000; Wilcock, 2006); boredom (Wilcock, 2006); substance abuse (Higgins, Duxbury, & Johnson, 2004); and diminished subjective well-being (Grant-Vallone & Donaldson, 2001; Hämmig & Bauer, 2009; Sheldon, Cummins, & Kamble, 2010). Some of these conditions, such as workaholism, burnout and sleep disorders, are

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[1] A version of the *Review of Literature* chapter has been published. Wada, M., Backman, C. L., & Forwell, S. J. (2010). Theoretical perspectives of balance and the influence of gender ideologies. *Journal of Occupational Science, 17*, 92-103.

considered indicators of lifestyle imbalance and often subsequently lead to illness (Matuska & Christiansen, 2009).

There are various theoretical concepts about balance in daily life (e.g., work-life balance and occupational balance) and they are labelled and defined according to the fundamental theories informing the specific concept. Given the serious consequences of imbalance on health and well-being, conceptualizing healthy balance is a critical focus for research on balance. However, because balance has been conceptualized using different fundamental theories and therefore varied terminology, there is a lack of consensus and conceptual clarity about its meaning. In addition, although some conceptualizations of balance are rooted in gender equity (Bird, 2006), little research has been conducted that aims to better understand the dynamic relations between gender and balance. The 2006 Statistics Canada Census revealed that 74% of women who were living with a spouse or partner and at least one child under the age of six spent 30 or more hours a week on unpaid childcare, compared to only 33% of men in similar circumstances (Statistics Canada, 2011). Four times more women than men spent 30 hours or more on unpaid housework, and 65% of women living with a spouse or partner and at least one child under six were employed, compared to nearly 90% among men. Gaining a more thorough understanding of how couples negotiate occupational roles and perceive balance therefore has implications for research on health and family quality of life.

This literature review examines gender and parenthood and explores different theoretical perspectives of balance. It analyzes how gender may influence perceptions and experiences of balance among parents in heterosexual couples, specifically relating these perceptions and experiences to participation in family occupations and employment. It concludes with implications for future research. In addition, it should be noted that the discussion in this study is limited to gender perspectives among individuals in heterosexual couples.

1.2 Gender

The word 'gender' typically refers to the social and cultural connotations of biological maleness or femaleness (Ferber & Nelson, 1993; Glenn, Chang, & Forcey, 1994; Kimmel, 2004; West & Zimmerman, 1987), which are diverse depending on context. Gender roles in western cultures in the mid-20th century, for example, dictated that women were traditionally responsible

for domestic occupations while men's primary role was that of breadwinner (Cohen, 1993; Coltrane & Valdez, 1993; Joshi, 1998); in the 21st century, however, the roles of earner and carer have become less gender-based, at least amongst the younger generations (see, for example, Sullivan, 2004). The roles of economic earner and homemaker became more distinct and gender based as industrialization grew in the United States (Gambles, Lewis, & Rapoport, 2006; Sapiro, 1994; J. Williams, 2000) and productivity and the value of labour began to be evaluated on a monetary basis. Domestic work was devalued because it was rarely paid work (when done in one's own home) and therefore was not considered a contribution to the economy (Collier, 1992; Sapiro, 1994).

Gender ideology is a set of beliefs about gender that reflect culturally and temporally specific ideas that denote differences between men and women in terms of characteristics and expected behaviours (Ridgeway & Correll, 2004). Although gender ideology changes over time, it is often categorized into three types: traditional, transitional, and egalitarian/contemporary (Hochschild & Machung, 2003). Traditional gender ideology refers to the idea that men are primarily the breadwinners and women are responsible for domestic occupations, whereas the egalitarian/contemporary ideology argues for equal opportunities and responsibilities for men and women in domestic and paid occupations. Transitional gender ideology is somewhere on the continuum between the two. The gender ideology individuals internalize underlies their behaviour related to domestic and paid occupations, informing their perceptions on role expectations, the types of tasks and activities in which they participate, and the degree of their participation. Their ideas about the types of occupations in which to participate and the degree of involvement in those occupations inform their ideal occupational balance. Thus, their gender ideologies, as well as actual involvement in occupations, most likely influence their perceptions of balance.

There is no single homogeneous theory on gender. West and Zimmerman (1987), for example, consider gender "a routine, methodical, and recurring accomplishment" (p. 126) that individuals pursue through their actions—manifesting and producing their femininity or masculinity—in their daily interactions. As such, individuals are "doing gender" in a way that is consistent with culturally approved standards of femininity and masculinity (West & Zimmerman, 1987, p. 126). In contrast, gender is also considered to be a social structure that restricts individual choices of actions according to sex category (Risman, 2004). Ridgeway and Correll (2004) placed gender beliefs in a social-relational context, pointing out that the ways in

which these beliefs are shared and enacted inform not only how men and women behave but also how they evaluate the consistency of their behaviours with culturally approved norms of gender. Therefore, as Risman (2004) acknowledged with reference to Gidden's structuration theory developed in 1984, gender structure and human action is bidirectional—that is, social structure not only informs and shapes human actions consistent with sex category, but is also shaped and constructed by those same actions.

Gender exists in three layers of society—individual, interactional, and institutional (Risman, 1998, 2004). At the individual level—that is, developing one's identity as a man or a woman—people understand and internalize gender identity in terms of proscribed, permitted, and expected behaviours and actions based on sex category through socialization. While interacting with others, individuals act not only on their gender ideologies but also on the expectations of others in order to make sense of a gender ideology in a given context. At the institutional level, gender norms constructed and shared in context produce and serve gender-specific material goods and social resources.

Gender is structured in multiple ways. Connell (2002) depicted gender as social structure that governs gender practices in daily life, and proposed four dimensions of gender that produce modern gender relations: power, production, emotion, and symbol. The concept of patriarchy, promoting men as a dominant group and women as subordinate, creates a power difference between men and women. The gender division in the production process remains in modern Western culture and locates men in the paid labour force and women at home. This gender segregation contributes to creating men's role of production in the wider market (the world of work) and women's role of 'producing' care by taking responsibility for domestic life (that is, at home). In terms of emotional relations, romantic love is expected by most to be the foundation of the household in contemporary Western society. Lastly, the structure of symbolism in gender relations is created through a cultural history that has constructed and accumulated meanings associated with men and women in specific contexts. The meanings symbolize gender and provide people with certain expectations and understandings of masculinity and femininity. Connell (2002) noted that these four dimensions constantly interact with each other in practice; he segregated them to help analyze the tremendously complex reality of gender, because one dimension will always appear more salient than the others according to the context.

In short, gender is constructed as a consequence of the interaction between individuals' gender practice and social gender structure, interactions that implicitly and explicitly indicate the

orders, divisions, and connections between people, groups, and organizations. Gender structure shapes and informs people's gender ideologies and behaviours, as well as organizational policies, while people's gender practice reconstructs and modifies gender structure. This bidirectional interaction between gender practice and structure may influence the ways in which men and women perceive balance in everyday life. As individual and societal gender beliefs infer the types of occupations men and women should ideally participate in and the degree of that participation, they may mold individuals' perceptions of balance in everyday life. Further, individuals' gender practice in occupational participation can be associated with how they approach finding balance in their daily lives.

1.3 Parenthood

Views on housework, parenting, and paid work are a dimension of gender. A mounting body of literature explores parenthood among heterosexual couples, which often corresponds to, and also informs, expectations about their participation in domestic and paid occupations as well. This section delineates fatherhood and motherhood as discussed in the reviewed literature. Therein, it interprets the expectations that mothers and fathers have of their roles as paid workers, housekeepers, and child caregivers.

1.3.1 Fatherhood

The literature contains much discussion of contemporary fatherhood. Jacobs and Gerson (2004) contended that what constitutes being a good father has changed greatly over the last several decades: "The 'good father' is no longer a benevolent but absent breadwinner" (p. 82). Modern-day fathers are expected to engage with their children in all aspects of their lives—physical care, playtime, day-to-day activities, schooling—in what was previously the domain of the mother in traditional society's eyes. Now the concept of the ideal father does not seem so different from that of the ideal mother (Gatrell, 2005; Harsch, 2006; S. Williams, 2008). However, this new "good father" concept is still in its embryonic stages from a cultural perspective, and its transition from theory to practice is proving to be slow in the UK and France

(Gregory & Milner, 2008, 2011). Similarly, men in North America remain secondary, and usually passive, childcare providers. Lareau (2000) conducted interviews with and observations of third- and fourth-grade children and their families in the USA, and discovered that fathers' childcare contributions tended to be merely "helping" mothers—who find themselves having to recruit the help, and then to guide and supervise the fathers—and that they do not know much about their children's daily activities. This "father as helper" role may stem from and be reinforced by ingrained social beliefs that deem fathers to be less competent at child rearing than mothers and therefore reliant on guidance from women (Doucet, 2011). Using interview data obtained from 20 married men with children in the USA, N. W. Townsend (2002) identified a "package deal" (p. 2) of employment, marriage, home ownership, and fatherhood as a set of elements essential for being an ideal father. Fatherhood comprises four facets: providing financial security, building and maintaining emotional connections, ensuring safety for the family, and creating opportunities for a better life for the children (N. W. Townsend, 2002). The following section examines and delineates these four facets of fatherhood, along with the additional components of providing physical care for children and playing with them, with reference to other literature.

1.3.1.1 Providing financial security for the family

Despite an increase in women's paid labour participation, financial and material provision has long been the most prominent and symbolic feature of fatherhood. In the late 1980s, Thompson and Walker (1989) reviewed studies on gender in family life with a focus on marriage, paid and unpaid work, and parenthood, and concluded that the responsibility for breadwinning (that is, earning) typically falls to men while women usually take primary responsibility for marriage, housework, and parenting. More recent studies, such as those by Hauari and Hollingworth (2009) and Doucet (2009), demonstrated that the breadwinner role remains a primary feature of fatherhood. Hauari and Hollingworth used time-use diaries, semi-structured in-depth interviews, and fieldwork to collect data from husbands, wives, and children from 29 heterosexual two-parent families in England. They found that being the breadwinner was an endorsed aspect of fatherhood among all family members, although White British, Black Caribbean, and younger parents, particularly those from dual-income couples, were somewhat less supportive of this perspective. Similarly, Doucet (2009), using evidence from three

qualitative studies conducted with more than 200 fathers and 40 mothers in Canada in 2000−2008, argued that the fathers associated financial provision with being responsible for their families. In S. William's (2008) study, which conducted semi-structured interviews with 40 fathers in South Wales between 2001 and 2003, the majority of the fathers indicated that the breadwinner role is not necessarily an essential feature of fatherhood, although they nonetheless wished to sustain that role. Accordingly, for men, a commitment to employment signifies dedication to family because it is the means of earning household income. The paradox, of course, is that devotion to employment restricts them from engaging with their family even if they want to be more involved in parenting (Hand & Lewis, 2002; N. W. Townsend, 2002). The resonance of men's employment and financial provision as a symbolic responsibility toward the family is one reason why fathers are satisfied with their family lives when they devote more time to their paid occupation (Friedman & Greenhaus, 2000). This correspondence between fatherhood and the financial provider/paid worker role is predominantly approved of by society; stay-at-home fathers often endure "a suspicious gaze" from the community at large, which is puzzled by their atypical role (Doucet & Merla, 2007; Doucet, 2011).

1.3.1.2 Building and maintaining emotional connection with children

The findings in the literature about whether it is important for fathers to develop an emotional bond with their children are inconsistent. Wall and Arnold (2007) critically analyzed discourse in relation to fathering in the "Family Matters" series published from 1999 to 2000 in the Canadian newspaper *The Globe and Mail*, and found that fathers were barely expected to play a critical role in such parenting aspects as building an emotional bond with their children and spending enough one-on-one time with them to meet their developmental needs. Clearly, the mother was perceived as being the primary player in these areas, with the father seen as the secondary player. This appears to be particularly the case during the first year of parenting when fathers often endorse the notion of mothers' special connection with their newborn infants because of the physical connection, first to the fetus and then to the baby, which is fostered from pregnancy to childbirth to breastfeeding (Doucet, 2009).

Despite the father's secondary position in parenting, however, there appears to be an increasing notion and expectation among parents that bonding with children is an important feature of being a "good father" (Doucet, 2009; Hauari & Hollingworth, 2009; N. W. Townsend,

2002). Further, some fathers have a genuine desire to form close relationships with their children (Fox, 2009; N. W. Townsend, 2002). Although Gatrell's (2005) research, conducted from 1999 to 2001 with 20 double-income couples living in the UK with at least one preschool-aged child, noted that this hierarchy—mothers as the principal carer and fathers as secondary—prevailed in parenting, her research also revealed that most of the fathers undertook a significant share of the practical and emotional responsibility for childcare once their partner/wife returned to paid work. Gatrell indicated that the men in her study engaged in the physical and emotional aspects of childcare in part because they realized how much work it involves, which necessitated that it be shared. Some fathers also felt resentful that their wives bonded more with their children than they did most probably because of the extra time they spend with the children, and that these bonds excluded them. Others realized that their engagement in child rearing brought long-term benefits to their families.

It is likely that fathers begin to nurture their emotional parental attachment as their children become older and require less of the physical care that is often designated to women. Fathers often rely on their spouses to provide physical care for their children, particularly while mothers are on parental leave, which then leaves fathers with few opportunities to connect with their children. Mothers communicate with their children by caring for them on a practical level every day, whereas fathers tend to connect by playing with the children (Doucet, 2009). Because infancy is primarily a time of self-care activities (e.g., sleeping and eating) and contains little opportunity for playing, it is likely that fathers delay bonding with their children if they rely heavily on play as a means to do so. Fathers tend to play more with an older child upon the arrival of a new baby, leaving the infant care to mothers (Doucet, 2009). This behaviour of fathers encapsulates their secondary position in childcare; a father generally undertakes less intense care than a mother does, or he looks after a child who requires less of her attention and direct care than other children do.

1.3.1.3 Providing physical care for children

Fathers are also perceived as being secondary in taking responsibility for physical care for their children, particularly during infancy. Because mothers' biology gives them sole responsibility for carrying, giving birth to, and nursing a child, mothers are often considered to be "naturally better equipped" and more competent than fathers at providing practical, physical

care for babies (Hauari & Hollingworth, 2009, p. 17). A link between fathers' perceived childcare skills and their involvement in childcare was found in a study conducted by Barry, Smith, Deutsch, and Perry-Jenkins (2011). They examined interview and questionnaire data obtained from 152 American dual-income, working-class, heterosexual couples who were transitioning from the third trimester to one-month and one-year postpartum periods with their first child. Barry et al. found that the more skills fathers perceived they had in childcare, such as bathing and feeding, the more they were involved in childcare. Mothers' perceived gatekeeping behaviour toward fathers' child rearing was unrelated to fathers' perceived skills, but was negatively associated with fathers' engagement in childcare at one month postpartum (Barry et al., 2011). Mothers' breastfeeding was not related to fathers' involvement in childcare or perceived childcare skills, and Barry et al. presumed that fathers might be engaging in supplementary feedings, for example, because both members of the participating couples planned to return to full-time paid work within six months of the birth of their child and might have been using bottles as well. Therefore, it is safe to say that while fathers' sense of competence at child-rearing occupations corresponds to their participation in them, it may not necessarily originate from men's biological (in)ability in comparison to women's. Rather, the greater the mothers' involvement in childcare, the more likely fathers may be to depend on them and consequently be less likely to engage in it. In fact, fathers' involvement in physical care for their children increases as mothers return to their paid work, which may in turn contribute to increasing their perceived childcare skills (Barry et al., 2011; Gatrell, 2005).

1.3.1.4 Playing with children

Fathers often express their interest by engaging in athletic activities with their children and mentoring them in acquiring physical skills (Doucet, 2011; Doucet & Merla, 2007; Hand & Lewis, 2002; Lareau, 2000). The skills fathers teach their children—particularly sons—can extend to hard-core sports (e.g., wrestling, boxing), fighting, self-defence, and repairing objects, all of which correspond to socially accepted interpretations of masculinity (Lareau, 2000). Not only do fathers want an active, playful, and physically demanding role in parenting, but fathers, mothers, and children all view it as a significant feature of fatherhood (Hauari & Hollingworth, 2009).

1.3.1.5 Protecting family

Protecting family is perceived as an important feature of fatherhood. In the fatherhood study conducted by Hauari and Hollingworth (2009), fathers, mothers, and children all associated the role of family protector with fatherhood, and this was partly explained by an expectation that men will often be physically stronger than women. Similarly, in N. W. Townsend's (2002) study, fathers pointed to the need to protect their children not only from harmful, dangerous people but also from negative influences such as drugs, violence, and unwanted sexual attention. N. W. Townsend found that protecting children as a facet of fatherhood was closely interwoven with emotional connection to children and a corresponding willingness to talk openly about the dangers around them.

1.3.1.6 Providing children with opportunities to enrich their future lives

Giving children opportunities to improve their future has been consistently identified as a feature of fatherhood. In N. W. Townsend's (2002) study on men's lives, fathers indicated that they help their children succeed in school and sports by letting them try new things, encouraging them to develop skills and learn new ones, tutoring them, praising their accomplishments, setting higher expectations, providing them with the necessary resources (e.g., sports equipment, lessons), and discussing future options with them (e.g., college education). In providing children with learning opportunities, the fathers also ensure that their children acquire determination, self-reliance, and aspirations, all of which are attributes that contribute to successful decision making in the future (N. W. Townsend, 2002). Other studies showed that parents register their children for activities that are organized and instructed by adults in order to develop children's skills and learning. For example, Lareau (2002) conducted an ethnographic study intermittently from 1989 to 1997 with 88 US children aged 8−10 and their parents, categorized as middle-class, working-class, and poor families based on both parents' work hours and types of work. In comparing the parents' child-rearing styles between social classes, Lareau characterized middle-class parents' child rearing as "concerted cultivation" (p. 748) that strives to nurture children's talents and skills. Middle-class parents enrolled their children in a variety of activities, aiming to foster their development and skills, and consequently the children's activities govern the life of the family. While it was not clear in Lareau's (2002) paper whether these educational opportunities for the

children had been initiated by mothers or by fathers, the author Lareau (2000) indicated in her another article that fathers in the same study played an important role in imparting skills, particularly more physical skills, to their children.

In summary, while the notion of ideal fatherhood now encompasses a new variety of activities that fathers are expected to engage in, blurring the distinction between "traditional" fatherhood and motherhood, providing financial stability appears to persist as a focal feature of fatherhood. Accordingly, fathers sustain their secondary caregiver position, particularly in the areas of hands-on daily care and building an emotional connection to their children. They will perceive themselves, and also be perceived by others, as being a better father if they engage more in caregiving. Yet what is considered to be ideal in fatherhood seems more individualized in that it is determined by individuals' family circumstances rather than by traditional models (S. Williams, 2008) and reflects the various lifestyles adopted by young families.

1.3.2 Motherhood

The reviewed literature indicates two types of mothering ideologies: "intensive mothering" (Hays, 1996, p. 6) and "extensive mothering" (Christopher, 2012, p. 82). According to the former, mothers should be the primary caregiver and dedicate their time, energy, love, finances, and material goods to meeting their children's needs (Hays, 1996; Horwitz, 2011), whereas the latter describes a mother who delegates hands-on care to somebody else (e.g., a nanny) but takes responsibility for her children's well-being while she is away from them (Christopher, 2012). The following section delineates the two ideologies.

1.3.2.1 Intensive mothering

Intensive mothering appears to have been the dominant ideology in terms of "appropriate" motherhood in contemporary Western society since the 1970s (Hays, 1996; Horwitz, 2011). By analyzing in-depth interviews with 38 San Diego mothers living with two- to four-year-old children, Hays (1996) indicated that intensive mothering is a gendered ideology that advises mothers to be the primary caregiver, devote considerable time, energy, and finance to raising their children, and prioritize meeting the needs of their children over their own needs. The

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following section discusses the characteristics of intensive mothering that emerged from the literature review: primary caregiver, primary housekeeper, and orchestrating family life.

1.3.2.1.1 Primary caregiver

The expectation that a mother is the primary caregiver to children appears to persist in the literature. Thompson and Walker's (1989) review demonstrated that women remained the dominant carer and secondary financial provider for their families. This "woman's role" was reflected in how paid and family occupations were arranged—women were more likely than men to alter their paid work schedule to manage their family's needs (Thompson & Walker, 1989). Twenty years later, Doucet (2009), using her three qualitative research studies conducted in the 2000s, contended that "mothers feel pulled toward care while fathers feel pulled toward paid work" (p. 88). This claim was also present in the study of Yeung, Sandberg, Davis-Kean, & Hofferth (2001), who analyzed time-use diary data on over 1,750 children living with both parents. The data, obtained from the children and/or their primary caregivers in 1997, revealed that mothers generally spent a consistent amount of time with their children on weekdays despite increasing involvement in their paid occupations, whereas the amount of time fathers spent on childcare on weekdays dropped significantly as the more they earned and the longer hours they worked.

Women's biological ability to gestate and nurse partly, and yet profoundly, contributes to the idea of women being the default care providers. Although fathers' involvement in the physical and emotional aspects of childcare is increasing (see, for example, Gatrell, 2005), mothers continue to be regarded as more competent at, and better suited to, coping with the physical care of children (such as feeding, bathing, and dressing) than fathers (Hauari & Hollingworth, 2009; Thompson & Walker, 1989). In addition, a mother's emotional attachment to her infants can set and reinforce a father's idea that the mother is the primary caregiver, particularly for the first year of parenting. In the 1990s, Fox (2009) interviewed 40 Canadian heterosexual couples several times over a period that began late in the female partner's pregnancies and ended when the first year of parenting was complete. She found that the wives' return to paid work typically increased pressure on their husbands to be more involved in childcare. However, she also pointed out that mothers maintained innumerable "invisible"

responsibilities related to caring for their babies—such as thinking about schedules, supplies, and their infants' needs—even though their husbands were committed to sharing child rearing.

Mothers' intensive involvement in childcare inevitably leads them to sacrifice their own needs. Lavishing a plentiful amount of time, energy, and material goods upon their children means that mothers must prioritize their children's needs over their own and must be aware of, and conscientiously respond to, all the needs and desires of their children (Hays, 1996). Accordingly, intensive mothering leaves little time for mothers to meet their own personal needs. Nevertheless, they feel responsible for not letting their fatigue affect their children for the sake of the children's happiness (Gatrell, 2005). J. William (2000) conceived the absence of women's self in the private sphere as the result of the domesticity-gender system, which is a reflection of the structure of the marketplace and the family, and the gender expectations that rationalize, nourish, and reconstruct these structures.

1.3.2.1.2 Primary housekeeper

Intensive mothering particularly involves being the primary housekeeper during maternity leave, when mothers typically assume their central responsibility for caregiving and depend on their husbands for the household income. Although there is a shift toward non-traditional gender ideology in household work, particularly among young men in dual-income couples, women are apparently still expected to shoulder, and in fact do shoulder, the majority of domestic responsibilities in a household. Among employed parents living with a spouse or partner and a youngest child under the age of six in Canada, approximately 3.5 times more mothers than fathers spent 30 hours and more on unpaid housework in 2006 (Statistics Canada, 2011). Some reasons behind this ongoing segregation in the division of housework stem from a belief in women's inherent ability to handle housework. In Hauari and Hollingworth's (2009) study, although fathers and mothers acknowledged the need for fathers to be increasingly involved in, and ideally do their fair share of, household tasks, some fathers expressed a belief that women take the lead role in housework because of their 'natural' ability to deal with such tasks. Men and women were seen as intrinsically different, with the differences being used to explain the lack of balance in chore distribution. Zimmerman, Haddock, Ziemba, and Rust (2002) interviewed 47 American middle-class, dual-income, heterosexual couples with children, and found that the women took primary charge of orchestrating and overseeing family activities.

Many couples in Zimmerman et al.'s study attributed wives' "organized, uptight, and detail-oriented" personality traits—versus men's "flexible and spontaneous" (p. 82) personality traits—to the belief that wives were naturally better suited to taking on the role of family organizer. Considering both this perspective—based on expectations about what constitutes good household management—and time-use data indicating that women spend more hours doing unpaid household work than men do, presumably women feel driven to be more committed to housework simply because they are expected to be.

While the increasing notion of egalitarian gender ideology contributes to men's commitment to taking on a fair share of household occupations, the division of domestic labour appears to revert to a more gender-specific one when children are born (Fox, 2009; Friedman & Greenhaus, 2000; Sayer, 2010). Fox (2009) contended that when women take on the primary caregiver role during their maternity leave, they rely economically on their husbands, which leaves them feeling obligated to do most of the housework. Women's sense of being a primary caregiver to their children as well as of being economically reliant on their husbands diminishes their sense of entitlement and intensifies their reluctance to negotiate with their husbands about the division of domestic and childcare occupations (Fox, 2009).

1.3.2.1.3 Orchestrating family life

Another facet of motherhood is orchestrating and overseeing family life. Planning and organizing family activities continue to be women's responsibility (Fox, 2009; Lareau, 2002; Thompson & Walker, 1989), even in couples who equally divide the other household responsibilities (Zimmerman et al., 2002). Lareau (2002) observed that mothers in middle-class families fulfill extensive demands relating to their children's involvement in extracurricular activities. These demands range from shuttling the children to activity sites to planning and coordinating children's and mothers' schedules, all of which leave mothers with little time for themselves.

Being accessible to family members and being attuned to their various needs is critical to orchestrating family life and often considered to be a primary feature of motherhood (Friedman & Greenhaus, 2000). Sustaining an intimate marital relationship is just one of the family needs that mothers feel pressured to fulfill. The arrival of children can make it difficult for women, now mothers, to fulfill their partners' emotional needs because they find themselves devoting

much of their time and energy to fulfilling the demands of their paid employment and meeting the needs of their children, all of which push their husbands/partners further and further down the priority list (Gatrell, 2005). In addition, Gatrell (2005) pointed out that mothers feel resentful about being expected to take major charge of the domestic occupations after their children are born, and that prioritizing their children over their husbands is one way in which they can express their resentment about the unfair division of household chores.

1.3.2.2 Extensive mothering

The ideology of extensive mothering was developed relatively recently based on contemporary gender beliefs and is a contrast to the notion of intensive mothering. One of the most recent studies, which was comprised of in-depth interviews with 40 employed or on-leave mothers in Canada or the US, illustrated that the mothers defined good mothering as delegating routine day-to-day childcare tasks to somebody else; remaining "in charge" of and responsible for their children's well-being while absent from their children; and ensuring that their paid work does not temporally spill over into their family life (Christopher, 2012, p. 83). As such, extensive mothering contradicts intensive mothering as well as the ideal worker model because ideal workers are expected to devote long, intensive hours to paid work (Gambles et al., 2006).

In summary, although the notion of extensive mothering is becoming more popular, intensive mothering remains the dominant ideology. Concurrently, ideal fatherhood continues to be construed as the father being the family's primary financial provider, even though it extends to the mother's traditional childcare responsibility. The evolving motherhood and fatherhood ideologies may influence and inform what occupations parents engage in and how they engage in them. The way parents participate in occupations might in turn shape their perceptions and experiences of balance in everyday life.

1.4 Perspectives of balance

Balance has been conceptualized based on various theoretical backgrounds related to social sciences (Guest, 2002; Voydanoff, 2005a), organizational studies (Clark, 2001), and occupational science (Matuska & Christiansen, 2008; Wilcock, 2006), among others.

Terminology to connote balance varies across literature, and labels such as work-life balance, role balance, life balance, and occupational balance have been used to refer to the concept. While some of these labels are occasionally used interchangeably, indicating overlapping concepts, they are not necessarily synonymous. In this chapter, the terms are used in a manner that is consistent with the literature being discussed, while the generic term "balance" is utilized to encompass all of them.

Based on a literature review, four perspectives on balance were identified: the quantity of involvement across occupations; congruence between occupations, personal values and goal orientations; the fulfillment of demands of roles/occupations; and compatibility in occupational participation. The literature was searched through online article indexes, including Medline, EMBASE, CINAHL, PsycINFO, Academic Search Complete and ERIC with keywords (balance, work, family and life) and, if available, subject mapping/headings/terms (gender identity, sex role, and lifestyle). When the subject mapping/headings/terms were not available, these terms were used as keywords. Papers were selected for review by the primary researcher (a doctoral candidate) if they described the concept of balance. A thematic analysis was conducted with particular attention to definitions or concepts of balance, various dimensions of the concept, and theories explaining the relationship between balance and other concepts, such as well-being. Four perspectives on balance emerged and are defined in Table 1. Existing balance theories were then examined for their conceptual or explanatory contribution to the four defined balance perspectives (Table 2). The primary researcher conducted the preliminary analysis, and her doctoral supervisory committee verified the resulting balance perspectives, their definitions, and the contribution of existing theories to the perspectives. It should be noted that the four perspectives are not mutually exclusive; however, they suggest core concepts embedded in defining balance. The following section explains each perspective and the influence of individuals' gender ideologies on those perspectives.

Table 1
Definitions of Balance Perspectives

	Definition
Quantity	Time allocation or ratio of involvement across occupations in a manner that promotes one's health and well-being. Time allocation or ratio is considered based on the characteristics (e.g., level of challenge, and employment-related and family-related) or dimensions (e.g., physical, mental, social, and rest) of the occupation.
Congruence	The extent to which an individual's occupations are in accord with their beliefs, values, interests, and/or aspirations. Occupations that reflect one's beliefs, values, interests, and/or aspirations are likely to be meaningful to the individual.
Fulfillment	The extent to which individuals meet the demands of role or occupations. The aspects that influence the degree of fulfillment include not only one's competency/ability to perform roles/occupations but also the resources available to satisfy the demands.
Compatibility	The extent of internal harmony in the arrangement of occupations. In a harmonious, compatible arrangement, participating in one occupation does not interfere with participating in another. The aspects that influence the internal harmoniousness and compatibility are time, location, and the amount of energy required to participate in an occupation.

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Table 2

Concepts of Balance: Comparing Definitions and Their Contribution to Four Perspectives on Balance in Everyday Life

Concept	Definition	Quantity	Congruence	Fulfillment	Compatibility
Occupational balance	"Subjectively defined by individuals in terms of how they choose to spend time on valued, obligatory and discretionary activities" (Backman, 2005, p. 287)		+		
	The occupations an individual participates in are collectively compatible (Christiansen, 1996)				+
	"The expression and development of our capabilities through engagement in a wide range of individually meaningful occupations that promote health and well-being" (Westhorp, 2003, p. 103)		+	±[a]	
	"The balance may be among physical, mental, and social occupations; between chosen and obligatory occupations; between strenuous and restful occupations; or between doing and being" (Wilcock, 2006, p. 343)	+	+		
Experiential balance	A balance between Exacting, Flowing and Calming experiences of occupations (Jonsson & Persson, 2006; Persson & Jonsson, 2009)	+		+	
Life balance	Comprised of four dimensions: · Image of occupational self (capability, needs, values) · Strategies to manage and control everyday life (adjusting demands and responsibility) · Occupational repertoire (occupational harmony) · Occupational experience (perceived meanings and emotional content of occupations) (Håkansson, Dahlin-Ivanoff, & Sonn, 2006)		+	+	+
	Occupational aspects promoting life balance: · Structural factors - occupational balance (complexity, interruptions, variety, and amount) · Experience factors - meaning, control, and manageability (Erlandsson & Håkansson, 2009)	+	+	+	

Concept	Definition	Quantity	Congruence	Fulfillment	Compatibility
Life balance	Occupational integrity: People experience well-being when their involvement in occupations is congruent with their personal values and strengths and harmonized with the demands of their environment (Pentland & McColl, 2009)		+	+	
Lifestyle balance	"A satisfying pattern of daily occupation that is healthful, meaningful, and sustainable to an individual within the context of his or her current life circumstances" (Matuska & Christiansen, 2008, p. 11) Consists of five occupational dimensions: ・ Fulfilling needs to sustain biological health and physical safety ・ Attaining rewarding and self-affirming relationships ・ Gaining a sense of engagement, challenge, and competence ・ Developing meaning and a positive personal identity ・ Organizing time and energy to accomplish personal goals and renewal (Matuska & Christiansen, 2008)	+	+	+	+
Work-life balance	"A perceived balance between work and the rest of life" (Guest, 2002, p. 263) with objective indicators (work hours, free time, and family roles) Determinants: ・ Organizational factors (culture and demands of work and family) ・ Individual factors (life stage, personal control and coping, gender, etc.) (Guest, 2002) Influential factors: ・ Managing work and home life ・ Responsibility and demands at home and work ・ Hours spent at work and home ・ Making compromise between family and career ・ Others (e.g., life cycle, income, prioritizing) (Dow-Clarke, 2002)	+ +	+ +	+ +	+ ±[b]

Concept	Definition	Quantity	Congruence	Fulfillment	Compatibility
Work-family balance	"A global assessment that work and family resources are sufficient to meet work and family demands such that participation is effective in both domains" (Voydanoff, 2005a, p. 825)			+	+
	"Satisfaction and good functioning at work and at home with a minimum of role conflict" (Clark, 2001, p. 349)		±[c]	+	+
Role balance	"The tendency to become fully engaged in the performance of every role in one's total role system" (Marks & MacDermid, 1996, p. 421)			+	±[d]

Note. + indicates that the definition contributes to the balance perspective; ± indicates that the definition arguably supports the balance perspective. Reprinted with permission from "Theoretical Perspectives of Balance and the Influence of Gender Ideologies" by M. Wada, C. L. Backman, and S. J. Forwell, 2010, *Journal of Occupational Science, 17,* p. 94-95. Copyright 2010 by the Association for the Journal of Occupational Science Incorporated.
[a]"The expression and development of our capability" implies a significant role of fulfilling occupational/role demands in accomplishing occupational balance. [b]A combination of two factors (managing work and home and making compromise between the two areas) implies the importance of a minimum conflict between work and home to experiencing work-life balance. [c]In order to accomplish "satisfaction," congruence between an individual's values and his/her participation in work and home or the outcomes of his/her participation may be necessary. [d]Full engagement in every role as the condition of balance implies the requirement of harmony in occupational participation.

1.4.1 Balance as the quantity of involvement across occupations

In occupational science, the primary focus of balance is the arrangement of occupations that enhances health and well-being. Time allocation in occupation is often investigated in order to understand healthy balance from the view of quantity of occupational participation. Meyer (1922/1977) initially pointed out the importance of balancing time that is allocated to work, play, rest, and sleep. Although he did not describe balance as equal amounts of time spent across these occupations (Westhorp, 2003), the term "balance" generally refers to a state in which different aspects exist in equal amounts (Wehmeier, McIntosh, Turnbull, & Ashby, 2005), and may have resulted in ideas inferring that balance requires an equally allocated time budget. In any case, equal time allocations of work, play, rest, and sleep do not appropriately capture occupational balance because of the variable arrangement of one's occupations at any point in time and over the life course (E. A. Townsend, 2002). For example, toddlers spend more time on play than do adults, the majority of whom spend more time on paid work than play. Yet allocating and distributing time for paid work, leisure and recreational activities, and sleep appears to play a significant role in achieving a subjective sense of balance. Harvey and Singleton (2009) examined data from the 1998 and 2005 Canadian General Social Surveys and found that workers who reported feeling imbalanced spent more time on paid work, commuting to and from their workplace, and childcare than self-reported balanced workers in both 1998 and 2005. Balanced workers devoted significantly more time to sleep, leisure, and recreational activities than out-of-balance workers did.

While an equal time allocation in work, play, rest, and sleep is an unlikely representation of occupational balance, some type of time equilibrium in other dimensions of occupation may explain balance to some degree. Wilcock (2006) contended that the ideal time allocation may be an equal involvement in physical, mental, social, and rest occupations, based on the pilot study she and her colleagues conducted with Australians and replication study in the UK and Europe. In their pilot study, a questionnaire completed by 146 Caucasians from different living situations and age groups explored individual perceptions of balance across occupations categorized as physical, mental, social, and rest/sleep, and relationships between occupational balance and health (Wilcock et al., 1997). Approximately 77% of the participants in their study perceived

ideal occupational balance as moderate to high involvement in all these four types of occupations, and the less discrepancy between participants' current and ideal balance, the higher their self-reported health. Although Wilcock (2006) conceptualized the ideal occupational balance based on studies from more than three countries, it may not be applicable to people from different cultures. For example, those holding strong work values concerning achievement, prestige, and high income may not be satisfied with being involved in social and rest occupations, compared to the mental and physical occupations which are generally connected to paid occupations (Frieze, Olson, Murrell, & Selvan, 2006).

Balance is explained as an optimal ratio of qualitatively different occupational experiences rather than an equal time budget allocation. Persson and Jonsson (2009) proposed a Model of Experiential Balance by analyzing occupational experiences of challenges characterized as Calming, Exacting, and Flowing to determine the ratio that promotes health. The model was developed using Csikszentmihalyi's (1993, 1996) flow theory, which explains how participating in occupations that are manageable yet sufficiently challenging to maintain one's focus leads to an optimal experience (Jonsson & Persson, 2006). Jonsson and Persson (2006) conducted secondary analysis of data on perceived challenge levels of occupations and the skills that they require, from 159 adult and adolescents from three countries. They found that of the participants' entire experiences, almost 50% consisted of Calming occupations (e.g., rest and relaxation) while slightly over 25% was formed by each of the Exacting and Flowing occupations. Exacting occupations demand skills exceeding one's competency, whereas Flowing occupations require high level skills compatible with one's ability. Jonsson and Persson posited that a reasonable balance between Calming, Exacting, and Flowing (approximately 50%, 25%, and 25% respectively) represents an occupational experience pattern that could enhance health and well-being. In addition, incorporating this model of balance may also enable individuals to contribute more to society, sustaining a healthy equilibrium between consuming and restoring their energy, removing them from social isolation, and enhancing their productivity and creativity. Interestingly, the model acknowledges the benefit of occasionally feeling bored for a balanced occupational life, as boredom can be a catalyst for creativity and initiative (Persson & Jonsson, 2009). This suggests that boredom is not always an indicator of imbalance.

Similarly, Wilcock (2006) contended that balance between strenuous and restful occupations must be considered as a factor that enhances well-being. One of the most recent qualitative studies on balance, conducted by Wagman, Björklund, Håkansson, Jacobsson, and

Falkmer (2011), who interviewed 19 employed Swedish adults, echoed the importance of balancing specifically physically demanding activities with relaxing ones. Restful occupations enable individuals to conserve energy and regain watchfulness in order for them to participate in strenuous occupations (Wilcock, 2006). However, Wilcock argued that people are likely to spend less time on restful occupations and more time on strenuous occupations due to an increase in mental and social demands in contemporary Western society. This tendency was not found in Jonsson and Persson's (2006) study, possibly because over 75% of the participants were adolescents who may have been exposed to fewer social and mental demands than adults. The imbalance between rest and socially or mentally strenuous occupations attracts attention, particularly in a capitalistic society, because it increases the risk of fatigue and burnout (Wilcock, 2006).

In addition to the level of effort required by occupations, the degree of choice when participating in them is another way to perceive balance. Swedish workers indicated that involvement in both compulsory and chosen activities is necessary for a balanced life (Wagman et al., 2011). Wilcock (2006) likewise suggested that occupational balance may be perceived as one's involvement in obligatory and chosen occupations. Obligatory occupations are those that satisfy fundamental physiological needs for survival and self-sufficiency, whereas chosen occupations are more discretionary, for the purpose of pleasure and relaxation (Ås, 1978; Verbrugge, Gruber-Baldini, & Fozard, 1996). Katz and Yelin (2001) found that limited participation in discretionary occupations increased the risk of new depressive symptoms among women with rheumatoid arthritis. On the other hand, a decline in obligatory occupations may diminish one's self-efficacy, given the value of independence, particularly in Western society.

Time allocation across occupations is a perspective on balance not limited to occupational balance, but also discussed in other theories. For example, Matuska and Christiansen (2008) identified time allocation as one of the occupational dimensions that determine lifestyle balance: circadian rhythms structure the time frame for everyday occupations to meet biological needs, and attaining personal aspirations and renewal requires a time investment. Originating in business models, work-life balance refers to the perceived balance between work and other aspects of life, including leisure (Bird, 2006). The concept of balance acknowledges time budget as one of the objective determinants of work-life balance (Guest, 2002), although subjective determinants are also considered.

Although time use is readily quantified and a useful indicator, Christiansen and Matuska (2006) contended that it is essential to investigate not only time use but also the meanings individuals perceive when participating in a given occupation at a given time. This suggests that the satisfaction one achieves from time spent on an occupation, in addition to the quantity of time spent in occupations, influences one's sense of balance. Harvey and Singleton (2009) likewise pointed out the importance of considering the subjective side of daily time allocation and its contribution to a sense of balance. The subjective dimension of time use can be captured by affective information including motivation, feelings, attitude, and stress regarding activities and occupations that people participate in and the context in which they engage in occupations, such as the time, place, and people with whom they participate. Harvey and Singleton examined the 1998 and 2005 Canadian General Social Surveys and revealed that the segmenting variables that were most associated with the level of satisfaction with balance between work and home life were dominantly subjective dimensions, such as "time crunch" and "stated stress" (Harvey & Singleton, 2009, p. 108). Therefore, subjective experiences of time devoted to occupations inform one's feeling of balance/imbalance.

Based on the reviewed literature, the quantity of involvement across occupations (i.e., time allocation and ratio) is one perspective on balance. Occupational balance is described as "an ideal mix of occupations that one ought to have" (E. A. Townsend & Polatajko, 2007, p. 46), which suggests that participating in a variety of occupations is important for health. This notion raises many questions. For example, how much variety in occupations is necessary to support health and well-being? What dimensions or characteristics of occupation ought to be balanced in the perspective of time budget (e.g., the taxonomy of physical, mental, social, and rest; or flowing, calming, and exacting occupations)?

1.4.1.1 Influence of gender ideologies on balance as quantity of involvement

Research shows gender differences associated with an individual's perceived balance and the amount of time he or she spends on paid occupations. In a study of 80 Pennsylvania couples, the amount of time female participants spent on paid work was found to be a positive predictor of their role balance and had a linear relationship with it, whereas the men's paid work hours were negatively correlated to their sense of balance (Marks, 2009; Marks, Huston, Johnson, & MacDermid, 2001) although it should be noted that this finding needs to be interpreted with

caution because of the small sample size. The relationships among individual gender ideologies, paid work hours, and balance were unclear in the study. Gender ideology likely shapes occupational choice such that people engage in occupations that are congruent with their gendered values, and this in turn informs the time they allocate across occupations. For example, women with traditional gender ideology are likely to spend more time on domestic work because it is congruent with their perceived roles of wife and mother, whereas women with a more egalitarian view generally distribute more time to employment (Corrigall & Konrad, 2006) when striving toward their ideal sense of balance. In other words, an individual's perception of how paid work hours best contribute to his or her experience of balance may vary according to his or her gender ideology. Given the impact that personal perspectives have on an individual's sense of balance, gaining a better comprehension of the concept of balance requires more than just superficially measuring time allocation or identifying the ratios of involvement in occupations.

1.4.2 Balance as congruence between occupations, personal values, and goal orientations

Occupational balance is also connected with the extent to which the occupations of individuals reflect their values and goals (Backman, 2005, 2010). Although people need to participate in obligatory occupations, they also seek to engage in occupations that are directly or indirectly related to their goals. Occupation is a means to express who one is and wants to become (Wilcock, 2006). Wilcock (2006) posited that congruence between occupations and an individual's needs of doing (e.g., engaging in specific activities and tasks), being (e.g., being who one is, and identifying with a specific role, such as mother), and becoming (e.g., becoming who one wants to be, such as a good mother) is a profound factor that influences one's perceived occupational balance and well-being. Depending on the degree of congruence between the occupation and the person's roles and goals, individuals discover meanings in their occupations. This implies that engaging in occupations that are meaningful to individuals is essential for accomplishing a sense of balance. 'Sense' in this context refers to "a particular awareness of a physical dimension or property (e.g., time, space) or of an abstract quality, usually one that is desirable (e.g., humor, justice)" (VandenBos, 2007, p. 836). As such, an abstract quality of balance connotes participating in occupations that are important for individuals. Pentland and

McColl (2009) echoed the significant role of individual values in gaining a sense of balance, although they argue that "occupational integrity" (p. 167) is a more appropriate term than 'balance' to capture this congruence.

Also coming from an occupational science perspective, Håkansson, Dahlin-Ivanoff, and Sonn (2006) discussed balance in everyday life, exploring the concept of balance more broadly than previous studies. They found two dimensions of life balance that reiterate the importance of participating in occupations congruent with individual values and needs. Their study explored how balance in everyday life is accomplished and what it means to have balance in everyday life, based on data from focus groups with 19 southern Swedish women, after the first phase of recovery from stress-related disorders. The study found four dimensions that influenced the women's experience of a state between balance and imbalance: self-image as an occupational being; strategies to manage and control everyday life; degree of harmony in occupational repertoire; and occupational experience. The self-image as an occupational being suggests that congruence between occupations and individual values and needs is likely to lead to a sense of balance. The dimension of occupational experience suggests that the more meaningful the occupations are to the individual, the more balanced everyday life feels.

Similarly, work-family balance embraces congruence between occupations and individual values as a determinant of balance. Work-family balance refers not only to an individual's comfort with the demands of paid work and family, but also to his or her satisfaction in relation to having the ability and resources to fulfill the demands of both (Clark, 2001; Voydanoff, 2002, 2005a). The extent to which individuals feel comfortable with the respective demands of paid and family occupations, and satisfied with the resources they have to fulfill these demands, often reflects their values and their perceived expectations of their occupations. For example, individuals who value family occupations over paid work may feel comfortable with a more demanding number of family occupations than with increased paid work hours. Ensuring that they have adequate resources for meeting family needs may lead them to a greater feeling of readiness and satisfaction than fulfilling the demands of paid occupations.

Although congruence between occupations and individual values appears to be critical for a sense of balance, focusing exclusively on the congruency may be a somewhat simplistic way to understand perceived balance. Given that time is limited, individuals often have to prioritize their occupations and choose the ones that best fit their schedules, which means that individuals arrange occupations based on both individual values and time demands of the

occupations. Yet it is unclear how time allocation and the concordance between personal values and occupations integrate to diminish or enhance a sense of balance. Are individuals likely to have a better sense of balance as they allocate more time to the occupations that they value most? Or, as Voydanoff (2002) indicated, is a sense of balance experienced when the individual's satisfaction with the outcomes of occupations is congruent with his or her "relative values" (p. 148) assigned to those occupations? For instance, it is likely that individuals accomplish a better sense of balance when the occupations that they highly value produce satisfying outcomes than when their less valued occupations achieve satisfying outcomes to a similar degree.

1.4.2.1 Influence of gender ideologies on balance as congruence between occupations and values

Little is known about the arrangement of occupations that are compatible with an individual's gender ideology and enhance his or her sense of balance. Wierda-Boer, Gerris, and Vermulst (2008) examined relationships between gender ideologies and work-family balance, based on questionnaire data obtained from 149 Dutch dual-income couples with young children. Work-family balance was measured by the self-reported degree of success in balancing work and family, and gender ideology was measured by a Dutch adaptation of the Personal Attributes Questionnaire. The study revealed that there was a significant positive association between femininity and work-family balance for male participants. Masculinity was also positively associated with work-family balance for both men and women; however, the association was stronger for women than for men. The findings suggest congruence between holding less gender-based ideologies and perceiving a better balance between work and family; the less traditional views on gender roles women and men espouse, the better balanced women and men feel in relation to work and family. The underlying assumption is that paid work is traditionally a significant, particular component of masculinity (Pleck, 1982) and that women who are more masculine might therefore be more involved in paid occupations, which might in turn have led them to feel successful in balancing work and family. For the male participants, being more feminine might have increased their engagement in family life and led them to feel more balanced. However, the study did not directly address occupational participation; that is, it did not investigate relationships between gender ideology, participation in work and family occupations, and work-family balance.

It is clear that the more people participate in the types of occupations that their gender ideologies inform, the more likely they are to have meaningful experiences with the occupations. Doucet and Merla (2007) conducted a qualitative study with 70 Canadian and 21 Belgian stay-at-home fathers with the aim of exploring how they managed conflicts between their sense of masculinity and their traditionally-female caregiver role. Some participants reported feeling like "a failed man" as a result of not fulfilling the predominant social expectation of men as salary earners. Those men modified their care-giving role by integrating aspects of traditionally more masculine types of occupations (e.g., physical labour and leadership) as a way to address the incompatibility between their masculine identity and the traditional femininity implied by their occupation. Some participants also justified their ideas concerning the caregiving role by interpreting and acknowledging childcare as a "real" or "full-time" job. Although Doucet and Merla did not explore fathers' sense of balance per se, the participants appeared to reduce conflicts between their masculine values and the femininity underlying their care-provider role by adjusting the role and/or their ideas about it in order to be compatible with their values.

As people often act on socially and culturally constructed values and beliefs, the gender ideology that individuals perceive as the primary view among their social group also informs the meanings that they attribute to occupations and the level of their satisfaction with participating in occupations. Conducting a naturalistic study with 50 double-income heterosexual couples and 45 other individuals (e.g., baby-sitters), Hochschild and Machung (2003) discovered in the late 1980s that a male participant had conflicting feelings when he took his daughter to a public park and found himself sitting surrounded by paid nannies. He felt he was an active father yet he also felt he may have been seen as a "loser" from a masculine societal perspective. Not all men may have the same experience, given contemporary Western society's evolving perspectives of fatherhood, increasing commitment to fairness, and sense of responsibility for parenting (Wada & Beagan, 2006). Nevertheless, the finding suggests that the incongruence between individual and perceived social values concerning gender may diminish people's satisfaction with their occupational involvement even if it is based on their gender ideologies. In other words, although it appears essential that individuals participate in the occupations that are informed by their gender ideologies in order to accomplish a sense of balance, agreement between an individual's gender ideology and occupational participation might be merely one of the integral features of balance. A wife with a traditional gender ideology will likely be satisfied when she participates in traditional feminine tasks, such as cleaning, cooking, and child rearing (Richmond-Abbott,

1992), rather than in a traditional masculine occupation, such as paid work. However, if societal gender norms are more egalitarian, she may not necessarily perceive her life as balanced if she maintains a traditional gender ideology and participates in the traditional feminine tasks.

1.4.3 Balance as fulfillment of demands of roles/occupations

The extent to which individuals feel competent to fulfill the demands of the roles and occupations in which they participate emerges as another perspective on balance. This concept has been developed particularly in role balance and work-family balance studies. Role balance refers to a state in which people are fully engaged in all the roles they hold (Marks & MacDermid, 1996). More specifically, in work-family balance, a sense of balance derives from satisfaction with the degree to which one fulfills the demands of paid work and family (Clark, 2001; Voydanoff, 2005a). Similarly, responsibility and demands from paid work and family are identified as determinants of work-life balance (Dow-Clarke, 2002; Guest, 2002). A weakness of this balance perspective, however, is that it is not clear whose perception is used to evaluate the demands of paid work, family, and other areas of life. Role demands are constructed in context, influencing individual perceptions of the demands; however, one's internalized ideas of role demands may differ from that of others according to social locations (e.g., age, gender, ethnicity) in the same environment.

The model of occupational integrity assimilates the importance of meeting personal values and needs and the demands of the environment in enhancing life balance. When individuals participate in occupations that are congruent with their values, meet their needs, and enhance harmonious relationships with their environment, they accomplish occupational integrity and well-being (Pentland & McColl, 2009). In this manner, the model bridges the perspectives of balance as congruence between occupations and personal values, and balance as the fulfilment of occupational/role demands.

The concept of balance as fulfillment of the demands of roles or occupations is evident in occupational science literature. For example, Håkansson et al.'s (2006) study indicated that "having strategies to manage and control everyday life" helped the female Swedish participants, who had stress-related disorders, attain a better sense of balance. It was the creation of strategies and the sense of control they confer that seemed to be key, rather than their total competency in

occupations, which is not always necessary to fulfill demands at work and home. Finding resources to meet the demands, negotiating demands, and modifying one's own perceptions of expected demands can enhance one's sense of control, which can in turn lead to a sense of balance. This view is supported by the model of experiential balance, which describes how individuals use external resources to modify perceived demands and challenges when fulfilling occupations and roles (Persson & Jonsson, 2009).

In addition to strategies and resources, the complexity of occupational patterns may influence the extent to which individuals meet the demands of occupations and roles. Erlandsson and Håkansson (2009) demonstrated from their studies that the less complex an individual's occupational pattern is, the better balanced he or she feels life is. Unexpected changes and interruptions to occupations often divert an individual's attention from the occupations he or she tries to focus on, which may result in difficulty or failure to fulfill occupational demands. A complex life pattern stemmed from unexpected occupational changes and interruptions can therefore increase the risk of imbalance and ill health. This appears particularly true in the case of employed women with partners and dependent children (Erlandsson & Håkansson, 2009).

1.4.3.1 Influence of gender ideologies on balance as fulfillment of role/occupational demands

Workplace and family cultures shape the demands of paid work and family occupations, but individual gender ideologies inform one's perceptions of those demands. Women with contemporary gender ideologies are more likely than those with traditional gender beliefs to expect their male partners to share roles at home, such as taking care of a sick child (Kushnir, 1985). In contrast, those who possess more ingrained traditional gender ideologies would regard totally fulfilling a care-provider role as a demand of motherhood. Therefore, when employed women with such traditional gender beliefs are unable to leave their workplaces in a child-related emergency, they might be less likely than those with more contemporary gender ideologies to feel that they fulfill the demand of the caregiving role. In addition to their tendency to set a high standard for their roles at home, women who uphold traditional gender role expectations have a greater challenge due to the nature of traditional feminine household tasks being inflexible in terms of timing and frequencies (Hochschild & Machung, 2003), especially in a household with children. Women with traditional gender ideologies may be less likely to feel they are

satisfactorily fulfilling the considerable demands of the feminine housekeeping and caregiving role, which may in turn lead them to perceive their life as imbalanced. In contrast, women with more contemporary gender beliefs may be less challenged to fulfill demands at home because they have different expectations. For example, they may be comfortable with alternative ways to accomplish care provider and household roles, such as delegating to others, hiring help, or using community resources like daycare centres. In this way, individual gender ideology informs an individual's perception of occupation and role demands and might also shape how he or she assesses personal competency in fulfilling those demands.

Conversely, men with traditional gender beliefs can likely effectively manage the demands of the roles at home and at work, because a paid worker role enables men to satisfy the traditional demands of being the primary financial provider in the family. Men can not only fulfill the demands of paid occupations but also meet at least partial, and yet significant, needs of their families by their paid work. In this regard, participating in paid occupations likely assists those men to achieve a sense of balance. When men have less traditional gender beliefs, exclusively focusing on paid occupations will likely not lead them to perceive their life as balanced because they believe that they should give their family more than just financial security.

1.4.4 Balance as compatibility in occupational participation

Balance is also perceived as harmony across occupations (Backman, 2010; Håkansson et al., 2006). High "collective compatibility" of the occupations in which individuals are involved gives them a sense of control over these occupations (Christiansen, 1996, p. 445). Similarly, the concepts of role balance and work-family balance posit that balance is related to the degree of compatibility among the roles played by an individual. Imbalance occurs when the amount of time and behaviour required by each role, or the strain caused by participating in one role, makes it difficult for individuals to fulfill the demands of other roles (Goode, 1960; Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, Snoek, & Rosenthal, 1964). It is believed that the more congruent the demands of paid and family occupations (i.e., the less work-family conflict), the more likely individuals are to perceive work and family as being balanced. Interestingly, resources provided by one role may enable individuals to fulfill the demands of another role; this is called 'role fit' (DeBord, Canu, & Kerpelman, 2000; Voydanoff, 2005a). Multiple roles or

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occupations do not always conflict and thereby disrupt an individual's sense of balance, because some roles may assist the person in meeting the demands of another.

The concept of harmony is common within work-family balance and role balance. While role balance focuses on roles rather than on occupations, the demands of roles are presented as a set of occupations (Kielhofner, 2008). Whether conceptualised in terms of roles or occupations, if a woman employs daycare services to take care of her children and is satisfied with that, her role as a working mother involves overseeing the services for her children, rather than direct care (at least for those hours of the day). By delegating daycare tasks, she satisfies the demands of a paid worker role and maintains the mothering role, which may result in harmony between the two roles and lead her to a sense of balance.

1.4.4.1 Influence of gender ideologies on balance as occupational compatibility

Gender ideologies influence the compatibility of occupations in which men and women participate. In the instance of traditional gender ideology, men fulfill their roles as husband and father significantly through a paid worker role, while women's roles as mother and wife are incompatible with the role of a paid worker. For example, caring for sick children—a role traditionally expected of a mother—does not allow her to go to work and be responsible as a reliable employee (Cunningham-Burley, Backett-Milburn, & Kemmer, 2006). Paid occupations are often physically incompatible with domestic occupations because they generally take place in the private sphere, whereas paid occupations correspond to the public sphere (Haywood & Mac an Ghaill, 2003). As a result of these incompatibilities between paid and domestic occupations, women with traditional gender beliefs are more likely than men with a similar ideology to find it difficult to manage both types of occupations in a manner conducive to experiencing balance. The physical incompatibility often requires individuals to choose one role over the other when the demands for family and paid work conflict (role interference) (Voydanoff, 2002), which may feel like imbalance to women with traditional gender ideology.

However, as contemporary mother/father images evolve, younger generations of adults may lean toward egalitarian gender ideology. Due to increasing social expectations for men to be more involved in care-giving, less emphasis is placed on a breadwinning as a sole or primary role (Cohen, 1993; Gerson, 2002). Cohen (1993) found that not only breadwinning but nurturing, disciplining, being a role model, and playing with children were considered as fatherly roles,

based on data obtained from in-depth interviews with 30 new husbands and fathers in the greater Boston area of the US. Women with egalitarian gender beliefs reject the assumption that women are solely responsible for household work, and seek a balance between providing and receiving support (Coltrane & Valdez, 1993; Gerson, 2002). Consequently, women with contemporary gender role ideologies tend to expect and seek a certain level of compatibility between family and paid work roles by accessing and using support for family-related occupations when the latter create conflict with paid occupations. Because younger women seem to agree on egalitarian gender ideology, they may be more likely than older women to experience a sense of balance. For men with egalitarian gender beliefs, however, the challenges might be greater, compared to those with traditional gender ideology, given that traditional feminine occupations/roles are less compatible with an earner's role.

To summarize, four perspectives on balance are identified in the reviewed literature: quantity, congruence, fulfillment, and compatibility. While these four perspectives suggest a framework to better understand how one perceives balance in everyday life, there is limited empirical support to determine which perspective best relates to a better sense of balance and well-being, and under what circumstances, or if there are other perspectives of balance that are not yet fully described. In addition, little is known as to how gender structure (e.g., power, production) influences individual perceptions on balance in a family context, as men and women as couples have rarely been involved in research on balance.

1.5   Subjective sense of balance among heterosexual parents

Family culture and demands are factors that influence one's individual sense of balance (Guest, 2002). When heterosexual partners live together, each bringing specific expectations arising from the gender ideology they developed over their life course to their negotiated responsibilities for domestic and paid work occupations, how is each partner's sense of balance influenced by the family context? To address this question, the following factors are discussed: gender structure in the family context and values concerning ideal balance shared between partners.

1.5.1 Gender structure in the family context

In a family context, there are two primary levels of gender structure: individual and interactional. Gender ideology that one has internalized is the individual level of the structure, whereas division of labour and power relations between partners are two aspects of the structure created at the interactional level. Negotiated gender ideologies and power relations between partners inform a couple's labour division; then, depending on that labour division, the roles and occupations that they engage in can be inconsistent with their own respective personal values. This might be particularly the case when they do not share the same expectations of roles. Because the negotiated division of labour might not allow an individual to engage in occupations that his or her own gender ideology informs and are therefore meaningful to the individual, the gender structure constructed in the labour division at the interactional level could positively or negatively affect either individual's sense of balance.

1.5.1.1 Gender ideology negotiated and shared in a couple

Gender ideology has been identified as being associated with a division of paid and unpaid occupations in heterosexual couples. Risman (1998), who aimed to explore the gender dynamics of fair-share families, conducted qualitative research with 15 heterosexual couples who perceived that both partners shared responsibility for earning a living and caring for children and that the relationship was therefore fair. Risman observed that both men and women expressed aspects of non-traditional gender beliefs in their behavioural and attitudinal characteristics (family-centeredness for men and dedication to paid work for women). What constituted a fair share of earning and caring responsibilities may have been derived from characteristics that represented their non-traditional gender ideology. Similarly, Primeau (2000b) explored how lower-middle and working class heterosexual couples divide domestic labour by conducting participant observation, interviews, and questionnaires with 10 American families. She indicated that combinations of both male and female partners' gender ideologies determined how partners divided housework and childcare: an equal share where both partners had transitional gender ideology, and a gender-based share where both partners possessed conventional gender role expectations. These two studies illustrate labour divisions between partners whose gender ideologies were compatible (e.g., egalitarian-egalitarian and traditional-traditional couples),

suggesting that they are less likely to have conflicts with a labour division than couples with incompatible gender ideologies.

In terms of balance, it can only be assumed that if the occupations in which partners are involved are congruent with their gender values, each will have a better sense of balance. They may also confront fewer conflicts in occupational participation, potentially enhancing a sense of balance. However, this requires empirical validation. In the same research project, Primeau (2000a) monitored the wives' conflicting feelings on labour division. A wife in a couple with traditional gender orientation felt the conventional role division was unfair, while another wife in a couple sharing egalitarian gender ideology felt guilty about not participating in as many domestic occupations as she felt she should have, despite an approximately equal share of domestic occupations with her husband. This example suggests that wives simultaneously held and expressed two distinct gender ideologies: traditional and non-traditional. As Hochschild and Machung (2003) indicated, some people may have conflicting gender ideologies, labelled as the "on-top" and "underneath" levels (p. 15). A gender ideology at the "on-top" level is explicit and usually observable based on behaviour, whereas the "underneath" is implicit, hidden, and underpinned by deep feelings. It is worthwhile to explore how these conflicting ideologies influence individual perceptions and sense of balance. In addition, it is important to investigate how incompatible gender ideologies between partners in a couple influence their sense of balance.

1.5.1.2 Power relations between partners

Power relation between partners, an aspect of gender structure, is another factor that influences couples' negotiation of domestic and paid occupation roles. Despite the increasing number of dual-earner couples and corresponding shifts in financial contributions to household resources, men appear to command power over women, which can in turn impact the labour division between partners. Wilkie, Ferree, and Ratcliff (1998) conducted a telephone survey with approximately 400 heterosexual dual-income couples from Connecticut and found that the husbands' beliefs about gender roles were more strongly associated with couples' labour divisions than the wives' beliefs. In addition, the husbands' preferences for family roles were associated with both husbands' and wives' perceived fairness in the couples' labour divisions,

which suggests that a patriarchal power structure may remain influential and affect couples' labour divisions such that men take on fewer domestic roles.

A difference in income and education between partners is believed to be one of the foundations of power structure (Arrighi & Maume, 2000; Gerson, 2002; McMullin, 2005). Fox (2009) observed that when a wife undertakes the primary household income earner role, she is empowered to claim, and negotiate with her husband for, a fair share. In contrast, when a wife is the primary childcare provider and is financially dependent on her husband, she feels reluctant to request a fair share from him because his income-earning status puts him in a position of power over her. In addition, one's career success influences one's degree of participation in domestic occupations. Coltrane and Valdez (1993) analyzed interview data obtained from husbands and wives in 20 Chicano couples with one child and found that the men who were unable to pursue career goals were likely to be more involved in domestic labour than other male participants. In relation to education, Hochschild and Machung (2003) reported that men whose female partners pursued advanced degrees and professional careers were more likely to share housework and childcare than those whose wives did not. Thus, the more equal the power balance between partners, the more likely their labour division is to be correspondingly equal.

Because power relations influence household work distribution, they may also affect individuals' perceptions of balance among occupations, but to date little is known as to exactly how any such effect might manifest or occur. One question in particular remains: How balanced do men perceive their lives to be when they are not successful in fulfilling an earner's role and become involved primarily in domestic occupations? Presumably, as these men fulfill demands of domestic occupations, they may be more likely than those who participate less in family occupations to gain appreciation from their female partners (Hochschild & Machung, 2003). On the other hand, they may have less sense of control at home than those with a primary breadwinner role, due to their secondary household income earner role. However, it is not clear how such a situation might influence their sense of balance. It is also uncertain whether or not female partners generally feel a better sense of balance if their increased power at home enables them to have more choice of the occupations in which they participate.

Power relations in a couple may influence individual sense of balance differently than does gender ideology. Primeau (2000b) found that couples experience fewer conflicts about the division of labour when they share compatible gender ideologies, but that the conventional division of labour frequently reflects a power inequity because it produces and reinforces the

gender construct of male dominance and female subordination. Traditional gender ideologies can create a power differential between partners because the concurrent division of labour may prevent women from earning as much as their male partners. This suggests that the unequal power relations between partners in a couple can be a source of conflict even when the partners have compatible gender ideologies. Therefore, both gender ideologies and power relations between partners need to be taken into consideration when exploring their perceptions and experiences of balance.

1.5.2 Values concerning ideal balance shared between heterosexual partners

Little research has been conducted on the impact of one partner's balance perception on the other partner's balance perception and sense of balance. There are several issues to explore and understand, such as questions like these: If partners have different or conflicting perceptions of ideal balance, how would their different perceptions affect their individual sense of balance? If one partner aims for a sense of balance by fulfilling the demands of a paid worker role, and the other partner believes a work-dominated lifestyle is unhealthy, how would the partners' perceptions of balance change? It would also be worthwhile to investigate how gender structure in a family shapes a couple's shared perception of ideal balance. For example, if both partners hold conventional gender ideologies, would a husband's perception be more likely than a wife's to be dominant, due to a belief in patriarchal power (which corresponds to the conventional gender ideology) being reflected in family values?

1.6 Conclusion

Balance is an important concept to study and a growing body of literature suggests various increased health risks associated with imbalance. For now, balance remains an elusive concept, which may hinder the development of policies and resources that foster it on the individual and societal level. This discussion presents four perspectives embedded in balance theories developed from different theoretical standpoints. Articulating these four perspectives adds insight into an understanding of balance in everyday life and suggests core concepts that

explain balance. Given the lack of theoretical consistency, contributing to the conceptualization of balance is warranted and worthwhile. Further, subjective, individual, and contextual characteristics of balance need to be taken into account in the course of exploring balance in everyday life (Backman & Anaby, 2009). For example, as discussed in this chapter, little is known as to how individuals experience and perceive balance in the context of heterosexual couples with dependent children, and how similar and dissimilar individual experiences and perceptions are according to one's gender beliefs. Potential questions for future research are as follows: 1) how do men and women in heterosexual couples experience and perceive balance in everyday life?, and 2) how does gender as a structure influence their perceptions and sense of balance? A better understanding of men's and women's balance perceptions, and the influence of gender on their perspectives, would add a wealth of insight on the occupational arrangement that enhances the health and well-being of both individuals and families.

2 Methods

The reviewed literature presented in the preceding chapter informed this research's inquiry into how men and women in dual-income couples with young children experience and perceive balance in everyday life. To address the inquiry, the study predominantly utilized a phenomenographic approach. Semi-structured individual interviews were conducted with 30 heterosexual parents (15 dual-income couples) who had at least one child under six years old. Two sets of data analysis were conducted. This chapter begins by presenting the specific objectives of the study, defining key terminologies (i.e., meaning and perception), and describing the philosophical positioning that guided the primary researcher's decision-making throughout the study. Second, it describes the philosophical and theoretical framework of phenomenography. Third, it outlines the research process and methods, which include sampling, data collection, and data analysis. The chapter concludes by detailing the strategies employed to ensure the study's trustworthiness and authenticity.

2.1 Research objectives

The primary purpose of this research is to better understand how male and female dual-income parents with at least one preschool-aged child experience and perceive balance in everyday life. The specific objectives are: 1) to describe the perceptions of balance as expressed by men and women as dual-income couples with children; 2) to describe from multiple perspectives (e.g., gender relations and family quality of life) the meanings they attribute to balance; and 3) to discuss implications for community support, including occupational therapy, social policy, and future research on balance.

2.2 Definitions of key terminologies

Meaning and perception are two of the key terminologies used in this research. Meaning is defined as "the idea that a word, expression, or sign represents," "the quality that makes life, work, etc., seem to have a purpose or value," or "the true nature and importance of something"

(Summers, 2003, p. 1021). Based on these definitions, meaning in this study primarily refers to: 1) the idea that a word, expression, or sign represents in terms of its focal features; and 2) the focal features that are valuable and significant to individuals, groups, or society.

Perception is defined similarly to meaning, but includes the feature of sensual processing that occurs in noticing an object. Perception refers to "the way you think about something and your idea of what it is like" (Summers, 2003, p. 1219). As such, perception and meaning both refer to an "idea" of something. However, perception is also defined as "the process or result of becoming aware of objects, relationships, and events by means of the senses, which includes such activities as recognizing, observing, and discriminating" in *APA Dictionary of Psychology* (VandenBos, 2007, p. 683). These definitions suggest that perception means the ideas about an object that an individual has gained and developed through their senses, and this is the meaning of perception utilized in this study. Because perception has a sensual component as well as a cognitive component, the subjective balance experienced by participants is expressed as "a feeling of balance" and "a sense of balance."

2.3   Philosophical positioning

Throughout this inquiry, the primary researcher aligns herself with the view of social constructionism and critical theory. Social constructionism assumes that the reality of everyday life is socially constructed (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). The reality is intersubjective, shared with others. Individuals experience human actions and activities as an objective reality that they then internalize, with socialization playing a significant role in the internalization process. By interacting with others, individuals develop knowledge and meanings that are common in the world and therefore come to constitute the 'reality.' When the values and meanings that the majority of people attribute to the actions and activities become crystallized in the consciousness of individuals, objective and subjective reality becomes symmetric. According to Burr (1998), social constructionists focus not on the objective reality (actions and activities) but on the different meanings with which it is endowed and which are shared in context.

Critical theories address issues associated with power relations in a society (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005), embracing an ontological assumption of historical realism as truth being shaped by social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic, and gender values (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). Social

factors are perceived as being the origin of norms, meanings, and knowledge, especially in regards to powerful, dominant groups in historical periods. As noted in the *Review of Literature* chapter, attention to gender values and power relations is critical to the research purpose explored in the present study.

The social constructionist and critical theorist perspectives view discourse (language) as central to any examination of social realities. Discourse is a means not only of transcending the objective and subjective realities of everyday life, but also of maintaining and modifying subjective reality (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). In this regard, the language that participants in this study used in describing what balance means and how they experience it contains and portrays both their objective and subjective realities in everyday life. In dialoguing with the primary researcher as an interviewer, participants concurrently presented and (re)constructed balance.

Discourse represents shared meanings and values that are socially, culturally, and historically produced and perpetuated by dominant groups (Gavey, 1997; Smith, 1990). This suggests that as long as reality is presented in text, language, or discourse, the reality can never be described as it is; it is always discursive—an account of that reality (Burr, 1998). Therefore, the participants' values and beliefs about balance, parenting, a couples' division of labour, and health—in short, the meanings of balance in their lives—are inherently articulated in their dialogue. The meanings conveyed by their discourses may be shared, negotiated, and modified among the specific population—heterosexual dual-income couples living with young children in a metropolitan area in Canada—at this particular historical moment. When collecting and interpreting data, the primary researcher has remained aware of the social, cultural, and historical influences on the participants' discourse.

A researcher's epistemological positions influence methodology, methods, and how research findings are presented, and the nature of the knowledge should be consistent with his/her position (Carter & Little, 2007). A conscious effort was made to employ the social constructionist and critical theorist approaches throughout this research such that they provided the foundation of the inquiry and guided the decisions made regarding data collection and analysis, the verification of transferability of the research findings, and the language used in disseminating the findings. It should be noted that due to different analytical approaches used in the study, the second findings and discussion chapter—*Constructions of Balance*—reflects the primary researcher's social constructionist and critical theorist positions to a greater degree than

the first findings and discussion chapter—*Conceptions of Balance*. That is, the philosophical underpinnings of the discourse analysis used in the *Constructions* chapter are firmly grounded in the social constructionist and critical approaches, while the phenomenographic approach more strongly informs the *Conceptions* chapter. The language used to present and discuss the findings is consistent with the respective analytical approaches used in these chapters.

2.4 Phenomenography

The philosophical and theoretical framework of the research design is predominantly informed by phenomenography, being concerned with individual conceptions of the world (Marton, 1981; Richardson, 1999). The word 'conception' refers to experiences and understandings of phenomena, which signify relationships between context, meaning, and perspective (Barnard, McCosker, & Gerber, 1999; Marton, 1981, 2000; Sandberg, 1997; Svensson, 1997; Säljö, 1997). As such, the construct of conception is similar to that of perception in that both are comprised of experiential (sensual) features and referential features or ideas. The construct of conception had been consistently criticized for its underdeveloped state until Marton and Pong (2005) presented it as "the basic unit of description" (p. 336) of a phenomenon that comprises two interweaving aspects: referential and structural. A referential aspect encapsulates a meaning that a person ascribes to a phenomenon, and a structural aspect indicates particular features of the phenomenon that are discerned and focused on in the meaning described.

Phenomenography is situated in a relational ontological paradigm (Bowden, 2005). By perceiving the world objectively and subjectively at the same time, phenomenography appreciates that there is one world, but how that world is experienced varies according to the individual (Barnard et al., 1999; Marton, 2000; Richardson, 1999). One's conceptions of a phenomenon are influenced by the relations between one's self and the phenomenon (Marton, 2000; Renström, 1988; Svensson, 1997). Säljö (1988) contends that conceptions are abstractions developed and expressed through discourse based on reality and that the abstractions can be different if the meanings one attributes to phenomena vary.

Phenomenographic research strives to qualitatively explore various ways in which individuals experience, conceptualize, perceive, and understand phenomena (Dunkin, 2000;

Marton, 1986, 1988a, 1988b; Säljö, 1988). The aim of this approach to research is to portray *how* phenomena appear to individuals rather than to describe what the phenomena are (Marton, 1988a). It should be noted that the primary goal of phenomenographic study is to better understand the range of conceptions concerning a phenomenon within a group of people under study rather than an individual within a group (Åkerlind, 2005b; Åkerlind, Bowden, & Green, 2005). In short, phenomenography aims to understand the reflective—not pre-reflexive experiences of a phenomenon—and to describe it through the voiced experiences and understandings of the group of interest (Barnard et al., 1999; Renström, 1988).

2.5   Research process and methods

The research process (Figure 1) includes a reflexive interview, sampling, recruitment, data collection, data analysis, verification of transferability, articulation of the findings, and dissemination. In this section, the process and participant inclusion and exclusion criteria are explained sequentially; the exceptions to this are the reflexive interview and the verification of transferability, which are described in the *Reflexivity* section.

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│   Ensuring Maximum Variation              │
│   ・ Ethnic background                     │
│   ・ Age and number of children            │
│   ・ Employment characteristics            │
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│   After interviews with 10 couples        │
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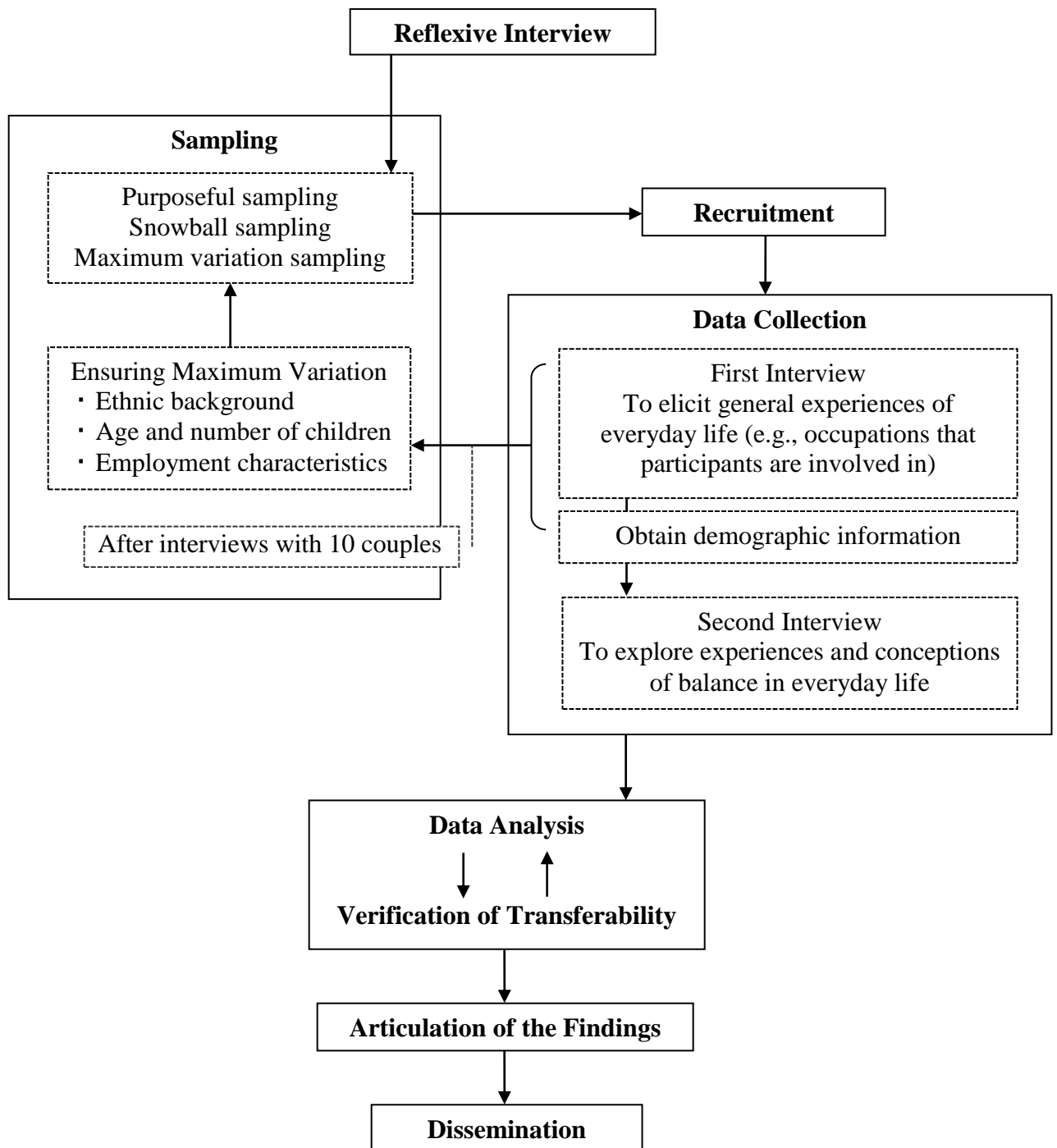
Figure 1. Research process.

2.5.1 Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Eligible participants for this study were heterosexual couples, both of whom were employed at the time of the interviews and living together in the selected metropolitan area with at least one preschool-aged child (< 6 years). The agreement to participate had to come from both partners. In order to explore how couples manage family demands and what power relations exist between partners, the study only recruited couples who lived together. The age of at least one child in a household was required to be under six on the assumption that young, dependent children are likely to require more intensive care than older children (Joshi, 1998); couples with a preschool-aged child might juggle particular, multiple daily occupations and have much insight to share on balance in life. Further, it is assumed that having proximal experience of caring for children and managing other life aspects would enable couples to relay experiences and conceptions of balance with greater clarity and comprehensiveness.

Exclusion criteria were: 1) lack of fluent English-speaking skills and 2) full-time live-in childcare providers other than parents, whether paid (e.g., nannies) or unpaid (e.g., grandparents). Participants had to have a primary responsibility for fulfilling family demands, particularly management of childcare, although they might use childcare resources, such as daycare, preschool, friends, or extended family members living separately from them.

2.5.2 Sampling

A sample size of 20 is considered adequate for a phenomenographic study to capture sufficient variation in conceptions of a phenomenon (Bowden, 2005; Trigwell, 2000). Purposeful, snowball, and maximum variation sampling was applied to identify suitable participants. For the purposes of the study, the purposeful sampling necessitated recruiting people with experience of balancing life. However, because using the terminology "balance" from the outset might increase the risk of shaping the participants' perceptions of daily life, the word was not used during the recruitment process. Instead, "managing everyday activities" was used for the recruitment and consent form. This phrase explains the nature of the study—a focus on understanding what occupations dual-income parents are involved in and how they manage their day-to-day occupations—and allows the experiences of balance to emerge naturally within the context of

participants' descriptions of experiences of everyday life, rather than leading or directing them to discuss balance at the outset.

Participants were invited to pass along the recruitment information to other potential participants (snowball sampling). By this procedure, the research information was delivered efficiently to the targeted population, as many parents belong to various communities (e.g., schools and children's sport teams).

Every effort was made to select participants with a varying range of backgrounds in order to increase the variation in conceptions of balance the study aimed to capture (i.e., maximum variation sampling) (Åkerlind, 2005a; Bowden, 2000b, 2005; Green, 2005; Maxwell, 2005). The recruitment poster was circulated widely in the metropolitan area to maximize a variation in participants' backgrounds, particularly their ethnic origin and paid work hours, and the number and age of children in a household. The characteristics of the participants were reviewed after the first interviews with 10 couples. Because there was little variation in those couples' ethnic origins and arrangements of paid work hours, an active search was begun for couples from un-represented ethnic groups (e.g., African, Asian) and/or with paid work arrangements whereby the husband worked significantly fewer hours than the wife. The sample size and time constraint for recruitment did not allow for multiple families with each and every characteristic listed here; rather, maximum variation was attempted to encourage careful consideration to recruiting families as diverse as possible to increase the relevance of research findings.

2.5.3 Participant recruitment

Recruitment notices were widely displayed in 114 public areas with community bulletin boards (e.g., community centres, childcare facilities, public libraries, and shopping malls) that might be accessed by parents of various ethnic origins and with children at different ages. With the permission and guidance of associations that provide services for families (e.g., public libraries and daycare services), the primary researcher gave 21 brief presentations on the research to potential participants and left the recruitment advertisement with them at 16 public areas. In addition, the faculty, staff, and students in the Rehabilitation Sciences programs at the University of British Columbia, and the primary researcher's friends were invited to circulate the recruitment notice.

2.5.4 Participant characteristics

Thirty individuals—15 heterosexual couples—were recruited in 2009−2010. Every couple had at least one preschool-aged child and lived in one of approximately 10 different neighbourhoods across two cities in the selected metropolitan area. Their characteristics are listed in Table 3. Most of the participants were in their 30s or 40s and were born in North America. All of the participants were employed, but one male participant was unemployed at the time of his second interview. More than 75% of the participants were working 30 hours a week or more at the time of the interviews. Those whose work hours were less than 30 hours a week were all female and accounted for approximately half of the women in the study. In two of the 14 couples, a wife was working eight or more hours a week more than her husband. In seven of the couples, a husband was working eight or more hours a week more than his wife. These last seven men do not include the unemployed husband, but he was working more than eight hours a week more than his wife when he participated in the first interview. Six participants were healthcare professionals, four were scientists, and another four worked in the information and media services industry. Two self-reported as business owners and seven were in a managerial or higher level position. Eighty percent of both men and women had bachelor or higher degrees. Regarding household income, 12 out of the 15 couples earned more than $75,000 a year; two couples declined to answer. In terms of the number of children in a household, four of the couples had three children, six had two children, and five had one child.

Table 3
Participant Characteristics

Characteristic		n	%	Female		Male	
				n	%	n	%
Age	30s	19	63	11	73	10	67
	40s	8	27	3	20	5	33
	Unknown	3	10	1	7	0	0
Place of birth[a]	North America	24	80	12	80	12	80
	Europe	4	13	2	13	2	13
	Asia	1	3	1	7	0	0
	Unknown	1	3	0	0	1	7
Paid work hours (per week)[a]	< 20	1	3	1	7	0	0
	20−29	6	20	6	40	0	0
	30−39	11	37	3	20	8	53
	40−49	7	23	4	27	3	20
	50−59	1	3	0	0	1	7
	60 ≤	2	7	0	0	2	13
	Unknown (30 <)	2	7	1	7	1	7
Types of careers/jobs[a]	Healthcare	6	20	4	27	2	13
	Scientific services	4	13	2	13	2	13
	Information/Media	4	13	2	13	2	13
	Administration	2	7	2	13	0	0
	Adverting/Marketing	2	7	2	13	0	0
	Construction/Property	2	7	1	7	1	7
	Engineering	2	7	0	0	2	13
	Retailing	2	7	0	0	2	13
	Other[b]	6	20	2	13	4	27
Education[a]	Graduate degree	11	37	6	40	5	33
	Bachelor degree	13	43	6	40	7	47
	College	1	3	0	0	1	7
	Other	2	7	1	7	1	7
	Unknown	3	10	2	13	1	7
Household income	$50,000−$74,999	1 couple					
	$75,000−$99,999	2 couples					
	$100,000−$149,999	8 couples					
	$150,000 ≤	2 couples					
	Unknown	2 couples					

Characteristic		n	%	Female		Male	
				n	%	n	%
Number and age of the children in a household	1 child	5 couples					
	2 children						
	2 under age 6	4 couples					
	1 under age 6	2 couples					
	3 children						
	3 under age 6	2 couples					
	2 under age 6	2 couples					

Note. [a]Percentages sum to 99% or 101% due to rounding. [b]Other includes six areas: education, transport, financial management, publishing, hospitality, and human resources and employment. Each has one participant.

2.5.5 Data collection

All participants completed the data collection process in 2009−2010. The primary method of data collection was semi-structured interviews. Open-ended questions are regarded as effective in phenomenographic study as they help a researcher gain valuable, abundant information on participants' experiences and ways of understanding the phenomenon under study (Barnard et al., 1999; Bowden, 2000b; Marton, 1986, 1988a), because they invite participants to talk freely about whatever comes to mind in response, as opposed to closed questions. Interviews were conducted individually in order to prevent one partner's conceptions from influencing the other's within a couple. In addition, individual interviews appeared to encourage participants to disclose their honest opinions and feelings without worrying about the presence of their partner in the conversation when exploring division of labour and shared responsibilities.

Guided by Åkerlind's (2005a) work, interview questions were developed and then reorganized, and modified as data collection unfolded (the final version is Appendix A). Inquiries were designed to: 1) understand the context in which participants experience everyday occupations and balance/imbalance; 2) explore the meanings that they attribute to their everyday occupations and ideal balance in life; and 3) obtain examples of a lifestyle that could potentially enhance their sense of balance. These questions were formulated for use in the first interviews.

Questions for the second interviews were further refined based on the information obtained from the first interviews.

Pre-proposal interviews were conducted with the primary researcher's fellow graduate student and her husband, who met the inclusion criteria of the research. The main purpose of conducting these interviews was to develop the primary researcher's interview skills in co-constructing with participants a shared comprehension of their experiences and understanding of balance in everyday life. Feedback on the interview questions and probes was provided by the couple. Based on their feedback, the questions were modified in a manner that would effectively delve into participants' day-to-day life context, experiences of everyday occupations, and balance.

Study participants were interviewed twice. The first interview was designed to elicit their general experiences of everyday life, including occupations that they were involved in, the meanings they attributed to their occupations, and the division of domestic occupations or responsibilities with their partners. The second interview was undertaken to further investigate the participants' experiences of life, clarify things that the participants talked about in their first interviews, and explore participants' experiences and conceptions of balance in everyday life. Most of the participants were interviewed for the second time approximately one month after their first interview; two and a half months was the longest time between the two interviews.

The term "balance" was not introduced to the participants in the first interviews because it might have shaped their perceptions of their lives. Instead, the primary researcher allowed the term to emerge naturally in their first person accounts of their daily lives. However, if they mentioned the term, they were asked to talk more about it without concern about using the term. Half of them used the word "balance" to describe one or more life experiences in their first interviews or early in their second interviews. For the majority of those who did not use the word, balance was inquired of only in the second interview. The typical questions about balance were:

1) When people say balance, what comes to mind?

2) Have you ever thought about balance in your life? If so, tell me more about these thoughts?

3) Have you experienced a sense of balance or being out of balance? If so, can you tell me more about your experience of balance or imbalance?

4) How important, or unimportant, is balance in your life, and why?

Interviews focused more on exploring the experiences of the participants than asking "what balance is" because such a question might risk leading participants to theorize about ideals, thus decreasing the variation in conceptions of balance (Bowden, 2005; Larsson & Holmström, 2007). Further, describing personal experience might be less threatening to participants (than posing 'philosophical' questions) and would encourage deeper insight into the relationship between participants and the phenomenon than conceptualizing balance (Bowden, 2005).

Each interview lasted approximately 60 minutes and was held in the participant's home or workplace, in a seminar room of the UBC Department of Occupational Science and Occupational Therapy, or at a quiet public place. Each interview concluded when: 1) questions in the interview guide that were relevant to each participant had been asked; and 2) alternative questions arising from participants' responses had been discussed. Another signal to complete the interview was when participants expressed that they had nothing further to add. All the interviews were audio-taped with the written consent of the participants (Appendix B).

Power relations between an interviewee and an interviewer often exist in various forms and degree (Nunkoosing, 2005), so every effort was made to equalize that potential power differential by creating a relaxing, comfortable atmosphere and developing conversational interviews. When participants were interviewed at their homes or workplaces, it appeared to help them relax and to feel in more control of the interview situation. Nevertheless, power relations might still have influenced the information obtained from participants, and therefore a reflexive journal was kept for documentation. In the data analysis stage, the potential impact of power relations was assessed using the journal for reference.

At the end of the first interview, participants were asked to fill out a demographic information sheet to aid in describing the sample and participants' sociodemographic backgrounds.

2.5.6 Data analysis

Audio-taped interviews were transcribed verbatim. The first 10 interviews were transcribed by the primary researcher, and professional transcribers were hired to process the rest of the interviews after signing a non-disclosure agreement. The transcripts were compared with the audio-taped interviews to check that they were accurate. Any identifiable information,

including the names of participants and their family members and employers, was replaced with pseudonyms. Transcripts were labelled with ID numbers and pseudonyms. The data analysis had two phases, with different methods used for each phase. A phenomenographic approach was the predominant method in the first phase, which aimed to develop and describe various conceptions of balance. The second phase was informed by discourse analysis, which helped to identify the ideological subject positions that were embedded in the constructions of balance and determine how the positions permitted, promoted, and hindered participants' involvement in occupations.

2.5.6.1 Phenomenographic approach

While the data analysis was primarily informed by a phenomenographic approach, the phenomenological psychological procedure, guided by the work of A. P. Giorgi and B. M. Giorgi (A. P. Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003; A. P. Giorgi, 1989, 1997) was applied at the beginning of analysis. The primary purpose of using this method is to divide a substantial amount of data into manageable chunks, which enables a more thorough analysis (A. P. Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003). The procedure started with an exhaustive reading of the transcripts in order to acquire a sense of a holistic understanding of participants' experiences of everyday life. A set of two whole transcripts for a participant was then broken into meaning units. Each meaning unit consisted of a single meaning. As mentioned previously, meaning refers to 1) the idea that a word, expression, or sign represents in terms of its focal features; and 2) the focal features that are valuable and significant to individuals, groups, or society. Accordingly, each unit contained an idea that a participant presented about balance, or an occupation or role that a participant engaged in, or a significant experiential aspect of having balance in life, participating in an occupation, or undertaking a role. Some meaning units contained only contextual information.

After breaking the two interview transcripts from each participant into meaning units, the meaning units that addressed balance from that participant's perspective were identified. The meaning units contained: 1) descriptions of balance or imbalance; 2) descriptions of the situations that led participants to feel balanced or imbalanced; 3) physical, affective, and cognitive experiences of balance or imbalance; 4) reflections on why the situations led them to a sense of balance or imbalance, or; 5) other ideas about balance or imbalance (e.g., to what extent participants thought it significant to pursue balance in life). The meaning units on balance were selected from a holistic stance; that is, the meaning units that contained contextual information

were retained to assist in gaining a better understanding of a participant's experiences and conceptions of balance.

Next, participants' descriptions and experiences of balance/imbalance contained in those meaning units were described in a way that would capture a comprehensive picture of the essential meanings of balance from participants' perspective. Two techniques were employed in this process: free imaginative variation and hermeneutical circle. Free imaginative variation, developed by Edmond Husserl, helps a researcher discover and encapsulate the meanings that a participant lives and that highlight the essential feature of the phenomenon under study (A. P. Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003). The essential feature refers to "the most invariant meaning for a context. It is the articulation, based on intuition, of a fundamental meaning without which a phenomenon could not present itself as it is" (A. P. Giorgi, 1997, Philosophical Method, para. 10). The essential feature of balance in everyday life was not always explicit in participants' accounts; the descriptive process rendered the essential meanings precisely and explicitly. To sustain the nuances of the essential meanings in participants' descriptions of balance, as much as possible of their original language was kept in the description of the meanings.

Attention was paid not only to what a participant meant within each meaning unit but also what his or her whole transcripts conveyed in terms of the meanings of balance/imbalance, to better understand the implicit meaning expressed by the participant. This interaction between the meanings of the parts and the whole in understanding a text refers to hermeneutical circle. According to Kvale (1996), "the understanding of a text takes place through a process in which the meaning of the separate parts is determined by the global meaning of the text" (p. 47). The description of meaning in each meaning unit represents a conception of balance or imbalance. Once all the balance conceptions had been identified in a participant's transcripts, they were categorized. This process was completed for 30 participants.

The phenomenological approach (A. P. Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003; A. P. Giorgi, 1989, 1997) complemented the phenomenographic analysis because it strategically guided the exploration of the essential meanings of balance. The phenomenological and phenomenographic approaches seek to identify the essential meanings of a phenomenon contextually rather than universally. The two approaches differ in that phenomenography actively searches for different meanings. It assumes that essential meanings of balance presented to individuals—their experiences of it— vary because the relationship between individuals and balance differ. Individuals recognize only the essential features that are relevant and specific to that relationship (Marton, 1988a), but the

essential meanings presented by individuals are considered to have logical, internal connections (Barnard et al., 1999). When essential meanings are assimilated, they therefore capture a complete picture of a phenomenon—in this case, balance. Although A. P. Giorgi and B. M. Giorgi (A. P. Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003; A. P. Giorgi, 1989, 1997) acknowledge that essential meanings differ according to context, they appear to give little consideration to the fact that an individual's daily life takes places in multiple contexts, which leads individuals to have multiple essential meanings of balance. As explained below, phenomenographic analysis enabled the primary researcher to actively search for various essential meanings of balance and inclusively map them out.

The next level of analysis applied the phenomenographic approach. Outcomes of phenomenographic analysis are represented in two forms: a set of categories of description and structural relations of the categories (Åkerlind, 2005b; Larsson & Holmström, 2007; Marton, 1986). A category of description represents the key features that encapsulate each conception of balance in everyday life (Dall'Alba, 2000; Marton, Dall'Alba, & Beaty, 1993). The structural relations of the categories represent the logical relationships among salient features of balance conceptions across participants (Trigwell, 2000).

This phenomenographic approach comprised five stages. The first stage was to compare and contrast 10 participants' conceptions of balance and indicate similarities and differences. In the second stage, the same 10 participants' conceptions of balance were sorted based on the degree of their variations. In the process, the participants' transcripts were reread when it was necessary for indicating and ensuring nuances of the balance conceptions. By means of this comparison and contrast, a key feature of balance embedded in each conception was refined in a way that signified its implications for unique experiences and understanding of balance (Åkerlind, 2005a; Bowden, 2000a; Dall'Alba, 2000).

The third stage was to describe each category of balance conceptions. In describing categories, it was ensured that the meanings of balance were holistically understood and captured (Bowden, 2005). In interpreting conceptions of balance, particularly in the second and third stages, a conscious effort was made to be open to alternative interpretations of the meanings of balance (Åkerlind, 2005a). The primary researcher took significant responsibility for developing a draft set of categories of description to increase consistency in the way the meanings of balance were interpreted. This consistency in turn enhanced the rigour of the analysis (Bowden, 2000a, 2005; Dall'Alba, 2000).

In the fourth stage, another 10 participants' balance conceptions were incorporated and assimilated, with the aim of actively searching additional categories. The categories were compared and contrasted with each other to clarify distinctions among key features that signify each category. This stage was repeated, incorporating the last 10 participants' balance conceptions and refining the categories as appropriate. At this point, the primary researcher frequently went back and reread transcripts and adjusted categories until a reasonably stable set of categories encompassing all possible balance conceptions was constructed (Åkerlind, 2005b). In addition to the set of the categories of description, the structural relations among the categories were developed.

The fifth stage was peer debriefing. As the data analysis unfolded, some participants' balance conceptions were presented and discussed with the primary researcher's thesis supervisor, Dr. Catherine Backman and some fellow graduate students. In addition, the preliminary set of categories of description and the structural relations were discussed with the primary researcher's thesis committee. The committee critically analyzed and challenged the interpretation and categorization of the data, description of the categories, and relationships between the categories (Bowden, 2000a, 2005; Green, 2005). Based on the feedback from the supervisor, committee, and students, the categories of description and structural relations of the categories were modified. In July 2011, the summary of preliminary analysis and the questionnaires were sent to all participants, and three volunteer couples who were eligible but not interviewed, to obtain feedback on the primary researcher's interpretation of the interview data (verification of transferability) (Appendix C). Seven participants and one volunteer returned the questionnaires, and three other participants provided general feedback. All the feedback was used to refine the depiction of conceptions and their relationships to each other.

The analytic process was complete when no new meanings and perspectives of balance emerged and all categories were explicitly differentiated from each other (Åkerlind et al., 2005). Each category was then appropriately labelled (Bowden, 2005).

2.5.6.2 Discourse analysis

Ian Parker's (1992) framework on critical discourse analysis was applied in the comparison and contrast of men's and women's balance conceptions.

2.5.6.2.1 Philosophical underpinning

Parker (1992) depicted discourse as a simultaneous representation and construction of reality. The reality that discourse objectifies is composed of two layers. The first layer—representation—of reality is the object that the discourse refers to (balance in everyday life in this research); the second layer is the construction by discourse itself (Parker, 1992). From this perspective, the conceptions of balance that were identified using the phenomenographic approach can be considered as comprising a layer that signifies the object balance and a constructed layer given by discourse.

Discourse can describe and construct a single phenomenon in numerous ways (Parker, 1992; Potter & Wetherell, 1987). Variation in the construction of a phenomenon derives from a diversity of established linguistic resources from which an individual actively selects according to his or her interests (Potter & Wetherell, 1995). In this regard, language contributes significantly to constructing the second layer of the reality objectified by discourse. Potter and Wetherell (1995) asserted that people adjust their discourse coherently to social norms and moral expectations in context and to the actions that they intend to perform with the discourse.

The notion that discourse is a means to effect actions and outcomes evolved from linguistic philosophy (see, for example, Wittgenstein, 1967) and other related theories, including speech act theory (Potter, Wetherell, Gill, & Edwards, 1990). John Austin (1962)—one of the scholars who developed speech act theory—indicated that there are at least two types of utterances: "constative" (p. 3) and "performative" (p. 6). A constative utterance (sentence) states, describes, or reports a fact or affairs, which are often characterized as being true or false. A performative utterance is in and of itself part of an action—"to *say* something is to *do* something…*by* saying or *in* saying something we are doing something" (Austin, 1962, p. 12). For example, "I give and bequeath my watch" (p. 5) signifies the actions that I am taking—that is, giving and bequeathing—while it performs those actions (Austin, 1962). Austin acknowledged that the same sentence can be used as both constative and performative, depending on the context, and indicated that using language can perform three types of actions: uttering sense and reference, conveying some force (e.g., informing, warning), and achieving certain effects on feelings, thoughts, or actions of a speaker or others (e.g., persuading, surprising). Austin's theory was criticized as being too philosophical to apply to ordinary talk in an authentic context in which people do not necessarily make their actions explicit, but his theory

increased the notion that discourse is action oriented (Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Potter et al., 1990). The notion of an action-oriented discourse suggests that the discourse of balance constructed by the participants in this current study not only references balance from their point of view, but also conveys actions. An example of this is a participant persuading the interviewer of what balance means and/or justifying the meanings of balance compatible with his or her circumstances.

Potter and Wetherell (1995) identified two foci of discourse analysis: "discourse practices" and "resources" (p. 81). Discourse practice (discursive practice) refers to the performative nature of text regardless of whether it is written or spoken—that is, what people do with their text. People use resources (discursive resources) to navigate the discursive practices. Potter and Wetherell identified interpretative repertoires as a resource and explained them as:

> [D]iscernible clusters of terms, descriptions and figures of speech often assembled around metaphors or vivid images. In more structuralist language we can talk of these things as systems of signification and as the building-blocks used for manufacturing versions of actions, self and social structures in talk. (p. 89)

Exploring interpretive repertoires means understanding the content of discourse—balance in everyday life, in the present research—and how the content is organized, as it signifies the versions of reality (balance in everyday life) that participants constructed and that are foundations for their social actions (discursive practices) (Potter et al., 1990; Potter & Wetherell, 1995).

The notion of there being discursive construction of an object questions a single, definite, true nature of the self (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). Each discursive repertoire (construction) is formulated differently, involving different features of an object which manifest a corresponding perspective or identity of the repertoire (Potter & Wetherell, 1995). Each feature and its corresponding perspective or identity is specific to a single repertoire and hence discrete from other repertoires of an object. The perspective or identity embedded in a repertoire is considered to represent a speaker's "position" (Harré & Gillett, 1994, p. 34) or location (Parker, 1992). Parker (1992) indicated that "a subject, a sense of self, is a location constructed within the expressive sphere which finds its voice through the cluster of attributes and responsibilities assigned to it as a variety of object" (p. 9). Harré and Gillett (1994) likewise contended that the things people choose to say are consistent with their positions on what constitutes their rights and obligations.

A subject position or location involved and represented in a single version of a discursive repertoire is interwoven with social actions. There are multiple ways in which balance in everyday life is constructed in discourses, each of which contains or presents a subject position within it, and the subject position within each version of discursive construction constrains or permits opportunities for actions (Parker, 1992). Thus, balance in everyday life is formulated and constructed in discourse and each version of construction as a discursive repertoire informs people's social actions of balance. Conversely, one's social actions and practices may hinder or facilitate one's internal access to discursive resources and subject positions (Willig, 2000). This suggests that how people currently balance their daily lives and how they engage in occupations in relation to balance may affect the way in which they construct balance. Willig (2001) depicted the logical relationship between discourses (speaking) and practice (doing) that occurs in the discursive construction of subjects and objects thusly: "certain practices become legitimate forms of behaviour from within particular discourses. Such practices, in turn, reproduce the discourses which legitimate them" (p. 111).

Various discursive constructions of an object indicate multiple positions which may contradict or conflict with each other. Parker (1992) explained that various discursive constructions of an object may contradict each other and that, if presented with such a conflict, researchers must understand the interrelationship between discourses. Potter and Wetherell (1995) indicated that the contradiction or tension between different discursive constructions reflects ideological dilemmas that derive from respective subject positions. Thus, a subject position involved in a single version of construction of balance is based on specific ideologies that may contradict the ideologies associated with another position embedded in a different version of the construction. Billig et al. (1988) pointed to the supposition that social knowledge, including common sense, contains contrary ideological themes, which in turn enable argumentation and deliberation. In argumentation, speakers often recall and reproduce conflicting conceptions rooted in common sense by comparing them and trying to make them appear convincing, in order to highlight a standpoint (Billig, 1991). Ideological dilemma arises when it is challenging for people to estimate and evaluate potential profits and losses from choosing one ideology over another (Billig et al., 1988). Accordingly, it is likely that people will have a dilemma if they have difficulty choosing one position associated with particular ideologies over another position(s) because the balance of potential gains and losses seems to be equal, regardless of the positions.

2.5.6.2.2 Analytical method

The primary goal of using Parker's (1992) discourse analysis was to better understand the meanings that men and women attribute to two constructions of balance in life: managing life and participating in a mix of occupations. Drawing from Parker's framework, the following analytical questions were developed to indicate: 1) subject positions contained in those two discursive constructions; 2) occupations that the discursive constructions and the subject positions contained within them permit or constrain; and 3) tensions or contradictions that arise between the constructions.

1) What types of person/self (subject) appear to talk about each version of the discourses?
   What ideologies may be associated with the respective subject positions?
2) What occupations does the discourse constrain the subject from participating in or permit them to engage in?
3) Do those two discourses contradict each other? If so, in what way? Do the contradictions relate to the ideologies embedded in the discourses?

In summary, the discourse analysis was informed by the philosophical foundation that theorizes discourse as the representation and construction of reality—balance in everyday life. This underpinning allowed shifting the primary researcher's perception from two conceptions of balance, which the phenomenographic approach had identified, to two versions of discourses that the participants constructed. The construction of balance comprises, in and of itself, social actions by which participants attempt to reinforce or modify a conceptualization of balance, for example, or may use to justify their daily lives in relation to balance. Parker's (1992) framework of discourse helped identify a subject position and related ideologies involved in each version of the discourses of balance—managing life and participating in a mix of occupations. It was then incumbent upon the researcher to ask: Does each version of the discursive constructions limit, hinder, or facilitate parents' occupational engagement in the course of accomplishing balance in the constructed way?; How is their occupational participation affected? Further examination followed of whether there was tension or contradiction between the two versions of discursive constructions and, if so, where the tensions or contradictions arose, and whether they sprang from ideologies imbedded in the constructions. This procedure was applied to the male and

female participants' data separately and the findings were then severally compared and contrasted.

2.6 Reflexivity

Reflexivity refers to the process of a researcher's critical self-reflection, which is "the conscious experiencing of the self as both inquirer and respondent…as the one coming to know the self within the processes of research itself" (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). While researchers need to make every effort to avoid the impact of their presuppositions on data obtained and interpretations of it (Bowden, 2005), it is often difficult for researchers to entirely bracket out their presuppositions (Dunkin, 2000). Thus, this research employed both a reflexive interview and reflexive journaling.

Dr. Wolff-Michael Roth, a member of the primary researcher's thesis committee, conducted a reflexive interview with her before the data collection began. The interview was analyzed to increase her awareness of any internally-held values, beliefs, presuppositions, and preconceptions that might possibly influence the study (Pollio, Henley, & Thompson, 1997). A conscious effort was made to prevent these perceptions, preconceptions, and values of balance from limiting the way in which meanings that participants presented were interpreted in her favour during the interviewing and data analysis processes.

Throughout the research process, the primary researcher's reflexive journal documented ongoing interviews, power relations between her and the interviewees, implications of the research methods, and potential theories underlying research findings (Laliberte-Rudman & Moll, 2001). During the data analysis stage, the journal was reviewed to reflect on the impact of power relations on the information obtained. To reinforce transparency and rigour, any power relations that may have influenced the outcomes of the study were documented.

2.7 Trustworthiness and authenticity

Guba and Lincoln (1989) outline four criteria of trustworthiness pertaining to qualitative research: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility is enhanced in

the research by peer debriefing, reflexivity, progressive subjectivity, and verification of transferability. Peer debriefing was conducted at the phenomenographic analysis in stage five, ensuring the logical interpretations and categorizations of the balance conceptions in the social and cultural context of the metropolitan area. The factors that might have affected the research outcomes were reflected upon and documented, which increased the transparency of the study and hence the credibility. The primary researcher's progressive subjectivity (the increasing knowledge on the research topic) was monitored and assessed by her thesis supervisor in regular meetings.

The verification of transferability was enhanced by consultation between the primary researcher and several participants, and a volunteer from the study population after the preliminary analysis. Åkerlind (2005b) suggests recruiting non-participants for the verification process because participants might not fully understand interpretation and categories, given that the research outcomes capture the collective conception of the group of participants, and not each participant's conception. In addition, the way in which participants experience balance at the time of the verification may not be the same as when they were interviewed (Åkerlind et al., 2005). The verification process was described in the *Phenomenographic Approach* section above. Furthermore, the findings chapter below present thick descriptions of the data, which encapsulates findings in a manner that enables readers to understand the answers to the research inquiry and enhances the transferability of the study outcomes (Guba & Lincoln, 1989).

Dependability was augmented by changes to the recruitment procedure, interview questions, and methods of data analysis that were made in response to issues and challenges that arose in the process of conducting the study. Such adjustments are considered to be hallmarks of maturity and efficacy in the construction of qualitative research. As such, they increase dependability (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). The thesis committee members were consulted about all modifications to the methods. Further, the issues and factors that led to the changes, and justifications and rationale for the changes, were tracked (an audit trail) and made transparent in the research report shared with the committee.

Confirmability affirms that study outcomes are the direct result of the data sources and that the logic used for interpreting the data emerges from the data itself (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). An effort was made to explain the themes in response to the research inquiry by providing excerpts from the interview transcripts. This demonstrates that the development of the themes was based on the data and the primary researcher's interpretation of it.

Fairness is critical to the authenticity of a study (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). A commitment was made to remain open to exploring what the participants had to say, rather than imposing prepared questions on them during interviews. This openness helped actively seek out the different values and perceptions existing between the participants and the primary researcher during the interviews, as well as the verification of the transferability process. Further, the primary researcher made an effort to establish and maintain a collaborative relationship with the participants by listening to them, expressing her curiosity about their experiences and perceptions, and respecting their conceptions. This prompted the participants to actively engage in conversations about balance in everyday life with the primary researcher.

3 Findings and Discussion I: Conceptions of Balance

This chapter illuminates the overall findings regarding the conceptions of balance that were generated from the 30 participants' accounts of balance in everyday life. As mentioned in the *Methods* chapter, the intent of the first interviews was to broadly explore the participants' contexts and experiences of daily life without overtly asking about balance. Later, the follow-up interviews exclusively focused on exploring the participants' experiences of balance. Notations following interview excerpts quoted in this chapter specify the first or second interview and location of meanings unit(s) that involve an excerpt (e.g., 1-22 refers to first interview, a meaning unit starting line 22; 2-192, 199 refers to the second interview, meanings units starting line 192 and 199). The analysis was primarily informed by a phenomenographic approach and generated two conceptions of balance from a needs-based perspective: *collective* needs and *individual* needs. The conception of balance as managing life is a reflection of participants' concerns about meeting collective needs, whereas their conception of balance as participating in a mix of occupations focuses on their individual needs. After presenting the overall findings, the main and sub-categories of the two conceptions are summarized in Table 4 and a discussion of the findings follows.

3.1 Findings

3.1.1 Balance as managing life

When the concept of balance was presented as being about managing life, participants often interpreted it as achieving the collective happiness of the groups to which they belonged because managing means meeting the needs of the groups. Approximately two thirds of the participants indicated that managing life was the core feature of living in balance. Steve depicted balance as "just managing your workload, your family life, and your social life and making sure you're happy, and your family's happy, and your boss is happy" (2-1). In Steve's case, balance meant juggling his paid, family, and social occupations in a way that optimized the happiness of his boss, his family, and himself. To achieve this balance, he must fulfill the expectations and

standards of both his father/husband role and paid worker role. Although a few parents were like Steve in that they perceived balance as managing personal life as well as paid work and family lives, many of the participants focused on fulfilling paid work demands in a manner that allowed them to have a satisfying family life. For example, Kevin was grateful that his situation allowed him to manage his employment and his family life:

> What I find I'm really fortunate about is I can do this job and have pretty good balance. Like sometimes if you have an executive job, it's all-consuming, and there's travel, and the expectation is you're there for long hours, way longer hours than I put in. And lots of evening things, and evening events, and this job isn't. I'm able to manage it so it doesn't have that. So I recognize that I'm in a pretty good situation to be able to have both those things [job and family] and not have to sacrifice them, sacrifice one or the other…. Like it helps that my wife works three days a week and works just 8 hours a day…like she's therefore able to give more to the family at home, and that makes it a lot easier. (1-478, 484)

For Kevin, "pretty good balance" meant that his paid work expectations did not include evening and weekend duties, allowing him to spend time with his family. In terms of family occupations, he acknowledged that his wife had more responsibility for managing family life than he did and that being able to depend on her for that allowed him to better manage his part of family life. Therefore, while balance to Kevin, meant competently managing both areas of life, he devoted significantly more time to managing paid work than family life, and he was therefore successful in managing both life areas because he had a wife who undertook the majority of hands-on, day-to-day family occupations on his behalf. The occupational division between Kevin and his wife helped him to achieve balance in managing life, which suggests that it may be more challenging for him to simultaneously manage both paid and family occupations on his own. Brian's passage below implies that the demands of paid work and home life compete for his time and attention. He depicted balance as:

> Balance is like, you know, a homeostasis of it, like, everything is just even.... Everything is being taken care of and you know, there's no one thing demanding more than the other, right? And I can pick and choose where I want to go, where I'm not pulled to one side or the other.... Well for me that would be what balance is...when it's ultimately in my control what I want to do. (2-168, 172, 180)

For Brian, too many demands in one occupation (paid work or family) could constrain his efforts to deal with the other, which resulted in imbalance. Several other participants also perceived balance as managing the needs and maintaining control of both employment and family life. However, Nicola's perception was different in that even though the demands of both her paid

work and home life were described as overwhelming, she still saw things as being in balance because neither of them spilled over to the other.

> When was the last time that I felt in balance? I don't know. I mean…I have lists, pages long, of things I have to do at work. And I have lists, pages long, of things I need to do at home. There's no…I don't know. Everything's overwhelming. You know what I mean? It's very negative, isn't it? But, I don't know, I don't know…. I guess everything's in balance in that there's a lot to do in everything… in terms of work and home life. But I mean both are pretty high. They're balanced in their craziness. They're balanced in that they're both crazy. You know? Neither are like low expectations, both are high expectations. (2-635, 642)

Nicola perceived balance similarly to Brian in that it was important to her to not have the demands of one occupation pull her away from the other occupation. However, Nicola felt balanced because she felt she did not let one occupation negatively affect the other even though she was unable to completely manage both, whereas Brian indicated "everything is being taken care of" as the condition of balance.

Participants referred to three areas of life—family life, paid work, and other aspects of life—as being important to manage for their sense of balance. In the sections that follow, the three sub-categories of managing family life, paid work life, and other aspects of life are described first, and then four sub-categories that support managing these three life areas are presented: getting things done; negotiating personal needs and desires; reconciling demands with resources; and sharing responsibilities and opportunities.

3.1.1.1 Managing family life

Many parents recounted experiences of imbalance resulting from not fulfilling the needs of home life. The needs that participants identified as being important to fulfill for their subjective balance included: meeting basic needs (e.g., diet and sleep); having time with family as a whole; bringing in household income; looking after children; completing household tasks; socializing with neighbours and other families; and maintaining a good marital relationship. Sally provided an example of her imbalanced situation in relation to managing household tasks:

> I guess I feel sort of the impact of a lack of balance, or…when...all our needs are not really being met. I definitely sort of feel acutely kind of, I don't think in my head, like our life isn't balanced or it's out of balance, but I just think, like, oh my god, like nothing, we're not doing, we haven't paid our bills this month and the car is not working and no one's taking it to—it like definitely feels sort of, if it's getting really out of balance, our

needs aren't being, things aren't getting done and whatever. I definitely feel, I can feel very out of balance. (2-458)

While Sally felt imbalanced when household tasks did not get done, for other participants, preserving family time was absolutely critical for their sense of balance. For example, Brian described an imbalanced situation:

I feel out of balance when you know, it's family time...where I want to be with my kids, like say in the evening or something, right? And we're there and we're having dinner or watching a movie or something like that. And then I'll get a phone call, or I'll have to go deal with something at work. That's definitely an out of balance thing for me, right? When that happens too much and I'm losing that time, everything becomes unbalanced. (2-276)

In other words, Brian felt imbalanced when unexpected demands from his paid work disrupted family time; the more often such disruptions occurred, the more imbalanced he felt. Participants indicated that the needs of paid work disrupted family time more often than family needs compromised paid work time. As the excerpts above illustrate, managing family life to one's satisfaction contributes to a sense of balance. As such, the degree to which parents could effectively manage all aspects of family life plays a role in their experiences of balance. Further, their perceptions of family responsibility were also associated with their subjective sense of balance. In general, the four factors considered paramount to managing family life were: perceived responsibility; managing effectively; ensuring quality time; and meeting the collective needs of the family. Each is explained below.

3.1.1.1.1 Perceived responsibility

The level of family responsibility assumed by participants depended primarily on their paid work schedules and flexibility, and the employment status of their spouses. Gustave noted that his share of household and childcare responsibility changed depending on his and his wife's employment status. His wife was working part-time at the time of his interviews, and his perception of his family obligation was limited to fulfilling what he understood as "[his] share." In Gustave's own words: "Balance? Well, to me that means doing my share in terms of caregiving for the kids, and cleaning and cooking, 'cause that to me is very much a shared responsibility, all of those things" (2-53). He identified the following tasks as his weekly responsibility: cooking dinner and breakfast at least once, taking his children to school a couple of times, putting them to bed regularly, and helping his wife with cleaning and gardening. As

mentioned previously, Kevin likewise felt that the majority of his family's needs were met because his wife was able to dedicate more time to household chores than him. Both Gustave and Kevin perceived their role in managing their families' day-to-day needs as being secondary to that of their wives. Just helping out with household tasks and childcare in the evenings and on weekends and fulfilling their obligations to family enabled them to attain a feeling of balance.

In contrast, a couple of mothers perceived their family responsibility as bigger than merely their share of the parental and household tasks. Ellen noted that society expects women to take primary responsibility for the family and household, and that a messy house was therefore often attributed to irresponsibility. Similarly, despite working full-time, Vicky believed that she must take full charge of any work inside the house, particularly parenting:

> Vicky: I am not a very good mom if I compare to others.
>
> Interviewer: Other moms?
>
> Vicky: Yeah other moms…if you want to be a good mom, it has to be 100% on childcare. So I mean you still work but for childcare you still put in 100%. (2-706, 726)

Although Vicky acknowledged that her husband's involvement in domestic occupations was crucial to her sense of balance—being able to fulfill the needs of her employment and family life—her high expectations of herself as a mother left her feeling dissatisfied with what she perceived to be her lack of dedication to childcare.

3.1.1.1.2 Managing effectively

The extent to which participants felt that they effectively managed paid work and family life affected their feelings of balance or imbalance. A few mothers described their perceived imbalanced situation by referring to their experiences as being in survival mode. Pauline recounted her experiences of imbalance while her husband was away:

> After a few nights at home on my own with the kids, I get a bit panicky.... Like it seems silly 'cause life is not that difficult, but it's, I find it quite hard to be the only parent in the house you know for several nights and...I would sort of describe it as survival mode where I felt like I'm just trying to get through it, get through it, keep everyone safe and get to work.... And it's not very nice, it's not very pleasant and I don't enjoy it.... That feels out of balance. I guess it feels like the responsibilities are too great on me. (2-577)

The responsibilities Pauline had to handle exceeded her capacity for solo-parenting, and she just got through each moment in order to survive, meeting only the bare minimum of family and paid work demands. This was inadequate for her sense of balance, which she only experienced when

all the family's needs were met, her paid work was under control, and she was in a pleasant mood:

> Actually last night...we got home from the party and I came into the house, and our nanny had cleaned and tidied up...and the kids were sleeping peacefully and we had just been out having a fun night and I thought this is so lovely, and the weekend is ahead of us and I don't have any work on my plate. And that felt like a balance, that felt really, really nice. (2-568)

Several participants agreed that balance was a feeling of satisfaction at how well they managed everyday life.

3.1.1.1.3 Ensuring quality time with family

In addition to the quantity of time allocated to occupations, quality of time was a crucial feature of perceived balance among parents. The main attributes of 'quality' time were being fully involved with family members and not feeling hurried. David reflected, "If you have a balance of things, then you don't feel like you're hurrying through things" (2-503). His experience of feeling rushed during his family's evening routine exemplified low-quality time:

> You come home and you make dinner and you, you know, you do the bedtime routine and you get everyone ready for bed.... You get to the end of it and you don't even really feel like you spent any time with your family, you know, you just kind of were moving through all the steps because it's you know, just, what you have to do. (2-505)

David's account highlighted the dilemma inherent in choosing between executing the evening routine and fully engaging with his family. On the one hand, routine helped him and his family to smoothly complete tasks that needed to be done before bedtime. But on the other hand, the rigid, time-oriented structure of routine did not allow him the flexibility to organically interact with his family. Raymond depicted quality as "intensity":

> I'd say like something very active, like reading to my son or playing with him at the park would be an intense family time but just kind of hanging around the house while he's playing or something would be family time but at a lower quality, so I think there's, intensity also plays a role. (2-534)

Raymond's comparison of "an intense family time" to "just hanging around" suggested that simply being with his child physically would not constitute high quality time. Intensity of, or quality of, family time appeared to depend on the extent of active, direct engagement with family members. For parents with toddlers and older children in particular, quality time referred to activities beyond basic childcare, such as teaching the children and facilitating their development. Jessica explained that as her children got older, she felt her life was more balanced because she

spent more time on activities that involved verbal interaction and learning (e.g., reading, playing a game, helping with homework) rather than on care-giving activities (e.g., bathing).

3.1.1.1.4 Meeting the collective needs of family

In family life, fulfilling the needs of the family as a whole was a critical feature of balance. Ian described the way in which he organizes the weekend:

> We look at what we have to do you know whether it's grocery shopping or errands or whatever, you know if there's something that we need to do together or I need to do that that has priority…and then…sometimes it's making sure we can do something as a family, whether it's swimming, or sometimes it's, the priority is to stay home and do nothing because it's been such a busy week. So um we try and make sure we have balance where these guys [children] have a chance to go out and get their ya-yas out, so that they can go run around, whether it's to go to the park or go to the pool or go play with their friends or something, so they're, they're not cooped up. Because if they're cooped up, then they go batty and then it's more stress in the house. …that's a high priority up there with all the errands that we have to run. (2-679)

Ian took into account his wife's, children's, and his own needs, then negotiated and prioritized them to organize weekend activities for the sake of the greater good of the family as a whole. At the end of the above excerpt, Ian indicated that neglecting his children's need for an outing would result in more hassle at home and thus diminish the quality of his family life. This quest to satisfy the greater good means that individual needs may not necessarily be met. Kate's account referred to a change in her perception of whose benefits she considered when making decisions: "I have more of a family focus now.... Whatever we decide would be, this is what makes the most sense for our family, and not this is what I need" (2-636). For Kate, putting the family's collective happiness before her own did not mean that she would entirely sacrifice her personal needs. Some participants' individual needs likewise merged with family needs. John noted that his perspectives on life had shifted as his identity changed from that of a single man to a husband to a father: "You view the world through the eyes of, of maybe what you think your kids' needs are, and then your perspective as a parent" (2-470).

3.1.1.2 Managing paid work life

Managing paid work life was also an important feature of balance for several parents, although they did not talk about it as explicitly as they discussed managing family demands. The participants' conceptions of balance in relation to paid work highlighted the significance not only

of completing tasks assigned to them but also of satisfying colleagues' expectations of their work. For example, Jessica tried to be flexible with her schedule for the benefit of co-workers and was available to them via email on her days off:

> I often will check to make sure nothing's going on, or just to stay in touch, because...I feel fortunate that I have part-time, but not everybody's been able to get part-time even though they've wanted it.... So, I try to make it work for the office too. Like, I try to help by being more available, and I'm able to switch my days if I need to, for certain reasons. (1-147)

Jessica's perception of balance depended upon the degree to which she was able to deal with her paid work demands in her three-day work week. At the same time, she was flexible and committed to being accessible to her employer outside of those three days in order to make her work arrangement effective for herself as well as her colleagues. Other participants likewise made an effort to meet their paid work demands. They spent evenings and/or weekends on work-related tasks or worked from home when they took sick leave to tend to their children. When participants felt that both they and their colleagues were content with how work demands were handled, they felt balanced. Pauline, who reduced her paid work hours after her second maternity leave, said:

> I feel like my work-life, work-family balance is pretty great, or I feel very fortunate about it.... I feel like work doesn't, you know, doesn't get a lot of me basically. They kind of get the bare minimum, but I can live with that, and I think my work can as well. (2-509)

Pauline's observation shows that collective satisfaction at her workplace was commensurate with the extent to which she managed her paid work demands; she was content with how she was managing, and she perceived her colleagues as also being content with her work.

Conversely, when work demands became unmanageable unless some attention to family life or social life was sacrificed, often felt out of balance. An excessive workload spilled over to other life areas and/or increased participants' fears of an inability to fulfill their work demands, which in turn led them to a feeling of imbalance. Tom expressed his feelings about an extensive workload thusly:

> I realize I only have a certain amount of time to get all these things done. So I'm gonna have to try and do my 9:00 to 10:00 kind of work…over the next couple of weeks to try and get through all this stuff. It's more that sense of being overwhelmed to me…a sense of being worried about being able to do all the things you're supposed to be able to do. But it still gives me that sense of unease, anxiety, which to me, in a way, feels like being out of balance. (2-615)

Tom reserved 9:00 to 10:00 p.m. for reading books that he liked, and his day felt incomplete without this pleasant respite. However, he occasionally had to use that time for fulfilling all the

paid work demands he had and still worried that he might not be able to manage. His anxiety about not meeting expectations was closely associated with his sense of imbalance.

3.1.1.3 Managing other Aspects of life

Managing life outside of family and paid work was also important to some participants' subjective balance. Socializing with friends, engaging in volunteer activities, and networking in the community were examples of this side of life. Some participants tried to keep actively involved in organizations or groups that they had supported before having children. Others stated that some of their volunteer activities were school-related, and demanded of them by their children's school, but their perceptions of these activities, as Jessica pointed out in the following excerpt, were positive nonetheless:

> Jessica: The school promotes parent volunteerism. Well promotes, we have to do a minimum amount of volunteering…. That's fairly typical at most schools. There's always parents needed for certain activities and certain things.
>
> Interviewer: So, it's a sort of obligation? It's not really voluntary.
>
> Jessica: It's an obligation. Yeah, but there's good benefits, too, because you kind of get to know the school better if you're there and volunteering…you feel part of that community as well…you're familiar with the kids…you get to know the teachers better. It's good. (1-182, 191)

While Jessica acknowledged that some of her volunteer activities were actually obligations, she found them beneficial because they gave her a better understanding of her children's school community. Other participants were likewise motivated to make a contribution to their community that would in turn benefit their families.

In their choices of volunteer activities, socializing, or networking, several participants mentioned being selective about what they engaged in with their children and/or spouses because time with family was so important. Otherwise, they would have to significantly cut back their participation in occupations outside home and paid work.

3.1.1.4 Getting things done

Several participants indicated that completing tasks contributed to their sense of balance. A few mentioned that they had a to-do list for both paid work and home life and felt out of balance when there were too many things on the list, while others were more conscious about

prioritizing tasks. Mothers in particular were continuously caught up in the small, albeit important, tasks associated with meeting the needs of family members. Maggie indicated her experience with seemingly endless things to do: "It just feels like a marathon a lot of the time. Just trying to get it all done" (2-433). She "restored a lot of sense of balance" when she finally found time to accomplish all those "little things that just don't ever get done" for her family.

Other mothers' conceptions of balance or imbalance also highlighted their experiences with a never-ending stream of demands, obligations, and needs to meet. These mothers struggled even more to meet every equally important challenge, but the effort of doing so made them feel overwhelmed. For example, Clare explained that it was challenging for her to fulfill her responsibility for childcare as well as her and her husband's personal needs:

> My husband, he doesn't mind calling on babysitters or calling our parents, or things like that in order for us to go out and do things, whereas I feel a little more guilty about it. I feel like, we should be at home, like, that's what we do. We're parents, we have children, we should be at home...I guess that's where my challenge is, is trying to balance it all so that we do have time to do things ourselves, but I don't want to do it at the sacrifice of my family, that was the whole point of us being together and having this family. (1-420)

Clare's statement outlined the difficulty of choosing between spending time with her children and going out on dates with her husband. These two needs conflicted temporally and ideologically. Satisfying one would not allow her to simultaneously meet the other. Her mothering ideology left her feeling "guilty" if she hired a babysitter to look after her children so that she and her husband could spend time together on their own. She tried to "fit in" all the things she needed and wanted to do, which required planning for every day. However, planning ahead helped her accomplish her tasks, and this in turn led her to a feeling of balance.

For several participants, managing day-to-day demands was accomplished through a combination of routines and plans. When asked how she felt about her balance, Vivian responded:

> My balance? ...mostly I think about managing everyday life, which is: "Do we execute our routines well in a way that gets us to where we need to go on time?" You know, "our shirts are mostly tucked into our pants?" And "our socks match?" You know, all those other things you want to do generally everyday. (2-351)

Conversely, some participants mentioned feelings of imbalance when they were thrown off schedule or routine due to a business trip or unforeseen paid work demands. This was partly because unusual or inadvertent demands required them to adjust plans and reorganize their routine in order to ensure that other needs were met. This readjustment in itself felt overwhelming and time-consuming.

Implementing routine was challenging for a few participants because they had unpredictable paid work or family demands, or they had health conditions that required flexibility. Those participants remarked that it was difficult to feel balanced because their lives were unpredictable and inconsistent.

3.1.1.5 Negotiating personal needs and desires

Many parents pointed out how important managing time to meet their personal needs was to their sense of balance. They negotiated for their own needs alongside other responsibilities. As a result, some of the parents sacrificed time for themselves and gave higher priority to other needs, whereas other parents sought out time to meet their personal needs in daily life for the greater good of their families. The needs that participants rationalized fulfilling included resting, relaxing, eating well, treating aches and pains, and exercising. Looking after themselves in this way was a particularly significant feature of balance for some parents because failing to do so might affect their family's health and happiness. A few parents emphasized that sustaining a good diet, sleeping enough, and being energetic was crucial for supporting their families, and some mothers noted that time for exercise helped them prevent paid work–related stress from affecting family life.

The parents who acknowledged the significance of personal and social time for their perceived balanced life also admitted to a feeling of guilt or selfishness when enjoying that time. Some approached this conflict in a multifaceted way. Lilly, for example, found support for her desire to exercise in her attitude:

> For me it [exercise] is important because it gives me a bit more energy…for me it stimulates the mind, it gives me a sense of achievement that I'm doing it as well, like I feel like I'm supermom if I can fit a run in a few times a week. So, for me it's just that sense of self achievement, and that little bit of something that's for me. It's selfish, and I'm looking after myself as well. (2-575, 578)

Here, Lilly expressed the personal benefits of exercise, while simultaneously noting that being fit and healthy made her a positive role model for her children. When she only considered the benefits to herself, particularly in terms of her own achievements, she felt that she was being selfish. However, this feeling of selfishness was alleviated when she saw exercise as having a self-care purpose. Other parents likewise indicated that fulfilling their personal needs was essential for a sense of balance from two perspectives: the family's overall happiness and their

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own personal benefit. However, mothers in particular struggled with the choice between meeting family needs and personal needs. The latter issue will be further elaborated on in the section entitled *Balance as Participating in a Mix of Occupations*.

3.1.1.6 Reconciling demands with resources

If the demands of daily life are to be met, they must be reconciled with the time and other resources available to meet them, including one's ability to deal with them. Participants talked about allocating resources (time, attention, and energy), controlling demands, and not sacrificing important occupations, as ways that helped them acquire a sense of balance.

3.1.1.6.1 Allocating time, attention, and energy

Most of the participants indicated allocating enough time to meet demands and needs as crucial for their subjective balance. For example, Jessica articulated her feelings about the amount of time dedicated to meeting the needs of both her paid work and home life:

> I asked for temporary part-time, and I've kind of stayed with it. It's worked out really well. I feel, I wouldn't want to work more outside the home. Like I mean, the house and the kids are already so much work. I mean, but I like to be with them, and I see the benefits of staying home with them. And so, I've just kind of stayed on that schedule, and it feels like a really good balance.... I wouldn't mind dropping down to two days, but then I'd feel like I wasn't getting as much done at work…. I need to do meetings and I need to, you know, work with people a lot, and on projects, so I kind of need to be there at least three days a week. (1-140, 143, 144)

For Jessica, the way she distributed time led to very good balance because it allowed her to deal with the demands from both areas within a reasonable amount of time. However, it appeared that "enough time" was not determined merely by the clock; it might rather be subjective to some participants. David depicted balance as "having adequate time for all the different things that you want to devote time to in your life" and further elucidated:

> I don't think it's a matter of like saying, "Okay, you know, this many hours for this, this many hours for this." It's just more of an instinct, an intuitive thing. Like "Okay, things are out of balance, I'm doing too much, too much working these days and not enough sleeping or whatever." (2-483)

In David's case, imbalance was associated with a feeling of being over-committed to certain occupations and inadequately engaged in other occupations. Thus, an indicator of balance was an absence of feeling "I don't have enough time to do this or that" (David, 2-493).

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Energy was another resource that some participants were conscious of using carefully. Raymond remarked that devoting a certain amount of energy as well as time to paid work, family life, and social life helped him to maintain balance in life. In addition, a few participants noted that distributing attention across different areas of interest was important for managing life and subsequently feeling balanced. Ellen summed this up quite succinctly: "If you're out of balance, and something's getting way more attention than something else, then something is inevitably suffering. So whether it's work that's suffering or it's home life that's suffering, something…" (2-440). The word "attention" connotes consideration, careful observation, interest, and an object with which to take care of things or people (Summers, 2003, p. 82). Paying attention is thus more specific than spending time with regard to the extent to which parents use their mental functions. Being physically present with family does not always mean that parents are mentally involved. This was the case for Ellen, who indicated that managing life required her to be attentive to the areas of life that she was interested in.

3.1.1.6.2 Controlling demands

When demands exceeded the amount of time or ability that parents had to deal with them, parents relied on extended family, babysitters, friends, and/or neighbours for help. A few participants who were discontent with their extensive paid workload noted that they could afford to use a cleaning service to reduce their household chores and spend time with their family.

Alternatively, some parents tried to control demands by keeping certain activities low-key, turning down appointments and opportunities, or avoiding overbooking themselves. Zack tried to take charge of his paid work and volunteer commitments to preserve time with his family:

> Because there's always more time for work...I could work 80 hours a week or 100 hours a week very easily and not be finished, there's always more that could be done, that I just have to make sure that I save that time for the family. And given the way that we [he and his wife] used to live our lives, where we were very much volunteering, there's a temptation to do that. But I think that both of us have been very clear about not making any commitments that might infringe upon that family time. (1-586)

Parents recounted their experiences of feeling overwhelmed, stretched thin, and worn out when they were over-committed, and indicated their physical and emotional exhaustion as a state of imbalance. Their emotional and physical responses to the demands placed on them suggest that the demands exceeded their available resources. Conversely, the indicators of balance that

some participants identified included: the successful management of family life (e.g., having a clean and tidy house); well-behaved, studious, and socially adept children; and a relaxed spouse or partner. Favourable results in this regard meant that parents had adequate resources to meet their challenges.

3.1.1.6.3 Not sacrificing important occupations

Some participants perceived balance as allocating time in a way that was not detrimental to their whole life or the occupation that they ranked among their top priorities—which was often family-related. Vivian recounted her decision-making process when distributing her time to occupations:

> Part of my decision making is based on balance you know like, if I spend an extra 20 minutes at work, what will that do to the time I have with the kids over the dinner hour.... So my decision is usually, don't spend that extra 20 minutes at work, you know, come home and enjoy the time with the kids. And that is sort of given about the equation of balance, from a time point of view. (2-484)

For Vivian, adding an extra 20 minutes to dinner time with her children was more meaningful than spending that time on her paid work. Her balance was therefore achieved by devoting more time to some occupations than to others, based on their importance to her. A few other participants were self-aware like Vivian in realizing that their paid work situations might affect their family and other activities. These parents were reluctant to pursue or accept a higher position because they predicted it would have a negative impact on their family lives. Raymond, for example, expressed little interest in a senior management position, at least at the time of his interview, primarily because it required a greater time commitment and would thus negatively affect his balance—the "equilibrium" between paid work, family, and social occupations that he valued.

3.1.1.7 Sharing responsibilities and opportunities

The division of domestic chores agreed upon between partners was a feature of some, particularly female, participants' balance conception. For example, it was important for Lilly to share family responsibilities and occupations outside the home with her husband;

> Interviewer: You mentioned balance several times. Could you tell me a little bit more about your experiences of balance? ...

Lilly: I perceive my husband and I to be a partnership.... We both work, so there is an expectation that we share lots of things, be it household chores or looking after the kids or you know, time doing other things. So I think maybe it stems from balance in our relationship. 'Cause I feel like we're fairly 50-50 split on most things or where we're not, then the other person's fine that the other person leads that thing. There's no like resentment. (1-529)

Lilly's understanding and enactment of doing her fair share and creating a flexible yet relatively equal allocation of responsibilities with her husband were fundamental to her balance perceptions. In short, a balanced relationship contributed to her sense of balance in life. Along with sharing domestic responsibilities with a partner, sharing time or opportunities to engage in occupations other than family-related and employment-related occupations was a prominent feature of balance for some women. However, the concept of doing one's "fair share" was not especially important to them. Kate pointed out that her focus was not so much on sharing 'fairly,' but feeling connected to her husband as the result of their satisfaction with domestic arrangements led her to a feeling of balance.

3.1.2   Balance as participating in a mix of occupations

It has been confirmed that to approximately two thirds of participants, engaging in more than one occupation is essential for a sense of balance because it brings more gratification than involvement in just one occupation. One participant depicted balance as being inherently a combination of various things. The following section presents three sub-categories of balance, which describe the benefits of engaging in multiple occupations: fulfilling varying needs and desires, complementing one's ability to fulfill the demands of occupations, and promoting health in various domains.

3.1.2.1 Fulfilling various needs and desires toward a completion of life

Up to a point, the more activities or greater variety of activities parents engaged in, the more likely they were to meet their needs and desires, which in turn contributed to their sense of balance. The trick was to select a mix of activities that worked together to fulfill one's needs. Tom depicted balance as "completion of life" and listed critical activities that led him to a sense of completion at the end of the day: going to work and being productive; looking after his

children; riding a bicycle; going outside; and reading. Missing any of these activities triggered "a sense of longing" in Tom: "If I haven't done all of those things, then I would feel out of sorts. I'd definitely want to try and rectify the situation the next day" (2-469). Needs were fulfilled through engaging in a variety of occupations, and participants attributed benefits or meanings to engaging in paid, family-related, and social and personal occupations, as outlined below.

3.1.2.1.1 Engaging in paid occupations

Parents acknowledged that certain needs were met by engaging in paid occupation, and fulfilling those needs brought them a feeling of balance. Two thirds of the mothers perceived engagement in paid work and family occupations as providing better balance than just being involved in family occupations because paid work stimulated them intellectually. Maggie said: "I think I would be bored staying home full-time. Like I love the intellectual stimulation, learning new things, applying new things" (1-565). Those mothers recounted difficulties finding intellectual and social fulfillment when they were on maternity leave. They valued the social stimulation of interacting with adult co-workers and contributing to society through their paid work, and consequently expected to receive these benefits from engaging in it. The sense of achievement that parents gained through their learning and social contribution was one of the focal meanings they attributed to paid occupations, regardless of gender, and it led them to feel balanced. Furthermore, a sense of being competent at their paid work helped a few mothers to offset the lowered self-esteem that resulted from mothering alone or from the lack of social value attributed to mothering.

Finally, many mothers also appreciated a break from their children and the freedom they found at work. Kate remarked:

> In some ways work is more relaxing. If you want to go for a coffee, you can go for a coffee…. I can't do that with [her child]. I'm there with him and, you know, things are more constrained around him. So, there's a certain freedom in being at work, which I know sounds a bit funny, that I actually have a little bit more control over my time. I like that. (2-59)

Being at work not only allowed Kate the liberty of engaging in activities that were limited when she was with her child, but also gave her more freedom to use her time as she liked.

3.1.2.1.2   Engaging in family-related occupations

Although some participants noted that staying home all day could get boring, they also described engaging in family activities at length. The primary meanings that parents attributed to participating in family-related occupations were accomplishment, pleasure, and joy, which played significant roles in feeling balanced. For some parents, this feeling was invoked by fostering their children's learning and sharing in the children's moments of achievement. Raymond described pleasant moments with his son:

> He [his son]'s getting good at climbing, so I like watching him climb on the playground apparatus. He's been able to get up wardrooms, stairs, and ladders than he previously could, so it's nice to encourage him and watch him get up these more challenging things…just kind of watching him play, and [he was] asking for me at various points when he needed help so, that was nice. (2-503)

Watching as his son took on new challenges and helping the boy to overcome them was pleasurable for Raymond. In addition, receiving and responding to requests for help from his son might have strengthened Raymond's bond with his son and bolstered his sense of fatherhood. Sally likewise ascribed enjoyment to having and spending time with her children:

> We [She and her husband] spend a lot of time just hanging out with them [her children], and just doing stuff.... We do lots of little adventures and go places. And I love like hanging out, like I love going out with them and doing stuff with them and that's like what takes up all your time.... We enjoy that, and that's what I love about having them...that's why you sort of have them. (2-341)

The enjoyment that Sally gained from sharing seemingly little things with her children——"just doing stuff" with them—might explain what Kevin was trying to articulate when he compared childcare to paid work: "No one ever looks back and wishes they spent more time at work, right? I mean, it's a good job and it's fulfilling, but that only goes so far. Family is really important too" (1-465). The features and meanings that were attributed to family life were special in that love was equated with "just doing stuff." On the other hand, the responsibility involved in childcare was enormous. Tom perceived it as definitely 'work' because he felt a commitment to parent fully and properly, treating it as seriously as he would a paid occupation. He felt that he had no choice in parenting—"opting out" would have too many negative effects on his children.

3.1.2.1.3 Engaging in personal and social occupations

For the sample studied, there was no question that having time to socialize and meet personal needs was important in the subjective sense of balance, and failing to take care of oneself in particular led parents to feel a state of imbalance. This view reflects an interesting internal struggle. That is, parents ignored their needs in part because they gave their children's or employers' needs a higher priority in expectation that the imbalance was to be short-lived. However, they concurrently recognized that they would be better able to meet the needs of others if they took care of themselves. When they did not meet their own needs, the sacrifice was seen as necessary to managing collective needs. And when they put their own needs ahead of an immediate demand from work or family, they rationalized this decision by asserting that it was necessary if they were to satisfy collective needs.

Participants reported a range of personal and social occupations, some of which overlapped with family and paid work occupations. For some women, engaging in paid occupations fulfilled their personal and social needs. Other participants had adapted to their excessively demanding life circumstances and did not strongly desire "me time" at their current life stage as a parent with young children. David, for example, noted that he had so little time for his hobbies that he felt rushed and could not enjoy them. He had given up on his hobby and adopted a mindset of being family-focused. Thus, "me time" was not an essential feature of some parents' perceptions of balance at the stage of their lives, but was rather an "ideal," "real [true]," or "perfect" balance or the "most" balanced lifestyle, and hence was likely to be sacrificed or modified to whatever extent the individual saw appropriate in terms of their lifestyle at the time. Sally described her perceived balance at the time of the interview:

> Sally: I feel like I do have a bit, not real balance, but a little bit or enough balance right now.
>
> Interviewer: "Real balance." What is real balance?
>
> Sally: I guess, I don't think I probably have enough time for myself to, I don't know, do whatever, you know, have my own time to do my own thing, whatever that may be…going to a yoga class or doing something by myself. (2-428, 445)

For Sally, "real balance" meant having enough time to exclusively satisfy her own needs and desires in any ways that she chose. Given that she had insufficient time to herself, she graded her balance as "enough" or "a little bit [of]" balance. Some participants put aside extracurricular activities that could not be integrated into their current lives, stating a belief that this was

temporary and included the expectation that they would resume the activities once their children were older.

3.1.2.2 Complementing one's ability to fulfill the demands of occupations

Engaging in different occupations can actually strengthen parents' abilities to deal with the demands of those occupations. For example, parents acknowledged that their family lives had a positive influence on their professional lives. Kate noted that her first-hand experience of raising a child had contributed to her professional strength and expertise. Maggie observed a reverse effect when she said that the intellect and knowledge gained from engagement in paid work helped her to be a good mother. Further, a few mothers said that going to work gave them a break from childcare that made them look forward to the time with their children. Overall, absence from an occupation increased parents' motivation to return to it with a fresh attitude. Kate's passage below highlighted the compatible benefits of paid work and family occupations:

> On Tuesdays and on every other Friday I'm home, which is really lovely, and I feel present, and like it's nice quality time with my son. And then I go to work for a while and that's sort of nice too, and then I'm ready to be home again, so it's a nice balance between motherhood and professionalism. (2-6)

Kate's experience of engaging in two occupations was positive. She had a pleasant relationship with her son because the gratification of her work gave her the psychological readiness to spend time with him. In turn, the sense of fulfillment she derived from spending quality time with him motivated her to do well professionally. Similarly, Ian found that distancing himself from a stressful activity and instead participating in other activities gave him time to think about how to resolve the issue causing the stress or simply helped him to calm down. In other words, temporarily redirecting to another activity gave him the ability to tackle the stressor. Exercise was a primary stress-relieving strategy for some participants that enabled them to "recentre" or "reground" them when they felt out of balance.

3.1.2.3 Promoting health in various domains

Balance was particularly associated with health when it was conceived to be participating in a mix of occupations. The primary reason for this association appeared to be that participating in just one occupation or activity can never sufficiently promote and sustain health because it

inherently comprises multiple domains. A few participants explained that involvement in a variety of occupations gave them unique challenges or required varying energies and hence contributed in different ways to their overall health. Ian's passage below described this nicely:

> You do things that are physically active, so your body stays strong. You do things that are cognitive, whether it's going to school or you know doing crossword puzzles, doing whatever, reading, you know, stuff that keeps your mind active. And then obviously there's social stuff, seeing your friends, going out to parties, you know, going for picnics, whatever. (2-550)

Ian explained that health has physical, cognitive, social, and spiritual dimensions and that it was paramount for him to engage in activities that fulfilled all of those dimensions of health in order to have balance in life. Ideally, engaging in a mix of occupations allows an individual to express all facets of himself or herself—physical, psychological, cognitive, social, spiritual, relational, and financial—and exposes an individual to challenges and opportunities that engage and nurture all of these aspects' respective characteristics.

3.1.3 Summary of the findings

Table 4 represents the categories of description of each balance conception, and structural relations among them are shown in Figure 2. Managing life—the *collective* needs-based conception of balance—is composed of seven sub-categories. Three sub-categories indicate areas of life to be managed: family life, paid work life, and other life areas. They describe 'what' parents were managing day-to-day. Competently managing these life areas led parents to a feeling of balance. The other four sub-categories are processes involved in managing life: getting things done; negotiating one's own needs and desires; reconciling demands with resources; and sharing responsibilities and opportunities. These categories describe 'how' couples were managing day-to-day. The first three process sub-categories are relevant to managing all three areas of life. Parents considered and made conscious decisions about what needs and desires of their own they could meet according to the extent to which they managed family life, paid work, and other areas of life. Similarly, parents reconciled demands with resources across all three areas. Getting things done, particularly in the area of family life and less so in the other two areas, guided parents to a feeling of balance. Sharing responsibilities and opportunities—an aspect

presented particularly by women—related primarily to managing family life and paid work and negotiating one's own needs and desires.

Participating in a mix of occupations is the *individual* needs-based conception of balance and has three sub-categories: fulfilling various needs and desires, promoting health in various domains, and complementing one's ability to fulfill the demands of occupations. These three sub-categories related to participating in a mix of occupations because they embodied the positive outcomes of such engagement.

Table 4
Categories of Description

Conception	Description
Balance as managing life	This reflected participants' concerns about meeting collective needs, primarily in the areas of paid work and family life. Managing life outside those two areas was also important for some participants.
Managing family life	Meeting the needs of family was a critical feature for participants' sense of balance, although the needs that must be met to satisfy their subjective balance varied. There was an association between the extent to which they effectively managed overall family life and their sense of balance. Both quantity of time to meet family needs and quality of time with family were critical features of perceived balance. Fulfilling the collective needs of the family led to its overall happiness and brought parents a sense of balance.
Managing paid work life	Fulfilling the needs of paid work led to a feeling of being in balance. Conversely, excessive workload rendered concerns, work stress, and potential interference with other life areas, which in turn gave rise to a feeling of imbalance.
Managing other aspects of life	Engaging in social and volunteer activities that supported community contributed to a feeling of balance for some participants. Many participants limited their involvement in those activities because they were focusing instead on managing their family and paid work lives.
Getting things done	Completing tasks was a feature of balance. The tasks were related to paid work, family life, and personal/social life or comprised demands and needs in the area that participants prioritized over other areas. Conflicting needs and a long list of tasks brought a sense of imbalance while executing a routine and plans helped parents to meet day-to-day demands and subsequently feel balanced.
Negotiating personal needs and desires	Participants felt that meeting personal needs such as looking after themselves (physical and mental health) and socializing with their friends was critical to achieving a subjective sense of balance. Parents' personal needs were either sacrificed for collective benefits (i.e., family's overall happiness, co-workers' satisfaction) or justified when parents determined that meeting their needs served the interests of the collective and not just their own.
Reconciling demands with resources	If the demands of daily life were to be fulfilled, they must be reconciled with the resources, including time and ability, to deal with them. Allocating enough time to meet demands, or feeling that one had adequate time to do things, was critical for subjective balance. Relying on available resources and sustaining a manageable volume of demands contributed to a sense of balance. Sacrificing occupations or demands that participants considered to be high priority in the process of matching demands to resources increased the risk of feeling out of balance.
Sharing responsibilities and opportunities	Both partners having equal opportunities to engage in occupations both inside and outside the home was critical for subjective balance. This reflected participants' desire for a good marital relationship.

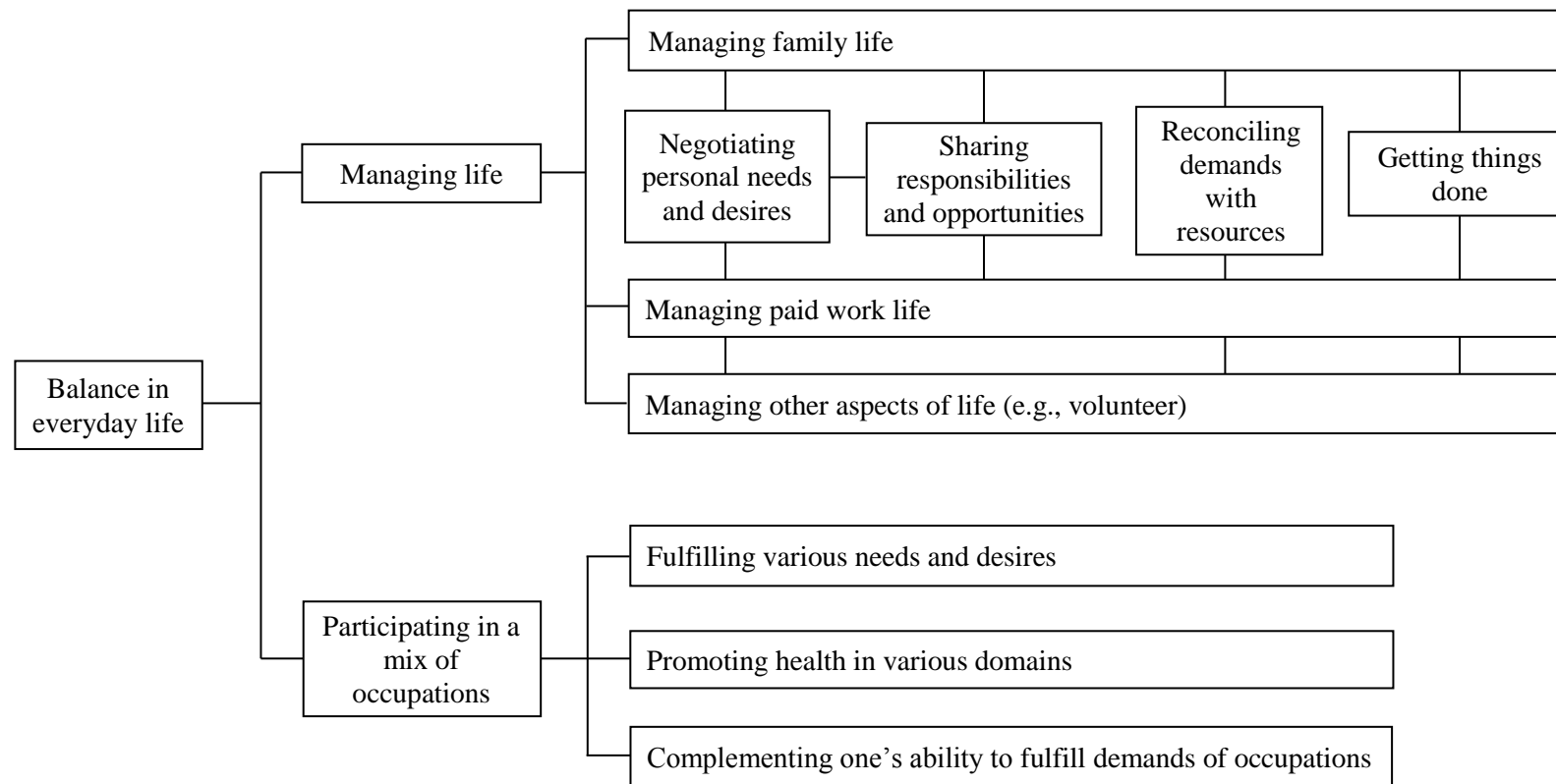| Conception	Description
Balance as participating in a mix of occupations	Participating in a mix of occupations is a core feature of balance. This reflects participants' tendency to feel more gratified when engaged in multiple occupations rather than just one occupation.
Fulfilling various needs and desires	Involvement in diverse occupations helped participants to meet their various needs and desires, which brought a sense of balance. Engagement in paid, family, and personal/social occupations fulfilled participants' different needs. The more diverse occupations seemed to give participants a feeling of having a full, rewarding life.
Complementing one's ability to fulfill demands of occupations	Involvement in a mix of occupations could be mutually beneficial, which led to a sense of balance. Engaging in paid occupation complemented participants' ability to fulfill the demands of family occupations or vice versa.
Promoting health in various domains	Engaging in a mix of occupations required varying energies and challenged participants in unique ways, and this promoted their overall health. The resultant health benefit from participating in a variety of occupations led parents to a subjective sense of balance.

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                          ┌─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┐
                          │  Managing family life                                                             │
                          ├───────────────┬─────────────────┬────────────────┬─────────────────────────────┐
                          │  Negotiating  │    Sharing      │  Reconciling   │                             │
            ┌───────────────┐  personal needs │ responsibilities │   demands      │      Getting things         │
            │ Managing life │  and desires   │ and opportunities │    with        │         done                │
            └───────────────┘               │                 │   resources    │                             │
                          ├───────────────┴─────────────────┴────────────────┴─────────────────────────────┤
                          │  Managing paid work life                                                          │
                          ├─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┤
                          │  Managing other aspects of life (e.g., volunteer)                                 │
                          └─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┘
┌────────────┐
│ Balance in │
│ everyday   │
│ life       │
└────────────┘
                          ┌─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┐
                          │  Fulfilling various needs and desires                         │
            ┌───────────────┐                                                             
            │ Participating │─├─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┤
            │ in a mix of   │  │  Promoting health in various domains                       │
            │ occupations   │  ├─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┤
            └───────────────┘  │  Complementing one's ability to fulfill demands of         │
                          │   occupations                                                 │
                          └─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┘
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Figure 2. Structural relations of balance conceptions.

3.2   Discussion

3.2.1   Balance as managing life

For many of the participants in this study, managing life was an extremely important factor when it came to experiencing balance. Those participants were primarily concerned about meeting the collective needs of paid work and family lives, and limited their engagement in other life areas. The extent to which they experienced balance was, therefore, determined by how well the collective needs of their paid work and family life were met. This balance conception is similar to the work-family balance, which entails satisfactorily fulfilling the demands of both paid work and family lives (Clark, 2001; Frone, 2003; Grzywacz & Carlson, 2007; Voydanoff, 2005a). As is encapsulated in work-family balance, fulfilling the demands of roles or occupations is one of the major concepts of balance addressed in the existing literature (Wada, Backman, & Forwell, 2010). Similarly, in the context of health, balance denotes managing or controlling things. Lipworth, Hooker, and Carter (2011), in a synthesis of qualitative research, found that balance in a health context was perceived as not only a state of health and well-being but also a process of managing health, illness, or disability.

This current study deviates from previous research on balance as managing life by including concerns about meeting the collective needs of the occupations that participants engaged in, with collective needs denoting the demands and expectations of others. Fulfilling the expectations of predominantly paid and family occupations contributed to the subjective balance of the participants. Their sense of balance rested on perceiving their colleagues and family members as being satisfied and content with the extent to which they met the needs of paid work and family respectively.

3.2.1.1   Managing co-occupations for balance

Zemke and Clark (1996) noted that humans, as social beings, spend much time participating in occupations that involve more than one person and call such occupations "co-occupations" (p. 213). Co-occupation has three distinct aspects: shared physicality, shared

emotionality, and shared intentionality (Pickens & Pizur-Barnekow, 2009). The parents in this study were involved in co-occupations. Although their conceptions of balance did not explicitly include shared physicality, shared emotionality was a focal feature of balance for parents in that it was seen to denote a sense of connectedness between family members and overall happiness of the groups to which they belonged. Their daily co-occupations typically involved colleagues, family members, neighbours, and friends. As the parents were members of these groups, they managed their occupations in a way that contributed to the groups' greater good. However, parents were more likely to sacrifice their personal needs for the sake of the family unit than for other occupational groups (e.g., work teams or volunteer groups), in part due to their emotional attachment to family. Shared intentionality also contributed to balance. This was evident in the feeling of balance that partners in a couple gained when they shared responsibilities and opportunities. It is possible that parents' emphasis on managing life as a key construction of balance may have reflected their sharing of primary occupations as co-occupations.

3.2.1.1.1 Balance: Collective happiness as a result of managing co-occupations

Managing family occupations meant pursuing the greater good of the family by meeting the needs of family members, including basic needs such as sleep and diet, finances, household tasks, family time, time with children, and couple time. A parent's subjective balance was primarily reliant on the tidiness or cleanliness of their house, their children's behaviour, and the well-being of all the family members, including himself or herself. Thus, managing family occupations required not only that parents attended to their household and parenting occupations, but that they ensured the positive effects of these occupations on their family—that is, that their family as a whole was healthy and happy as a result of their efforts. In this regard, a sense of balance stemming from managing family occupations was inextricably intertwined with family quality of life (FQoL).

FQoL—an evolving concept in health care services for children with disabilities with a strong focus on a family-centred approach (Poston et al., 2003)—is defined as "conditions where the family's needs are met, and family members enjoy their life together as a family and have the chance to do things which are important to them" (Park et al., 2003, p. 368). One of the most recently developed conceptualizations of FQoL comprises five domains: family interaction, parenting, emotional well-being, physical/material well-being, and disability-related support

(Hoffman, Marquis, Poston, Summers, & Turnbull, 2006). A confirmatory factor analysis indicated that four of these domains (excluding disability-related support) are applicable to families of children without disabilities (Zuna, Selig, Summers, & Turnbull, 2009). In the present study, parents' accounts of their experiences suggested that those four FQoL domains were focal points in the management of family life and that they contributed to their experiences of balance. Specifically, participants considered having "enough" of unhurried family time, building and maintaining close connections to their children, and sustaining a good marital relationship as important features of their subjective sense of balance; the three aspects mentioned were related to, or the result of, family interaction. Engaging in educational activities with children and intensively sharing their pursuit and achievement of developmental milestones exemplified the features of balance associated with parenting. In terms of physical and emotional well-being, the health and happiness of family members was the key indicator of balance for parents. They evaluated their partners' emotional well-being specifically by how relaxed their partners seemed to be, while children's behaviour was seen to partly be a manifestation of their emotional well-being (or lack thereof). Finally, ensuring that the family was financially secure reflects parents' desires for material well-being and another component of emotional well-being. A recent study conducted by Milkie, Kendig, Nomaguchi, and Denny (2010), who examined data obtained from over 900 employed parents living with children under the age of 18 (from the US National Survey of Parents, 2000−2001), suggested a link between parents' sense of work-family balance and parent satisfaction with their children's well-being, which relates to the FQoL domains developed by Hoffman et al. (2006).

Managing co-occupations involving the family unit required parents to negotiate their own needs with the needs of other family members (Figure 3). The occupations that a parent managed were partly determined by the needs associated with three dimensions of the social environment: a parent's needs at the micro level; family members' needs at the meso level; and social and organizational needs and expectations at the macro level. Parents in this study took into account the needs of family members, including them when scheduling and organizing family activities and tasks. According to Ian, these activities and tasks included taking children out to "get their ya-yas out," letting family members take adequate rest, and participating in family activities (e.g., swimming). When family members' needs competed, parents negotiated them. Parents were also conscious about need to spend more time with their children if the children's behaviours and performance warranted it. Accordingly, the demands of family

occupations were determined by, and changed depending on, the physical and emotional needs of the co-agencies. In addition, social and organizational needs and expectations have an impact on the demands of family occupations. "Social demands"—social and cultural expectations (American Occupational Therapy Association, 2008, p. 639)—of parenthood, as well as needs from outside the home (e.g., school events, swimming lessons) shaped parents' ideas about what demands they needed to fulfill for their families. By determining and negotiating the demands and needs, parents, like Ian and Kate, ensured that everybody in their family felt more or less satisfied that their needs were being met and that the family collectively accomplished as full a range of happiness as possible. This sense of the family's overall happiness, or FQoL, then led parents to feel balanced.
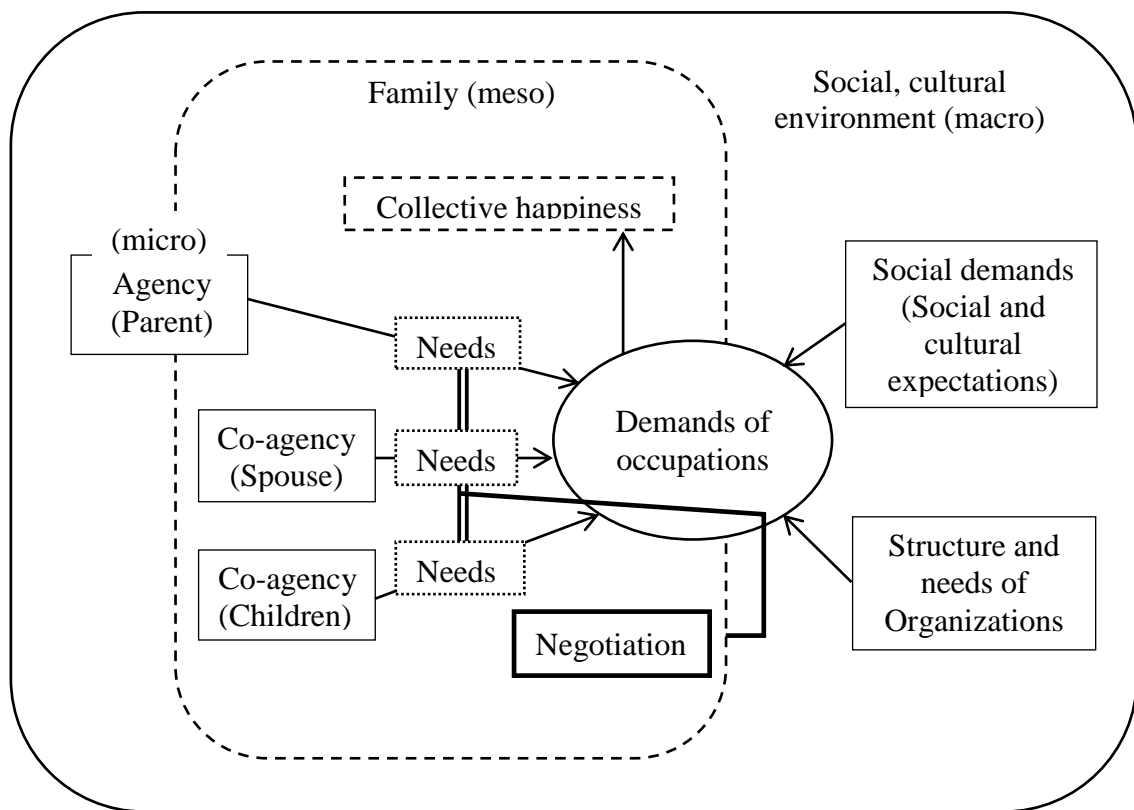

Figure 3. Relationship between parents, co-agencies, demands of occupations, and environmental factors in managing family occupations

3.2.1.1.2 Negotiating between personal and collective needs

Achieving overall happiness for the family meant, however, that everybody's needs might not be met fully—and parents' needs were no exception. Because the overall happiness of the family was a centre of interest to parents in managing family life as a critical feature of balance, they inevitably felt that they needed to compromise their personal needs. Pentland and McColl (2009) pointed to tension between the self—which wants to live in a way that is congruent with one's values, choices, and strengths—and the external demands and expectations of being. The present study illustrates this tension in several ways; for example, parents sacrificed personal needs for networking and volunteering in order to have "enough" family time.

3.2.1.1.2.1 Sacrificing personal needs

Parents in this study frequently neglected or ignored their needs and desires, particularly when those needs and desired ranked higher on Maslow's (1943) list of basic needs. Some parents sacrificed time set aside for their hobbies or felt guilty about exercising if it was simply for the purpose of a sense of achievement. Hobbies and achievement are ranked higher on Maslow's list. Maslow grouped basic human needs in five categories and organized them in a pre-potently hierarchical order from most to least: physiological, safety, love, esteem, and self-actualization. Hobbies—a means to express who one is—are typically based on a need for self-actualization, and achievement is a need for esteem. Thus, both needs are higher than love. Maslow suggested that only when the more pre-potent needs are satisfied do the less powerful needs emerge. According to this theory, if parents were seeking to meet these higher needs they were presumably satisfied with their lower needs. In contrast, in this study parents in the role of care provider to the family felt committed to satisfying the physiological, safety, and love needs of the other family members, which in turn led them to sacrifice, or at least minimize, meeting their higher needs and desires. Women particularly ignored higher needs partly because spending time away from their children led them to a feeling of guilt.

Although sacrificing personal needs creates imbalance at the individual level, it was essential to parents' feeling balanced at the family level. From an individual perspective, balance entails participating in occupations that meet the individual's needs, desires, and interests, or are

meaningful. Matuska and Christiansen (2008) integrated Maslow's (1943) theory in proposing a model of a balanced lifestyle. The model consists of five dimensions of occupational engagement that would lead individuals to feel balanced. Organizing time and energy in a meaningful way is one of the dimensions of an occupational pattern that determines lifestyle balance. Accordingly, parents who had to sacrifice their time for hobbies or exercise are less likely to feel balanced because their occupational patterns did not allow them to "organize their time and energy in ways that enable them to meet important personal goals and renewal" (Matuska & Christiansen, 2008, p. 11). However, at the collective level, parents perceived their sacrifice of personal time as being meaningful with regard to the greater good of the family and the family's happiness; it alleviated their feeling that their sense of balance was being compromised. In addition, parents anticipated that they would only have to give up their extracurricular activities temporarily. They attributed this sacrifice to having made the decision to be parents, which eased their feeling of being out of balance because they couldn't adequately meet their personal needs.

3.2.1.1.2.2 Transitional occupations: Integrating personal needs into family needs

When parents' needs were basic and directly related to their health, meeting them contributed to managing family occupations and subsequently increased their sense of balance. Good sleep and diet and regular exercise were all part of daily occupations undertaken to maintain their health, and satisfying their physiological needs was fundamental to managing life roles. For some parents, exercise was particularly important because it helped mothers in particular to manage their stress—"burn off" their work-related stress—and prevent it from spilling over into their family life. Such activities or behaviours, ones that aid people in successfully transitioning from one role to another, are identified as "rites of passage" (van Gennep, as cited in Ashforth, Kreiner, & Fugate, 2000, p. 478) or "transition rituals" (Desrochers & Sargent, 2004, p. 42). Commuting between home and workplace can be a rite if it guides parents psychologically switching one role to another effectively while they are crossing temporal and spatial role boundaries (Ashforth et al., 2000), and exercise is identified as one of the effective boundary transition rituals for home-based workers (Ahrentzen, 1990). For some parents in this study, exercise was clearly an activity that promoted their psychological transition from paid work to family life, which in turn aided them in managing family occupations and experiencing balance. In contrast, other personal occupations, such as hobbies and community

volunteer activities, were seen to compete with paid and family occupations. As a result, parents gave them a lower priority and often ignored the need to engage in them. Parents therefore viewed exercise as a suitable transitional ritual by which to acquire balance in life, but did not see hobbies and volunteer activities in the same way. This perspective shows that parents integrated personal occupations into their lives if they found them beneficial to their performance in managing paid and family occupations. This is where their personal needs and collective needs converged.

3.2.1.1.3 Division of occupations between partners in relation to balance

3.2.1.1.3.1 Gender-specific occupational divisions in a couple

The division of family occupations between the two partners in a couple was associated with the ways in which parents conceived balance. In other words, their conceptions of balance reflected their time allocations to paid and family occupations. Several women in the study had made conscious decisions to work part-time and take primary charge of family occupations because they perceived it as a good balance, but few of the men had made a similar decision. Accordingly, almost half of the wives in this study took primary responsibility for family occupations and worked significantly fewer paid hours than their husbands, who worked full-time as the primary financial provider and "helped out" with family occupations. This signifies that a traditional gender ideology persists in Canada (Ferrao, 2010), Europe (European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, 2012), Australia (Baxter & Gray, 2008; Thornthwaite, 2004), and elsewhere in the westernized world.

While the traditional labour division appeared to reinforce gender segregation between two partners in a couple, it also promoted work-family balance for some parents in this study. The Kevin's case is an example. Kevin's wife took primary responsibility for the family's day-to-day household and childcare occupations, which reduced the family demands placed on him and made it easier for him to accomplish his family occupations and fulfill his part of work-family balance. For her, family was the primary focus, and getting things done in response to her family's needs contributed significantly to her feeling of balance. A similar pattern was described in the case of Jessica, a wife who acknowledged her role as the primary caregiver and housekeeper for her family. Jessica estimated the amount of time she needed to deal with family

occupations, and then allocated her time to her paid occupations accordingly. Her time allocation not only enabled her to fulfill the demands of both family life and paid work, which in turn gave her a feeling of balance, but also allowed her husband to reduce his share of family occupations while he had to fulfill the substantial demands of his paid occupations. To have a sense of balance within a couple, it is critical for two partners to support each other in managing their respective areas of primary responsibility. This positive effect of a gender-specific division of labour in a couple reiterated findings from previous research. Neault and Pickerell (2005) found that negotiating and prioritizing one career over another is perceived not only as challenging but inevitable in managing childcare, and is also a strategic move to accomplish balance in a couple. Voydanoff (2005a) describes this inter-partner support for managing life as "boundary-spanning resources" (p. 830). She defined "boundary-spanning resources" as the resources available in a single life domain that help people to manage the demands of another life domain. As such, these resources foster cohesion by allowing a couple to integrate family and paid work. For example, having a husband who undertakes the role of primary financial provider for the family is support originating in the family domain, which allows his wife to choose the amount of her involvement in paid occupations to accommodate her family responsibilities. Thus, his support assists her to effectively combine paid and family occupations. If she serves as the primary care provider to the family, her role allows him to adjust his involvement in family occupations in a way that does not interfere with fulfilling his paid work demands, which can improve his paid work performance. This example echoes the way Kevin and Jessica managed their lives with their respective partners and what they perceived to resonate with a sense of balance. When the man in a couple worked full-time and the woman worked part-time, both benefited from the traditional division of occupational responsibilities and supported each other in undertaking their assigned occupations. Their collaboration in managing the occupations led both to attain balance.

3.2.1.1.3.2 Balanced relationship: Fair share of occupations and equal relationship

Although the concept of 'fair share' was an important feature of balance for some women, their subjective sense of balance derived more strongly from an equal relationship with their partners than from the equal division of family occupations. The fair share was a mere means to sustain an equal relationship with a partner. As Lilly and Kate said, their husbands' commitment to doing a fair share was a basis for their sense of "connected[ness]" or "partnership" with their

husbands. These men's efforts to carry out their fair share of tasks expressed respect for their wives' interest in occupations outside the family and values of equity. In these cases, the notion of fair share had a symbolic meaning that led to an equal, balanced marital relationship. The importance of positive relationships with others for overall health has long been recognized in the literature. A rewarding, self-affirming relationship is identified as one of personal needs, the fulfillment of which enhances lifestyle balance (Christiansen & Matuska, 2006; Matuska & Christiansen, 2008). Zimmerman, Haddock, Current, and Ziemba's (2003) study conducted interviews with parents who formed dual-earner couples and who regarded themselves as having balance between family and work, and suggested that equality is essential to intimacy and friendship in the couples. That is, the intimacy and friendship that results when partners shared equal occupational responsibility fosters a sense of balance for both (Zimmerman et al., 2003).

It is clear that intimacy between partners is a focal feature of the balance a couple achieves when they co-manage life, regardless of whether they employ a fair share principle or engage in a more traditional division of paid and unpaid occupations. When both partners in a couple adhere to the traditional gender ideology, the husband's role of primary financial provider and the wife's role of primary caregiver may nurture intimacy between them. However, those who value equity may likewise find that the fair share perspective strengthens their partnership and enhances their feeling of balance.

3.2.1.2 Congruence between priorities and time allocation to occupations

The findings suggest that engaging in occupations that are important to parents is crucial for their subjective balance. Among 15 couples in the present study, women were more likely than men to work less after having children, in an attempt to save an adequate amount of time for family occupations. Reducing paid work demands for the purpose of preserving time for family occupations was particularly essential to a mother's sense of balance, regardless of whether or not she was given such a position by her workplace. In contrast, men's approaches to acquiring balance were primarily to spend as many evenings and weekends as possible with their children and control their paid work demands, particularly business trips.

Mothers, more so than fathers, seemed to value allocating their time to paid and family occupations consistently with their priorities. A mother's preference for allocating less time to paid occupations and more time to family occupations often reflected her gender ideology, which

informed her priorities between paid work and family. It was then important for her to devote her time to these two occupations in an agreement with her priorities between the two in order to achieve subjective balance; the higher priority was on family life and the more days in a week she spent with her children, the greater sense of balance she felt. In this regard, balance is a result of occupational integrity, where a mother lives in a way that is in accord with her personal values and choices of occupations (Pentland & McColl, 2009). Conversely, as was indicated by some full-time working mothers in the present study, when employers do not give them the option of working alternative hours and require them to remain on a full-time work schedule regardless of how they feel about it, it is likely that their balance would be compromised.

However, fathers' priorities regarding paid work and family may not be consistently reflected in the amount of time they devote to family and paid occupations. Fathers in this study minimized their commitment to travelling and evening work as much as possible and put their career advancement (e.g., acquiring a higher position or more responsibilities) on hold because family was important to them. They made a dedicated effort to maximize their time with their children when they could because their children were not self-sufficient and hence required considerable care. However, these fathers did not seem to want to reduce their participation in paid occupations to a significant degree. The literature shows that fathers are more likely than mothers to work full-time despite an increasing number of employed mothers in Canada (Ferrao, 2010), and the US and Australia (Craig & Mullan, 2010). Fathers devote more time to paid occupations than family occupations in part because their perception of their family role as the primary financial provider makes it difficult for them to withdraw from paid occupations. The present study likewise found that men's traditional gender roles informed their occupational engagement. Brian's feeling obligated to work for the sake of his family's financial security illustrates this well. Therefore, men's priority on family may not directly be in accord with the amount of time they spend on family occupations because paid work is an occupation that helps to fulfill men's traditional family responsibility (Friedman & Greenhaus, 2000; Thompson & Walker, 1989).

3.2.1.3 Reconciliation between occupational demands with resources

In managing life, reconciling occupational demands with resources is critical. Among the occupational demands and resources that parents indicated as being important for managing life,

time played a significant role as both a resource and a demand in parents' experience of balance. Having enough time to manage paid work and family occupations—primary foci for parents— was paramount. Accordingly, parents tried to minimize time demands from outside these two occupations to preserve their time to perform them.

Further, balance denoted controlling the demands of family and paid occupations because they were often competing time-wise. Parents were particularly conscious about preventing their paid work from impeding upon their family occupations, opposed to vice versa, which suggests that family occupations were more vulnerable to being compromised than paid work. Taking on excessive paid work demands and letting them spill over into family occupations led to imbalance; conversely, parents felt balanced when they had "enough" time for family occupations. Previous studies consistently concur that allocating an excessive amount of time to paid occupation has a negative impact on balance. Regardless of gender, the more time parents spend on paid work occupations, the more likely it is to conflict with family obligations (Higgins, Duxbury, & Johnson, 2000; Milkie et al., 2010; Peters, den Dulk, & van der Lippe, 2009; Tausig & Fenwick, 2001; van Rijswijk, Bekker, Rutte, & Croon, 2004; Voydanoff, 2005b).

The question of how much time is "enough" to manage family life is neither objectively set nor static; rather, it is determined subjectively based on the extent to which family occupation is managed. For example, participants in this study indicated that they see their children's misbehaviour or an unclean and untidy house as signs that they do not spend enough time with their children or looking after the household. Therefore, parents understand "enough time on family occupations" in terms of outcome. If they are satisfied with the outcome of the time they spent, the amount of time will have been "enough" or "right." This is parallel to the finding of Milkie et al.'s (2010) study, which revealed that parents who perceived themselves as spending the "right" amount of time with their youngest child felt successful in balancing work and family regardless of how much time they actually dedicated to being with their child. In addition, parents' perception of their children's well-being is positively related to their sense of work-family balance. Thus, it is safe to assume that the amount of time for family occupation that parents perceive as being "right" or "enough" changes according to the outcome of their participation in family occupations.

3.2.1.4 Occupational disruption and obstruction

Occupational disruption and obstruction indicate imbalance and often occur as a result of occupational spillover. Spillover refers to "a within-person across-domains transmission of demands and consequent strain from one area of life to another" (Bakker, Demerouti, & Burke, 2009, p. 23). Figure 4 provides an illustration of occupational spillover. Each square block represents one type of occupation, and spillover occurs when one type of occupation overflows into another and dominates it. Consequently, family occupations, for example, are incomplete because paid work occupations encroach upon them. This condition is labelled occupational disruption or obstruction. The triangular piece of family occupations square that is overlapped with the paid work square represents the compromise of the former made to accommodate the latter. As a result, the family's state is incomplete or family's functioning is diminished. Parents in this study recounted that their family occupations were disrupted by phone calls and emails related to their paid work. As they had to respond to these messages, the consequent disruption or obstruction evoked a sense of imbalance in both male and female participants. The literature recognizes that this type of time pressure creates a conflict between paid and family occupations, making it more difficult for individuals to physically meet the demands of their family occupations (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). The parents in this study also experienced occupational obstruction. For example, when they had to care for a sick child, their capacity to engage in paid work was physically and temporally constrained. Their consequent failure to meet the demand of paid occupations was associated with a feeling of imbalance.
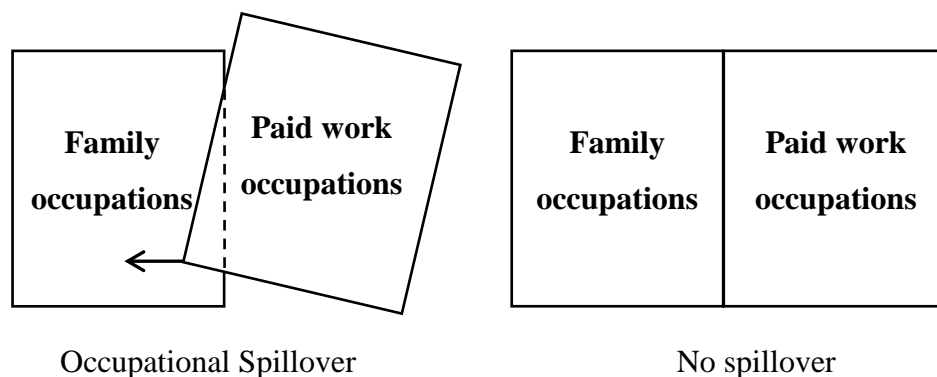

Occupational Spillover   No spillover

Figure 4. Occupational spillover.

This study suggests that mental spillover, in addition to physical and temporal spillover, is an indicator of imbalance for parents. Previous studies found positive correlations between paid work demands and the frequency of work-to-family interference (Peters et al., 2009; van Rijswijk et al., 2004). In the studies of Peters et al. (2009) and van Rijswijk et al. (2004), work-to-family interference was measured by questionnaires inquiring into mental spillover (e.g., the extent to which individuals thought about paid work, felt irritated by it when they were at home, and enjoyed time at home) as well as physical spillover (e.g., how frequently their paid work demands made it difficult for them to fulfill demands of domestic occupations). However, as these studies did not examine mental spillover separately from physical spillover, the frequency of the former remained unclear. In contrast, the present study illustrated that parents' anxiety and stress associated with paid occupations spilled over into, and negatively affected, the fulfillment of the demands of family occupation, which in turn led to a feeling of imbalance in the parents. Balance meant being both physically and mentally present with their children; they felt imbalance when they were mentally preoccupied by their paid occupations.

It was particularly vital that parents not sacrifice family occupations in order to feel balanced in managing life. Participants almost always mentioned that family life needed to be preserved—that is, paid occupations should not "infringe upon" or "spill over" into family life— but they almost never mentioned the reverse—that is, that paid work ought not to be sacrificed for the sake of family. This might have reflected that parents experienced paid occupations interfering with family life more often than vice versa. Frone, Russell, and Cooper (1992b), in a study conducted in New York, found the higher prevalence of work-to-family conflict than family-to-work conflict among employed adults living with a spouse and/or children. Consistently finding that work-to-family conflict occurs more frequently than family-to-work conflict, Frone (2003) posited that paid occupations impact family life more deleteriously than vice versa. In addition to excessive paid-occupation demands, a family stressor also appears to lead to work-to-family conflict via an increase in family-to-work conflict (Frone, Russell, & Cooper, 1992a). Considering this effect of a family stressor on work-to-family conflict, having to look after a sick child or dealing with low spousal support for paid work, for example, leads to family-to-work conflict, which may in turn contribute to work-to-family conflict. This evidence suggests that family life is more likely to be neglected or sacrificed than paid work. A stressor, regardless of whether it derives from family or paid occupations, can increase the risk of the disruption of, or obstructions to, family occupations. Parents' emphasis on managing family life

as an important feature of balance might be indicative of their awareness that family occupations are more vulnerable than other occupations.

Parents in this study might have been more susceptible to occupational spillover than other populations because of their educational and job characteristics as well as their use of electronic communication devices. The participants' educational background and types of job/profession might have accounted for the high prevalence of spillover of paid occupations into family occupations. Given that the majority of parents in this study were highly educated and had a managerial or professional job or ran a business, they had a considerable amount of responsibility at work, which often translates into increased work hours and intensity and requires an atypical work schedule, and obstructions to their family occupations occurred accordingly. In addition, due to growing work demands deriving from a service-oriented economy and maximizing variation in work norms (Peng, Ilies, & Dimotakis, 2011), managers, executives, and business owners were more likely than others to work longer hours, and were often expected to be available around the clock. Even outside their work hours, they were expected to monitor business conditions, respond to inquiries or requests from their clients and colleagues, and resolve issues. Paid work that requires constant availability is demanding in nature and thus likely to be susceptible to conflict.

In addition, advanced information and communications technology has expanded the temporal and spatial capacity and flexibility of paid work (Peng et al., 2011; Perrons, 2003; Peters et al., 2009). This advanced technology, coupled with the expectation that one be accessible outside work, allows paid occupations to intrude more easily on family occupations (Chesley, 2005; Peng et al., 2011; Peters et al., 2009). The negative impact on family life of using the technology was evident in the present study. For example, receiving work-related emails and phone calls was perceived as intrusive and the parents felt pressured to respond, but the technology also enabled them to work—blending paid and family occupations—when they needed to look after a sick child or interact with their colleagues on days off work.

3.2.1.4.1 Routine

Executing routine was an approach to managing life and was perceived as contributing to subjective balance because routine helped parents to complete things smoothly and in a timely fashion. As Vivian depicted in this study, managing everyday life entails following through and

completing patterned tasks and activities in a timely and fashionable manner that will get her to an intended place. Routine guides people to effectively locate themselves temporally and spatially, which enables them to complete the tasks or activities that they are expected to be doing (Kielhofner, 2008) by "a set of integrated behaviours" (Seamon, 1980, p. 157). Because behaviours become automated in routine, parents can anticipate and complete certain tasks without too much mental and physical effort. Evans and Rodger (2008) illustrated that routine assists mothers in accomplishing a family's daily activities, based on semi-structured interview data from 10 mothers with at least one child aged between two and six years old. In their study, establishing and implementing routine is identified as a strategy for mothers' running child-related evening activities smoothly. Routine provides structure and consistency, which not only enables children to predict sequential daily events and prepare themselves for what is coming up next, but also limits their off-track behaviour (Evans & Rodger, 2008). Thus, the structure and consistency of routine increases the extent to which parents manage daily occupations, which in turn leads them to feel balanced. On the other hand, as was the case for David in this study, routine can put a family at risk of feeling rushed and the structure of routine can constrain time flexibility for engaging in alternative behaviours and activities. This interferes with quality time for the family, leading to situation of imbalance.

The degree of disruption to routine or daily occupations is perceived as corresponding to a feeling of being out of balance. In the present study, parents related a lack of balance to their challenges in establishing a routine. Parents' involvement in occupations changed depending on their own health conditions or the unpredictable demands of their paid work and family. Unpredictable and inconsistent everyday life situations deprived parents of a sense of balance. The literature shows the relationship between an unpredictable life pattern and one's perceived health. Erlandsson and Eklund (2006), who examined whether employed mothers' subjective health and well-being differed depending on the degree of complexity in the patterns of their daily occupations, found an inverse association between the levels of complexity in the women's occupational patterns and their subjective health. Erlandsson and Eklund mentioned that the women's perceived diminished health in relationship to a higher level of complexity in their occupational pattern is considered occupational overload. Interruptions typically require spontaneously responding to disruptive demands and finding time to meet the needs of the occupations that are being suspended. This process in and of itself can be taxing for parents who are overloaded. Thus, the more complex a mother's daily occupational pattern is, the more

chaotic and consuming her daily life will be. As a result, she is less likely to feel healthy and be fully productive in her planned occupations. Moreover, when parents' lives are highly inconsistent, unpredictable, and full of intrusions, it is challenging for them to anticipate what, when and to which extent occupational demands can be fulfilled. The difficulty of managing lives in such circumstances would presumably undermine parents' experience of balance.

3.2.1.5 Occupational harmony

While advances in technology regarding communication and information have allowed paid occupation to spill over into family life and affect parents' sense of balance, they have also enabled parents to work from home when they need to look after a sick child or to interact with their colleagues on days off work. Jessica's email correspondence with her colleagues on her days off work helped her to update her part of group projects and respond to her colleagues' urgent requests. The temporal and spatial flexibility that she gained from using email increased her ability to manage her paid work demands while she was home with her children, thus enabling her to deal with both family and paid work needs simultaneously. This mirrors the findings of Wajcman, Rose, Brown, and Bittman's (2010) study. Wajcman et al. examined data obtained by questionnaires and time diaries from 850 Australian employees from 658 households, and found that using technology to stay connected to work while staying home can contribute to a positive work-to-family occupational spillover (Wajcman et al., 2010). This contrasts with the disruptive occupational spillover described above. Negative spillover occurs when paid work demands inadvertently disrupt or obstruct family occupations via communication technology, leading parents to a feeling of imbalance. In contrast, positive spillover, which is perceived as balance, is experienced when parents actively integrate paid work and family occupations by using technology to resolve spatial issues (e.g., distance between the workplace and home).

A family-friendly work environment also helps mothers manage the demands of multiple occupations. Female participants in this study appreciated employers who gave them flexible work hours and reasonable paid work demands because the flexibility allowed them to choose working hours that best enabled them to meet family and other demands. Reasonable paid work demands enable women to have realistic expectations for their workplace performance. As a result, both they and their employers/colleagues will be content with their work performance. Pauline's comment "work doesn't…get a lot of me basically…but I can live with that and I think

my work can as well" captures this shared contentment. A family-friendly work environment acknowledges that parents must give family a priority and accommodates this by providing guidelines and resources to help their employees acquire balance.

Advanced communication and information technology and family-friendly paid work increase the flexibility of the boundary/border between paid work and family lives, which fosters harmony between the two areas (Figure 5). This flexibility—the degree of temporal and locational malleability—eases parents' transitioning between paid and family occupations and helps them manage both by harmonizing them (Ashforth et al., 2000; Clark, 2000; Desrochers & Sargent, 2004; Hall & Richter, 1988). The harmony between occupations in turn contributes to parents' subjective sense of balance. In Figure 5, *Occupational Harmony*, harmony is indicated by the curved boundary between family and paid work occupations, which shows the flexible relationship between the two. In contrast, *Occupational Disharmony* portrays a situation in which the two occupations do not easily mesh with each other.
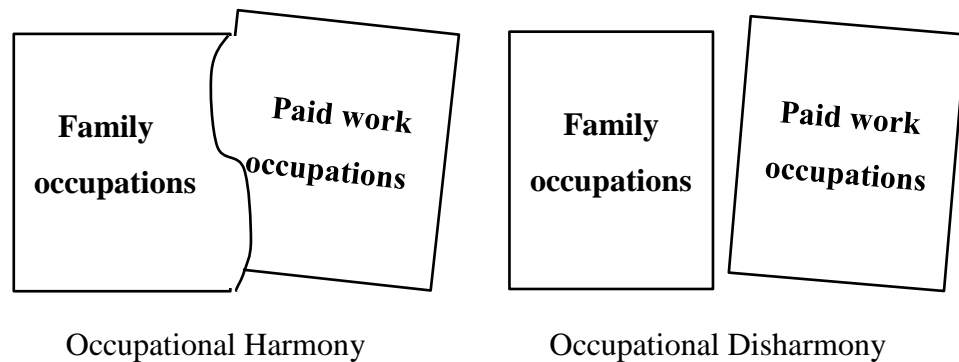

| Occupational Harmony | Occupational Disharmony |

Figure 5. Occupational harmony. Flexible boundary/border between *Family occupations* and *Paid work occupations* promotes occupational harmony.

3.2.2 Balance as participating in a mix of occupations

One of the salient findings of this study is that participants attributed meanings to one occupation in a way that offset a lack of meanings infused in other occupations. Participating in a variety of occupations led parents to feel balanced because it helped them meet their various personal needs. Previous research contended that variation in occupations is necessary for a balanced life (Wagman et al., 2011). While the men and women in this study participated in paid,

family, social, and personal occupations to satisfy their various needs, the ways in which the men and women satisfied their needs differed slightly because each gender attributed different meanings to those occupations.

3.2.2.1 Maintaining physical and mental health

The findings suggest that engaging in a mix of occupations is essential for employed parents' subjective sense of balance in part because it helps them to meet the needs of sustaining their physical and mental health. This echoes Matuska and Christiansen's (2008) lifestyle balance which depicted a balanced life as involving the occupations that help one sustain one's biological health. The primary challenges for the participants in the present study were the physical and emotional fatigue stemming from childcare and a lack of time to address that fatigue. The existing literature indicated that children are significantly associated with parents' perceived imbalance between paid work, family, and personal life (see, for example, Tausig & Fenwick, 2001).

For women in the present study, engaging in paid occupations provided a release from childcare stress, whereas men found stress relief primarily in personal occupations. Paid work gave mothers a break from having to fulfill the constant needs of, and requests from, their children. This means they did not reflect on whether they were a good mother according to how well they fulfilled their children's requests. A break from the pressing responsibility of childcare while engaging in paid occupations helped women feel balanced.

Family occupations can both hinder and facilitate parents' sense of balance because they have both negative and positive influences on parents' health. Participants in the present study perceived childcare as being frustrating, physically and mentally tiring, and requiring a great deal of patience because the demands and requests from children are constant. As many parents indicated, however, family occupations also brought joy, which led parents to feel balanced. "Just hanging out with children and just doing stuff" had special meaning for parents and satisfied their needs for feeling engaged and having fun. In addition, some household chores can allow parents to escape their children for a time, and they can be productive because they get done those tasks that need to be done. Some women perceived family occupations as opportunities for alleviating their stress from paid work.

For parents in this study, the primary purpose of engaging in personal occupations was to sustain physical and mental health. The activities that they mentioned engaging in when they had time for themselves are known to promote and maintain health: exercising, doing yoga, resting, healthy eating. Feeling physically and mentally healthy fosters subjective balance. One Swedish study found that fatigue and stress contributed to imbalance in women recovering from a stress-related disorder (Håkansson & Matuska, 2010), and that adequate sleep, exercise, physical activities, and healthy diet were regarded as highly important for subjective balance among both the women in that study (Håkansson & Matuska, 2010) and Swedish workers in a later study (Wagman et al., 2011). Stress management was also perceived as being critical for balance among women with multiple sclerosis (Matuska & Erickson, 2008).

3.2.2.2 Supportive, reciprocal interpersonal relationships

Sustaining social connections and rewarding relationships was one significant reason why the participants in this study engaged in a mix of occupations. Mothers in particular recognized the needs of social engagement and sought to meet these needs during their maternity leave when domestic chores and childcare were their primary occupations. For mothers, engaging in paid occupations increased their opportunities for social interactions with people outside the family, from whom mothers gained childcare support and an understanding of their challenges in managing both paid work and family life. Having relationships that are rewarding to an individual and affirm his or her values and beliefs is an essential component of a balanced life (Matuska & Christiansen, 2008).

From the mothers' perspective in this study, participating in paid work had a positive impact on their perception of their marriage, helping them implement the fair share of domestic and parenting responsibilities with their husbands and so reducing their sense of resentment about the distribution of responsibility. Being involved in paid occupations empowered mothers because it brought them financial autonomy and increased their independence. These benefits affected their perceptions of power differences in their marital relationship (that is, made them feel more equal to their husbands) and made it easier for them to ask for their husbands' involvement in occupations at home. Håkansson and Matuska (2010) found that a healthy, reciprocal relationship played a significant role in a balanced life among Swedish women who were recovering from a stress-related disorder. Likewise, Swedish workers indicated that

relationships based on both giving and accepting support were an essential aspect of a balanced life (Wagman et al., 2011).

Some participants perceived social occupations, such as volunteering, as ways to develop supportive relationships which in turn contributed to their subjective sense of balance. Building trust with community members or friends by helping and being helped by them enhanced participants' sense of worth and affirmed their sense of identity. A 2009 study (Stamm et al., 2009) of occupational balance among people with rheumatoid arthritis revealed that occupations that require people to care for others are just as important as occupations in which they care for themselves. The need for bidirectional, rewarding relationships may reflect parents' needs for being valued by others. Fulfilling this need therefore has a positive impact on their lives.

3.2.2.3 Feeling stimulated, challenged, and competent

Matuska and Christiansen (2008) identified participating in occupations that lead to a feeling of being engaged, challenged, and competent as one of the critical components of a balanced lifestyle. Participants in this study also attributed gaining a sense of stimulation, competence, enjoyment, and accomplishment to their participation in paid occupations. Women in particular mentioned that competence, challenges, and enjoyment in relation to the professional, intellectual, and social aspects of their involvement in paid occupations contributed to their feelings of balance. Paid occupation is in and of itself a forum to expand one's social and professional network and participants said it helped them stay up-to-date with events, issues, and knowledge relevant to their work. Professional work typically presents people with intellectual challenges and opportunities to develop their expertise, which leads successful workers to feel competent and brings them social recognition. Working parents can therefore establish an identity as a competent worker or professional.

In contrast, participating in domestic and childcare occupations is less likely to fulfill the needs of feeling competent and intellectually and socially stimulated. Female participants perceived those occupations as offering limited opportunities for intellectual advancement and social accreditation. Although parents might have enjoyed some feeling of success when they saw their children achieve various developmental milestones, which gave rise to a subjective sense of balance, as some parents indicated, mastering parenting was extremely challenging. They—and mothers in particular—indicated that they struggled to be what they and society

perceived as the "ideal parent." No matter how hard they tried, they never felt they were fulfilling the role of parent as well as they had hoped they would. Thus, by engaging in paid occupations, parents counteract the absence of feeling stimulated by, and accomplished and competent in, childcare. Likewise, participants who were involved in community occupations satisfied their needs of self-efficacy and accomplishment through the public acknowledgement and appreciation of their contributions to the community. Maslow (1943) indicated in a theory of human motivation that the need for esteem comprises a desire for self-esteem—which is based on one's capacity, accomplishment, and confidence—and a desire for esteem from others— which manifests as appreciation, reputation, and acknowledgement. At least some participants in this study engaged in multiple occupations to meet their needs for esteem and as a result they did feel balanced.

Parents' subjective balance might derive from a combination of various types and degree of challenges that they experienced in their occupations. They experienced different degrees and types of stimulation and challenges by participating in a mix of occupations. While parenting was emotionally and physically exhausting, paid occupations gave parents intellectual challenges and social stimulation. Some parents experienced parenting as extremely challenging, but not particularly rewarding in terms of the social recognition of its value or their capacity to be what they considered an ideal parent. Therefore, they engaged in other occupations that challenged them but also provided a sense of achievement. Previous studies show that the amount of involvement in occupations that lead individuals to experience various degrees of challenge is an important factor that contributes to balance in life: a combination of both challenging and relaxing occupations was found necessary for a sense of balance among people with rheumatoid arthritis (Stamm et al., 2009), for example, and paid workers in Sweden (Wagman et al., 2011). A model of experiential balance explains more specifically that a mix of three types of occupations influences people's experience of health and life meaning: 1) flowing occupations, which lead individuals to experience challenges that match their skills; 2) exacting occupations, which individuals experience as being too difficult to accomplish with their skills; and 3) calming occupations, which give rise to experiences of a lack of challenge (Jonsson & Persson, 2006; Persson & Jonsson, 2009).

Matuska and Christiansen (2008) also identified that the ability to organize one's time and energy in a way that enables one to achieve his or her goals and a sense of renewal is an essential component for a balanced life. Many participants did not appear to have a sense of

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control over their time and energy; they indicated that they almost always struggled to find enough time for their occupations and often felt exhausted. The lack of control over time was partly because their work hours were set and rigid and partly because the combination of domestic, childcare, and paid occupations required so much energy and time. Some women expressed that they had more freedom and more control over their time while involved in paid work than when parenting. They could take a coffee break if they wanted and when they wanted; their children's needs did not offer the same flexibility.

3.2.2.4 Creating a positive personal identity: Being and becoming

Participating in a mix of occupations helped participants to meet their needs for creating a positive identity to some degree, which in turn helped them experience balance. Time off from stress arising from childcare while engaging in paid occupations helped mothers be "good mothers" because their paid work helped them refresh themselves and feel ready to spend time again with their children. Thus, as mentioned previously, engaging in paid work not only enabled mothers to establish a positive identity for themselves as workers, but also helped them sustain their "good mother" identity. Further, even though some mothers might have felt that being an ideal mother was unachievable, they counterbalanced their negative parenting identity by building a positive identity in other areas. As a result, being involved in a mix of occupations brought participants a positive sense of collective self.

Having personal time to be alone or to engage in occupations that allowed participants to express who they were and who they wanted to be was particularly important for some participants to sustain their identity. This was reflected in participants' perceptions of alone or "me time" as helping them to "reground" and "recentre" themselves when feeling stressed. Pentland and McColl (2008) contended that people are often enticed into fulfilling demands external to them (i.e., others and their environment) and that this can leave little time or opportunity for them to reflect on their values, beliefs, and strengths. Western culture dominates individualism, which is about one's autonomy, self-determination, and independence (Doi, 2001; Iwama, 2003, 2006). However, western culture also imposes, to a lesser degree than collectivism, external expectations; excessive external demands still draw an individual's attention toward their environment and away from their identity, which can make them feel decentred or as if they are floating. Some participants in this study remarked that they found time to reflect on and

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regain their identity, while others juggled being a good parent and a good worker by going back and forth between the two roles.

The importance of having occupations that enable one to create a positive personal identity is asserted by Matuska and Christiansen (2008) and identified as being important for a balanced life among American women with multiple sclerosis (Matuska & Erickson, 2008), Swedish women in the recovery phase of a stress-related disorder (Håkansson & Matuska, 2010), and Canadian parents who have a child with autism (Woodgate, Ateah, & Secco, 2008). To build and sustain a strong identity, it appears particularly important for individuals, regardless of whether or not they live with illness or disabilities, to stay aware of and prioritize their values, beliefs, and goals, and to consciously engage in occupations that are compatible with their priorities. Further, Maslow (1943) depicted the desire for self-fulfillment—which is comparable to Matuska and Christiansen's (2008) need for creating a positive personal identity—as "the desire to become more and more what one is, to become everything that one is capable of becoming" (p. 382). Participants in this study identified family and paid occupations as their primary and important occupations, and many of them minimized or put on hold time to enjoy and participate in recreational activities. However, those who retained a strong desire to express the identities that they valued outside their family and paid work life areas, or to seek out such identities, might be lacking a sense of coherence in their identity and will thus face challenges in achieving a sense of balance. This was particularly so for fathers like David, who did not have enough time to enjoy his hobbies and had therefore abandoned them until his children were older. The following chapter examines the dilemma that fathers, like David, experience when being the financial provider for their families impedes their need to pursue contentment as an individual.

3.3 Conclusion

This chapter delineated the findings on conceptions of balance in everyday life presented in the accounts of 30 parents. The findings highlight the two key conceptions of balance that reflected whose needs are important to the attainment of balance. The conception of balance as managing life is based on *collective* needs, whereas its conception as participating in a mix of occupations is based on parents' *individual* needs. In accord with the findings, the discussion highlighted important features of balance that are unique to managing life because they focus on

the collective nature of happiness. For example, the conceptual features of balance are comparable to the domains of FQoL. Family's collective happiness is vital to parents' sense of balance, but it requires them to negotiate their personal needs with family members' needs as well as the social demands of daily occupations. As a result, parents' personal needs for extracurricular occupations are often ignored or sacrificed, whereas attending to their health-related needs is rationalized and integrated into the needs of the family for its greater good. Further, positive and negative spillover between family and paid work occupations was discussed in relation to occupational disruption, obstruction, and harmony, all of which contribute to the conceptualization of balance from an occupational perspective.

This chapter explicated and discussed the four meanings parents attributed to engaging in paid work, family occupations, and other occupations when they perceived balance as participating in a mix of occupations: maintaining physical and mental health; developing/maintaining supportive, reciprocal relationships; feeling stimulated, challenged, and competent; and creating a positive personal identity. Participating in a variety of occupations allows parents to find these meanings and subsequently leads them to feeling balanced.

4 Findings and Discussion II: Constructions of Balance

While the previous chapter presented conceptions of balance drawn from the experiences of participants as one group, this chapter presents the discourse analysis of women's and men's constructions of balance in everyday life. Ian Parker's (1992) framework of discourse is based on the assumption that an object—balance in everyday life—is constructed in texts, which refer to "delimited tissues of meaning reproduced in *any* form that can be given an interpretive gloss" (p. 6). According to Parker, subject positions that facilitate, permit, and/or hinder certain actions are embedded in each discursive construction. This chapter highlights the ideological subject positions that are embedded in the female and male participants' discursive constructions of balance in everyday life. First, women's subject positions are described, including ways each position facilitates and hinders actions. Then, men's subject positions and actions are presented.

4.1 Findings

4.1.1 Women's discursive constructions of balance and subject positions

Women constructed balance as managing life and engaging in a variety of occupations. Each construction presented one of two female subject positions: household chief executive officer (CEO) in the construction of balance as managing life; and happy healthy woman in the construction of balance as participating in a mix of occupations. Each construction has six sub-categories that describe women's experiences of seeking balance (Table 5).

Table 5
Women's Constructions of Balance

Construction	Managing life	Participating in a mix of occupations
Subject position	Household CEO	Happy healthy woman
Experience	• Orchestrate family functioning • Ensure family's overall happiness • Take primary charge of childcare • Allocate time to occupations according to priorities • Limit paid occupations • Compromise alone time	• Take time out from childcare • Try to be "happy," "better" mom • Seek freedom in occupational choice and time allocation • Wrestle with societal expectations of women • Access and be part of "the bigger world" • "Look after myself"

4.1.1.1 Woman as household CEO

In the construction of balance as managing life, many women emphasized the importance of family life over other areas of life. For female participants, the construction spoke from a position of a household CEO. This position was identified based on the behaviours and actions that they constructed as contributing to their subjective sense of balance: 1) orchestrating family functioning; 2) ensuring the family's overall happiness; 3) taking primary charge of childcare; 4) allocating time for occupations according to priorities; 5) limiting type of or time in paid occupations to manage both home and paid work; and 6) compromising on time for oneself. Each of these behaviours and actions is analyzed below.

4.1.1.1.1 Orchestrating family functioning

When female participants constructed balance in everyday life, they often referred to the family functioning well as an indicator of balance. At the very least, their descriptions made mention of preventing things from interfering with family life. Aspects of family life they expected to function smoothly, or free from interference from outside factors, included: planning and organizing; core household tasks; finances; the family's social network; and the husband's involvement in housework and childcare occupations.

The mothers' commitment to caring for everyone in the family required organization and scheduling, particularly if they were employed full-time and had multiple children. To meet the needs of everybody in the family, scheduling was critical, as Clare pointed out:

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As much as I don't like doing [the schedule], it makes for a much better week. If I spend the time on the Saturday or Sunday, spend an hour figuring it out then it makes the week go really smoothly, really easily. It's the weeks where I don't figure it out in advance that it feels very chaotic and that we're always running behind and scrambling. (1-561)

Clare's example shows how women tend to anticipate family needs and use schedules to avoid chaos—a form of imbalance. Most of the female participants identified themselves as the one who organized and scheduled, whether it was planning meals, scheduling household projects or family events, organizing childcare, or assigning tasks to their husbands.

While the mothers acknowledged the importance of organization to the family's well-being, some of them expressed a desire for their husbands to be involved or to take the initiative because scheduling and planning were so time consuming. The rationale for the mother—rather than the father—taking on the role of organizer was based on the view that men were not suited to planning. Clare stated, "My husband is much more spontaneous, a fly-by-the-seat-of-his-pants kinda person" (1-443). Another rationale was that husbands preferred their wives to be responsible for all the household responsibilities. As Maggie said: "He wants me to do all of it [household tasks]" (2-362). These mothers felt that taking on the role of organizer and planner was their job, regardless of whether they attributed it to their own judgement of which partner was best suited for it or to their husbands' expectations.

When women in the study constructed managing household life as a primary aspect of balance, they felt responsible to take care of core household tasks for the family, such as cooking, housecleaning, paying bills, and getting cars fixed. Some women felt imbalanced when their engagement in paid occupations limited their capacity to perform household tasks, particularly cooking and cleaning. Speaking from her own experience, Jessica mentioned that full-time working couples might have to take "shortcuts" when trying to meet family needs:

I find that would be hard to work full-time and be travelling, that would be very hard. I mean, it was fine for work but it wasn't fine for my home life…. If both of you are doing that, then you start looking for shortcuts…you start not eating well, for example, or you order food in or something… you try to shortcut some of the chores out that. You know the house gets messy. (2-469, 471)

By working part-time, Jessica avoided having to take these shortcuts for the sake of her family. In constructing that it was she—rather than her husband—who should have worked less and taken primary responsibility for the family's diet and house cleaning, she established and reinforced a sense of balance that spoke to women as "household CEO."

Furthermore, many mothers indicated that while checking things off on their to-do list helped them to feel satisfied, relaxed, and in balance because it indicated that needs were being met, their position as primary care provider and housekeeper might limit their time for themselves. Maggie, for example, explained that "it's more relaxing for me to get things done and so that's how I choose to spend my leisure time" (1-224). On the one hand, the mother's sense of being responsible for core household tasks motivated her to complete them and hence feel balanced in terms of the construction of balance as managing life. On the other hand, her responsibility could overburden her and cause her to feel out-of-balance on an individual level—in terms of the construction of balance as participating in a mix of occupations. This tension is discussed below.

Ensuring that the household was financially secure was a prominent aspect of managing family life and was linked to balance. Some mothers implied that they engaged in paid occupations primarily because their households needed the income, whereas for others working was optional. In either case, meeting the family's financial needs or desires (e.g., saving) through their paid work contributed to their sense of balance. For example, Olivia attributed her family's financial gain to her feeling that working three days a week and staying home the other four was a good balance: "Well, we need the income even though after childcare initially there's not a whole lot, but it's something and every year childcare gets less expensive, so my take-home does get better each year" (1-189). The financial security that Olivia's family gained from her involvement in paid work might have directly led her to feel balanced or contributed to her subjective sense of balance by justifying the time she allocated to paid work and family life.

A few of the mothers in this study engaged in paid occupations to satisfy their personal interests and goals, rather than to meet their family's financial needs, and did so even though it meant that they had the additional expense of childcare. In these cases, the mothers ensured that it did not place a financial burden on the family. Some of the women who worked part-time justified their involvement in paid work and work hours because the money earned from their paid work afforded the childcare that they needed while they were at work: "I'm bringing in enough money to pay for the nanny," and that is one of the reasons why "I always feel like [working three days a week] is a good balance for me" (Maggie, 1-559). As most of the couples depended on childcare services while they were at work, the mothers were apparently required to cover the expenses of childcare that they would not have needed if they had not been working. However, it was challenging for them to maintain a positive financial balance between the wages

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they earned and childcare expenses in the metropolitan area. If childcare costs had exceeded their earnings, they would have perceived their involvement in paid work as interfering financially with family life, in which case, they may have chosen to stay home with children. Therefore, regardless of whether women participated in paid work to meet the family's financial needs or their own personal needs, ensuring that the family had a financial safety net remained the focal aspect of managing family life that was linked to mothers' sense of balance. When balance was constructed in this way, mothers would limit their paid work opportunities unless they could afford childcare; the cost of childcare may have affected the decision of some not to work, even if they would have liked to.

Developing and maintaining a strong social network was constructed as another critical aspect of managing family life. Ana remarked that her family needed some kind of social circle in order to have a balanced life:

> Your social circle—this is what makes your life balanced then complete. You need it to function properly as a human being, right? And you need friends, you need going out or whatever. So yeah we are trying to put that on the to-do list, still not working very well, but we are trying our best. (2-187)

A social network was certainly an important resource for a young family. However, participating in social occupations was a low priority when paid and/or family occupations became overwhelming. In women's construction of balance, tensions often arose between actual schedules and ideal schedules due to demands of orchestrating household responsibilities.

Women in the study also orchestrated their husbands' share of domestic and childcare occupations. Several women found it impossible to handle the domestic and childcare occupations entirely by themselves as they also had to fulfill the demands of their paid employment. Vivian remarked that she could only manage half the childcare and household responsibilities, and stated that "my husband has to do the other half" (2-753). Nicola, who did the majority of the housework, created a chart that showed how many household tasks she and her husband completed every week to encourage him to do more of them:

> It was a whole process to develop the system because what happened was, I was saying to him, "I am doing everything around here," and he said, "No, no, I'm doing my fair share," and I'm like, "No you're not. Like I feel like…I'm constantly cleaning up…" Like I feel like I'm doing so much more…. What he says is that it [the system] makes him do more, which is true…he can see that I do all these things…. Because I think a lot of housework is sort of like unseen work…like people just assume that there won't be dishes in the strainer, or that the counter will be wiped, or whatever, you know these multitude of little things that go on. (1-67)

Because housework seemed invisible to him, she tended to take on more of the household tasks, which caused her to feel overloaded. Several other women likewise constantly encountered the stressful situation where household tasks were left to them because of their husbands' inattention or a lack of awareness about what tasks needed to be done.

Women's justification for "fair share" of childcare responsibilities was similar to, and yet slightly different from, the case of housework. As with housework, mothers such as Florence indicated the necessity of sharing responsibilities because they worked as much as or more than their husbands: "If I'm going to work the same number of hours he is, there is no reason that I'm going to come home and do more. I just, it never even occurred to me to do it all. It shouldn't be that way" (1-373). However, some mothers felt they were expected to be the primary care provider whenever childcare needs could not wait until the parents got home from work. Looking after a sick child was a typical example of this, and it created tension between the demands to fulfill the dual responsibilities of childcare and paid occupations. When this tension arose, some mothers negotiated with their husbands about who was to look after the children when they were sick and the decision was made based on which partner had fewer and less urgent work demands, whose workmates had a better understanding of young working parents' situation, and/or who worked closest to their childcare facility. For example, Kate said:

> The challenge around sort of, what do you do when your kid's sick, and you've also got something going on at work. So that's an ongoing challenge. [Her husband] and I have to negotiate sometimes who's going to stay home, depending on who's doing what at work, and things like that. And, at first it was me that stayed home 'cause I was breastfeeding still…. We sort of talked about it, like, "Okay, I really have to be at work on Thursday, can you take the day off?" or something like that. (2-216)

In Kate's case, the fact that she was breastfeeding suggested that she was better equipped than her husband to care for a sick child, which led to her always shouldering the role of caregiver in those circumstances. Couples seemed to start negotiating this issue once their children stopped breastfeeding and childcare needs interfered with fulfilling the needs of a mother's paid work. The pressure resulting from childcare needs conflicting with the demands of the mothers' paid occupations was an impetus for couples to find ways to share childcare responsibilities. Further, some female participants pointed out the importance of fair share because they understood that fatherhood is as important in parenting as motherhood is.

4.1.1.1.2 Ensuring the family's overall happiness: "We each get a bit of everything we need"

Consider Olivia's description of how she felt about having three days at work and four days at home:

> Olivia: Three days [at work] is a good balance. It's enough to feel at work like you're getting enough satisfaction out of work…you can get some of that professional fulfillment on three days a week without having to ruin your whole life.
>
> Interviewer: You mentioned balance…. Could you tell me a little bit more about balance?
>
> Olivia: Making sure everyone gets enough pieces of time and of you. [laugh]
>
> Interviewer: "Everyone"?
>
> Olivia: Your kids, you know, your husband, yourself. That everyone's getting enough of what they need. (1-205, 214)

Like Olivia, other mothers constructed balance as a situation where all the family members' needs were met "enough" and the family as a whole was generally happy. Lilly corroborated this: "It seems like we are all really happy at the moment, and we each get a bit of everything we need" (2-633). This family-centred view of balance was reflected in one indicator of imbalance that the mothers mentioned—damage to relationships with family members. Jessica expressed this by saying: "If I had to work a lot and travel every week…my relationship with my husband would suffer" (2-523). Women were aware that their substantial engagement in paid work could diminish their relationships with family members and cause them to feel imbalanced, so they therefore tried to conscientiously avoid excessive paid work demands.

4.1.1.1.3 Taking primary charge of childcare

In constructing balance, most of mothers in the study located themselves as primary care providers to their children and emphasized that being an ideal mother was an important aspect of feeling balanced. Mothers highlighted three key features of childcare that affected their perception of balance: nurturing children, time spent with children, and monitoring children.

Some mothers constructed that meeting their children's basic needs—safety, consistent good sleep, rest, healthy diet, and love—was an important and foundational aspect of balance. Lilly explained that her perception of balance was embedded broadly in everyday nurturing and parenting, and that she aimed to determine and provide the appropriate amount of fulfillment for

her children's needs, right down to a micro level, for example, TV time and, in the passage below—snacks:

> I just think an all or nothing approach isn't healthy no matter what it is.… We don't ban chocolate but it's knowing that you don't have it every day or…you don't have pudding before dinner. Like you need to eat dinner first and then if there's pudding…that comes after dinner, and you have to have eaten most of your dinner or a satisfactory amount of your dinner and vegetables, before you eat pudding. (1-545)

Balance in this case applied to not merely determining what snacks Lilly did or did not give her children but also deciding how many snacks to give and when to give them. Her view that an "all or nothing" approach was not desirable or proper when determining to what extent her children were permitted or given things specifically corresponded to her sense of balance.

Many mothers constructed spending time with their family, particularly their children, as being critical for their subjective sense of balance. The pertinent elements of spending time with children were having "enough" time, as well as being in the moment with the children and responding fully to them and their needs. Clare mentioned that she felt imbalance because her involvement in family life was inadequate in her opinion:

> Interviewer: How balanced do you feel your life is?
> Clare: I feel like it's too much on the work side. I feel like it's off balance that way…and it's probably with my husband because he does own his own businesses, so you know, he's very involved with his work. So I feel like between the two of us there's far too much going on on the work side and not enough going on on the family side. (2-231)

Obviously, "enough" time with children was critical, and Clare's evaluation was based on the collective amount of time that she and her husband spent with their children. In constructing balance, the amount of time spent with children was often compared with the amount of time spent on paid work, and mothers indicated that the former was sacrificed for the latter. Indeed, imbalance was often tied to a mother's lack of time with her children as a consequence of her substantial paid work demands. Some mothers remarked that they worked while their children were at school, at daycare, and/or in bed and expressed satisfaction with their work schedule because it did not compromise their time with their children. For example, Florence said:

> I think it's balance, I don't work a huge day, but it works enough that I get a break. I get away from them [her children] for a little bit, they're not missing out. I mean, my daughter is only with a babysitter for two hours a day, and then she's at preschool for the rest of the day which she would be going to anyways if I was at home. (2-382, 388)

The rationale that these women presented for the amount of time they spent on paid work indicated that they were confident their work hours and schedule did not have a negative impact on their time with their children.

Another important feature of time with children was how "in the moment" a mother was with her children, and how much she responded to their presence. Maggie appreciated the time she spent on paid work because it had positive effects on her time with her children. She explained what it meant for her to spend time with her children:

> Because I get what I need from work, I can give more fully to just spend time with them [her children] and not feel like resentful in terms of needing something to feed my intellect…also the social time…structured time…, or making phone calls to get things done…. So I think that helps me at home to feel more in a place where I can give more freely to the kids, if that makes any sense. (1-579)

In this passage, Maggie identified two ways in which her involvement in paid occupations helped her to be more in the moment with her children: satisfying her own needs, which prevented feelings of resentment from arising, and completing some household tasks during her lunch time, which reduced the number of demands she had to fulfill at home. Therefore, Maggie was able to give of herself "more fully" and "more freely" to her children, which meant that she was physically and mentally present and appropriately responsive to them.

Conversely, several mothers constructed imbalance as being temporal and psychological negative spillover from their paid work into family life. Ellen's comment on her balance captured this feeling:

> Interviewer: Are you happy with the balance you have right now?
>
> Ellen: I think it's pretty good. It could be better…I think work could be just a little bit less intense, just a little. But hopefully it's temporary.
>
> Interviewer: What would the less intensity of work benefit in your family life?
>
> Ellen: It just means that I'm less stressed, and that I'm more able to focus on my family, and not be preoccupied with work. It means that I'm just more fun, you know, I'm not weighed down with, like feeling like there's a lot of work to do, or you know, "Oh I'd like to play with you [her children] right now, but I really need to work." You know, I think it makes me more present. (2-455)

Negative psychological spillover included worry and anxiety stemming from substantial paid occupational demands in relation to the time available to fulfill them. Consequently, even if mothers devoted time to being with their children, they might feel that they did not pay as much attention to, or were not as mentally present with, their children as they could have otherwise been.

Mothers also talked about the types of activities that engaged them with their children and thus contributed to their sense of balance. Such activities were interactional, educational, and enjoyable rather than obligatory. For example, Jessica remarked:

> As the kids get older it feels more balanced 'cause you're having to spend less time doing kind of day-to-day tasks for them, like getting them dressed or you know bathing them…so I can actually spend more time with them doing more engaging work, like reading a book or playing a game or homework, like where I'm talking to them, rather than taking care of them. Even though taking care of them is being with them too but it's different. It's more like a chore or it's more like things you have to do. (2-408, 420)

For Jessica, looking after her children's physical needs felt like chores, perhaps because it involved very little mental interaction. In contrast, homework and games were more meaningful to her in terms of her subjective sense of balance because these activities involved more intellectual and verbal interactions with her children. Similarly, for Olivia, "having home days" for her preschoolers and toddler was essential to her balance because she was able to do "mothering stuff"—"colouring and baking and Play-Doh and going to the park and story time and enjoying nap time" (1-225). Most of these activities were educational and promoted verbal communication between her and her children.

Although mothers in the study were committed to being "good mothers." they certainly found it challenging. Some expressed the conflict between their concept of ideal motherhood and their lack of ability to implement it, and as a result constructed balance in two contradictory ways. Pauline's passage below shows two competing activities that each contributed to her sense of balance in one way or another:

> Interviewer: Do you have any strategies to recover from being out of balance?
> Pauline: …Actually this week I was quite tired, and I felt a bit, I felt really guilty about it, but I left [a nanny] to play with [her child] for an hour…and I went down to have a nap because I thought I'm too tired. I just have to have a little break. So, I thought in my head I thought this is what I need to do but then I feel, I find it quite hard to do it because I feel guilty to be in my house with my kids and not the one taking care of them. (2-596, 601)

Pauline first indicated that taking a rest to recover from fatigue was important for her sense of balance, but later considered that resting did not meet the demands of her primary caregiver role, which implied that looking after her children was critical to her sense of balance. In Vicky's case, there was contradiction between the degree of her involvement in childcare occupations and how she constructed balance. First, she acknowledged that negotiating a fair share of childcare and housework responsibilities with her husband contributed to her sense of balance. However, she then stated that a good mother took full charge of core childcare occupations (e.g., feeding,

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bathing, playing, and educating children) and remarked that being a good mother led her to feel balanced. In both cases, former constructions of balance, taking a rest and sharing childcare responsibilities for Pauline and Vicky respectively, were denied by conflicting ideologies from the position of primary caregiver for their children. Although neither Pauline nor Vicky took full charge of childcare responsibilities—it was too exhausting for Pauline and not feasible for Vicky—both felt that their prominent parenting roles contributed to a sense of balance.

Monitoring children was another childcare responsibility that led mothers in the study to feel balanced in managing life. Some mothers ensured that their children were healthy and content because that mattered to their feelings of balance. Vivian referred to her children's emotional, relational, and behavioural conditions with regard to her sense of balance:

> We're not balanced, because the kids are, you know, clingy, sort of outbursts and crying that seem a bit inexplicable, not connecting…to us or to each other, or, yeah, not engaging in the stuff. Some of the sparkle's gone, a few behavioural things. (1-109)

This passage highlights that when Vivian's children behaved unpleasantly, it negatively affected her sense of her family's overall balance. For Lilly, this kind of behaviour was a sign that her children were dissatisfied with their childcare or seeking more time with her. She therefore believed that it was important to monitor her children's behaviour:

> I know if work impedes on my family life too often, I know that that's not right…. Ultimately I think it comes down to how you feel your children are in their behaviours and what they're doing, and what they're saying, and how they're connecting with you…. I think if I were to see [her child] really upset every time I dropped her off at daycare that to me would be an indication that something wasn't right because either she's really not enjoying where she is, or she's just missing me too much and so doesn't want to let go of me…. If they were showing extremes of behaviour that weren't age appropriate, that I wasn't hearing echoed by other parents with children the same age, then I think that would be an indication. So, I think that's where it's good to get kind of check-ins and feedback from other parents, 'cause then you can go, "Yup, ours do exactly the same." (2-419)

Although Lilly was talking about her sense of balance from the perspective of allocating her time to paid work and family life, she ascribed her children's behaviours and interpersonal and emotional conditions to her subjective sense of balance. As such, her perception of her children's well-being was integral to her construction of balance and monitoring them was a reflection of the strong sense of responsibility she felt for looking after them.

4.1.1.1.4   Allocating time to occupations according to priorities

Balance as managing life was constructed in relation to time allocation. There were two main ways of allocating time to occupations that contributed to a mother's sense of balance. One way was to ensure that the amount of time she allocated to occupations was consistent with how she prioritized them; i.e., "work-family balance is pretty great…it's definitely tipped to the side of family" (2-509) was Pauline's assessment of her time demands. Olivia, too, remarked that dedicating more time to family life than to paid work satisfied her and was in accord with her priorities:

> I like having more days, like the four days at home, so the swing of the balance is more at home. And I like that 'cause to me, that weighs my priorities better…I want my first priority to be right now at home with the kids. So I've got more time with them. So to me, that's a much better balance, 'cause I'm putting the majority of my time where I want it to be. (2-697)

Both Pauline and Olivia felt balanced when they devoted more time to family life than paid work life. In contrast, other female participants expressed that they would have stayed home with their children a little more had they been allowed to work less. They wondered whether their time allocation between full-time paid work and mothering represented the "right balance." In explaining this uncertainty, some referred to the societal expectation that women be the primary care providers for their children and stated this expectation led them to feel selfish or guilty for giving more time to paid work and/or not taking full charge of home-related work. For example, despite her significant contribution to the household income, Lilly remarked, "For me work is purely selfishness.... I enjoy my work, and it's about me getting a sense of achievement out of that work that I do and getting recognition" (2-273). Lilly considered her involvement in paid occupations to be based on selfishness, given that she was a mother; her perception that she was expected to be the primary caregiver to her children could cause her to feel similarly selfish if she devoted time to other occupations that were unrelated to child rearing.

Another way of organizing time priorities was to first determine the amount of time required to meet the needs of the family and adjust the time distributed to paid occupations accordingly. Jessica, for example, said, "I wouldn't want to work more outside the home. Like I mean, the house and the kids are already so much work" (1-140). The way in which Jessica constructed and justified the allocation of her time to paid and family occupations reflected her priorities. She perceived her roles to be the primary childcare provider and housekeeper, and this self-identification determined how much paid work she committed to. In contrast to Pauline and

Olivia, who felt that their commitments to paid work and family life reflected their priorities, Jessica did not necessarily work fewer paid hours because she saw her home-based role as being more important and desirable; rather, what she saw as her primary responsibilities—parenting and domestic occupations—placed limits on her potential paid work schedule. Both time allocation styles discussed here reflect a thought process of "family first, then paid work."

4.1.1.1.5 Limiting paid occupations to manage both home and paid work

In constructing balance as managing life, female participants demonstrated a belief in the importance of being a responsible paid worker. Fulfilling the demands of paid work was a critical aspect of being a dependable employee. Nicola reflected this view in remembering that a month before, she "did have to work on the weekend [at home]" (2-785), and Kate expressed frustration about having to take sick days off work for her child's sake and about not being as productive as she wanted:

> I have had to take more time off because I've gotten sick more, because…kids are germy, they get sick a lot. I've had to take time off, once for two weeks…that was stressful for me, from a work point of view, about having to sort of leave things, and you know, try to work on things from home when I could, but that's a lot harder when there's a baby. (2-168)

Both Nicola and Kate brought work home to meet the needs of their paid occupations. In Kate's case, she was less productive when she simultaneously did her paid work and looked after her small child, which in turn led her to feel imbalanced. Mothers therefore tended to limit the amount of paid work that they did to a "bare minimum," "a fair amount," and a "reasonable amount." They said that otherwise, their family would "suffer," which was also associated with their feeling of imbalance. "I try not to let my work be too much," Nicola said, "so that I can still do it, and as I come home, it doesn't overwhelm my whole life" (2-588). In this regard, balance as managing life meant that mothers made an effort to meet the needs of both paid and family occupations, but did so by limiting their response to paid work demands in favour of family demands.

4.1.1.1.6 Compromising on having time for oneself: "They are my kids so I should be with them"

A discursive construction of balance as managing life, with family life being the priority, encouraged women to have family time, which, ironically, often hindered them from having time for themselves. Although many women acknowledged that personal time contributed to their subjective balance, their needs were more implicit than those of their male counterparts. Most of the female participants indicated time with the family as a whole, and time just with their children, as being particularly important to safeguard. Family life was one of the areas that women wanted to preserve above all, and time for family was accordingly more important to them than couple time.

Feeling responsible for being with the children limited the discretion mothers had over their free time. It appeared particularly challenging for mothers to give themselves permission to have a break from their children because of the "they are my kids so I should be with them" way of thinking (Sally, 1-525). Further, a mother's guilt intensified if taking time for herself meant her husband had to do more or solo-parent for longer than when she was at work. As a result, she did not allow herself to extend her time away from the children after a work day.

> Because I work the two days, I feel like I can't exercise. I couldn't go to the gym on those days or do anything on those days because I'm away from the kids all day, so I feel like I need to go home and be with them and give my husband a break, so I feel like I can't take any more time than my work day allows because I feel, I just feel bad that, I don't know, I feel guilty that I'm not there. (Sally, 1-467)

At this point in her life, Sally had two categories for the activities she engaged in: childcare occupations and non-childcare occupations. The latter included paid work and exercise. As the days she spent at her non-childcare occupations already caused her to feel some guilt, she tended to avoid other non-childcare occupations, such as exercise, after a work day,

While personal time invoked a feeling of guilt in mothers, they could justify it when they perceived it as beneficial to their family. Stress stemming from their paid work, for example, could threaten their ability to be fully present with their children if they carried the stress home with them. A few mothers therefore spent some time at the gym to clear their heads before going home, so that they could focus on their children. In Pauline's case, her physiological issues sometimes had to take precedent over child rearing, and her rationale for this time allocation was that her children would benefit from her being healthy. Furthermore, some mothers took time off from their children by engaging in the tasks that they perceived as obligatory, such as cleaning

and doing dishes. When they took a break from children, mothers appeared more comfortable participating in activities that were obligatory (e.g., housework) or would benefit their children (e.g., exercise) than those that were solely for leisure or recreation.

4.1.1.1.7 Summary

The discursive construction of balance as managing life evoked the notion of a household CEO. When constructing balance as it pertained to that position, the women in the study highlighted behaviours and actions that promoted their subjective sense of balance. They orchestrated all family functions, including: the logistics of family members' activities; core housework tasks; finances; a social network; and their husbands' involvement in household and childcare occupations. With the focus on family rather than on themselves, the women ensured that family members had their needs met and were generally happy. To manage family life, mothers took primary charge of childcare, including nurturing, spending "enough" time and being present with their children, and monitoring the children's behaviours. Some women allocated time for occupations according to their priorities, and limited the demands of their paid occupations to manage both home and paid work life. Consequently, the women often compromised on having time to meet their own needs.

4.1.1.2 Happy healthy woman

Women also constructed balance as participating in a mix of occupations, which spoke of a happy healthy woman. In acquiring a sense of balance, this position led a woman to: 1) take time out from childcare; 2) try to be a "happy," "better" mom with her children; 3) seek freedom in occupational choice and time allocation; 4) wrestle with societal expectations of women; 5) access and be part of the world outside the home; and 6) look after herself. These are demonstrated below.

4.1.1.2.1 Taking time out from childcare

More than half of the women in the study constructed balance as having occupations in addition to childcare because it was "demanding" and "tiring" and they needed a break from it. Sally remarked:

> Like periodically, I'm just like, "I can't take them [her children] anymore, take them away…I need a break"…they're so young, and it's like such a demanding time…so, I don't feel we have good balance in our life right now. (2-234)

Looking after several young children was constantly and substantially demanding for Sally, which led her to feel imbalanced. One of the biggest challenges that these mothers encountered was a lack of control over time to meet their needs—even simple, basic needs such as having alone time or taking a bathroom break—due to the substantial work that childcare required. Maggie disclosed her frustration:

> If I had them [her children] for an hour a day or two hours a day, I could be perfect. But it's this marathon and then it's my own needs that are mixed in there too. And there's that piece of me that's crying out, "Well what about me? When do I get my breakfast? When do I get to have two minutes to go to the bathroom without someone knocking on the door?" Like that just drives me nuts. Like, you escape, you try to go to the bathroom and they're outside the door, knocking on the door, and you're just like you know. You know the right thing is just to be kind and patient all the time, but it's really hard to do that all the time. (2-564)

Maggie's account highlights that she was torn between wanting to be a perfect mother who is always kind and patient and seeking to meet her own needs, which so often had to be ignored in the interests of childcare. Further, some of these mothers mentioned that childcare would be "isolating" and "boring" if they had to do it around the clock. Clare recounted her experience of her two maternity leaves:

> Interviewer: Has your sense of balance changed over time? For example being on maternity leave, you felt balanced?
>
> Clare: No. It's funny, I felt off balance the other way, like I needed some work. I had a hard time on both mat leaves just being home. It bothered me just being in baby mode. It was driving me crazy, so, you know, I did keep picking up little projects at work, just to kind of stay involved, and do something outside of just parenting. So…I wouldn't say I actually felt balanced either. (2-267)

Clare's experience of imbalance derived from "*just* being home," "*just* being in baby mode," and "*just* parenting," indicating her desire for occupational variety. The monotony she experienced when she stayed home full-time actually led her to return to her paid work. Sally and Maggie had similar feelings, and like Clare, mentioned a need for space and time away from their children. Other mothers, like Olivia, agreed that a break, no matter how small, was desirable to maintain a sense of balance: "I just need a break for like five minutes of [laugh] no one pestering me so I can have my thoughts for a moment" (1-405). Some of these mothers acknowledged that they engaged in paid occupations because they needed a break from childcare.

In addition to temporal and spatial breaks from their children, mothers constructed mental respite from their family responsibilities as an important aspect of balance. A few mothers, as Lilly does in the following, expressed finding it difficult to enjoy time for themselves because their attention was constantly on their families even if they were away from them:

> I'm always on somebody else's clock. I don't have an opportunity just to completely be off the clock and spend a whole morning doing whatever I want, whenever I want…that gets a bit frustrating, 'cause obviously before kids you just did what you did and it didn't matter if you were running late, or you got home a bit late or something. So, it's not so much the lack of time I miss, but…it is the fact that I'm always on...the clock's always ticking...if I'm by myself, yeah…that's one area where the balance isn't quite there...even when I have that time to myself, it's not completely free time. (2-123, 132)

Lilly experienced time pressure stemming from her family responsibilities even when she managed to find some time for herself, whereas Kate, in the quote below, wondered whether, had her attention not been drawn to her two-year-old child all the time, she might have had a greater sense of balance with regard to 'me time':

> Part of your attention is still on the child.... At least at this age…that's almost 24/7, like…there's a lot, so that's probably what I miss the most is just being able to not worry about anybody else and just either be with my husband and have some nice time, or just be by myself and do whatever I feel like. Just pop up to the grocery store, or just, nothing complicated [laugh], but just be a bit more, sort of, free…. Mostly I'm just fine with it…it just seems like that's how it is. But, I think in a subtle way, if I was better at that, then I might feel a bit more like that balance of a bit of me time was better. (1-624, 676)

Kate pointed out that her attention was continuously drawn to her child, which put psychological constraints on her ability to fully and freely enjoy spending time by herself. These mothers attributed their tendency to constantly focus on their family to motherhood. For example, Kate observed that her husband seemed more likely than her to focus on his own activities when he was not involved with his child. Laughing, she reflected on her tendency: "It might just be this mother protective thing…you just have to know where your child is or something" (1-656). In constructing motherhood as a potential contributing factor to the challenges of enjoying personal time, the mothers in the study agreed there was a lack of balance in meeting their needs or desire for personal time.

4.1.1.2.2 Trying to be a "happy," "better" mom with her children

Several female participants' constructions of balance revolved around their feelings about and readiness for parenting. Balance related to a mother's positive feelings as well as her

judgement of how "good" a mother she perceived herself to be. As mentioned previously, some mothers said that parenting evoked negative feelings in them. However, at least some mothers attributed an increase in their motivation to go home and spend time with their children to their engagement in paid occupations. Paid work not only allowed some respite from childcare and brought the mothers pleasure, it also offered intellectual stimulation, something that some women identified as helping them be better mothers.

Further, involvement in paid occupations benefited women financially, which helped them pay for family entertainments. Florence expressed this in the following statement:

> When we are doing things with the kids we have a little bit more money to do it with. And we're doing more enjoyable things, I don't think it's much fun, personally, to go to the library every day and to go to the park every day and I'd like to be able to go to the aquarium and the movies every once in a while and do those things that are fun and then, you know, the kids get to do it. (2-382)

Florence's earnings made it affordable for the whole family to go to a variety of places that were amusing for children and parents. In addition, she pointed out that being able to take her children to different places was advantageous in that it gave them a variety of experiences. Thus, her income helped her to not only satisfy her own needs in terms of family time and family entertainment, but also increased her ability to provide her children with interesting, diverse experiences.

4.1.1.2.3 Seeking "freedom" in occupational choice and time allocation

In constructing balance as participating in a mix of occupations, several women highlighted the significance of having the freedom to choose, and allocate time to, their occupations. The occupational choices that those women indicated as contributing to their sense of balance ranged from exercise and socializing with friends during their lunch breaks at work to taking a break from family responsibilities whenever the opportunity arose. Helen mused about her balance during the previous year, compared with her situation at the time of her interview, when she was experiencing challenges with her mobility due to pregnancy, and how she expected it to be for the next couple of years:

> Normally walking probably is a de-stressor but my hips are not letting me be very mobile lately so I'm not walking almost at all. (1-152)

> Probably last summer I felt more balanced, because I did have a fair amount of work, a lot of [time at] home, and I had more freedom because my child was a little bit older [than before] and I could leave her longer periods, and I wasn't pregnant so I was more

comfortable in my body to do whatever I wanted, really…. I just sort of assume that over the next couple of years this next child will mature the way she did, and I'll be able to leave the next child longer, so I can work, or do other things to take care of myself, or take care of my marriage, or, right? I just feel like when you have an infant they're basically attached to you, and then that changes gradually over the first year, and second year. (2-486, 497)

Helen experienced limited occupational participation because of her constrained mobility and because she was nursing and nurturing. Like her, several mothers indicated that the time when their babies were "attached to" them had felt imbalanced because they were limited in adding occupational choices to this all-consuming choice they had made in becoming a new mother.

The women's feelings of imbalance were stronger when they perceived themselves as being the one who had to abandon participating in occupations outside the home just because infants are "attached to" mothers and not fathers. Increased freedom for an outside life was empowering for most of the female participants, particularly Pauline. She contrasted her experiences of her maternity leave, where she struggled with being bound to the home and was left responsible for all the domestic occupations, with her current situation, where she had a life outside the home:

Just getting out of the house makes a big difference in…how I view it [the burden of running the household] and how my resentment at my husband and all of that stuff...I noticed that when I was at home full-time for a year after the babies were born. And that was, I found that very difficult and I just was so reliant on him…. For me I felt quite powerless being the one always at home and he always was out and he always had the car. And I was very attuned to that, whereas when I get out of the house myself, I'm suddenly so much less attuned to it. It made a big difference for me. (1-166)

The amount of work Pauline took on inside the home did not change after she returned to paid work. However, paid work brought her certain sense of freedom. She was now out of the house for part of the day and felt engaged in her paid work and independent of her husband, all of which lessened the power difference between them and reduced her feelings of resentment about his lack of engagement in family-related occupations.

Being able to freely allocate time, particularly for paid work, but also for the marriage, was important for many women's subjective sense of balance. Pauline acknowledged her gratitude to her workplace because it gave her a good salary and an opportunity to work part-time:

I'm so fortunate that I can work part-time in a relatively well-paying job and so few people have that kind of privilege. I think I have balance really, you know, with some exceptions, but what that is is a family friendly workplace really, yeah. (2-671)

Pauline's sense of balance was derived not only from having an alternative paid work arrangement and a high salary, but also from having an employer who valued her and a family-friendly workplace that allowed her to choose work hours that best fit her schedule. However, when women had conflicting interests, they needed to negotiate them. For women who were inspired by their paid occupations or career advancement, there seemed to be a conflict between their desire to take on more work because it was exciting and beneficial to them, and their reluctance to do so because of the responsibilities they had to fulfill outside their paid work. Kate commented:

> I guess one of the challenges is I have to say "no" to some work opportunities that come around, because I don't want to work any more than I am. I think it is easy to get sucked into work things, or professional things, or opportunities that sound exciting, or sound interesting, or would pay well, or whatever the reason is. (2-195)

While Kate made it clear that she was not interested in taking on more paid work, she also admitted that she could easily be drawn into professional opportunities if they were appealing. Her challenge, and thus her dilemma, was in turning down professional opportunities in the interests of maintaining balance.

The women in the study deemed it important to arrange time to meet their own needs. Nearly two-thirds of the female participants remarked that, in order to feel a greater sense of balance, they needed more time for themselves, regardless of whether it was for socializing with their friends, exercising, or resting. The passage below illustrates the time crunch Florence felt when she juggled her paid work demands and meeting her children's needs:

> When I work it's not as balanced, because I'm working. I'm worried about work and then I have only, like, six waking hours to fit in their [her children's] needs and then my needs and I do try but it is hard. I would like more time with my friends and I would like more time to go out. But as they get older I think their needs will lessen as far as me having to pick out their clothes and prepare their food and do all of that stuff. And then there'll be more time for me. But it is harder when you're working. (2-38, 44)

Florence considered her own needs only after fulfilling the demands of her paid occupations and satisfying her children's needs, and by then there was little time left over. When prioritizing, the women usually put their own needs after paid work and parenting responsibilities. Further, they limited the amount of time they spent with their husbands. Florence expected that, as her children became more self-sufficient, she and her husband would have more time together: "As they get older, like in the next three years, it will get easier and we'll find more time for each other, for date nights and things like that" (1-562). Again, the extensive time demands of childcare constrained mothers from devoting time to their own needs and desires.

Other women in the study had different preferences when allocating time to occupations. Olivia constructed balance in relation to how her occupational engagement fostered her spiritual fulfillment. Although her perspective focused on time allocation, she did not divide time according to responsibilities for paid and family occupations versus her own needs and desires.

> We all have like, our intrinsic needs as to who we are spiritually as a person, what makes us tick. And balance is when you feel like you're getting enough of those parts of you fulfilled. You could box that up and compartmentalize that in different terms or, you know, however you want. But it's when you feel like, okay, of the things that are really important to me, I'm spending time...and the weighting is right at the time in those areas. (2-707)

Balance for Olivia was allocating time to occupations in a way that would meet her need to be who she was and was consistent with the priorities she placed on the facets comprising her identity. In other words, engaging in the occupations that helped her to build and sustain her identity was essential. The more she prioritized occupations that fulfilled her needs to develop and sustain her identity, the more likely she was to feel balanced.

4.1.1.2.4 Wrestling with societal expectations of women

Some of the women in the study struggled with societal expectations of mothers. A few mentioned that in their experiences society had higher expectations of mothers than of fathers in terms of standards in childcare and housework. Kate explained:

> I see a lot more mothers than fathers being totally overwhelmed, stressed, upset, like, society, societal pressure goes more towards women. I cannot tell you how many times people have complimented my husband on what a good father he is. He is a good father, don't get me wrong. But, he would be complimented because he changed a diaper, or because he was at the park, things that I do all the time every day, and so does every mother. (2-582)

Kate observed that society rarely acknowledges mothers' commitment to day-to-day childcare, whereas fathers were more likely to receive credit and recognition for being a "good" father even when they were responsible for regular caregiving. Societal expectations that women be the primary childcare provider led some mothers to become "engulfed" in motherhood, even though they did not wish to be, and to feel pressured to do more although they were almost never complimented on being a "good" mother. As a result, paid work and family life never seemed to be harmoniously integrated for some women, while others actively negotiated responsibilities inside the home with their husbands to acquire freedom for occupations outside the home.

A mother's role—and societal expectations of this role—can deny women the freedom to engage in other occupations in which they are interested. Before having children, Kate was concerned that the social expectations of motherhood might govern her occupational choices and affect her sense of identity:

> I was nervous about how that [societal expectations of mother] was going to play out for us [her and her husband]. Was I going to end up being kind of resentful? Like I said, I like my career. Was I going to end up in a position where there was absolutely no time for me, and I was nothing but a work horse, and a slave to my child's needs, and lose myself? I didn't know. I mean I didn't know what it was going to be like to be a mother…. I initiated a lot of conversations about, what is it going to be like when we have children? What's going to happen with the work load? Who's going to work, how much? 'Cause I really wanted to know what that was going to look like before I jumped into it. (2-582)

Kate was worried that she would have to be exclusively dedicated to childcare and accordingly sacrifice her own needs for her child's sake if she fully met the societal expectations of motherhood. The very fact that in order to start a family she had to negotiate with her husband beforehand—and get him to agree that she would carry on her career after having a child—suggests that it can be quite challenging for women who are interested in pursuing career advancement to arrange occupations in their favour if they have young children.

Only a few women engaged in personal occupations whenever they had the chance, without making detailed arrangements with their husbands. Laughing, Florence said:

> You just have to go. I just go, you've just got to walk away sometimes. I'll just go out, I'll just say, "I'm going out with my friend tonight," and I'll just go. If the opportunity arises I'll just take it because otherwise I'll miss out for years. (2-53)

Florence later said, about her husband's parenting ability: "he'll figure it out, he's a big boy…he's their dad, I trust him to make choices. That's why I wanted a father for my children who was participatory" (2-596). While Kate explicitly negotiated and planned out divisions of labour with her husband even before having children, Florence's more implicit approach meant trusting her husband's ability to look after the children, and taking time for herself when the opportunity arose. Women who expressed appreciation for their freedom to have "space and time" for themselves attributed it to their husbands' understanding of the need for fair sharing of responsibilities. This appeared to be the result of ongoing negotiation between the partners, regardless of whether it was implicit or explicit, over their responsibilities and opportunities for personal and social time.

4.1.1.2.5 Accessing and being part of "the bigger world"

Half of the female participants acknowledged the social and cognitive benefits of their paid occupations as important features for a balanced life. Engaging in paid work gave mothers access to "the bigger world" outside the home, and this could expose them to more interactions and much broader and richer information than if they had been a full-time stay-at-home mother. Florence talked about the benefits that she gained from interacting with adults at work:

> Your brain doesn't turn to mush and you realize there are other things that are important than the Wiggles, you know, kids are irrational, and they talk about crazy things all the time. And, you start to feel stupid after a while. [laugh] Honestly, like otherwise I would never know any current events, I would never know anything. (2-400)

In addition to helping mothers stay up to date with social events and issues, engaging in paid occupations gave them more opportunities to nourish and use their intellect than they would be likely to get from the unrelieved parenting of young children. Kate remarked:

> I like learning, I like reading, so there's an aspect of my work. If I'm reading journal articles, or I'm preparing a group, or I'm thinking about an assessment where I'm just using an aspect of my brain that I don't use as much in parenting, that I enjoy. So, that makes me happy. I get to think about things at a different level than I would one on one with my son. (2-48)

Engaging in paid work not only expanded the area of information that mothers could access, but also stimulated higher levels of intellectual functioning than interacting with their children did.

Some mothers further remarked that they could contribute to "the bigger world" by using their intellect and skills at work. Maggie's remarks below highlight the fact that her paid occupations as a health care professional enabled her to effect positive changes in her patients' lives:

> I get a lot of enjoyment out of working and again contributing and coming up with ideas to help people make their lives better…the patient population I work with is very disenfranchised, it's wonderful to actually be there in their corner and advocate for them and help make their lives better. And so I think that does a lot for my feeling that I'm contributing. (2-530)

In Maggie's case, paid work affirmed that she had skills and knowledge that benefited society. Maggie also mentioned that because of innovative and professional contribution to her work, she considered it her first baby and wanted to stay involved in her career because "when they [her children] go to school, I don't want to be left with nothing" (1-575). Thus, sustaining paid work not only provided her with a feeling of a balanced life at this point in her life but also helped her to prepare for her future balance after her children became independent.

In discursively constructing balance as participating in a mix of occupations, some mothers pointed to the importance of self-esteem for balance. Ana identified it as spiritual health—that was "how content you are, how confident you are, how good you feel about yourself" (2-56). For a few women, balance corresponded to a sense of contentment with their ability to enact all the roles expected of them, including being a friend. However, this was not the case for many others. As Pauline commented: "I feel like my obligations at work and to family kind of trump everything, and there's not a lot left over for friendships" (2-554). For many of the women, the focus was on fulfilling "obligations" in the roles of paid worker, mother, and wife and gaining self-esteem exclusively from these roles. Ana said:

> When…I'm with my child, and I see her growing, and I see her learning new things…it makes me feel good…and if I do some things and I succeed in things like my job, different tasks, that also makes me feel very good about myself because I guess by my character I am an achiever. (2-72, 86).

Ana's remark suggests that she associated a feeling of success or achievement in mothering and paid work with her subjective sense of balance. However, not all women believed that they could fully establish themselves both at home and at work. Ellen questioned whether women's incompatible roles of paid and unpaid workers could lead them to success in both:

> I always think of work vs. home, that balance, being the ultimate balance to make, because I think women in particular have a really hard time balancing life and work…. I hope we can be successful women and have the family life, but a lot of people say, "You can't have both. You just can't. You either have one or the other, or you're just like a mediocre success, and you have a mediocre family life." Oh God, that's depressing. (2-409, 433)

Some mothers found it extremely challenging to feel competent in the all-consuming role of mother per se, which could explain why it was particularly difficult for women to attain balance when it was seen as succeeding in both home and work occupations. Maggie disclosed her struggle to be good in her roles at home, as opposed to excelling in her role of paid worker:

> Sometimes it's hard to feel like you're doing good job at home because I think being a mother and a wife and all the things under pressure, you find out sides of yourself that you don't really like. You didn't know that were there…I found out I had a terrible temper that I never thought that I did have. I never felt rage until I had children, and I didn't like that…. I found out that I'm extremely impatient and I don't like that at all about myself. So I have to find out ways to manage that and at work you don't have to do that as much, you can always shine, right? I can shine at work. (2-549)

Maggie continued to explain that engaging in paid occupations was critical for her subjective sense of balance because it compensated for the lack of confidence she had in her family roles:

As far as the balance I think it's nice to go some place where you just feel that you're doing a good job without too much of an effort. And being at home, you know, stretches your personal growth and I think makes you a better person in the long run. But it's always a challenge, like I'm always battling with my wishes to become a better person under pressure. (2-571)

Maggie was consciously dedicated to becoming a better mother and wife, but did not feel that she was achieving this goal; when she was "impatient" or displayed a "terrible temper" she would judge herself as having fallen short of the societal notion of the perfect mother and wife. For her, a sense of balance was associated with self-esteem. However, she rarely gained it at home, despite her substantial commitment to household and childcare occupations. To the contrary, her self-esteem was easily boosted by her paid work.

In addition to self-reflection on one's abilities, social recognition of them enhanced a mother's self-esteem. Lilly's statement below touches on the social values of paid work and mother's work:

I enjoy my work, and it's about me getting a sense of achievement out of that work that I do, and getting recognition. And you often don't get recognition as a mom, it's just, that's what you do. So for me I think it's the right balance to be able to use my brain in quite a more intellectual way. (2-273, 286)

According to Maggie and Lilly, mothers always felt pressured to become a "good" mother, and made efforts to do so, but seldom felt genuinely good about their mothering. In addition, their mothering abilities were rarely recognized by others. Their perception was that society was more likely to acknowledge women's paid work abilities than their domestic abilities. Volunteer work had an effect similar to that of paid work, reinforcing a mothers' self-esteem and counteracting the lack of confidence brought about by aspiring to be the perfect mother.

4.1.1.2.6 "Looking after myself"

Several mothers constructed balance in terms of their "health" and "well-being," both of which were consequently mentioned frequently when they were noting the importance of having time for themselves for a balanced life. In the following excerpt, Pauline pointed to a lack of balance in meeting her health needs:

I do feel like my sort of personal needs are out of balance. Like I kind of worry—it's a bit irrational, but I worry about my health. I worry that I'm not taking care of my body or you know even for the sake of the kids you know I want to live for a long time and I don't feel like I take very good care of myself. (2-516)

Pauline's construction suggested that the more she met her health-care needs, the healthier she would be, and the greater the sense of balance she would have. Many female participants related their mental and physical conditions to their sense of imbalance. Vivian listed the indicators of imbalance as follows: "We know ourselves when we're just run ragged, like tired, cranky, skin goes bad, you know, tummy aches, headaches, physiologically just you know feeling rough" (1-109). Other conditions include feeling "overwhelmed," "stretched thin," "anxious," "worried," and "burnt out," and being "on the pessimistic side." As mentioned previously, mothers limited satisfying their personal needs when balance was constructed as managing life, which created a tension when they focused on their health and well-being and sought balance by engaging in a mix of occupations.

Many women in this study identified activities that helped them to care for themselves and subsequently accomplish and sustain balance in relation to their health and well-being. Lilly remarked on the importance of exercise for a balanced life:

> I try and get a little bit in wherever I can, so, obviously I run home and pick the kids up [on the way and bring them home] in the trailer [while] I'm running. So that for me is like I'm doing at least a little bit a few times a week. And now I'm actually starting training for a half marathon I'm doing in June. So, for me I've always been fairly sporty…. It [exercise] is important because it gives me a bit more energy, although it's hard to get yourself out the door. Once you've done it you feel so much more energy. (2-567, 575)

In Lilly's case, exercising regularly led her to feel balanced because it added variation to her day-to-day activities and promoted her health and well-being. Other women, like Vivian, simply rested and relaxed to restore their energy: "Sometimes I'm just tired so at certain nights I'll just say, 'Okay it's 8 o'clock, but I'm just going to go to bed.' And that allows me to restore a little bit, or I'll just lie in bed and read" (2-387). Having a good diet was another critical aspect of looking after oneself. Pauline remarked:

> I'm worried about the kids, what the kids are eating, but…I should actually pay a little bit more attention to what I eat. If I remember to take my vitamin every day…. Just getting the groceries regularly so I feel like I have enough produce and fruit and vegetables, getting myself more time to prepare food. I don't feel great about the meals that we eat lately. I really noticed that when I went back to work that, I feel like we're eating a lot more, like more processed food and a lot more carbohydrates and not enough proteins and not enough vegetables…. I guess I wished I was making more salads. [laugh] That's one thing I don't. I used to be big on salad and haven't made a salad in the longest time. (2-521, 530, 545)

For Pauline, looking after her children's diet was usually a bigger priority than looking after her own, and consequently she neglected to take supplements, buy enough fresh groceries regularly,

and cook nutritious meals for herself. When she looked at balance in terms of her own health, she felt that she needed to devote more time and attention to maintaining healthy eating habits.

Female participants also mentioned strategies that enabled them to avoid getting overwhelmed; some looked outward—using external approaches—whereas others looked inward. External approaches included help-seeking and task management. Maggie mentioned that she would cancel appointments or seek help if she was beginning to feel overwhelmed:

> I do know sort of when I'm feeling a little bit too over-booked, and then I need to sort of take something off the calendar or get some help, like getting a friend to drive [her son] to baseball for instance or asking [her nanny] if she can stay a little later or work an extra half day. (2-461)

Other resources that some of the women mentioned included grandparents, childcare, and teenage babysitters. In contrast, Olivia's response to her balance needs was internal—she reflected on her personality and acknowledged her accomplishments: "I'm that type of personality that always wants to do more and do better in each aspect of my life. And sometimes you just need perspective to stand back and say, 'This is what's reasonable'" (2-692). Olivia's approach was to adjust her perceived goals to be more realistic and reasonable and recognize what she had achieved, whereas Vivian admitted that uncontrollable external factors existed and simply let them go:

> There are external factors that influence balance…let's say maybe there's a heavy snowfall so your car gets stuck in the driveway so you can't drive to school, and you know all these things. But it's how do you approach some of these challenges…it's an approach to the external factors that you can't control, and knowing that you can't control everything and that that's okay. I'm very happy with knowing that I can't control everything. It just gives me great relief to know that I can't control everything and so you focus on the things that you can. And you prepare for them as best as you can, but if you know you can't, you can't do it all, so just let a lot of it go. (2-516)

By acknowledging that there were things she could not control, Vivian eased the pressure she put on herself to control them and shifted her focus to things that were controllable. Some women, including Olivia and Vivian, used both the external and internal strategies to avoid and alleviate the sense of imbalance that they experienced when they felt overwhelmed by the excessive pressures of having to get things under control or achieve more and higher goals. In short, the women's strategies for looking after themselves included: simply taking a rest; exercising; having a healthy diet; seeking support; choosing demands that they will take on; adjusting their own perceptions of the outcomes of their work; and focusing primarily on the things that were controllable rather than the ones that were not.

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4.1.1.2.7 Summary

This section focused on a subject position embedded in the female participants' construction of balance as participating in a mix of occupations. The position was a happy, healthy woman and women who took this position behaved and acted in a certain way to accomplish a balanced life. They took a break from childcare, and tried to present themselves as a "happy," "better" mother to their children. They sought "freedom" to choose the occupations that they engaged in and to allocate their time to the occupations. They struggled with society's expectations of women and negotiated home life responsibilities with their husbands to free themselves for opportunities outside the home. They kept a life in "the bigger world" (outside the home) to boost intellectual fulfillment, social contributions/connections, and self-esteem, all of which they rarely experienced in the mothering role. Finally, they cared for themselves.

4.1.2 Men's discursive constructions of balance and subject positions

Although men constructed balance in the same way as women did, their experiences of those constructions were slightly different. Contemporary father was the primary position for men who focused on participating in both family and paid work occupations to achieve balance by managing life. Contented man was the subject position embedded in men's discursive construction of balance as participating in a mix of occupations. The subject positions and men's experiences of seeking balance in the respective constructions are presented in Table 6. There was an inherent tension between these two positions because one was about meeting collective needs whereas the other was about meeting one's own needs. Each position is described below.

Table 6
Men's Constructions of Balance

Construction	Managing life	Participating in a mix of occupations
Subject position	Contemporary father	Contented man
Experience	• Ensure financial security for the family • Make a commitment to paid work • Committed to making time for the family • Engage with children • Share family responsibilities with wife • "Try and make sure you satisfy all the needs in your house"	• "Get out and do other activities and see other people and experience other things" • Seek a feeling of being stimulated, gratified, and energized • Wish for the freedom to "just go" • Meet one's own needs for health

4.1.2.1 Contemporary father

Men's construction of balance as managing life involved and spoke from an ideological perspective of contemporary father. This, as a subject position, presented six actions or behaviours that helped men accomplish a subjective sense of balance: 1) ensuring financial security for the family; 2) making a commitment to their paid work; 3) being committed to making time for their family; 4) engaging with their children; 5) sharing family responsibilities with their wives; and 6) ensuring that they met all the family's needs.

4.1.2.1.1 Ensuring financial security for the family: "I've gotta bring in income"

When constructing balance as managing life, some male participants indicated explicitly that ensuring household income was important. Traditionally, for men, managing family life connotes a role of primary financial provider, which then ties them to a paid worker role. Hugo constructed balance as managing things in his daily life and indicated his "well-paid job" as being fundamental to it:

> When you can't really manage things well, then you get stressful…you are not happy at work and then you feel you don't want to go to work or you don't want to go home…that's my way of thinking whether my life is balanced or not…. It [paid work] is kind of my top priority because if I don't have that stable and good job, well-paid job, I won't be able to do a lot of other things…for example, putting my child to daycare. If I don't have a good job, then I would have to think where to put my child…. We [He and his wife] don't have that kind of burden…we don't have to think about the financial stuff, and that takes care of a lot of other things. (2-37, 44, 61)

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Hugo considered his commitment to work to be his first priority because it ensured financial security for himself and his family. This in turn made his responsibilities less burdensome. While Hugo firmly believed that paid occupations were the first priority, Brian found it challenging to balance "kids and work" with fun activities. He felt he had to dedicate more attention and energy to his responsibilities than to pleasurable activities that didn't generate income because otherwise his family might not be able to maintain their current lifestyle:

> I've gotta bring in income. And I find it stressful to, you know, it's expensive to keep things going these days, right, like you gotta pay for the house, you gotta pay for their schools, food, cars, everything, you know. I make more money now than I ever have but I have less. (1-244)

Given Brian's high living expenses, he could not take the risk of investing his energy and attention in pleasurable activities. It appears that the role of financial provider led men to be dedicated to a paid worker role in order for them to manage family life, which limited their opportunities to participate in recreational occupations.

4.1.2.1.2 Making a commitment to paid work: "Doing enough…but not too much"

In constructing balance as managing life, some men indicated fulfilling the demands of their paid occupations as the way in which they addressed the family's need for financial security while others minimized their paid work demands in favour of their other responsibilities.

> Interviewer: How do you feel about your current life style in relation to balance?
>
> Raymond: It's good, I think. I work 37½ hours a week. I don't do overtime very often, I travel a few times a year but that's not too extensive, I do have some control over it. So I think work's under control but I'm doing enough, as much as I need to do, but not too much more. (2-172)

For Raymond, the amount of paid work that resonated with balance was as much as his workplace expected from him. As this amount was "enough" but "not too much more" than his ideal, he felt that his paid work was "under control" and not too taxing. Other male participants also mentioned that they tried to avoid or minimize travelling and having meetings in the evenings and at weekends and so could fulfill their paid work responsibilities without sacrificing their family lives.

However, sometimes paid work demands were so urgent and unexpected that men might need to temporarily sacrifice meeting the needs of family time to fulfill their paid work demands. Mike recounted his experience of this:

I just had to spend more time at work as opposed to like spending time with the kids. I worked my hours…and then on top of that I came in and did more…. So the time that I allocated for sort of the family time…like my wife and myself playing with the kids or hanging out with the kids…was just [taken care of by] my wife, because I had to spend time at work. And that's just the nature of the beast, right, that's just what happens…. You try and adjust your balance, but when things have to be done, they have to be done. So just, shoots the balance out of sorts, and then once things calm down, you work on your balance again. And if things don't calm down, then you'd find a new balance. (2-181, 190)

Mike felt he had achieved an ideal balance when the hours he spent at his paid occupations left him with sufficient time for his family. However, given that he was a business owner and his business was the source of household income, Mike found it natural to sacrifice family time for time at work. He did not experience balance when he had to exclusively focus on his business. However, he did find balance when his business slowed down and his confidence that he provided his family with financial stability allowed him to better enjoy family time.

The expectation that men took the responsibility for the household income led some men to feel obligated to engage in paid occupations. This was particularly the case for fathers who wanted to reduce their time commitment to paid work to spend more time with their children. William commented on how his time was distributed between his paid and parenting occupations:

Interviewer: How do you feel about time allocation on paid work and parenting?

William: I feel like the cumulative sum is too much…like there is too much, I am doing too much of a combination of the two. But like it feels it is the right balance, like I would rather be working part-time and parenting than anything else…. Although I would rather work less and part-time, like fewer hours, I need the money and we need the money. So if I had my way I wouldn't work and I would parent all the time. (2-320, 334)

For William, ideal balance was to parent all the time, or at least to work much less and parent much more. However, his family's need for household income did not allow him to attain his ideal balance. Although he felt he devoted a substantial amount of his time to productive occupations (including both paid and unpaid work), he indicated that this distribution was "the right if not ideal balance" because it fulfilled his financial demands and also allowed him to parent concurrently.

In addition, even though paid work was frustrating and stressful, men's financial responsibility to the family impeded them from opting to resign, which in turn exacerbated their

feelings of being obligated to work. Brian struggled with his relationship with his business partner and felt he had little control over the situation:

> He [his business partner] points out things…he makes it seem like I'm out of control of my business…. He's a very controlling person, and you'll never get a word in edgewise…. Out of balance for me in that situation is where I don't have control of my own business…he's a majority partner, I'm not, right? So I don't have that control, or that balance, and I feel very not in the situation that I want to be. I work for my family, right? ... I endure what I have to endure at work for my family. (2-193, 264)

The lack of control Brian felt over the business invoked a feeling of imbalance in him. However, he sustained his work to maintain his family's financial situation.

Thinking beyond financial responsibilities for the family, Tom attributed pressure to fulfill paid work demands to the values underlying the industrial social structure.

> It's interesting. People play with that quite a bit, right? They'll, you know, they'll take time for sleep so that they can do more, usually it's work…. And so you end up with this imbalance where you've got lots of work going on, but you might end up with less sleep and less leisure. So to me, maybe that's where that construct really takes root, is that people worry that that's not a healthy way of living. (2-516)

Because people are expected to be productive to contribute economically to society, they sacrifice their sleep and leisure in order to satisfy social needs. Men who share the contemporary ideology of fatherhood may be more willing to sacrifice sleep and leisure. In fact, a few men in this study mentioned that they regularly worked in the evenings after everybody went to bed in their family. Kevin said in the middle of his interview, which took place in the evening, "Usually about now I start doing some work…. Like after this [interview] I'm going to go do some work, like I've got a bunch of things to read, and get ready for tomorrow" (1-65). While some men reduced the amount of time spent on paid occupations to a manageable level that enabled them to spend sufficient time with their families, they accommodated paid work demands by sacrificing time for themselves.

4.1.2.1.3 Committed to making time for the family

Making time for family was a critical aspect of balance for most of the male participants, and this value encouraged them to safeguard family time. Mealtimes, evenings, and weekends were important moments for men to spend with their family. Some men indicated that they made an effort to leave their workplace early enough to be home for dinner. While men who were the primary financial provider for their families felt pressured to dedicate themselves to their paid

occupations, their family values also encouraged them to prioritize family time over paid work. Kevin remarked:

> Usually I get home at 6:00 p.m. That's kind of my deal with my wife. Be home for dinner, which is really good. I tell people to do that at work. Tell other people that the best thing they can do is just leave at a normal time. And then I get home…we eat dinner, and we put the kids to bed. (1-59)

Kevin recognized how important it was to his wife that he shared dinner and bedtime together with her and their children. Encouraging his colleagues to also leave work early enough to spend evenings with their families signified his family values. There was also some pressure from the family to spend mealtimes together:

> Interviewer: What made you to feel that you "have to" go home?

> Zack: Because people are counting on me here. Dinner's been made and we like to have mealtime together. So I'm trying to make sure that I'm home for that. (1-674)

Zack's feeling of being pressured to be home for dinner might have arisen from his children's desire for him to spend time playing with them and from his wife's expectation that he share evening routines with her. Both Kevin and Zack had three children, and presumably the time from meal preparation to bedtime would be all-consuming for parents with several young children. However, it was not always easy to leave the workplace on time, particularly when men were involved in projects with their colleagues. Zack mentioned the struggle between wanting to go home and wanting to stay at work: "Sometimes it's hard to say, 'No, I have to stop and go home now.' … So that's the real intersection where there's difficulty maintaining that balance" (2-632). One of the challenges to maintaining balance was negotiating the pressure from both sides (colleagues and family).

For men who experienced conflict between fulfilling responsibilities for family and paid work, vacation legitimized their not having to engage in work-related activities and focusing instead on family life. Steve described taking parental leave as the ideal and "very balanced" situation because "income was still coming in, albeit a lot less, and I was just solely focused on being a new dad" (1-363). For Zack, vacation time allowed him to put paid work demands aside and focus on family life. He said:

> I take most of my vacation in December…that's when I feel balanced, when I don't have any work actually and I'd be able to be home with the family and spend a lot of time with family, and catch up on housework. …if I can find short periods of time like vacation where I can set work aside, then I do feel more balanced…. Because my work isn't set hours, and I can get phone calls and so on in the evenings and weekends…there'd be

work pressures to intrude on the other parts of my life. But with vacation that tends to be limited, or a lot easier to restrict, so that's why I like those times. (1-594, 609)

Both Steve and Zack constructed balance as fulfilling the needs of family life (housework, family time, and household income) by setting aside their paid work demands and pressure.

Having couple time was also essential to a sense of balance for some men. They pointed to the importance of having time alone with their wives to sustain a good marital relationship because it played such a significant role in their balance. However, time for family as a whole still took precedence over couple time. Zack remarked:

I would like to continue to be vigilant about protecting the family part of my life, when I say the family, I mean the whole family…like keeping enough time for that…. I would like to find more couple time, and I don't really want that to come at the expense of family time. I'd rather that came at the expense of work time, but I'm not sure if that's gonna be manageable. (2-551)

These men prioritized time for the family as a whole over time with separate family members (e.g., couple time). Zack certainly placed a higher priority on sustaining and strengthening the unity of his family as a whole than he did on his intimate marital relationship with his wife. Another possible reason for putting family time before couple time might be that the former was a more efficient use of time because it included all family members. In fact, Zack doubted that he would be able to find couple time in addition to sustaining "enough" family time due to the demands of his paid work.

4.1.2.1.4 Engaging with children

The men in this study constructed managing family life as an essential feature of balance, and their construction suggested that they consequently actively engaged with their children. Active engagement was about spending "enough" time with children that they "recognize you as a parent…and that you're present in their lives" (Zack, 2-473). The men's focus on engaging with children stemmed from a desire to help the children learn and grow, and establish and maintain good relationships with them.

While spending "enough" time with children was important for fathers' subjective sense of balance, they also found it critical to ensure that the time invested was of high quality. For some fathers, helping their children to develop and learn was a focal aspect of quality time. In discussing their experiences of engaging with their growing children, they highlighted that it was important to provide their children with good care, involve the children in a variety of activities,

help the children to accomplish goals, and monitor the children's psychological conditions as well as their learning. Hugo indicated that helping his child to achieve developmental goals invoked a feeling of balance in him. He summarized his experience of this:

> Interviewer: How important is parenting?

> Hugo: I think it's a sense of accomplishment too because we kind of see her grow up from the first day she came to this world…. You see different stages…she was like crawling, then you want her to know how to walk…you try ways of getting her to walk…and then once she knows how to walk, then you have to think of ways to teach her to talk more…so there are many obstacles…it's very challenging, but in a way you feel accomplishment too. (2-490)

Hugo gained a sense of accomplishment from helping his daughter to navigate challenges, learn new skills, and achieve milestones, which in turn led him to feel balanced.

Fathers in this study often focused on physical activities when helping their children learn and grow, and achieving success in mastering these activities led them to feel balanced. For John, balance was determined by the extent of his involvement in his children's lives and the strength of his bond with them. He acknowledged that in order to nurture his emotional connection with them, he tended to focus on teaching them how to play sports, which was "a classic sort of guy-mentality" (2-435). Fathers found it particularly meaningful when their teaching improved their children's skills in various physical activities because their children's learning achievements were one of the indicators of balance. For example, Gustave spoke about his contribution to his daughter's learning:

> Recently as I've had more time to spend with my children…. I've noticed improvements. Like, my daughter in particular…she started riding a bike in the last couple of weeks when I've been around more…she's a little bit more brave when we go for a swim. She's coming off the edge of the pool. She's paddling on her own and that sort of thing…that's where I see signs of their development. (2-133)

In constructing the father's role as helping children learn, fathers promoted their active engagement with their children in managing family life and hence achieving subjective balance.

For some fathers, managing family life in relation to meeting their children's needs came down to and was reflected in the fathers' perceived relationship with their children. The better the relationship a father perceived he had with his children, the more likely he was to feel that he met the needs of his children. Kyle recognized that at times his behaviour toward his child put his relationship with her at risk, and that at those times he knew he was not meeting her needs:

> I'm big on harmony, big on people liking me, I'm big on things being smooth especially with my daughter…. Every time I get frustrated, or I think, you know, my daughter shouldn't do something, I think, "Wait a second, is that because I don't want to get up

and pay attention to her, you know, actually engage with her? Or is it because it's actually not good for her?" So, I think honouring that distinction, that she is a person, she's a very little person, but she's still separate from me, and my needs aren't always greater than her needs, even though I'm older and supposedly more advanced. So…I think my biggest job is for her to feel that I am paying attention to her, and that I don't sort of gloss over what's she's going through, whether it's "I don't want to go to bed," or whatever it is…'cause I think we get into routines, we sort of go on auto pilot with home life where, like "No, it's bedtime." You start, you know, that tension comes up in your voice, and so…I'm trying to make sure that she doesn't feel like I don't understand her, or like I'm irrelevant. (2-290, 299, 320)

For some fathers, like Zack, establishing a relationship with their children that was as strong as the relationship their wife had with them meant dedicating "enough" time to be with their children:

I know some kids who don't see most of their fathers…so they don't have as close of a relationship with their fathers as they do with their mothers. So that's something that I definitely don't want to have happen to me. (Zack, 2-473)

In constructing balance as managing life, fathers imposed childcare responsibilities on themselves and limited their participation in other occupations. A few fathers remarked that they felt obliged to contribute to child rearing because it was a responsibility arising from their decision to have children. Tom said, "There's much less discretionary element to parenting. You've got to parent. Otherwise, you know, you've got mayhem" (2-502). Such men's childcare responsibilities and the financial demands of childcare left them little time to engage in occupations other than child rearing and paid work. Consequently, they needed to sacrifice meeting their needs for rest, relaxation, leisure, and recreation. Further, others admitted that they had put their career advancement on hold until their children became self-sufficient and allowed them to devote more time and energy to paid occupations.

4.1.2.1.5 Sharing family responsibilities with wife

Men acknowledged that sharing housework responsibilities was essential to balance in life. Some pointed to the importance of being conscious about the division of the responsibilities with their wives, while others stated that their role in managing household occupations was to support their spouse. These two approaches to the division of responsibilities inside the home are examined below.

Some male participants indicated the importance of being conscious about whether any tasks needed to be done, when they needed to be done, and how much of the household responsibility their spouses were taking on. Zack commented on this as follows:

> Zack: I realized that things, balance between my wife and I had shifted a little bit, and so I did a little bit to try and shift that back a bit, so…I think it's important to be self-reflective about that from time to time, so things don't get too far out of balance.
>
> Interviewer: You mean the division?
>
> Zack: Yes, the division. (2-678)

In his first interview, Zack realized that he relied substantially on his wife being there to perform household tasks. As a result, he immediately shifted the division of household tasks so that he was taking more responsibility for them. When he subsequently reflected back on his previous lack of contribution, he admitted that it had negatively affected the balance of his marital relationship and that it was important to consider how the division of household responsibilities affected the relationship.

However, although some men, like Zack, acknowledged the importance of sharing housework responsibilities with their wives, these men indicated sharing solely as a means of managing day-to-day household demands as a couple, rather than fair share per se as a feature that contributed to their sense of balance. Gustave said:

> Certainly for myself…the balance is just something that, that's more that I feel in my heart as opposed to something that is negotiated…, that I would be able to tick off a box at the end of the week and say, "Okay I did these things and you did these things so everything—." It's more like, "Oh the house seems to just be in a good state and we're feeling relaxed," and actually I'd prefer that in a way because you know, if we had a list of chores or what have you that we would have to tick off, then it would feel like chores, as opposed to just seeing something and doing it or what have you. You know. Just allowing it to evolve and what have you. (2-77, 81, 89, 94)

Gustave constructed balance as being determined by the condition of the house and his and his wife's mental states rather than to what extent he and she managed to complete household tasks assigned to each of them. By producing balance in this way, he allowed fluidity and flexibility in terms of his share of responsibility for household tasks. In short, this position in turn could either encourage his active engagement in the tasks or permit him to depend on his wife if she was the primary housekeeper.

Some men appreciated their wives' undertaking primary responsibility for domestic occupations and helped their wives with those occupations. John said:

I'm conscious of the fact that um, managing all the aspects of our family's needs, the direction we're going financially, connections in the community, our kids' schooling…I'm conscious and aware that my wife carries a majority of that balance. And I worry sometimes that that is a bit of a heavy burden… At some point, she's gonna need me to, you know, take some of the load, and the problem is, she has those connections and I don't have them. So it's like, where can I help take some of the load off? … I'm conscious and aware to try and help balance things, like for example in the evenings, in terms of like, you read to the kids, I'll do the lunches and try to help some aspect of what the next day will be like, and how I can help in that regard. (2-406, 413, 418)

Like John, a few men attributed their lesser involvement in housework and childcare to their lack of competence or experience, which was sometimes related to a paid work schedule that restricted their opportunities to be involved in, for example, their children's school events. However, discursively constructing a helping role to describe his involvement might permit him to depend on his wife for managing childcare occupations, which might reinforce gender-based labour division.

4.1.2.1.6 "Try and make sure you satisfy all the needs in your house"

Several men had come to explicitly construct balance as meeting family needs rather than focusing solely on meeting their own needs since becoming an adult member of a family. John described the shift in his perception of balance as his identity changed along with his family's development:

When you start out, you know, as an individual with your own interests and your own directions, your own goals, and then...you mate and you form a relationship with somebody that has a future, and you continue to go, you know, in a direction in the future together. Then that sense of balance sort of shifts, and it's not all what you want to do and what you aspire to do. It's got to balance with what he or she wants to do with their lives. (2-463)

Those needs encompassed all aspects of family needs, including finances, community connections, children's schooling, and each person's physical and mental health. Kyle's description of balance captures this:

I want to be, I guess, healthy in all the different areas at once. You know I want to be physically healthy, I want to be financially healthy, I want to be emotionally and mentally healthy. And I want my family to be the same, like, I don't want anything I do to make them less healthy in one of those areas. And I suppose I don't want things they do to make me less healthy. (2-258)

Ideally, as Kyle constructed, a balanced situation entailed a situation where each person in the family had their own needs met and was healthy and content. However, Ian pointed out that

while it was unlikely that everybody's desires would be satisfied, meeting their overall needs could help him to accomplish his sense of balance:

> It's hard I mean it's tough to balance everything, to try and make sure you satisfy all the needs in your house, right…. I think it's really, really important to try it, you know, to try and find that balance because I think that down the line if you don't…. I think you're going to have problems or more difficulty because whether it's, you know, kids who don't have enough physical activity so they're not healthy, or they're just very closed-minded about stuff. And also just the general happiness in the family you have to have that balance for everyone to be happy. You're not going to get everything you want all the time, but you get what you need, when you can. You know you take your turns and you do it, so. But I think it's definitely possible, I think. (2-700, 715)

4.1.2.1.7 Summary

This section illustrated the actions and behaviours of a contemporary father aiming to achieve a balanced life by managing life. Men who presented this position undertook bringing in household income for the family and were dedicated to their paid work occupations. Yet these men also made an effort to preserve time for the family, particularly mealtimes, evenings, and weekends. As fathers, they devoted their energy and time to providing quality time for their children and establishing and maintaining a good relationship with them. As husbands, the men were conscientious about sharing household and childcare responsibilities with their wives and/or just helping them out. The men also emphasized that they tried to meet all the needs of their families.

4.1.2.2 Contented man

Men's construction of balance as participating in a mix of occupations contained the ideological perspective that represented "contented man." Men in this position aimed to accomplish a subjective sense of balance by: 1) engaging in a mix of occupations, meeting different people, and seeking diverse experiences; 2) striving for a feeling of stimulation, gratification, and energy; 3) wishing for the freedom to "just go" and enjoy time for themselves; and 4) meeting their basic needs for health.

4.1.2.2.1 "Get out and do other activities and see other people and experience other things"

Interestingly, more men than women depicted balance as involving social occupations as well as paid and family occupations and as having enough time for all these occupations. Raymond constructed balance as comprising paid work, family, and social occupations:

> What I'm referring to is balance between different activities and different parts of my life so primarily between paid work, family life, and social life. So I like to have time for each of those activities. I have to try and not neglect one in favour of another too much for a long time. (2-161)

The focal aspect of balance as participating in a mix of occupations was to gain various experiences of, for example, having interpersonal relationships, being challenged, and using skills. For Kevin, having a variety of interpersonal relationships was particularly meaningful:

> I like being in different situations. Like, I mean, at work…I'm the boss there, and everybody acts strangely towards me, and very deferential and polite…. And when I go to the baseball park…everybody's kind of on an even footing at the baseball park…and when I'm doing the money at the school fundraiser, I'm just one more labourer amongst all the other volunteers...just being one of the crowd. So, there's a bit of diversity of experience. And then at home, I'm just the dad…that's another relationship or another different circumstance. They're [his children] not at all deferential, or overly polite, or anything, right? So, I guess I find the diversity in those interactions to be enjoyable. (2-443)

Engaging in a variety of occupations provided Kevin with opportunities to experience different power dynamics in his relationships and he liked this variety because it enabled him to express different facets of his personality. As a boss, he held a position of power and was treated with extreme courtesy, but as a volunteer, he could be more relaxed and let his guard down. Other male participants acknowledged that in participating in a mix of occupations, they faced different types and degrees of challenges and that dealing with them led to better health and feelings of balance.

4.1.2.2.2 Seeking a feeling of being stimulated, gratified, and energized

For men, an essential aspect of engaging in a mix of occupations that created a sense of balance was a feeling of stimulation, gratification, and energy. William encapsulated a model of a person living in balance as he described his friend:

> He is super busy, but he allows enough of each piece of his life to get into what he is doing on a daily basis, so he is achieving huge amounts, and the result is he is very balanced. And the balance comes from being hyper productive…more than anything he

manages to discover new things all the time…and it gives him more energy and more stimulation to keep going. (2-562, 570)

William constructed balance to entail a positive cycle in which the different occupations of daily life were integrated in that they supported each other. Participating in a variety of complementary occupations appeared to stimulate and reinvigorate his friend, and enhanced his occupational performance. Further, being involved in only one occupation led men in the study to boredom and discontent, and this negative experience underpinned their constructing balance as participating in a mix of occupations.

The combination of, and variation in, occupations that led men in the study to feel stimulated, gratified, and invigorated varied among them. Some men appreciated that they gained enough gratification from engaging in paid work and family life, whereas others identified social occupations as well as paid and family occupations as being necessary for a balanced life. Generally, socialization and recreational occupations gave them enjoyment. Exercise was particularly beneficial for some men. It stimulated their minds, gave them a sense of accomplishment and opportunities for self-reflection, helped them relieve stress, and energized them. Ian recounted his experiences of golfing:

The other day I went out to the driving range by myself because I was feeling stressed out one night…. I put on my music and I go there and I hit balls for an hour or so…it's almost meditative…. It doesn't matter how I'm hitting the ball. I don't care if I hit it. There's just something about it…it centres me, it grounds me, whatever you want to call it. It's just a huge stress reliever and I feel just invigorated again after doing that. (2-538)

Occupying himself by repeatedly hitting golf balls was a meditative act for Ian in that it helped him to release his negative emotional energy and get into the mindset needed to perform his daily occupations well. Some men in the study acknowledged that 'me time'—regardless of what activities constituted it—particularly alleviated a negative psychological condition and restored positive mental attitude to their occupations.

Several men mentioned that paid work gratified them with its activities, feedback on their work from colleagues, challenges, and/or their accomplishments and productivity. Although career development was not a focus at the time of the interviews, some men expressed an interest in having "a bigger job" or "a slightly higher level" of responsibility at work once their children became more independent.

4.1.2.2.3 Wishing for the freedom to "just go"

Men in the study manifested their desire for the freedom to have alone time away from paid and family occupations when constructing balance as participating in a mix of occupations. Because "being a parent [would be] a full-time job for the rest of [their] life [lives]," it was important for fathers to allow themselves time alone. Zack justified his needs for "me time" to "rebalance" himself because of the physical and mental stress involved in parenting:

> Going back to the physical and emotional exhaustion of looking after the kids, you have to have that me time to sort of recharge your batteries and reground yourself…you can really lose yourself in that, and it's important that you have something that can reground yourself, otherwise you're no good for the kids…they can take control of your life and your emotions, and that's not good for anybody. So it's important to have some me time to sort of rebalance and recharge yourself. (2-494)

Having time alone gave Zack physical and mental energy while restoring his sense of self, all of which had been diminished or misplaced by the time-consuming and draining task of parenting. Other men mentioned that if they had had time for themselves, they would have used it for recreational activities that would let them express who they were and reinforce their sense of identity. However, because of family and paid work responsibilities, men's freedom to enjoy alone time was limited, which gave rise to a feeling of imbalance in some men. Tom commented:

> I love mountaineering, just really enjoy doing that kind of thing. So you know, whenever I see the mountains, I'm like, I say, "Oh that'd be great to be up there doing that." So I sense, there's sort of something missing in a way. So you know, my life would be more complete if I was able to incorporate that activity more often. (2-565)

Tom related imbalance to the sense of longing that he experienced because he was not able to do an activity that he was passionate about and that contributed significantly to his self-actualization. Further, men's responsibility for sharing domestic and childcare occupations with their wives also limited their freedom for alone time. Several men had given up on having some time for themselves because taking that time most likely entailed leaving their wives with all the childcare and domestic responsibilities and tasks.

4.1.2.2.4 Meeting one's own needs for health

Looking after oneself was a crucial aspect of the feeling of balance that men gained from engaging in a mix of occupations. Some men emphasized the importance of "enough" sleep for a balanced life. William remarked:

> If I don't sleep enough, I lose my balance pretty quick, like I can't perform at the level I need to, and I just find myself unable to solve problems in the amount of time I have to solve them in or move quickly. (2-479)

William understood and constructed having "enough" sleep as a foundation for functioning well cognitively, based on his experience of a lack of sleep resulting in his being unable to resolve household issues. Poor diet was also recognized as a hindrance to balance. Overall, taking a rest, relaxing, exercising, and reflecting on oneself were essential for most of the male participants to sustain their health and subsequently acquire subjective sense of balance. Hugo commented on the effect that exercising had on his health and sense of balance in the following excerpt:

> Interviewer: How important is exercise in terms of accomplishing a balanced lifestyle?

> Hugo: I think it's very important. I go to gym and exercise, and after that I feel a lot better and not as stressed as when you are doing a lot of things at the same time. It's the time to kind of relax…. You don't have to think about anything. I try not to think about anything. I may listen to music…. So I would like to do it more. If I do it more, I'd feel I actually do something for my body, right because it makes you healthier and makes you more alert…it's going to increase my efficiency in doing other things right because if you don't feel tired and all that, then you have more energy to do other things. (2-553, 569)

For Hugo, exercise was a stress reliever; as previously mentioned, Ian had the same experience of exercising. On the one hand, exercise was relaxing because it helped Hugo release psychological stress. On the other hand, it enhanced his sense of physical and mental health.

Men in the study referred to happiness as an indicator of balance. Balance was experienced when feelings of happiness resonated in all the aspects of one's life (e.g., physical and mental health, financial status, the marital relationship, relationships with children). To the contrary, as Mike pointed out, fatigue, frustration, distress, and a feeling of being overwhelmed were signs of being out of balance:

> Interviewer: If you had more time for yourself, do you think your sense of balance would be a little bit better?

> Mike: Yeah, probably. I mean, or you're just happier, you know, you're happier with your kids, you're happier with your work life, you know. You can just end up being, you know, more well rounded, as opposed to like being tired all the time, and maybe you know frustrated, or you know not in a good mood, because you didn't get sleep, or you have things looming at work, and you know, because the kids will never turn off, right? (2-164)

For Mike, having more free time allowed him to better manage his current day-to-day occupations and take good care of himself, which made his life "well-rounded."

4.1.2.2.5 Summary

In summary, balance as participating in a mix of occupations was constructed from the position of contented man. In accomplishing a feeling of balance, men with this position engaged in a variety of occupations, as opposed to just one occupation, to enrich their experiences of challenges that they face, and interpersonal relationships. By engaging in a mix of occupations in their daily lives, men strived for a feeling of being stimulated, satisfied, and invigorated. Although men found paid work and family occupations gratifying in and of themselves, they also considered personal and social occupations critical to balance because these occupations relieved a negative psychological condition and gave them the energy they needed to effectively manage paid and family occupations. Consequently, the men sought the freedom to leave their paid and family responsibilities behind and participate in personal and social occupations. This helped them to attain a greater sense of balance. Further, they recognized the important contribution that looking after their health made to their sense of balance.

4.2 Discussion

Both men and women in this study constructed two key discursive constructions of balance: managing life and participating in a mix of occupations. Each construction speaks from a particular subject position. Women's construction of managing life embeds a position of household CEO, while a position of happy, healthy woman underpins their construction of balance as participating in a mix of occupations. For men, contemporary father and contented man are the two ideological positions from which managing life and participating in a mix of occupations are constructed, respectively. Parker (1992) depicted a subject position or location that is embedded in a discursive construction of object as a particular type of self that the discourse allows to come forward. For each gender, the two positions are a source of tension.

4.2.1 Women's constructions of balance and subject positions

The position of household CEO is embedded in women's construction of balance as managing life. To the contrary, the notion of a happy, healthy woman underpins their

construction of balance as participating in a mix of occupations. All the women in this study presented the two key constructions of balance and shifted from one to the other. A subject position that speaks to each construction of balance represents the identity of the women within it. Kielhofner (2008) defined occupational identity as "a composite sense of who one is and wishes to become as an occupational being generated from one's history of occupational participation" (p. 106). Based on this definition, neither of the two subject positions portrays the whole, composite sense of the women's identity, but each is expressed by their respective constructions of balance.

4.2.1.1 Subject positions and ideologies

The position of household CEO that is embedded in women's construction of balance as managing life represented a family-focused ideology that embraces the concept of intensive motherhood. It encourages women to assume taking on the roles of primary caregiver and primary housekeeper, which involves being responsible for orchestrating family life and caring for family members (Fudge, 2011; Hauari & Hollingworth, 2009; Hays, 1996; Thompson & Walker, 1989; Yeung et al., 2001). When balance was constructed as managing life, female participants emphasized that their dominant roles were that of caregiver and housekeeper, which merged to create the position of a household CEO; paid worker and civic-minded community member were their secondary roles.

The notion of a happy, healthy woman underpinned the construction of balance as participating in a mix of occupations and represented an ideology of justice. This position did not correspond to any particular social role; rather, it describes a woman who chooses and engages in occupations that promote and sustain her health and well-being. This position espoused freedom to choose and to participate in occupations and activities that were in the women's best interests. People are occupational beings. Their daily lives are organized and influenced by occupations and they choose occupations and activities when given the opportunity to do so (Kielhofner, 2008; E. A. Townsend, 2002). Occupational and activity choices are limited for some people for various reasons and, being unable to participate in meaningful occupations, those people may consequently suffer diminished health and well-being. Occupational justice has been an evolving concept since the mid-1990s and is described as:

> *[R]ights*, *equity*, and *fairness* [that enables]…every individual to be able to meet basic needs and to have equal opportunities and life chances to reach toward her or his potential but specific to the individual's engagement in diverse and meaningful occupation. (Wilcock & Townsend, 2009, p. 193)

A happy, healthy woman spoke for balance from the ideological perspective of occupational justice—that is, the freedom to choose and participate in occupations that are meaningful to her.

The two positions conflict with each other because the two ideologies they represent are not always compatible. The intensive motherhood ideology associated with the position of a household CEO required women to be fully committed to the family's overall happiness and compromise their own needs and fulfillment. To the contrary, the ideology of justice associated with a happy, healthy woman encouraged women to put their own happiness and well-being before that of their family's. Their focus on their own needs and happiness in this position did not mean that they abandoned the family or put their family at risk for the sake of their own desires; they positioned themselves as a household CEO more often than they positioned themselves as a happy, healthy woman.

4.2.1.2 Power relations between women and men

The two constructions of balance created different power relations between women and men. The intensive motherhood ideology reinforced traditional views of gender in encouraging and expecting women to first and foremost care for all their family members (Friedman & Greenhaus, 2000). Adapting this intensive motherhood ideology segregates men's and women's occupations, increasing the power differential between the two genders. As a result, women have less bargaining power over their partners, in part because their financial dependence on their partners makes them reluctant to ask for a fair share of, or even help with, the household occupations. Pauline's experience of being confined to family occupations and consequently feeling disempowered exemplifies this situation. The intensive motherhood ideology gives a low priority to personal and social occupations and limits women's freedom to engage in those occupations, which will negatively impact women's health. In contrast, the position of being a happy, healthy woman empowers women to pursue a fair division of domestic and childcare occupations with their husbands and equal opportunity to participate in occupations that are meaningful to them. This equalizes power relations between men and women.

4.2.1.3 Occupational overload

Women in this study adhered to the intensive motherhood ideology and assumed the position of a household CEO in order to acquire a subjective sense of balance. The mothers' tendency to take on substantial responsibilities and occupations came predominantly from their perceived expectations of the primary caregiver and housekeeper roles. Sally's comment—"they are my kids so I should be with them"—shows that she felt obligated to be the primary caregiver. The literature provides compelling evidence that women assume the roles of primary caregiver and housekeeper particularly after the arrival of children in their lives (Fox, 2009; Friedman & Greenhaus, 2000; Gatrell, 2005; Yeung et al., 2001). To manage life well, the women in the present study orchestrated all of the family's functioning, which included: planning family activities; managing the family's finances; organizing and ensuring their husbands' involvement in family activities and tasks; taking care of the family's overall happiness; and taking primary charge of childcare. At the same time, by constructing balance this way—identifying that fulfilling the demands of family occupations is important to strike balance—women imposed it upon themselves to be committed to managing every aspect of family life in their everyday practice of balancing life. They shouldered the bulk of family responsibilities and occupations although they worked outside the home.

While doing it all in relation to home and children contributed to women's sense of balance, it also led them to occupational overload, which was an indicator of imbalance for women in this study. Overload refers to overstimulation in response to excessive involvement in occupations and can result in burnout (Wilcock, 1998). More specifically, overload means that one's available time and energy is inadequate to comfortably meet the substantial demands of occupations and activities (Rapoport & Rapoport, 1976, as cited in Coverman, 1989; Higgins, Duxbury, & Lyons, 2008). Women in the present study expressed exhaustion as: "overwhelmed," "stretched thin," or "worn out." This exhaustion was the result of their unrelenting commitment to getting things done or getting everything done. Female participants struggled with a long to-do list and indicated that was being overwhelming and contributed to their sense of imbalance. Previous research shows that exhaustion is an issue among dual-career couples juggling paid work and home responsibilities, especially for the female partners. Neault and Pickerell (2005) found women particularly vulnerable to role overload. Many of the female participants in their study were so driven to do everything that they sacrificed sleep and hence their well-being.

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Gatrell (2005) likewise found that mothers have little time to meet their own needs, including dealing with fatigue, as they are often the only ones dealing with the substantial demands of housework and child rearing even if they engage in paid occupations.

Orchestrating families' lives led the women to be heavily immersed in family occupations and experience occupational overload. On the one hand, women in this study said, overseeing, planning, and organizing family activities and tasks contributed to their sense of balance. Planning and organizing was essential for the women to maximize the fulfillment of family needs, and Clare's positive experience of planning for an up-coming week is the example of this. The advantage of planning and organizing in successfully managing all the daily occupations is evident in the literature (Larson, 2000), and for wives planning is a coping strategy that alleviates interaction between role overload, role conflict, and emotional affect (Paden & Buehler, 1995). Planning and organizing, therefore, is more likely than otherwise to guide parents toward beneficial activities and tasks that satisfy their family members' needs, and lead them to feel balanced. On the other hand, being the family planner and organizer usually means they are responsible for the lion's share of the family occupations. As such, being primarily responsible for planning and organizing can give rise to a feeling of imbalance in mothers. For some mothers in the present study, planning was also frustrating. This was particularly true when they needed to deal with competing needs and desires that cried out to be met simultaneously, such as when Clare experienced conflict between having a date with her husband and staying home to parent. Planning requires consideration of all needs and demands, prioritization, and organization of resources. Therefore, for mothers who took primary responsibility for domestic and childcare occupations, the logistics felt tiring, especially when the mothers were unexpectedly landed with an extra chore in addition to their already substantial responsibilities (Neault & Pickerell, 2005). Most of the female participants undertook this consuming role of planner and organizer, which reiterates previous research findings (Zimmerman et al., 2002). Thus, while planning and organizing help mothers get things done and maximize fulfillment of family needs, they may also be burdensome and thus increase the risk of occupational overload and imbalance. This issue is consistently associated with the construction of balance as managing life and needs to be addressed because planning and organizing can have both negative and positive effects on a mother's experience of balance.

4.2.1.4 Tension in occupational participation

The intensive motherhood ideology limits women from participating in personal occupations, which increases their risk of occupational overload. Mothers in this study did not have enough time to rest, relax, eat well, and exercise, all of which could help them recover from occupational overload. Maggie regarded getting things done as relaxing from the viewpoint of managing family life. For mothers, like her, who were dedicated to meeting as many family needs as possible, devoting time to restful and rejuvenating extracurricular activities posed a dilemma, because it would mean they got fewer things done. If they do not meet the demands that they must fulfill to avoid occupational overload and instead meet their own needs, they are unlikely to feel satisfied or balanced in terms of managing life. Thus, within the construction of balance as managing life, there is tension between being a household CEO to accomplish a sense of balance, and feeling tired, overloaded, and out of balance. This suggests that if women aim to achieve balance based on the construction of balance as managing life as a discursive resource, some of them may encounter challenges in pursuing a sense of balance; the more dedicated they are, the more likely they are to feel overloaded and imbalanced, and the less dedicated they are, the less likely they are to feel satisfied with the extent to which they manage family life and the more likely they are to feel out of balance.

The tension between the two constructions of balance affects mothers' engagement in personal occupations. In the practice of balance as managing life, women neglect, or at least minimize, their involvement in occupations if they are primarily based on their own needs and increase the risk of compromising the collective happiness of the groups to which they have decided to commit, namely family and workplace. Women instead prioritize the occupations that they need to manage. Women in the study often ignored their needs for looking after their health unless it affected their families' overall happiness. In contrast, the construction of balance as participating in a mix of occupations allows women to shift some of the weight to their husbands in terms of family responsibilities and gain more freedom for occupational participation. The construction sanctions women's entitlement to a fair share of family responsibilities and equal opportunities for both paid occupations and occupations outside the family. As the ideology of occupational justice underlying this construction emphasizes women's freedom, it allows them to meet their needs for health and well-being. Most of the female participants in this study constructed balance in both ways, which suggests that they routinely juggle competing

ideologies of balance in their daily lives. Pursuing balance in accord with one ideology can compromise the other ideology. For example, as is the case for Pauline, mothers may feel guilty about resting while a nanny looks after the children because they assume that society thinks an ideal mother should care for her children on her own. In this case, the social norm of ideal motherhood is competing with the ideology of occupational justice, making it difficult for mothers to take care of their own health.

4.2.1.5 Tension caused by the two ideologies of motherhood

Within the construction of balance as managing life, the ideology of intensive motherhood sets high standards that motivate the pursuit of an "ideal" of motherhood. As a result, women in this study felt pressured to take on a considerable number of childcare responsibilities, which led them to occupational overload and imbalance. Further, women typically prioritized childcare occupations over other occupations and wondered if their mothering was "good" or even sufficient. Despite their enormous commitment, some mothers were rarely satisfied with the quality and quantity of their performance in caring for their children. Some who needed to work full-time, for whatever reason, described their participation in paid occupations as somewhat selfish; others wished that they could work less or less intensively in order to be able to spend more time with their children. Even some of those who worked part-time felt guilty about prioritizing their physiological needs over being with their children, and having someone else care for the children. A mother's guilt about leaving her children with other caregivers, and anxiety about its negative impact on children, is evident in Gatrell's (2005) study. She showed that mothers' guilt and concerns seemed to be aggravated by the social expectations and perception of ideal motherhood as being a full-time mother who engages in every aspect of her children's daily lives. Mothers in the present study seemed to feel less pressure to be a full-time mother than the mothers in Gatrell's study, yet they still had a strong sense of needing to prevent their combined mother-paid employee role from adversely affecting their children. Indeed, while the women in this study were all employed, and some of them contributed considerably to the household income, many of them regarded themselves as the first and primary parent who adjusted the demands of paid occupations to the extent that she could undertake care occupations for her children, if necessary.

When balance is constructed as managing life, mother's engagement in parenting occupations inherently becomes challenging because of the high expectations associated with the intensive mothering ideology. Mothers in this study constructed ideal motherhood as devoting "enough"—which seemed eternally "more"—time to meeting children's needs. Their commitment required them to sacrifice their own needs for those of the children and to put pressure on themselves to be "kind and patient all the time." Such child-centred motherhood echoes the "selfless[ness]" of women segregated in the private sphere of labour division, as opposed to men as "market actors pursuing their own self-interest" (J. Williams, 2000, p. 31). Marshall (1991) likewise indicated, by analysing discourse on parenting manuals, that motherhood is prescribed as compelling women to put aside all other identities except those of mother and wife. However, the more committed mothers are to such an ideal motherhood, the more likely they attempt to deal with all demands, feel overloaded by their occupations, and fail to be tolerant with their children. Consequently, the mothers may perceive this as feeling imbalanced if they concurrently perceive their negative occupational performance to be a failure to manage childcare occupations despite their efforts to devote as much of their time and energy as possible to childcare.

Mothers in this study often constructed balance as participating in a mix of occupations when they mentioned how they resolved the challenges that they encountered in focusing solely on parenting occupations. In constructing balance as managing life, mothers assigned themselves the heavy responsibilities associated with intensive motherhood and did not allow themselves to "escape" from childcare occupations. In contrast, the construction of balance as participating in a mix of occupations sanctioned women to have a break from the physical and emotional stress resulting from being involved in child rearing occupations exclusively. Creating a temporal, spatial, and psychological distance from childcare by being involved in other occupations promoted mothers' motivation and sense of competence in their occupational performance in childcare. The positive effects of engaging in more than one occupation have been explored, discussed, and theorized in literature as work-family enrichment (Gareis, Barnett, Ertel, & Berkman, 2009; Greenhaus & Powell, 2006; Michel & Clark, 2009), work-family facilitation (Hill et al., 2007; Voydanoff, 2004), and positive spillover (Hammer, Cullen, Neal, Sinclair, & Shafiro, 2005; Kinnunen, Feldt, Geurts, & Pulkkinen, 2006; Lambert, 1990; Small & Riley, 1990; Song, Foo, & Uy, 2008). Hill et al. (2007) found that involvement in paid occupations positively influences parents' well-being, commitment to childcare, and financial status. The

psychological, physical, material, and social resources that mothers gain and develop in performing paid occupations can improve their occupational performance and emotional state in family occupations, and vice versa (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006). The construction of balance as participating in a mix of occupations liberates women from the demands of intensive childcare and thereby enables them to perceive themselves as a "better" mother than they would have been had they had to focus solely on the mothering role.

The construction of balance as participating in a mix of occupations allows women to practice extensive mothering, which involves delegating hands-on childcare tasks to somebody else in order to satisfy their own needs for health and happiness (Christopher, 2012). This construction encourages women like Kate to claim the freedom to pursue the occupational opportunities that help them to sustain the occupational identities they developed before they had children and to be the person they want to be. In addition, Florence often left her children with her husband, trusting his ability to look after them while she enjoyed time for herself. This suggests that wives make an effort to involve their husbands in family occupations in order to increase their freedom to meet their own needs, which reiterates the findings of previous studies. Fox (2009) found that when men were deeply involved in child rearing occupations, their wives actively involved them in the occupations. Some wives left their infants with their husbands while they spent evenings with their friends or exercising, while others stopped criticizing and directing husbands about how to care for the children and allowed them to try to develop their own childcare practices. Therefore, while extensive mothering reduces the amount of time a mother spends with her children, it also appears to require her to negotiate with her husband the division of responsibilities for family and paid work occupations; encourage him to be involved in family occupations; and express that she trusts and respects his childcare abilities.

4.2.2 Men's constructions of balance and subject positions

4.2.2.1 Subject positions and ideologies

The position of contemporary father is embedded in the male participants' construction of balance as managing life, while the concept of contented man is the premise for the construction of balance as participating in a mix of occupations. A contemporary father is a composite

occupational identity that included the roles of: primary financial provider for the family; involved father; supportive husband; responsible paid worker; and contributing community member. However, the majority of male participants emphasized fulfilling their responsibilities in the roles of financial provider, participant father, and supportive husband, and trying to minimize the adverse effects of the paid worker and community member roles on family life.

The contemporary father position embraced and was primarily influenced by, a belief in ideal fatherhood and, more covertly, an image of the ideal worker. Primary aspects of balance as managing life that men constructed echo the certain focal features of contemporary fatherhood described in the literature, such as providing financial support and material goods, developing and maintaining bonding with their children, and offering their children opportunities to learn and succeed (Doucet & Merla, 2007; Doucet, 2009, 2011; Fox, 2009; Gatrell, 2005; Hauari & Hollingworth, 2009; Lareau, 2000, 2002; N. W. Townsend, 2002). The position of contemporary father might over-represent a family-focused aspect of the construction of balance. Men in this study may have emphasized presence and active engagement in their daily family lives possibly because they recognized that they could easily be trapped into being consumed by their paid occupations. On the one hand, men's dedication to paid occupation was necessary for fulfilling the family's financial provider role; on the other hand, their time commitment to paid work could be seen as compromising their commitment to family time. In fact, the literature shows that perceptions of the ideal paid worker—dedicating long hours, intensive effort, and priority to paid work—are constructed based on a traditional model of men in a way that aggravates occupational segregation between men and women (Gambles et al., 2006; J. Williams, 2000). Men are given more permission than women to be ideal workers and they rationalize investing their time in paid occupations rather than family occupations as sustaining their designation as ideal worker. Claiming to be the primary financial provider for the family allows men to engage in paid occupations more than in family occupations. In this regard, the subject position of contemporary father embraced both the ideal worker and ideal fatherhood ideologies as key foci of the provider role.

Contented man underpinning balance as participating in a mix of occupations is person-centred and based on occupational justice as an ideology. This position allowed men freedom to arrange and engage in a range of occupations to satisfy their own needs, including physiological and mental health, intimacy, self-esteem, and self-actualization.

In a manner corresponding to the women's two subject positions, the men's positions cause ideological tensions when men seek to accomplish balance. The position of contemporary father is both driven by ideal fatherhood and ideal paid worker values and reliant on the collective contentment of groups in order to attain balance. Accordingly, the contemporary father's health and well-being is secondary to that of the groups. In contrast, the occupational justice underlying the position of a contented man legitimizes and encourages men to prioritize their own health and happiness.

4.2.2.2 Tension between the roles of ideal paid worker and ideal father

The position of a contemporary father encourages men to assume the role of primary financial provider for their families and also be committed to spending time with their families. Men in this study indicated that they found a subjective sense of balance by fulfilling both paid and family occupations that they viewed as being their responsibility. Compared to their female counterparts, most of whom identified family occupations as the most prominent responsibilities to manage, oversee, and practise, men took a stance that family was important and that they practised this ideology by engaging in paid occupations as the primary financial provider to the family as well as making time for the family. Some men felt pressured to be primarily dedicated to their paid occupations. Brian said "I work for my family," because he felt he had an obligation to provide his family with financial security and sustain the lifestyle they enjoyed. Literature based on US studies indicated that there was generally an increase in a man's paid work hours after the arrival of children and as the number of children in his family increased (Jacobs & Gerson, 2004). This is not the case for mothers in dual-income couples (Jacobs & Gerson, 2004), who may in fact reduce their paid work hours in favour of undertaking childcare occupations (Bianchi, 2011). As family size expands, men's involvement in paid occupations increases, which may be an expression of their commitment to fulfilling their family responsibilities.

According to the ideology of an ideal worker, men are expected to work long hours and give paid work a higher priority than family, which created conflict because men could not simultaneously fulfill paid work and family demands. Zack's case is an example. His struggle between wanting to spend dinnertime with his family and wanting to stay longer at his workplace to resolve problems gave him a feeling of imbalance. This dilemma arose because of competition between the ideologies of the ideal worker and the ideal fatherhood. The literature is

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inconclusive as to whether there is an association between the amount of hours men spend on paid work and their perception of balance; the results of studies that have investigated this association are inconsistent. While devoting 50 hours and more to paid occupations per week appears to give rise to a sense of imbalance regardless of gender (Jacobs & Gerson, 2004), Friedman and Greenhaus (2000) found that the more time men spend on their paid occupations the more satisfied they feel with family (according to survey data obtained in 1992 from 861 employed alumni from two US university business schools). Men in the current study, three of whom reported that they worked 50 or more hours a week, tried to maintain family time by cutting back on business trips, leaving their workplaces to have dinner with their families, and putting career advancement on hold. Nevertheless, some of them found it challenging to devote "enough" quality time to their families because unexpected demands of their paid work frequently infringed upon their family lives during the evenings and weekends. This finding, suggesting that men are committed to family life, is inconsistent with the finding of Friedman and Greenhaus (2000). Recent literature likewise suggests that the notion of what manliness means in relation to family life has changed. The men's ideal of contemporary fatherhood included not only being the family's primary financial provider, but also being committed to their children and doing a fair share of domestic occupations (Gatrell, 2005; Harsch, 2006). These ideological changes reflect a new interpretation of masculinity (Cooper, 2004) and may have modified the ideal worker model to make it more compatible with men's roles as fathers and husbands. Still, it is possible that societal expectations of the ideal worker role continue to place pressure on fathers to work longer and give paid work higher priority, which may in turn lead them to feel out of balance.

4.2.2.3 Tension in occupational participation

In practising balance by managing life, the position of a contemporary father required men to engage in both paid work and family occupations, and consequently limited the time men had to spend on them. When some men in this study primarily attributed the meaning of gaining household income to their engagement in paid occupations, they felt obligated to prioritize the occupations. Their commitment to paid work led them to compromise the amount of time they devoted to their families and the quality of family time. As exemplified by Mike's comment that "I just had to spend more time at work as opposed to like spending time with the kids," it felt

natural for some men to sacrifice family time for time at work. They felt pressured to respond (and did respond) to paid work-related emails and phone calls that disrupted them in the evenings and on the weekends, when they were enjoying activities with their children. Along with a paid occupation, although less explicitly, a child rearing occupation was mandatory for some men, and their responsibility for family occupations limited the extent to which they participated in paid occupations. It led male participants to leave the workplace early, reduce their paid occupation demands, and put their career development on hold in order to preserve their ability to fulfill the demands of family occupations. This commitment to family life was particularly the case for male participants who constructed their role of father as establishing and sustaining a good relationship with their children and being actively engaged in their children's learning and development. Fathers in the study maximized the amount of time they spent with their children, which then led them to spend the post-bedtime hours catching up on paid work tasks at home. In short, when men tried to attain balance by managing life, they felt a strong sense of responsibility to both paid work and family occupations even though engaging in one limited their participation in the other. This was not the case for many mothers in this study. These mothers admitted that they needed to work for their family's financial security, but also expressed a strong sense of responsibility for childcare and feelings of guilt and selfishness about their paid occupations. This comparison of the affect between men and women highlights the traditional gender ideology of man as breadwinner and woman as care provider and housekeeper.

Men who ascribed to the ideologies of both ideal fatherhood and an ideal worker gave up the occupations that would help them to relax or rest, or enjoy being entertained. Some men in the study sacrificed time for sleep because they regularly completed paid work in the evenings after everybody else had gone to bed, while others gave leisure and recreational activities a low priority in order to fulfill family and paid work responsibilities. Previous research also shows this kind of self-sacrificing behaviour on the part of fathers in regard to their active enrolment in paid work and family life (see, for example, Cooper, 2004). When attaining balance by managing life, men limit the extent to which they participate in paid, family, rest, and recreational occupations to manage the occupations that they sign up to take responsibility for or are obliged to do.

In contrast, the position of a contented man in the construction of balance as participating in a mix of occupations allowed men to more freely choose and engage in occupations in a way that helped them meet their own needs and desires. Men in this study emphasized how important it was for them to have variation in their activities, interpersonal relationships, and day-to-day

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experiences for their feeling of balance. Unlike women, who regarded paid occupation as "me time," men sought alone time outside of family and paid occupations in part because they felt that both occupations were obligatory and rarely satisfy their need for a break. They saw exercise as particularly critical to a balanced, healthy life. According to previous research, more men than women reported that they engaged in physical activities on regular basis and felt they had achieved balance between domestic and paid occupations as well as leisure and paid occupations (Håkansson & Ahlborg, 2010). The ideology occupational justice permits men to feel entitled to disengage from their families, paid work, and community responsibilities and "just go" to engage in occupations or activities that help them affirm and enjoy who they are. And when they do engage in paid, family, community, or social occupations, the position of contented man allows men to do so for the purpose of satisfying their personal needs rather than from a feeling of responsibility or obligation.

Many men in the present study constructed balance as participating in a mix of occupations when they started mentioning difficulty engaging in occupations through which they could express and affirm who they are in terms of passion, desire, and excitement in their daily lives. The actual occupations to which they ascribed specific meanings varied. Paid occupation was a source of inspiration for some male participants as it was a means of gaining a sense of accomplishment in a market sphere and potentially in the context of affirming their "manhood." Others valued active parenting because they found joy, excitement, and self-efficacy in assisting their children's development and learning. Friedman and Greenhaus (2000) contended that parenting enhances men's gratification with their personal growth because they have to use a different skill set, one that has been previously neglected because parenting has traditionally been undervalued among men. Men in the current study attributed positive meanings to paid and family occupations when constructing balance as participating in a mix of occupations. However, the ideal fatherhood and paid worker ideologies constrained their efforts to arrange and organize their daily occupations in a way that enabled them to benefit fully from participating in those occupations. This is the intersection of tension between the two constructions.

4.3 Conclusion

This chapter highlighted the subject positions that are embedded in men's and women's two discursive constructions of balance in everyday life. For women, the construction of *managing life* involved the position of household CEO, while *participating in a mix of occupations* positioned them as a happy, healthy woman. The former position motivated and encouraged women to take the primary responsibility for housework and childcare (e.g. orchestrating all the family functions and ensuring the family's overall happiness), which limited the time they had for themselves. The latter position increased their freedom to engage in occupations that promoted their health and well-being as individuals. For men, the position of contemporary father characterized the construction of *managing life*, while the position of contented man was associated with *participating in a mix of occupations*. The men's experiences of both constructions of balance were similar to the women's in terms of the focus of the subject position. That is, the former position emphasized their commitment to family (e.g. fulfilling the role of financial provider, engaging with the children) while the latter position allowed them to "just go" and seek the different kinds of stimulation they craved, and satisfy their health needs. However, assuming the position of contemporary father also led men to be dedicated to their paid occupations in order to provide their families with financial security.

The discussion delineated the tension that arose between the two constructions of balance due to the conflict between the respective ideologies that informed them. For women, the ideology of intensive mothering that underpinned *managing life* competed with the ideology of occupational justice that supported *participating in a mix of occupations*. For men, the ideologies of ideal fatherhood and the ideal worker that underpinned *managing life* competed with the ideology of occupational justice that supported *participating in a mix of occupations*. Further, tension existed between the ideologies of ideal fatherhood and the ideal worker when men constructed balance as *managing life*. Due to the tension between the two constructions, relying on one construction to achieve balance resulted in compromising the achievement of balance as defined by the other construction. Concurrently, there was a lack of congruence and continuity between the discourses associated with the two constructions, and being guided by one made it difficult to accept the ideology put forth by the other.

5 Conclusion

This phenomenographic study aimed to describe various conceptions of balance in everyday life from the perspectives of heterosexual men and women in double-income couples with young children. A phenomenographic analysis of the data compiled from 60 semi-structured interviews conducted with 30 individuals (15 couples) generated two key conceptions of balance: managing life and participating in a mix of occupations. These two conceptions or constructions were further broken down by gender and the male and female accounts were critically analyzed as two separate sets of discourse data. This second phase of the analysis advanced a comprehensive understanding of men's and women's respective experiences of balance within each construction and of the ideological tension within and between the two constructions. This concluding chapter begins by highlighting the main research findings and delineating how they contribute to the conceptualization of balance. Before making a concluding statement, the implications for health care practice, employment, and policy making as well as future research will be presented, followed by a brief comment on the limitations of the study.

5.1 Review of the main findings and synthesis

5.1.1 Collective and individual perspectives on balance

The phenomenographic analysis generated two primary conceptions of balance: managing life and participating in a mix of occupations. Managing life was a *collective* needs-based conception that referred to meeting the collective needs of family, colleagues, and other groups whom parents engaged with, in a manner that led them to feel balanced. When this conception was presented, both male and female parents focused more on family occupations than on paid work and were concerned about preventing the latter from negatively spilling over into the former. It was clear that allocating more time to family occupations than paid work contributed to some of the women's subjective balance. The focal features of managing family life were: optimizing the family's happiness as a collective; reconciling demands with resources; getting things done for the family; sharing occupational responsibilities and opportunities with

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partner; and negotiating one's own needs with the family's needs. Both male and female parents often ignored their need to engage in extracurricular activities and take care of their health unless their health issues threatened to compromise the family's overall happiness.

Parents also conceived balance from the perspective of meeting their *individual* needs, which was understood in terms of participating in a mix of occupations. Engaging in paid work, family, and other occupations contributed to parents' feeling of balance because it met their needs for physical and mental health; provided them with opportunities for rewarding interactions; stimulated them and led them to feel content; and gave them a positive sense of self. Participating in a variety of occupations helped parents to meet more of their needs and to feel more well-rounded and balanced than participating in just one occupation. Further, parents' abilities to deal with individual occupations increased when they participated in multiple occupations.

This study makes a primary contribution to the literature in identifying key conceptualizations of balance from parents' perspective. Most of the parents in this study presented both conceptions of balance when recounting their experiences of it. Their conceptions shifted in response to whether they attributed collective or individual meanings to the occupations they participated in. They perceived balance as *managing life* when they were concerned about their families, paid occupations, and communities. In contrast, balance was perceived as *participating in a mix of occupations* when they focused on their own happiness and health. The explication of these two co-existing conceptions clarifies and adds insight to the generally abstract concept of balance.

Further, looking at balance from the perspective of its collective meanings added another layer to the conceptualization of balance. That is, the attainment of a sense of balance can be contingent upon the well-being of others, particularly family members. This conceptualization suggests that FQoL scales might provide a useful measurement of balance which integrates balance within co-occupations.

5.1.2 Tension between the two constructions

The findings generated by the discourse analysis indicated that tension arose between the two constructions of balance when parents' individual needs were not compatible with the needs

of other members in a group. *Managing life* encouraged parents to commit to intensive parenting, which led to balance, but also limited their engagement in personal occupations, which was associated with imbalance. Conversely, *participating in a mix of occupations* allowed parents to meet their own needs, which was associated with a sense of balance, but this meant less time with families, which could compromise their sense of balance.

The difficulty of commensurably sustaining the two constructions of balance is indicative of how challenging it is to actually achieve balance in real life terms. Relying on just one to achieve balance appears to compromise the potential for the other to do the same because the ideologies that underpin the respective constructions are incompatible. For women, the ideology underlying *managing life* is intensive mothering, while occupational justice is the ideology that informs *participating in a mix of occupations*. For men, the ideologies of ideal fatherhood and an ideal worker underpin *managing life*, and *participating in a mix of occupations* is supported by occupational justice. The constructions of balance and their respective ideologies are rooted in social and cultural traditions, which indicates that balance is socially and culturally constructed. The ideologies thus reflect social norms that influence parents' beliefs about how they should live their lives collectively and individually, which can create dilemmas when they seek balance.

5.1.3 Balance in relation to gender ideologies

Women's constructions of balance reflected the gender ideologies that have been discussed. Their construction of balance as managing life reflects a transitional gender ideology in the sense that they saw themselves as the primary caregiver and housekeeper but they also engaged in paid occupations, even though they were a lesser priority than family occupations. The women's experiences of seeking balance by managing life were underpinned by the intensive mothering ideology, which encourages women to assume traditionally feminine roles (Fox, 2009; Hays, 1996; Horwitz, 2011). Women in the study felt responsible to dedicate as much of their physical and psychological energy to their children as they could and emphasized that it was important for them to orchestrate family life. As a result, reducing the demands of their paid occupations was an important aspect of balance, and they had little time for themselves. In contrast, when the achievement of balance was associated with participating in a mix of occupations, women held more contemporary beliefs about gender. This study illuminated the

experiences of balance that reflected women's adherence to contemporary gender ideologies. These experiences were informed by women's desire to engage in occupations other than motherhood. To this end, they implicitly and explicitly negotiated with their husbands about sharing family responsibilities as a couple, which increased their freedom to choose and participate in occupations that would promote their happiness and health.

As indicated, the transitional gender ideology was predominant in the first construction of balance, while the contemporary gender ideology was predominant in the second. However, most of the mothers in the study constructed balance in both ways, which is consistent with Hochschild and Machung's (2003) finding that conflicting gender ideologies coexist. When constructing balance as managing life, women presented transitional gender beliefs as the foreground—at the "on-top" level (p. 15)—and contemporary gender ideology as the background—at the "underneath" level (p. 15). In contrast, the levels were reversed in the construction of balance as participating in a mix of occupations. The co-existence of the dual ideologies reaffirms that values and beliefs are complex and even contradictory, which suggests researchers need to be careful and discerning when they evaluate individuals' gender beliefs and categorize individuals according to them.

The men in the study were like the women in that their construction of balance as managing life was associated with the transitional gender ideology. The men's commitment to devoting time to both paid and childcare occupations reflects the contemporary fatherhood ideology, although the majority of men relied on their partners to be the primary care provider and housekeeper. However, their willingness to fulfill the role of "helper" in domestic occupations is an expression of the transitional gender ideology.

Men's construction of balance as participating in a mix of occupations did not represent a specific gender ideology. In this case, the men identified multiple occupations or activities that would satisfy their personal desires and subsequently lead them to have a greater sense of balance, including paid work, alone time, and family activities. It was unclear to what extent the men considered to undertake the roles of the primary childcare provider and housekeeper to be an option for satisfying their personal desires. It is interesting to note the men emphasized the importance of having the freedom to take time away from both paid and family occupations more explicitly than the women. The men's strong desire for alone time may reflect their perception that paid work and family occupations are their obligations and responsibilities. In contrast, the women's less explicit emphasis on time for themselves may reflect their view that

engaging in paid occupations is "me time" because domestic occupations are their primary responsibility.

5.2   Implications

5.2.1   Implications for health care practice, employment, and policy making

Occupational therapists and other health care professionals (e.g., family counsellors) who work in healthcare settings play a significant role in promoting healthy lifestyles for parents. In practice, occupational therapists enable their clients to engage in the occupations that are meaningful to them, and address issues that may make their lifestyles imbalanced. They may apply the concept of occupational balance to the assessment and intervention of balance/imbalance. If occupational therapists and other health care professionals are educated about the concepts of managing life and participating in a mix of occupations as the focal features of balance for parents with young children, they will be more open-minded and better equipped to foster clients' achievement of balance. Further, as professionals they will need to understand how these conceptions compete with each other when parents' individual needs are incompatible with collective needs and choosing which need to prioritize creates a dilemma. Learning about these population-specific conceptions and the tensions between them will help occupational therapists and other health care professionals to avoid the risk of imposing particular balance concepts on their clients.

Policy makers and heath care professionals who help parents deal with lifestyle issues and related health issues need to understand the indicators of balance from parents' perspectives in order to develop and provide the services that best promote a balanced lifestyle for parents. In terms of managing life, parents in this study gave a higher priority to family life than other areas of life and considered balance to be achieved when positive outcomes (e.g., the family's overall happiness, well-behaved children) resulted from managing the family's needs. However, their accounts of balance highlight that meeting the family's needs leave them feeling physically and emotionally exhausted and that they have difficulty spending "enough" time with their children even when they ignore personal needs for the sake of the family's overall happiness. Thus,

parents might find it helpful to have access to workshops and/or social services that provide employed couples who have children with information about strategies, interventions, and resources for managing household and childcare tasks. For mothers who struggle with a seemingly never-ending list of tasks, it might be helpful to reconsider the most effective or most logical ways to set priorities, learn how to practice reasonable goal setting, and find out about useful electronic devices or assistive devices for managing their responsibilities and routines. This might relieve them of some of their burden, if recommendations are offered in ways that fit women's lifestyles. Workshops for fathers could specifically focus on their planning and organizational skills. Moreover, developing community peer-support resources would benefit young families by allowing them to share their challenges in managing life, exchange strategies and resources for resolving issues that impede the achievement of balance, and ease their stress. This may in turn enhance their family's quality of life and their subjective sense of balance.

In addition, employment policies need to safeguard employees' time off and support workplace practices that optimize employees' capacity to manage the dual demands of parenting and paid work. This can be accomplished in a number of ways. First, employment policies should allow employees with children to have a flexible work schedule whenever possible (e.g., a range of start and finish times or doing some work from home). Second, employers need to be aware that calling or emailing employees who have children at home is intrusive and can diminish employees' sense of balance. Employees' privacy must be respected and preserved. To this end, employment policies could advise employers and colleagues not to correspond with employees who are off duty and provide clear guidelines as to the circumstances which warrant such communication. Third, requirements for employees to take business trips and attend evening or weekend meetings need to be negotiable; if employees are granted this input and given a degree of control over the nature and extent of such requirements, it will enhance their sense of balance and can improve their work performance. Fourth, employers should foster family-friendly work environments not only in employment policies, but also in company cultures and workplace practices. For example, companies could establish a peer support system for colleagues who need to look after their sick children at home. Such family-friendly practices would increase employees' awareness of the value of balance and nurture harmony in their experience of handling paid and family occupations.

Furthermore, occupational therapists, other health care professionals, and policy makers would need to be aware of the social expectations of parenthood that inform parents' experiences

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of balance. In terms of managing life, balance was constructed in a way that requires mothers to provide intensive mothering and take primary charge of orchestrating the functioning of their families. Fathers sustain the role of primary financial provider, yet make an effort to engage in family life as much as possible. This construction is based on social norms of ideal motherhood and fatherhood that limit mothers' and fathers' choice of occupations and the ways in which they participate in occupations when striving to accomplish balance. These limitations can reinforce their tendency to ignore their personal needs for the sake of the family's overall quality of life. Occupational therapists, family counsellors, and consultants therefore need to be conscious about the messages they give when they advise parents to have a better balanced lifestyle. Referencing the dominant discourse of parenthood may reinforce parents' ideas about ideal parenthood and inadvertently put more pressure on them to manage their lives in a way that meets that ideal. It might be helpful for professionals to give parents opportunities to explore reasonable and achievable motherhood and fatherhood roles. For example, extensive mothering is an alternative ideology. As previously mentioned, this ideology emphasizes that a mother can still be a 'good mother' if she chooses to delegate hands-on childcare tasks to somebody else (Christopher, 2012). Even when not physically with them, she remains accountable for her children's well-being. Adopting the ideology of extensive mothering can relieve mothers of the constant pressure to be with their children while they are not at work. Lastly, policy makers need to pay enormous attention to the discourse of parenthood they utilize when developing and documenting policy guidelines to aid young parents' health and well-being.

5.2.2 Implications for future research

The body of knowledge conceptualizing balance in life is broadened by the descriptions of balance that this research generated using the collective accounts of employed parents with young children. The study's prominent finding was that parents lived with two competing conceptions of balance, yet it is uncertain to what degree each conception informs and contributes to a parent's overall sense of balance at a given moment. Are parents' senses of balance and the decisions they make in their daily lives generally determined more by one conception than the other? Or, does the combination of the two produce and determine their feelings of balance and the decisions they make to achieve balance? For example, Florence said

that she would "just go" and "walk away" from her family to spend time with her friends. In this account, she pointed to the importance of having "me time," which is an aspect of balance conceived of as participating in a mix of occupations. This raised the question: When would a mother with an ideology similar to Florence's choose to ignore her needs for "me time" in order to fulfill the needs of her family?

Although this study found associations between FQoL and balance, the extent to which FQoL is related to the subjective sense of balance remains unknown. To explore this question it would be particularly worthwhile to examine the relationships between the four dimensions developed by Hoffman et al. (2006) and parents' conceptions of balance, which would determine whether there is a conceptual overlap and clarify the domains of balance. If there is a conceptual overlap, Hoffman's measurement of FQoL can be used to measure parents' experiences of balance. In addition, developing a measurement tool specific to the population will be absolutely critical to examining trends in conceptions of balance and identifying issues pertinent to balance among the broader population.

Further, future research needs to apply the framework of co-occupation to parents' experiences and perceptions of balance. For example, parents could be interviewed about how their experiences of shared physicality, shared emotionality, and shared intentionality with their partners, children, co-workers, or community members affect their sense of balance. This could advance an understanding of balance from the viewpoint of families, colleagues, or other groups as a unit and theoretically contribute to the conceptualization of balance.

This study's exclusive reliance on semi-structured interviews for data collection limited an understanding of conceptions of balance in two key ways. First, it was unclear how partners actually divided domestic and childcare occupations, particularly in terms of the spontaneous decision making and non-verbal negotiations that routinely guided couples' determination of who did the tasks that demanded urgent attention. Understanding the dynamic of the power relations between two partners and their expectations of each other with regard to managing family life would shed further light on parents' experiences of managing life, which would in turn clarify that conception of balance. To this end, it is essential for researchers to observe couples' home lives. Second, the study did not investigate the numerical break-down and proportioning of participants' time use. While detailed data on time-use was not necessary for this study, it would have given the primary researcher an idea of how much time parents granted themselves in a day, week or a month, and what personal needs they met in that time. The

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amount of time devoted to social occupations would have also been worth investigating because parents sacrificed, or at least minimized, their time for social activities as well as time for meeting their personal needs. Time-use data on these occupations might have enriched and clarified the descriptions of balance conceptions. Future research needs to collect those two sets of data so that scholars and practitioners in this field of study can more deeply understand the conceptions of balance in the population.

5.3 Limitations

The primary limitation of the study is a lack of generalizability of the study outcome. This is because qualitative research designs do not generate "hard evidence," unlike quantitative research using causal models and randomization (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 9). However, the findings of qualitative research can be transferred between contexts if salient conditions are similar in different contexts (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Consequently, although this study's sample size is small, the knowledge it generated on men's and women's conceptions, constructions, and experiences of balance in everyday life may be transferable to comparable contexts.

Further, the sample is relatively homogeneous, which might have limited the variation in parents' conceptions, constructions, and experiences of balance. Although an effort was made to maximize variation in participants' ethnic backgrounds and employment characteristics, most of them are white and have post-secondary or higher education. Almost all the men work 30 hours a week or more, whereas only half of the women work that much. Although snowball sampling brought new participants in the study, it might also have contributed to the homogeneity of the sample. Thus, the conceptions, constructions, and experiences delineated in this study may not be applicable to parents whose ethnic and educational background differs from that of the participants and to men who work fewer than 30 hours a week. Moreover, in the case of 12 couples it was the wives or female partners who initially contacted the primary researcher to indicate that they and their husbands or partners were interested in participating in this research. This may indicate that these female participants tended to be the partner in the couple primarily responsible for organizing and planning family activities. If this is true, the study findings may over-represent orchestrating, organizing, and planning as female behaviours, and the role that orchestrating, organizing, and planning play in a female partner's accomplishment of balance.

Lastly, relying on one data collection method might have limited the degree of understanding about parents' conceptions, constructions, and experiences of balance generated by the study. Triangulation, which refers to using multiple methods (Denzin, 1978), embraces the simultaneous expression of complex, multiple realities, allowing multiple and potentially conflicting perspectives on a phenomenon to emerge and enrich the researcher's understanding (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Fontana & Frey, 2005; Jick, 1979). However, the interviews relying exclusively on collecting textual data may have limited the participants' elucidation of their experiences of balance. To address this issue, using an arts-based inquiry such as drawing or photography might enhance participants' delineation of balance. In addition, because the interviews consisted of self-reported information, an observation of parents' home life supplementing the interviews might reveal a discrepancy between what participants say and do. For example, the amount of involvement in childcare that fathers indicate in interviews may contradict what their wives' report (Lareau, 2000). Asking further interview questions about such a gap might reveal the factors responsible for it.

5.4 Concluding thoughts

The increasing attention that academia and the media are giving to balance in life indicates that it is a subject of societal interest as well as an individual issue. Research reveals that women`s participation in paid occupations has substantially increased, which has in turn reduced the gender gap in occupational participation and led to a shift in parenting ideologies (see, for example, Christopher, 2012; Doucet, 2009). The findings of this study reflect these changes to a certain extent. The experiences and perspectives shared by the employed parents with young children who participated in the study and two conceptions/constructions of balance that were generated in their accounts provide evidence of these changes. Commitment to family was absolutely critical to the balance parents achieved or sought through *managing life*. However, *participating in a mix of occupations*, which gave them a variety of life experiences and enabled them to meet individual needs, was also essential to the achievement of a greater sense of balance. The tension between these conceptions/constructions reflected in the competing ideologies that parents had internalized in the course of their socialization: parenthood and occupational justice. The study has therefore aimed to contribute to the literature by advancing

an understanding of balance that links parents' experiences, conceptions/constructions, and ideologies. Such research can significantly contribute to the development of health care, social service, and workplace policies that support parents in the achievement of balance and thereby promote the health and well-being of parents, families, and society at large.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Interview guide

First Interview Guide

<u>Purpose</u>
To understand how a man and woman as a couple experience everyday activities (e.g., paid work, childcare, housework, leisure, exercise, and other everyday activities) with relation to family quality of life

<u>Interview Questions</u>
- Tell me a little bit about yourself your living situation? (Probe: family structure, you and your partner's paid work)

- Tell me about
  - A typical weekday (Probe: family activities, paid work, extracurricular activities)
  - A typical weekend

- How do you organize a day/week/month?
  - How do you usually deal with a conflicting schedule?
  - How do you prioritize everyday activities? Why?
  - What are the things you often take into account in planning/organizing a day/week/month? (Probe: family needs, paid-work)

- Experiences of everyday activities
  - Tell me about your experience of housework.
    - What do you enjoy most/least in housework?

  - Tell me about your experiences of parenting.
    - Tell me about some of the joys and challenges of parenting.
    - When you think of being a mother/father, what are you most proud of/what is most fulfilling?
    - When you think about being a good parent, what comes to mind? How similar or different is it from your own parents?
    - What one thing would you like your children to say about you as a dad/mom?

  - Tell me about your current paid work.
    - Tell me about some of the joys and challenges in your work.
    - How did you choose your current job/profession?
    - How do you envision your career development?

- Tell me about other activities you do. (Probe: date with your partner, leisure, exercise, friend/social gathering)

- How do you share responsibility of paid work, housework and childcare with your partner?
  - How was the share/division set/begun? (Probe: negotiation was involved?; who made the decisions?; natural occurrence?)
  - How do you feel about the division?
  - What does the sharing/division mean to you?
  - How different or similar is your division from your own parents'?
  - Who would usually stay at home and take care of your children in the case of an emergency (e.g., sickness)?

- How do you manage everyday activities?
  - Tell me what is most challenging in managing everyday activities.
  - How do you deal with the conflicts between different activities (e.g., your paid work and family)?
    · Could you recall the most recent experience?
  - How much does routine contribute to how you manage your life?

- Are you satisfied with your current lifestyle?
  - How important/meaningful/significant or insignificant is this kind of lifestyle for you?
  - If not satisfied, what would you change?
  - What would you gain or hope to gain from your ideal lifestyle?
  - Do you see yourself having another child? Why?
  - What are indicators of a happy, healthy family?

- How and in what way does this kind of lifestyle influence your family's overall satisfaction/happiness? (Probe: meeting needs of family members, relationships)

- Is there anything else you would like to add relevant to your current lifestyle?

Second Interview Guide

<u>Purpose</u>
To understand how participants understand and perceive balance and what meanings underlie their perspectives of balance (e.g., functionality of family, family quality of life, traditional gender beliefs)

<u>Potential Interview Questions</u>

For those who did NOT mention balance in the first interview:
- One of the topics that interests me in my research is the idea of balance. When you think about balance, what comes to your mind?
- Have you ever thought about balance in your life?
- Have you ever experienced a sense of balance/being out of balance?
- How important or not important is balance in your life? Why?

For those who mentioned balance in the first interview:
- In the first interview, you mentioned "balance," could you tell me more about your experiences balancing everyday life?
- How do you feel about current balance? How satisfied are you with the current balance?
- What changes in your life for you to think it's better or worse balanced?
- Tell me the most recent occasion you felt balanced.
- Tell me the most recent occasion you felt being out of balance.
  - What would help you to recover from a sense of imbalance? Why is this helpful?
- What are indicators of balanced life?
- How is your sense of balance related to your family's overall satisfaction/happiness?
- Is there anything else you would like to add relevant to your current lifestyle?

Appendix B: Consent form

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

Department of Occupational Science & Occupational Therapy
T325-2211 Wesbrook Mall
Vancouver, B.C. V6T 2B5
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Consent Form

Couples' Experiences of Managing Everyday Activities

Principal Investigator:
Dr. Catherine Backman, Associate Professor
Department of Occupational Science and Occupational Therapy
Telephone:

Student Investigator:
Mineko Wada, Ph.D. Student
Rehabilitation Sciences Research Graduate Program
Telephone:

This research is a partial fulfillment of the requirement for Mineko Wada's Ph.D. degree, and forms a part of her thesis (which is a public document).

Purpose:
This research aims to understand how men and women as dual-income couples with at least one pre-school child experience everyday life with relation to their family's overall quality of life. You are being invited to take part in this research because you are 1) currently living with an opposite sex partner and at least one pre-school child, 2) currently employed, and 3) living in the greater Vancouver area. Both you and your partner must be willing to participate in the research.

Study Procedures:
You will be interviewed twice separately from your partner. In the first interview, you will be asked your experiences of everyday activities (e.g., childcare, housework, employment and leisure and other activities) and your views of your family's overall quality of life. The second interview will ask how significant it is for you to manage your activities/roles/demands in everyday life. Interviews will be conducted individually (not in the presence of your partner) either in your home or at a public place of your convenience. Each interview will take

approximately 60 minutes. The interviews will be audio-taped, and the interviewer will take some notes during the interviews.

After the first interview, the interviewer will ask you to fill out a demographic information sheet. The information will be used to better understand who has participated in the study. If you do not wish to answer any of these questions, you may decide to not fill out the sheet.

You will receive a summary of the preliminary analysis and be given opportunity to discuss it if you wish.

Potential Risks:
In the interviews, you may feel discomfort, embarrassment and/or guilt when you are disclosing your experiences and opinions. Please keep in mind that you may decide to not answer any questions or ask the interviewer to stop audio-taping the interviews at any time.

Potential Benefits:
There is no direct benefit to you for participating in this study. The study will contribute to a better understanding of dual-income parents' experiences of everyday life which may, in turn, improve community support and/or change social policies which assist dual-income parents to have a healthy lifestyle and improve their family's quality of life.

Confidentiality:
All information that could identify you will remain strictly confidential. Your consent form and demographic information sheet will be kept in a secure locked cabinet in a research office in the Department of Occupational Science and Occupational Therapy at UBC. Audio-taped interviews will be stored in two forms: in audio files kept in the department network system, which is password protected and encrypted, and on CDs for backup kept in the secure locked cabinet in the department. Your interview transcripts will be identified only by a code number or pseudonym. You, your family members and others you mentioned in the interviews and wrote on the demographic information sheet will not be identified by name in any reports of the completed study. Your consent form and demographic information sheet will be accessible to only the principal investigator Dr. Backman, the student investigator Mineko Wada. Your interview audio file will be accessible to only the principal investigator, student investigator, her thesis co-supervisors, and professional transcribers who will sign a non-disclosure agreement.

Although the investigators will make every effort to keep your identity confidential, some information in the study reports may be identifiable by your partner because the information about your experiences of childcare and housework may be recognized by your partner. You may decide to not disclose the information you do not wish to share with your partner, or tell the interviewer if you do not wish some information to be released in public reports of the research.

The data may be used beyond the conclusion of the proposed research project in the future. In such a case, a new study protocol will be reviewed and approved by the UBC Behavioural Research Ethics Board before it begins. Information that cannot be attributed to you as an individual study participant may then be analyzed in the new study. Alternatively, you will be contacted to obtain consent for the use of your interview data and demographic information for the new study.

Remuneration/Compensation:
In order to defray the costs of inconvenience and transportation, each participant will receive an honorarium in the amount of $30. The cost of the childcare services used during interviews will be reimbursed. If you wish, childcare service will be provided by a research assistant during interviews.

Contact for information about the study:
If you have any questions or desire further information with respect to this study, you may contact Mineko Wada at (phone number) or (email address). Dr. Catherine Backman is also available at (phone number) or (email address).

Contact for concerns about the rights of research subjects:
If you have any concerns about your treatment or rights as a research subject, you may contact the Research Subject Information Line in the UBC Office of Research Services at 604-822-8598 or if long distance e-mail to RSIL@ors.ubc.ca.

Consent:
Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary and you may refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any time.

Your signature below indicates that you have received a copy of this consent form for your own records.

Your signature indicates that you consent to participate in this study and audio-tape your interviews.

_____

Participant Signature   Date

_____

Printed Name of the Participant signing above

Appendix C: Invitation letter and questionnaire for verification of the analysis

UBC | a place of mind
THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

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July 18, 2011

<div align="center">

**Request for feedback on the findings from the study
"Couples' Experiences of Managing Everyday Activities"**

</div>

Thank you for participating in our study, or expressing an interest in being part of it after recruitment had closed.

We completed interviews with 30 individuals (15 couples), transcribed and analyzed the data, then wrote a draft report on our findings focusing on parents' conceptions of balance in everyday life. We invite your feedback on this preliminary report.

The report is attached for your reference and a feedback sheet with three questions is provided below. We will be deeply grateful if you take the time to read the report, respond to the questions, and return the sheet to student investigator Mineko Wada by mail or email (contact information is listed below), by the end of August 2011. Your feedback will help us to confirm or adjust our interpretations, which will in turn enhance the rigour of the study.

We assure you that information that may identify you will remain strictly confidential. The feedback sheets will be kept in a secure, locked cabinet in a research office or in the password-protected network system in the Department of Occupational Science and Occupational Therapy at UBC and will be accessible to only the student investigator, Mineko Wada, and her supervisor/ principal investigator, Dr. Catherine Backman. Your comments will be used to verify the interpretation of the data from the study, and study reports will not identify individuals.

Your participation in this process is entirely voluntary. Submitting feedback indicates that you consent to participate in this portion of the study.

Please contact us if you have any questions or desire further information with respect to the study. You may also contact the UBC Research Services Subject Information Line at 604-822-8598 or if long distance e-mail to RSIL@ors.ubc.ca.

Thank you for considering this request.
Sincerely,

Mineko Wada, PhD candidate   Catherine Backman, PhD
Rehabilitation Sciences Graduate Program   Professor
Tel.   Tel.

Couples' Experiences of Managing Everyday Activities

1. Do you think that the titles used to conceptualize balance (e.g., "Managing Family Demands") represent the quotes used? Do you agree or disagree with our interpretation of the quotes?

2. Please consider the categorized conceptions of balance listed in tables. Do any of the balance conceptions resonate with your perceptions of balance in everyday life?

    a. If yes, please identify the conceptions and comment on how they are described. (Do the descriptions make sense to you? Would you change them?)

    b. If no, please explain your perceptions of balance and tell us why the list in tables is not compatible with your perceptions.

3. Do you have any other comments or insights about the findings?

Thank you for your time and valuable input.