EXPLORING THE INFORMATION CONTEXTS OF YOUNG FATHERS IN TWO BRITISH COLUMBIAN CITIES

by

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Abstract

Young fathers are situated in a unique information context and have specific information needs which have not been explored in research to date. There are disproportionate amounts of services and information resources available for young mothers versus young fathers; this imbalance of supports reflects gendered inequalities in parenting by assuming that the mother is the primary caregiver. Using data from the longitudinal Young Parents Study, this thesis explores the information contexts of young fathers and shows that young fathers encounter exclusion from parenting documents, young parent programs and services and from their communities. It is the conjecture of this thesis that young fathers are often overlooked as parents due to the gendered nature of parenting information delivery. Young fathers also encounter challenges asking for help with parenting, in part due to masculine gender role values such as self-reliance. This thesis also compiles responses from young fathers and service providers proposing interventions to improve information access for young dads at services, with the intention that being informed fathers will enable them to be more empowered parents.
Preface

This thesis was written under the primary supervision of Dr. Heather O’Brien (Professor at the iSchool at UBC) and Dr. Jean Shoveller (Professor at the School of Population and Public Health at UBC). This thesis is a secondary analysis of data gathered from the ongoing study titled “Investigating the influences of social context and structure on young people’s parenting experiences,” and commonly known as the Young Parents Study. This study is led by Dr. Jean Shoveller and funded by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research. Approval for the study involving observation and interviews of human participants was granted by UBC BREB (H13-00415). Approval for secondary use of data for this analysis was granted by UBC BREB in Fall 2017 (H17-02504). I was involved with the study and the data prior to my secondary analysis. I served as a research assistant working primarily on this study since its inception in 2013. My duties related to this study included: preparing study documents, transcribing interview transcripts, accuracy checking interview transcripts, coding data, managing qualitative data using Nvivo software, managing quantitative data using Microsoft Excel.
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1. Introduction

The care of children has been stereotypically gendered for a long time. For centuries, child care duties and tasks were under a mother’s purview in Western societies. Because of these gendered expectations, mothers and fathers have disproportionate access to parenting information, and this disparity is amplified for young parents. Because of their age, young parents in Western countries are deemed a “risky” population. Young mothers are perceived to be a population that is “information poor” (Greyson, O’Brien & Shoveller, 2017): they are thought to be lacking the knowledge and information resources necessary to make good decisions. Pregnancy and parenting are highly visible markers that young mothers have made poor choices because they lacked information about safe sex and contraception (Duncan, 2007; O’Brien, Greyson, Shoveller, & Chabot, 2018; Whitley & Kirmayer, 2008). Young parenting men do not experience some of the stigmas that young mothers face because their bodies do not bear many physical markers of child-bearing and child-rearing, such as the pregnant belly (McKenzie, 2003) and the breastfeeding infant (O’Brien et al., 2018). Because fathering is not as physically visible as mothering, young dads are often unrecognized as a population in need of information interventions. However, young dads are perceived to be a “risky” population for other reasons. Young men are often labelled as irresponsible and absent (Duncan, 2007), so more information is targeted towards preventing reproduction rather than helping dads become involved in their children’s lives (Lero, Ashbourne, & Whitehead, 2006). Because of this particular stigma young fathers face, they are not even considered “information poor” because they are not acknowledged as active parents in need of personalized information resources.
In the past decade, there has been a rise in research regarding the experiences of young fathers (Dallas, 2009; Davies & Neale, 2015; Davies, 2016; Deslauriers, Devault, Groulx, & Sévigny, 2012; Kirven, 2014; Kiselica & Kiselica, 2014; Sopcak, 2013). However, most of these studies have focused on the benefits of establishing services and programs for young dads without considering the kinds of information with which dads want to and how they wish to connect with them. Despite increased interest in barriers to fathering and access to services, no research has been specifically conducted on the information practices\(^1\) of young fathers. Young fathers and partners of young mothers are situated in a unique information context, and they would benefit from customized information resources that acknowledge those unique contexts. For example, many young fathers may feel nervous about handling newborns, especially dads who have never held a baby before. Having guides on how to hold babies gently but firmly could help relieve a lot of anxiety for young fathers. However, there is a disproportionate amount of services and information resources available for young mothers compared to young fathers. The resources, services and supports that do exist for fathers do not always have enough resources available to engage them fully and provide sufficient parenting information.

\(^1\) Information practices are “socially and culturally established ways to identify, seek, use, and share information” (Savolainen, 2008, p.2). Information practices are often “imbedded in [people’s] everyday contexts” and “invisible,” meaning that people often do not recognize or think about their own practices even while they are doing them (Savolainen, 2008, p.3).
2. Background

In this chapter, I review the theories, concepts and literature which informed my analysis of young father’s information contexts. This chapter begins with an overview of the information theories and terminology. In section 2.1, I introduce McKenzie and her two-dimensional model of information practices and Savolainen’s theory of everyday life information seeking. These two related theories provide a foundation for my discussion of how young fathers seek parenting information day-to-day. I will also discuss many terms foundational to the concept of everyday information practices.

The second section of this chapter, Information seeking behaviours of young fathers and related populations, reviews current literature related to the information practices of young fathers. Since young fathers’ information contexts have not been explored in academic literature before, taking a look at related populations such as parents, youth and young mothers will help inform us about young father’s information contexts and also how they differ. In particular, understanding the information contexts of young mothers will help me show that young fathers have underdeveloped and under-supported information contexts. Following the literature review, I will discuss why young fathers encounter barriers to seeking information and help. Thus, the third section, Gendered help-seeking behaviours, focuses on the help-seeking literature, and why men, and young fathers specifically, encounter difficulties seeking help and information.

My long-term involvement with the data, as well as my extensive research on the subject, gives me the confidence to put forth a hypothesis. I hypothesize that the information contexts of young fathers are less developed than the information contexts of young mothers. By “contexts,”
I mean the social, cultural and situational processes that influence the information activities of young parents. My hypothesis will be discussed further in the final section of this chapter.

2.1 Information theories

My analysis builds upon previous work done by McKenzie (2003) and her model of information practices. Her two-dimensional model of information practices was first utilized to explain the everyday life information seeking behaviours of mothers carrying twins. These mothers were in unique situations since many of their parenting questions could not be answered by commonly used parenting information resources, which assumed the reader was a mother with a single baby. McKenzie’s (2003) model organizes information behaviours into four modes – active information seeking (“specifically seeking out a previously identified source”), active scanning (“semi-directed browsing”), non-directed monitoring (haphazardly finding needed information) and receiving information by proxy (receiving intelligence about a useful source from another agent, such as a doctor). These modes then have two phases: connecting (“identifying” a useful source) and interacting (taking action with a useful source) (p. 26-27). This model clearly defined the strategies mothers used to encounter, seek and find parenting information in everyday situations. With its foundation in everyday life information searching, McKenzie’s model is robust enough to interpret the varying questions and subsequent problem-solving search methods that emerge when parenting.

One of the foundations of McKenzie’s model is the theory of everyday life information seeking (ELIS), which Savolainen explains as a strategy “people employ to orient themselves in daily life or to solve problems not directly connected with the performance of occupational
tasks” (Savolainen, 1995). Savolainen writes that everyday life is complex to study since it is often taken for granted; everyday life is often perceived as “regular, repeated, familiar, quotidian, banal and even boring” (Savolainen, 2008). It often goes unstudied because it is seen as “something trivial that is not worth talking about” (Savolainen, 2008). However, scholars such as Savolainen and McKenzie demonstrate in their work that studying everyday life is important precisely because the events of everyday life affect us regularly.

Focusing on information practices in everyday life involves studying people’s habits as they use “socially and culturally established ways to identify, seek, use, and share” information (Savolainen, 2008, p.2). Information practices always occur in context; humans are social beings, information practices and knowledge have an inherently social dimension (Savolainen, 2008). The social quality of information practices explains why Savolainen leans heavily on “social phenomenology” to explain how people interact with information in daily life. Social phenomenology is concerned with how social meanings shape human experience and perception (Savolainen, 2008). Alongside the study of everyday information practice, the concept of social phenomenology adds to our understanding of how context influences a person’s habitual information practices.

Analyzing populations “in context” is a popular technique in information science; McKenzie’s model acknowledges that the information seeker is an “individual-in-context.” However, “context” is a complex term that has been used with nuanced differences in various studies of ELIS. Although its definition is debated among authors, for the purposes of this analysis information contexts are defined as the social, cultural and institutional influences, technologies, and power dynamics which shape people and their information behaviours.
(Courtright, 2007). Information behaviours encompass a wide range of activities, including encountering, needing, finding, choosing and using information (Case, 2002). The resources that people use to satisfy their questions and curiosities can range from published materials (books, websites, posters on the community centre wall, etc.) to people (e.g., professionals, friends and family).

Authors have likened “context” to various metaphors: “a container,” where context is a “setting” which exists “objectively around the actor” (Courtright, 2007, p.286). Others explain context as meaning constructed by the person at the center of many nested networks (Courtright, 2007). Still others argue that context is not constructed by one person “inside their heads,” but that it is a social process and therefore “information activities take place within an explicit or implicit social community” (Courtright, 2007, p. 289). For this analysis, “context” is understood as a social process. The young parents in this study connect and interact with information by being embedded in their contexts; their information activities are not divorced from their “social, cultural, situational and individual factors,” (Courtright, 2007, p. 289) but rather are wholly influenced by them.

“Place,” which can be understood as an aspect of a person’s information context, is an important concept in McKenzie’s work and its relevance cannot be overlooked in this analysis since place influences where young parents connect and interact with resources. The concept of place is well described in the “information grounds” and “information worlds” information science theories. “Information grounds” refers to physical (and online) locations in which people share information (Greyson, O'Brien, & Shoveller, 2017b). Fisher (nee Pettigrew) posits that an “information ground” is an:
Environment temporarily created when people come together for a singular purpose but from whose behavior emerges a social atmosphere that fosters the spontaneous and serendipitous sharing of information (Pettigrew, 1999, p. 811)

The concept was developed using Fisher’s observations of patients exchanging information in a medical waiting room but has since then been used to analyze other locations, such as the internet, which enables people to share knowledge (K. Fisher, Naumer, Durrance, Stromski, & Christiansen, 2005). “Information grounds” is important in McKenzie’s model (McKenzie, 2003) since the “active seeking” and “active scanning” modes of her model rely on spaces where information exchanges take place. A prime example of “information grounds” in the Young Parents Study\(^2\) is the alternative school programs which many young mothers who participated in the study attended to complete their high school education. Although these places existed for the purpose of working towards high school graduation, the students formed social ties with each other and service providers, which promoted information exchanges.

The term “information worlds” is commonly used in information science even though its definition lacks precision; it refers to general spaces where people seek, encounter, share and use information (Yu, 2012). This framework is useful for thinking about the places where people connect and interact with information. These concepts are useful for this analysis since young fathers encounter barriers to accessing the spaces where information-related activities take place.

\(^2\) The Young Parents Study is the data set I analyzed for this thesis. This study is a longitudinal study conducted by the Youth Sexual Health Team at UBC which gathered data from young mothers, young fathers, the young parents’ parents and service providers in Greater Vancouver and Prince George, British Columbia. Further description of the study can be found in Chapter 3: Methods.
In some cases, these barriers are clearly defined, such as policies that do not allow fathers to participate in programming designed for young mothers. In other cases, these barriers are less obvious, such as a program leader’s decision to purchase reading materials which prioritize a mother’s perspective, which gives fathers the impression that the program is not intended for them. This concept also reaches beyond program spaces and can include spheres such as the home, where partners often exchange parenting information and maintain an information world with their families.

2.2 **Information seeking behaviours of young fathers and related populations**

Due to the limited literature regarding young fathers, I expanded my literature search to the information practices of populations related to young fathers, such as young parents (which usually referred primarily to young mothers), older fathers and youth without children. Although the experiences of young fathers differ from those of young mothers, older fathers and youth without children, looking at these other populations provides a starting place to either compare similarities or contrast differences. Since this population has received little attention in the Information Science field, I consulted other disciplines including Social Work, Sociology, Philosophy, Nursing and Psychology. I consulted any literature referencing the information seeking and service use behaviours\(^3\) of these populations in their abstracts or keywords, which

\[^3\] Terminology varied across disciplines, but I looked for language which expressed these concepts
signalled to me that these topics would be addressed in the paper. For the review, I consulted over 90 academic articles and books.

I have categorized this literature according to samples studied: parents in general, youth, young parents, young mothers and young fathers. Collectively, this literature indicated possible characteristics of young fathers’ information contexts. Parenting literature generally focused on parenting women rather than men, which is mirrored in the literature on young parenting women and men. This literature showed that men want to be more involved with parenting but do not always know how.

**Information seeking behaviours of parents**

Most research about the information behaviour of parents to date has focused on parents seeking information about the medical conditions of their children (for examples, see Bernhardt & Felter, 2004; Kilicarslan-Toruner & Akgun-Citak, 2013; Knapp et al., 2011). Those that focus on more general information behaviours of parents have tended to sample older, middle-class mothers in stable co-parenting relationships (Loudon, Buchanan, & Ruthven, 2016; McKenzie, 2003). These studies show that people in the mothers’ social networks are important and trustworthy sources for sharing and receiving parenting information. Although healthcare professionals such as nurses are acknowledged as useful information resources (Marden & Nicholas, 1997), many mothers fear being judged by them (Loudon et al., 2016). Although the fear of judgement is common for many mothers, the distress of being surveilled and judged is often amplified for

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4 Not all 90 articles and books will be referenced in this paper. After review, some of them did not contribute to my understanding of the population or topic under study. Explanation of my literature search and review process can be found in the appendix.
young mothers who may be perceived as being unknowledgeable by virtue of becoming pregnant at a young age (Duncan, 2007; Greyson, O'Brien, & Shoveller, 2017a; O'Brien et al., 2018; Whitley & Kirmayer, 2008). In the case of mothers in uncommon situations – such as carrying twins – there was heavy reliance on personalized resources to be sure that the information they received was relevant (McKenzie, 2003). In general, the information that parents most often look for relates to health, childcare and child development (Marden & Nicholas, 1997).

The places parents look for information has changed significantly in the past twenty years. Earlier studies found that organizations such as health and social services and commercial shops were the most popular places to encounter parenting information (Marden & Nicholas, 1997). Since the early 2000s, more and more parents are using web-based sources to answer parenting questions and dilemmas (Radey & Randolph, 2009; Rothbaum, Martland, & Janssen, 2008; Walker, Dworkin, & Connell, 2011). While research has suggested that parents with higher socio-economic status use the internet more often to find information (Rothbaum et al., 2008), another study found that younger parents and mothers are more likely to use the internet to find parenting information than fathers and older parents (Radey & Randolph, 2009). Radey and Randolph’s findings contradict Rothbaum et al.’s finding that parents with higher socio-economic status use the internet more often since many young parents and single mothers have lower socio-economic status due to limited employment opportunities compared to fathers and older parents.

Many differences exist between the information practices of mothers and fathers. Not only are mothers more likely to use the internet to find information than fathers (Radey & Randolph, 2009), but mothers are also more likely to act on the information they find (Stern,
Cotten, & Drentea, 2012). Fathers want to be involved in pregnancies, childbirth and childcare but often do not know how to do so (Poh, Koh, & He, 2014; Symon & Lee, 2003). In a review of fathers’ experiences during their partner’s pregnancy and childbirth, Poh et al. (2014) showed that 25 studies substantiated findings that fathers felt uninformed about pregnancy and parenting topics and relied on their partners and healthcare professionals for support. The authors advised that “family-centered care” models be developed so that fathers’ desire to be “informed” and “involved” in the pregnancy and childbirth process would be acknowledged (Poh et al., 2014). Symon and Lee (2003) had similar findings that young fathers want to be involved in parenting but feel unprepared. The authors recommended that attendance at antenatal education sessions with a male facilitator could provide opportunities “for discussion” and information sharing between fathers (Symon & Lee, 2003). Because many fathers lack confidence in their parenting skills, mothers are often still the primary parent because they have more baby care knowledge (Wall & Arnold, 2007).

**Information seeking behaviours of youth**

Youth do not access information the same way that adults do, and this needs to be considered when studying young parents. Youth who grew up the 2000s are usually technologically savvy because they have grown up with information technology in their homes, schools and social groups. This population, often characterized as “digital natives” (Prensky, 2001), are comfortable using mobile phones for various tasks, including to browse the internet or connect with friends to seek advice (Agosto & Hughes-Hassell, 2005). Looking for information on the internet is appealing to teenagers since it is easy, comfortable, and relatively private compared to other methods of information seeking, especially for sensitive topics like sexuality (Marshall, 2015).
general, youth are drawn to digital resources over material and institutional resources, such as books or the library (Dresang, 2005; Marshall, 2015; Shenton, 2007).

However, young people are by no means a homogenous group. In their novel study looking at the information behaviours of disadvantaged and disengaged youth, Buchanan and Tuckerman (2016) found that the youth in their study often encountered barriers to connecting with information because they did not have regular access to technology, had literacy issues, and felt barriers to certain social services and institutions because they did not fit the “norm” of a middle-class, socially engaged adolescent. The study notes several examples of “passive” and “unmotivated” information behaviour exhibited by youth who do not perceive digital, social, material or institutional information resources to be useful in their contexts. These behaviours included withdrawal from conversations about their information needs or “appearing unable or reluctant to articulate or discuss their needs” (Buchanan and Tuckerman, 2016, p. 542). The authors explained that a combination of age, developmental stage, social class, low self-confidence and stigma compounded for adolescents and made them suspicious of technology, information and help.

**Information seeking behaviours of young parents**

The information seeking behaviours of young parents warrant focus because they have unique information needs. Although some of the information needs of young parents are like those of older parents, young parents have unique needs based on their combined identities as youth and parents. This combination of identities, which often labels them as a population at risk (Greyson et al., 2017b), means that young parents often progress through their pregnancies, give birth, and
subsequently raise their children in a more monitored environment than older parents (Carson et al., 2017; Greyson et al., 2017b; O'Brien et al., 2018).

The ways young parents seek or receive information is also unique due to their particular experiences. Some of their information searching strategies overlap with those of other youth. However, because they are more heavily surveilled by services providers, professionals and other adults in their lives as a consequence of having children at a young age, young parents are targeted by information interventions in a way that other youth are not.

**Information seeking behaviours of young mothers**

To date, most research on the information seeking practices of young parents has focused on young mothers (Greyson, 2012; Greyson et al., 2017a; Greyson et al., 2017b; O’Brien, 2018). Pregnant and parenting mothers often have many information interventions designed for them because pregnancy and childbearing are often more visible for them due to physical markers such as the pregnant belly (McKenzie, 2003) and a breastfeeding child (O'Brien et al., 2018). The visibility of pregnancy and parenting for young mothers is accentuated by their young age. Becoming pregnant young is often framed as a poor choice, resulting from a lack of information about safe sex and contraception (Duncan, 2007; O’Brien et al., 2018; Whitley & Kirmayer, 2008). It is because of the combinations of physical markers, age and the belief that they are unknowledgeable (Greyson et al., 2017a) that young mothers are often perceived as “information poor” (Greyson, O’Brien & Shoveller, 2017). Young mothers are often stereotyped as ignorant on topics such as baby care and child development. Their assumed ignorance on parenting topics often makes them a target for information and interventions others deem as important for them based on their new status as mothers at a young age.
Young mothers are often perceived as being in need of information and services to help them navigate pregnancy, birth and parenting (Carson et al., 2017; Greyson, 2012; Greyson et al., 2017a; Greyson et al., 2017b; Mann, Pearl, & Behle, 2004). Based on this perception, it is easier to advocate for programs and services dedicated to young mothers. There are also several studies that document the positive effects parenting services and programs have on the knowledge and parenting skills of young parents (Coren, Barlow, & Stewart-Brown, 2003; Lagges & Gordon, 1999; Mann et al., 2004). Together, common perceptions and research help make a strong case for parenting services dedicated to young mothers.

It is also important to note that many young mothers’ services are “wrap-around” in nature, i.e., they assist mothers in various aspects of their lives. These programs are often based at institutions with a primary mandate; for example, the goal of alternative schools is secondary education. However, at services catering to young mothers, service providers often provide young mothers with a variety of information and resources on a range of different topics (Greyson et al., 2017a; Greyson et al., 2017b; O'Brien et al., 2018).

**Information seeking behaviours of young fathers**

No research has been done specifically on the information seeking behaviours of young fathers; however, there is some literature regarding the barriers they face when trying to access services. Parenting services, such as young parent programs, are common places to locate parenting information, both actively, by focusing on finding information, and passively, by absorbing information without intentionally seeking it out (Wilson, 1997). Many articles discuss the hardships of engaging young fathers in services. Young fathers are often regarded as a “hard to reach” population (Davies, 2016; Kiselica & Kiselica, 2014), which discourages policy-makers
and program directors from focusing their attention on services aimed at them. Most young parent programs are actually young mother programs (Davies, 2016), either explicitly in policies or implicitly by cues such as the décor of the space, the style of service provision, the business hours and location, and the topics addressed in the program. For example, hosting a parents’ group on a weekday at 3:00 pm assumes that mothers will come and makes it impossible for young fathers working during the day to attend on a regular basis.

Recently it has been argued that dads are not a “hard to reach” population but rather that “many services are actually hard to access” (Davies, 2016). Many dads report that they do not feel that their needs are being addressed by young parent programs (Deslauriers et al., 2012; Kiselica & Kiselica, 2014). This may be because the information seeking styles of young fathers are different than those of young mothers; while young mothers are likely to routinize attending young mothering groups and services, young fathers want services with a “one-stop shopping” structure that provide assistance at the point of need and which answer their “practical concerns” such as employment, medical care, and child care (Kiselica & Kiselica, 2014; Sopcak, 2013). Fathers also report feeling uncomfortable in the spaces which host young mothers’ services (Deslauriers et al., 2012). One of the reasons may be that feminine décor, such as mothers’ craft projects, give fathers the impression that the service is not designed for them. It may be for this reason that young fathers report feeling more comfortable meeting with their peers and service providers in masculine spaces such as sports centres (Kiselica & Kiselica, 2014). Fathers often feel that they lack adequate amounts of information on child care, especially compared with their mothering partners (Deslauriers et al., 2012). Being on uneven footing with young mothers in this regard makes young dads uneasy about attending parenting groups filled with mothers (Kirven, 2014). Young fathers also report that having a close relationship with service providers
is a vital precursor to attending services hosted by them and seeking information from them (Kiselica & Kiselica, 2014). By not being present in information-rich spaces, which research has shown to be important places to find information even when a person is not actively looking for it (McKenzie, 2003), young fathers miss out on conversations and circulated resources; they do not receive one-on-one advice from service providers, nor do they meet other young dads who may share their experiences and struggles and perhaps offer support, nor are they given suggestions for relevant online resources. In many studies, young dads expressed the desire to have parenting services created with their specific circumstances and information needs in mind (Kirven, 2014; Kiselica & Kiselica, 2014).

Research on young fathers’ information behaviours is slim. This is in part because recruiting young fathers is difficult because there are few programs organized for them that they can attend. The lack of programs perpetuates a cycle: few places and programs exist where young fathers could be recruited for studies because there is limited evidence which shows the benefits young fathers receive from services; however, limited evidence exists because recruiting young fathers for research studies is difficult. As a result, many of the articles I reviewed had small samples (Bayley, Wallace, & Choudhry, 2009; Devault et al., 2008; Johansson & Hammarén, 2014; Sopcak, 2013). Other studies opted to interview professionals working with young fathers rather than young fathers themselves (Davies, 2016), but the experiences and opinions of service providers cannot be equated with those of young fathers.
2.3 Gendered help-seeking behaviours

To date, little research has explored the intersections between everyday life information seeking and gender (for exceptions, see work by Sin, S.C.J.) and the connections between everyday life information practices and gender have not been identified explicitly. Because this connection has not been made before, I used the help-seeking and masculinities literature of psychology and health sciences to introduce the connection between gender and information practices. Help-seeking literature has previously been used in a variety of library and information science studies, including studies of distance-education students (Clark, 2014; Tang & Tseng, 2014) and digital asset users (Xie & Cool, 2009). A recent study found that help-seeking and information-seeking were often complementary (Zerehsaz, 2017). Notably, help-seeking theory was first used to complement information seeking studies by Harris and Dewdney (1994) to analyze the formal help systems developed for women experiencing domestic violence. Harris and Dewdney argued that help-seeking could inform studies on information-seeking because, for most individuals, “there is little distinction between help and information” if we understand “information as that which helps people progress through troublesome situations” (Harris & Dewdney, 1994, 20). The authors found that people tended to look for information and help that was accessible and preferably from relatives and friends unless they had a specific reason for avoiding people they were close to in their lives (R. M. Harris & Dewdney, 1994).

Research on men’s help-seeking habits consistently shows that men, regardless of age, ethnicity and social background, are unwilling to seek help, advice or information when they experience problems (Addis & Mahalik, 2003). According to Addis and Mahalik (2003), “masculine gender role socialization” can explain why men are hesitant to admit they need help
and seek it out. This constructionist theory posits that society has different expectations for how men and women should behave. Men and women learn these socially and culturally acceptable ways of being gendered; these learned values and norms affect every aspect of daily life—so much so that they are often taken for granted as natural. Many masculine norms are developed from stereotypes about men, and these stereotypes can be problematic for individual men who do not fit the prescribed norms precisely (Addis & Mahalik, 2003).

In their review of help-seeking literature, Addis and Mahalik (2003) identified two related foci which contribute to our understanding of how masculine gender role socialization operates: “masculinity ideology” and “masculine gender-role conflict.” Masculinity ideology focuses on “what it means to be male”: the values, norms, behaviours and attitudes associated with normative masculinity (Pleck, Sonenstein, & Ku, 1993). Masculine gender-role conflict explores how ascribing to masculine ideologies can create “negative consequences” for men’s well-being (Addis & Mahalik, 2003). Because masculine norms are often based on stereotypes, many men do not benefit and even lose out by trying to adhere to socially acceptable gender norms. Help and information seeking are one such case. Men in many cultures and societies are encouraged to be self-reliant, so looking for help and information when it’s needed is contrary to social definitions of how men should behave. However, by not seeking help and information when they need it, men put themselves at risk (Addis & Mahalik, 2003; Courtenay, 2000a; Galdas, Cheater, & Marshall, 2005; Levant, 1996). Addis and Mahalik (2003) concluded that because of masculine gender role constraints,

A man is least likely to seek help for problems that he sees as unusual, especially when he also perceives them as central to his identity. He is also
unlikely to seek help if groups of men who are important to him endorse norms of self-reliance or other norms that suggest his problem is non-normative. Finally, help seeking is less likely to the degree that a man calculates that rejection from an important social group, as well as his view of himself as deviant, are costs too great to risk in relation to the help he might receive. This is especially true if he feels he will sacrifice his autonomy by seeking help. (Addis & Mahalik, 2003, p. 11)

Young men are very likely to display behaviours and practices of stereotypical masculinity (Pleck et al., 1993), and research suggests that the resistance to seek help is stronger in young men (O’brien, Hunt, & Hart, 2005; Oliver, Pearson, Coe, & Gunnell, 2005; Rickwood, Deane, Wilson, & Ciarrochi, 2005). Some studies attribute this phenomenon to young men’s underdeveloped emotional maturity and perceived stigma to ask for help (Rickwood et al., 2005). This discussion is particularly salient for young fathers, who are in the process of growing and developing their sense of identity and masculinity. O’brien (2005) suggests that men of any age are more likely to seek help if their problem affects another aspect of their perceived masculinity (e.g., a man will seek help for an injured arm if he finds it affects his muscle strength). Based on these findings, young fathers who identify strongly with fatherhood may be more likely to seek help and information regarding parenting.

The opposite may also be true. Studies have shown that young mothers avoid asking for help or showing struggle in order to show others that they are capable mothers (Carson et al., 2017). Similar to young mothers, young fathers who feel stigmatized may avoid help and information seeking in order to prove that they are able to handle fathering on their own. They
may hide any struggles they are facing in order to avoid speculations about their ability to father and, by extension, their ability to adhere to expectations of what it means to be a man.

2.4 Hypothesis

Although some work has been done to explore the information contexts of young mothers (Greyson, 2012; Greyson et al. 2017a; Greyson et al. 2017b; O’Brien, 2018) no work has focused exclusively on the role of information in the lives of young fathers. To date, a limited number of studies have focused on access to services and support for young fathers. However, fathers’ broader information contexts remain unexplored, which includes accessing parenting services plus other strategies and resources such as internet browsing, seeking advice from family and friends, consulting healthcare and child development professionals, and reading parenting materials. Based on the gaps identified in the literature review, the research questions guiding this thesis are: What are the information contexts of young fathers? Are young fathers excluded from information resources that include young mothers? The first question focuses on the resources, places and people that young fathers access to answer parenting questions and inform parenting decisions and behaviours. The second question will be answered by analyzing the resources, places and people young fathers access compared to those accessed by young mothers to uncover where young fathers encounter inclusion and exclusion regarding parenting information.

The findings of my literature review are not surprising to me. Due to my work over the past five years with the Young Parents Study data, I have already seen examples of the difficulties young fathers have when trying to access parenting information and support on
parenting. My research questions were deductive and they emerged from my intimate work with the data. Building upon my history working with the data and the results of the literature review, I hypothesize that the information contexts of young fathers are less developed than the information contexts of young mothers due to multiple levels of exclusion from parenting information resources and that these differences exist because of different gender expectations of parenting men and women. By having inadequate access to the places and professionals that support young mothers, young fathers have less robust information contexts than mothers and may have unmet information needs. By comparing the information contexts of these two populations, this thesis will show that young fathers, unlike many young mothers, lack access to information-rich resources and services. Unequal access to parenting services and resources between young mothers and fathers creates inequities in parenting knowledge and confidence. By analyzing the information contexts of young fathers and mothers, I draw upon various forces in their lives, such as personal factors and social networks, to illustrate why connecting to and interacting with information is more difficult for young dads.

In this thesis, I argue that young fathers face layers of exclusion. Data from the Young Parents Study indicates that young fathers are excluded from parenting information at three levels: from documents, such as posters and brochures with parenting information, from young parent programs and services, due to policies and atmosphere, and from their communities or society at large when they are not acknowledged as active parents. After analyzing the layers of exclusion young fathers face as barriers to seeking parenting information, I present data collected from young fathers and service providers discussing how to improve inclusion of young dads at services. This study will contribute to the growing literature regarding young fathers’ lack of
access to much needed parenting information and address what can be done to improve information resources for them.
3. Methods

3.1 Description of data collection sites

The Young Parents Study was conducted over a five year period across four sites in two cities in British Columbia, Canada. Prince George (PG) is a central British Columbian city with a population of 86,622; this number rose by 2.8% in the past five years (Statistics Canada, September 13, 2017a). Prince George’s citizenry is relatively young: 11,430 Prince Georgians are between the ages of 15-24, approximately 13.2% of the city population (Statistics Canada, September 13, 2017a). The Greater Vancouver area (GV), which is defined by Statistics Canada as the metropolitan areas before the Abbotsford, Mission and Squamish city borders, has a population of 2,463,431 and is home to more than half of British Columbians (Statistics Canada, September 13, 2017b). In the past five years, the population has grown by 6.5% (Statistics Canada, September 13, 2017b). About 12.6% of Vancouverites are between the ages of 15-24 (Statistics Canada, September 13, 2017b). Most data collection took place at four sites across PG and GV.

3.2 Description of participants

Four different types of participants were recruited: expecting or parenting young mothers (N=90) and young fathers (N=23), socially significant others (N=2), and service providers (N=25) with

5 The study included six participants from two towns outside the two large cities in which the majority of data collection took place. Two young mothers and two young fathers were from a town about 120 km away from Prince George. Two service providers were recruited at an organization located in a town about 70 km away from Vancouver. Due to the small number of participants recruited at these smaller sites, the data from these participants was amalgamated into the data sets of the larger sites to which they are geographically close to.
experience working with young parents (including youth care workers, daycare staff, teachers, health care professionals, organization and program coordinators).

Table 1 shows the number of young mothers, fathers, socially significant others and service providers at each site. The majority of participants recruited were young mothers. More young fathers were recruited in Prince George (PG) than in Greater Vancouver (GV). In total, a comparable number of young fathers and service providers were recruited from each locale and only two socially significant others in Prince George took part.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SITE</th>
<th>Young Mothers</th>
<th>Young Fathers</th>
<th>Socially Significant Others</th>
<th>Service Providers</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GV</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PG</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The young mothers recruited for the study were between the ages of 15-24. Young fathers were primarily recruited by their partners. Since there were no age requirements for fathers, four fathers recruited for the study were older than 25 years old. The oldest father in the study was 29 years old. However, they were included in the data collection and this study’s data analysis because of their active co-parenting roles.
Table 2: age ranges of young parent participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SITE &amp; PARTICIPANT</th>
<th>16-18</th>
<th>19-21</th>
<th>22-24</th>
<th>25+</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Greater Vancouver</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young Mothers</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young Fathers</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prince George</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young Mothers</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young Fathers</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>40</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3 shows the ethnic backgrounds of young parents. When answering this question, participants could choose more than one ethnic category when they felt it was relevant to do so. This figure does not display the young parents who chose the other category (N=6); these participants qualified their ethnic identification as either inter-racial (N=1) or a particular European nationality or combination thereof (N=5). This table also does not include categories with which no young parent participants identified. Most of the young fathers participating in the study identified as Indigenous or Caucasian (“white”). The ethnic identifications of young mothers were more varied. Although the majority of young mothers in the study identified as Caucasian or Indigenous as well, there were many mothers who chose other ethnic or racial identifications, particularly in Greater Vancouver.
Table 3: ethnic identifications of young parent participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicities</th>
<th>Young mothers</th>
<th></th>
<th>Young Fathers</th>
<th></th>
<th>Total</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>GV</td>
<td>PG</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>GV</td>
<td>PG</td>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aboriginal</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arab</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Filipino</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japanese</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Korean</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Asian</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South East Asian</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All the young fathers in the study identified as heterosexual men, with the exception of one young father from Greater Vancouver who identified as a bisexual man.

In general, most of the young mother and young father participants had completed some high school or were attending high school at the time of the initial interviews. The educational background of the young fathers varied from that of young mothers and across recruitment sites. Most young fathers (N=13, 56.5%) had not completed their high school education. A small number of fathers were in the process of completing their high school education (N=3, 13%) during the time of the initial interview. A few fathers (N=5, 21.7%) had graduated high school. The educational attainment among young fathers in the sample differed significantly from the sample of young mothers. At the time of intake, many young mothers (N=39, 43.3%) were currently completing their high school education. This disparity may be explained in part by the
fact that many young fathers did not have access to the same high school education programs as young mothers because some young parent programs only accepted parenting women.

Table 4: educational attainment of young parent participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Educational Attainment</th>
<th>Greater Vancouver YM</th>
<th>YFs</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Prince George YM</th>
<th>YFs</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Some high school</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Currently in high school</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduated high school</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some college or university</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduated college or university</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some trade school</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduated trade school</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

At the time of intake, 39.1% (N=9) of young fathers reported having difficulty accessing parenting services for themselves and their children either currently (defined as “in the last six months”) or in the past. (In contrast, 16.6% of young mothers reported barriers to accessing parental services.) Young fathers sometimes contextualized their answers, a topic which will be discussed in the empirical chapters of this paper.

3.3 Data collection

The Young Parents Study obtained approval from the University of British Columbia’s Behavioural Research Ethics Board. Approval for this analysis was obtained from the same board in 2017 (Certificate #: H17-02504).
The four recruitment sites chosen for the study were three alternative school programs and a community program for pregnant teens in two British Columbian cities. Participants were recruited via posters at these locales and via in-person recruitment during naturalistic observations at recruitment sites. In general, young mothers were recruited at young parent programs. Once the study was underway, some participants volunteered to tell other young mothers and fathers and their own parents (recruited as “socially significant others”) about the study, i.e., snowball sampling. Young fathers were more difficult to recruit because of their notable absence at the young parent programs where recruitment occurred. In most cases, young fathers were recruited through snowball sampling where the young mothers taking part in the study invited their partners to participate. The eligibility requirements for the study were for the mother to be between the ages of 15-24, pregnant or have a child, and fluent in English. Young fathers did not have an age restriction to participate as long as their partner qualified as a young mother. However, only four (17.4%) of the 23 young fathers recruited were older than 25 years. In some cases, the children the young fathers were helping to raise with the young mothers were not their biological children; however, these men were included in the study since they were actively engaged in fathering roles.

Data was gathered from participants using three methods: qualitative semi-structured interviews, sociodemographic questionnaires and notes on naturalistic observation. Research staff visited the recruitment sites many times: fifty-five one-day visits in Greater Vancouver and for nine two-week long periods in Prince George. Frequent trips to the sites enabled the researchers to interview each participant between one to nine times over the course of the five-year study from 2013-2018. Before interviews began, the researchers obtained written informed consent from every participant. The interviews were open and covered a wide range of topics.
about the experiences of young parents. Some of the topics addressed in the interviews that are relevant to this analysis included: information seeking practices, information sharing practices, information needs, internet use, use of services and other information resources, media use, social media use and technology use. The initial interview had many questions specifically framed around information contexts. At the Vancouver recruitment sites, a newly developed arts-based elicitation tool, Information World Mapping (Greyson et al., 2017b) was used. This drawing activity was included as part of the interview. Each interview lasted between 30 minutes to two hours. Participants were given a $30 cash honorarium per interview in appreciation. Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Participants were given an opportunity to review and alter their transcript. Transcripts were analyzed using Nvivo (version 11) software.

The questions from the sociodemographic questionnaires were asked either at the beginning or at the end of the interview, depending on the preference of the interviewer. These questions asked about age, ethnic identity, sex, sexual identity, reproductive history, contraceptive practices, and access to services. The answers from the sociodemographic questionnaires were recorded in an Excel file. Figures and tables were assembled using Excel functions and pivot tables.

Interviewers took notes after every interview to record their impressions. Interviewers also engaged in naturalistic observation at the recruitment sites. The purpose of these observations was to record some of the daily interactions and experiences of young parent program (YPP) participants. The researchers obtained separate written informed consent for these observations from the participants.

The researchers also took photographs of the young parent programs where recruitment took place. These images did not feature any study participants. The images showed the location
of the programs, the spaces dedicated to the programs, and detailed shots of information resources in the spaces, such as books, posters, brochures, signs and messages on the whiteboard. Researchers also collected handouts and brochures from these locales.

3.4 Methods for data analysis

The interviews were coded for a wide variety of themes using grounded theory methods (Dey, 1999). According to grounded theory methods, “coding and analysis proceed jointly” (Dey, 1999), which meant that coding the interviews, field notes and other research materials for the Young Parents Study involved conceptualization and critical thinking about the themes, rather than just gathering and grouping evidence. Grounded theory methods are based on three phases of coding:

1. Open coding (the first step, where data is broken down and examined in sections for the purpose of categorizing the data into themes (Dey, 1999))
2. Theoretical or axial coding (in this step, the categorizes established in open coding are connected (Dey, 1999))
3. Selective coding (this final step involves prioritizing a theme and organizing the data around this theme (Dey, 1999)).

Before I began my analysis for this thesis, I was involved in open coding the data of the Young Parents Study as a Research Assistant. Because the data was coded using open coding methods prior to my analysis for this thesis, I processed the data further using theoretical and selective coding. I used a subset of the data collected for the Young Parents Study: interviews with young mothers, young fathers and service providers, the ethnographic field notes recorded at the recruitment sites, and the photographs taken at recruitment sites, which were coded under
the following coding nodes. For each node, I also explain why it was chosen based on its relevance to my thesis.

- **Gender Roles, Norms, and Expectations:** The discussions captured by this node were useful to understand how gender roles, norms, and expectations affect parenting men and women. I was especially interested to see whether young fathers spoke to how masculine gender roles, norms, and expectations affected their parenting experiences and information seeking behaviours.

- **Information Behaviours/Practices:** This node captured the information behaviours and practices of parenting men and women, and was therefore vital to include in my analysis of fathers’ information contexts.

- **Parenting Support:** This node contained discussions about where parenting men and women sought help, support, and information. It was often cross-coded with the node “Information Behaviours/Practices,” but it also contained broader conversations about how well parents felt they were supported in their communities.

The codebook definitions for these nodes are outlined in the graph featured in Appendix B: Young Parents Study coding nodes extracted for this analysis.

I analyzed the photographs in my data using content analysis techniques. These photographs contained images of various information paraphernalia at the recruitment sites, including posters, pamphlets, and books. I used content analysis to analyze the photographs because this method focuses on the messages of objects, and the characteristics of those messages. Content analysis is a large and established research technique that identifies messages and characteristics of cultural objects to make inferences about the object’s purpose, causes and
effects (Rudy, Popova, & Linz, 2010). This technique was first developed for analyzing text (Holsti, 1969), and continues to be used primarily to analyze text in information studies (Hara & Sanfilippo, 2017; Li et al., 2017). However, this technique has evolved in other social science disciplines and is also used for a variety of media formats (Bryman, 2012). Although few information science studies have employed content analysis methods to study visual data, it is a powerful and flexible technique used in other social sciences and worth exploring in information science research. My data are particularly suited for this method because many of the objects present in the photos contained text (e.g., books, messages on a whiteboard, posters, and brochures) as well as images. Using content analysis strategies helped me interpret the text on objects in the photos, as well as the objects themselves and why they were present in the photographed environment.

For the purposes of this thesis, I used content analysis strategies to “[make] inferences by objectively and systematically identifying specified characteristics or messages” (Holsti, 1969, p.14). Holsti’s definition of content analysis is particularly salient in my work because it considers “latent content,” the “meanings that lie beneath the surface” (Bryman, 2012). However, working with latent content is “reserved to the interpretation stage” of the analysis, when “the investigator is free to use all of his powers of imagination and intuition to draw meaningful conclusions from the data” (Holsti, 1969, p.12). Using content analysis strategies during the coding stage required being “limited to recording only those items which actually appear in the document,” otherwise known as manifest content (Holsti, 1969, p.12).

Messages about gender and gender construction are often overlooked – for example, many people assume that a pink poster (an example of manifest content) aims to appeal to
women as its primary audience without realizing that the color of the poster makes assumptions about women and femininity while at the same time excludes men (examples of latent content). Using content analysis methods in gender studies has been popular, although much of the research using this technique has explored how women are objectified or stereotyped in media output (Rudy et al., 2010). I utilized this technique differently in my thesis by analyzing whether the information needs of both parents are considered in common parenting information resources, or whether mothers’ perspective and experience are privileged.

I coded the photographs by asking what was featured in the photograph, how the text, image or object in the photo was styled, and which gender was the intended audience of the text, images and objects that appeared in each photograph. For my codebook, please refer to Appendix B.
4. Young fathers’ information contexts

Young fathers faced layers of exclusion. Data from the Young Parents Study indicated that young fathers were excluded from parenting information at three levels: from documents, such as posters and brochures with parenting information, from young parent programs and services, due to policies and atmosphere, and from their communities or society at large when they were not acknowledged as active parents. Figure 1 below represents the barriers young fathers (YFs) faced trying to access information from documents, programs and their communities compared to the access young mothers (YMs) experienced. Figure 1, titled “Young Parents’ Information Contexts,” is as a mind map to help visualize the information contexts of young fathers described in my analysis.

Figure 1: Young Parents’ Information Contexts

Figure 1 depicts my hypothesis that the information contexts of young fathers are less developed than the information contexts of young mothers due to multiple levels of exclusion from parenting information resources. This is indicated by the sliver of information resources for young fathers contrasted with the majority of young parent information resources dedicated to young mothers. Some documents, programs and segments of the community targeted and
provided information to both young fathers and young mothers, which are indicated by the “shared” slice. However, the majority of information resources targeted young mothers, who received the largest portion of information resources to meet their needs.

My analysis of these three levels of exclusion begins with an examination of the various information documents displayed in spaces open to young mothers and fathers. Many of the documents privileged mothers’ perspectives and information needs. In section 4.2, I engage in a broader discussion of young parent programs and services and the kinds of barriers young fathers faced trying to access them. Section 4.3 of this chapter focuses on the exclusions young fathers encountered in their communities and societies. Due to the barriers young fathers faced accessing young parent programs and their information documents, many young fathers found answers to their parenting questions through other people in their lives, including their families, friends, and partners and the Internet. However, these resources were not always available, trustworthy or satisfactory for answering parenting questions. Many young fathers reported being excluded to some extent at all information resource levels because many of them focused on satisfying the needs of young mothers. Young fathers felt they received a sliver of the supports available to young mothers. Feeling unsupported and uninformed as young fathers made many of them hesitant in their parenting roles. The unequal supports available to young mothers and young fathers perpetuated gendered expectations that mothers should be the primary caregivers, which created stresses and tensions for both partners.
4.1 Inclusion and exclusion from information documents

This section focuses on the photos taken at young parent spaces and represents some of the information and resources available to the clientele. The photos used for this study showed resources available in the young parent spaces. In order to protect the identity of the services where these photos were taken, identifying information in the photos is blurred. The resources available to young mothers, and sometimes young fathers, at these spaces varied. Some of the most common resources available at these programs were:

- Books about pregnancy and parenting
- Pamphlets from parenting and health organizations
- Posters featuring parenting information, interventions and campaigns
- Computers with internet access (which, according to information gleaned during interviews, some young dads did not have at home)

This analysis focused on how the text, images and objects of the resources shown in the photos created barriers for young fathers seeking parenting information. These resources excluded young fathers because they were not designed for men or they perpetuated negative messages about men.

Many of the information resources available at young parent programs were intended for young mothers. Photo 1 shows the parenting books available to students at one young parent program. Most of these parenting books were designed for mothers and this is evident by the colours used (pinks and pastel colours) in combination with the subject matter (e.g., breastfeeding and pregnancy). Several scholars have drawn connections between colours and
their gender meanings and symbolism. Although the connection between the colours and gender are not historically deep-rooted, today pink is synonymous with femininity and blue with masculinity (Paoletti, 2012). Purple and pastel colours also carry connotations of femininity (Auster & Auster-Gussman, 2016). The consumerist world uses colours like pink and blue to customize for gender (Khan, 2017), which is also evident in the design of the parenting books in Photo 1. Nine (64%) of the books shown in the photo have pink or pastel colouring or designs, which signals to potential readers that the material may be targeted to women. Many of these books, such as the series What to Expect⁶ cater to a mother’s perspective. The spines of the books are decorated with pastel colours traditionally associated with femininity (Auster & Auster-Gussman, 2016). The design of the background mimics a patchwork quilt composed of floral patterns, a craft commonly done by women (Stalp, 2006). Although not visible in the photograph, the cover art on the What to Expect book series commonly features women, giving men who are glancing at the book the impression that the information is targeted to mothers.

In many cases, young fathers were clearly excluded from information resources. Photo 2 shows an assortment of posters from a program which designed their information resources to communicate that the intended audience for their programming was mothers. Every poster featured women or mothers, clearly communicating that fathers were not the intended audience of the information provided by the posters and the services they were advertising. The absentee father has been noted in other studies of information documents as well; some studies of

⁶ The “What to Expect…” series began with the book What to Expect When You’re Expecting, a popular pregnancy guide written by Heidi Murkoff and Sharon Mazel, published by Workman Publishing. The series now contains several other books based on other parenting or child development stages, including What to Expect: The First Year and What to Expect: The Toddler Years (Wikipedia, 2017).
children’s picture books have found that fathers were invisible or emotionally unavailable in many depictions of family dynamics (Adams, Walker, & O’Connell, 2011; Anderson & Hamilton, 2005). Excluding fathers from parenting literature and information documents perpetuates notions that mothers are and should be the primary – and at times, the sole – caregivers to their children. However, just as it is unfair to exclude fathers from early children’s literature, excluding fathers from promotions for programs and services also extends misleading messages that fathers do not need to educate themselves about children and childcare. Many of the resources being offered to mothers by this program may be useful to fathers as well, such as prenatal classes, support groups, and maternity ward tours, but this was unacknowledged in the promotional posters solely featuring parenting women.

Photo 3 features a poster depicting a portion of a pregnant female body with a purple/pink filter in the background. The foreground of the poster features text, which is informing the audience of a pregnancy outreach program hosted by the parenting program. Featuring an image of a pregnant female body in the background of the poster clearly communicated to young fathers that the program was not intended for them. For cis mothers with gender conforming bodies, the image of the naked, pregnant female belly and breasts may be familiar and relatable. However, for cis fathers with gender conforming bodies, the image may be alienating. Having not had personal experience with pregnancy, the naked, pregnant female body will not be relatable. Rather than sympathizing with the image, cis fathers may have reasoned that the image in the background did not depict their experience and was not meant for them. After negating themselves as the intended audience of this photo based on the background picture, fathers would be unlikely to read the information in the foreground. However, the image
Photo 1: books available to students at a young parent program

Photo 2: posters advertising a parenting program for mothers

Photo 3: poster advertising a parenting program for mothers
Photo 4: poster advertising a parenting event

Photo 5: domestic violence poster

Photo 6: poster advertising a fathers’ group
of the naked, pregnant torso sent a message that the text information in the foreground was only meant for persons who can relate to pregnancy by either being pre- or post-natal.

Photo 4 shows another gendered poster advertising an invitation to a Baby Shower event for mothers and their zero to six-month-old babies. The background of the poster features fluffy clouds and a light blue sky. The foreground contains text (coloured pink, light blue and black) and a cartoon image of a parenting panda with a baby panda on its back. The aesthetic of the poster is feminine because of the abundance of pinks and pastels (Auster & Auster-Gussman, 2016; Khan, 2017; Paoletti, 2012). Even though the text in the poster says, “Families welcome,” the poster was targeted to mothers, who could relay the information about the event to family members, including their partners. The aesthetic of the poster would not appeal to most young fathers, so they likely would not stop to read that they are welcome at the event. However, the suggestion is that they would not be welcome alone, since the program is mothers-only. In order to access the program, they need to be with their partners. The idea that young fathers are “guests” in the space, and not the intended clientele, is also indicated by the image of the two pandas. One of the pandas is positioned as a parent and the other is positioned as the baby. The fact that the poster did not feature an image of a family of pandas (such as two pandas positioned as parents) suggests that one parent, in this case the mother, is the target of this information.

The scarcity of resources available to men is precisely why information resources targeted at men need to be carefully constructed not to further isolate men. Even though some messages are important, they need to be presented with sensitivity. One such example is the image presented in Photo 5. This photo shows a poster from a series called
the “Domestic Violence Poster Set” warning about the potential effects of domestic violence. The poster features an image of a naked baby being held by its naked mother in the background, and the words “BEAT your wife and your SON will most likely go to PRISON” in the foreground. Messages such as these arise from literature suggesting a connection between domestic violence and youth delinquency (for examples, see Jonson-Reid, 1998; Snyder & Sickmund, 1995). However, other studies have fought against these damning conclusions and argued that the correlations are not as strong as presented (Holt, Buckley, & Whelan, 2008). Working to end domestic violence is important; however, shaming fathers through messages regarding the incarceration of their children because they witnessed the domestic violence of their parents may not be helpful. Such messaging does not address the root of domestic violence, and neither does it help men change their behaviours. Displaying posters such as these in spaces which host mothers-only programming perpetuates messages that fathers who have made poor choices are not welcome in the lives of their children since their impacts on them will be detrimental.

In many service spaces, there is evidence of an intention to increase resources and programs for fathers. For example, Photo 6 depicts a poster advertising a fathering group. However, upon further investigation, it is apparent that these efforts are outdated. According to field notes written by one of the researchers working on the study, the father’s group advertised by the poster “hasn’t been active since our study began in October 2013. Two of the staff [at the organization hosting the Father’s Group] I spoke with didn’t know much about the group or who is supposed to be running it.” Although the intention to run a parenting group for fathers was present at this organization, there was no follow-up action.
This selection of photos, which were collected during fieldwork for the Young Parents Study, shows that many information documents focused solely on parenting women. Photo 1 shows a bookshelf at a young parent program. Many of the books featured on the shelf are designed to appeal to parenting women rather than parenting men, giving young dads in the space the impression that there are no information resources personalized for them. Photos 2 through 5 depict posters showing pregnant women or women in parenting roles and fathers are absent. Although there may be an intention to create information and services for young fathers, many of these efforts were not maintained. Photo 6 shows an example of a parenting program customized for young fathers; however, the program no longer existed at the time of data collection for the Young Parents Study. This collection of documents demonstrates that young fathers seeking information encounter many information documents targeting mothers but very few designed for them. The issue of limited resource availability for young fathers will be discussed further in the next section where I explore the inclusion and exclusion of young fathers from services and programs.

4.2 Inclusion and exclusion from services and programs

Some young fathers had the opportunity to attend parenting classes. Young fathers’ descriptions of the classes often suggested that although they may not have had specific questions going into the classes, they learned a lot about parenting by attending them. Jim spoke about the prenatal class he attended with his partner as a rich learning environment, which provided him with parenting information he did not even realize that he needed.
I was in the prenatal class, like, that- that was really helpful. Like, it literally covered all the bases, like, health, what’s afterwards, different baby cries and stuff like that. Like, uhm, how to breastfeed, how to do this uhm, during a pregnancy, like, all those things, like, so it was really, really helpful, thankfully. […] And I didn’t even want to go to it at first ‘cause I was, like, “Oh, I know, I’ll figure it out.” But, yeah, no, it was really helpful.

Young fathers often received advice, information and information resources from professionals. Many young fathers were identified as being in need of parenting information when they came to parenting services with their partners or their children. Ryan talked about the abundance of information he got from professionals who knew he was a young dad.

Everybody’s, “Oh, here’s a pamphlet. Here’s a booklet. Here’s some information.” So it’s- so it’s all kind of- in here, some of it’s hidden. So that kind of brought some stuff out. Like, “Oh, yeah, I knew that.” But lots of it I already knew, but some of it was good to- good to learn.

Despite these few examples where young fathers felt included at young parent programs and services, the crux of the matter is that young fathers did not have the same access to them as young mothers. Many of the service providers interviewed for the study spoke about the lack of programming and services for young fathers. Ruby, who worked at an educational program for young mothers, said that she found services and information were missing for young fathers on several fronts.
There really isn’t anything put in place. You know, if they’re committed, I’m sure they could access [parenting support group] and all those other things right, too. But for the most part, there isn’t, like, support groups. [...] Boys just don’t have the same support. [...] It’s almost non-existent, right? [...] The dads just had no opportunity unless they were with that partner. If they weren’t with that partner, they really had no opportunity to parent and to be part of that kid’s life. [...] Most of them had supervised visits, they didn’t have their own visits, they had to be watched in one way or another. They just couldn’t be trusted to manage their anger or to be an effective parent. And I think you’re really kinda cutting some of them short.

Mavis, a service provider who works for an organization which hosts young mothers’ programming, says that even grandparents raising children are better served than young fathers.

They have a mother’s recovery group and I’m not – they have a grandparents raising grandkids group. I’m not sure if they have anything specific to dads. [...] Anything for young dads, just about, is missing.

Another service provider, Vince, who works at a centre dedicated to helping and supporting youth, says that there are few services for young men and that young fathers are not being served at all. The program he worked at had provided one-off supports for young fathers who had clearly indicated that they needed help. Vince remembers one young father he had helped:
We had a family – young man here with his son that was coming here for…

almost a year and we were teaching them – helping them – teaching him how to parent and getting him through the welfare system and trying to get him the supports to surround him so that he could support his son. Eventually he’s gotten a job and he’s working now and off of the system but there were no supports for him anywhere other than us helping him.

However, Vince said this instance “was a one-off.” Since few supports exist for young fathers, Vince says he and other workers at the organization he works for will “try and do our best to help that youth get what they need,” but these supports are not sustainable because they are not formal. It was not the organization’s mandate to aid young fathers specifically so the work could not continue at a larger scale. Many organizations make their mandate about helping parenting women, which is why they are able to sustain services and programs for them. These programs often have an “intensive focus on young mothers” (Greyson et al., 2017a) and programs are often customized to young women.

Kate, a service provider working with young mothers, reflects this sentiment and says that moms are often the focus while dads are often forgotten.

I think society places a lot of the burden of parenting on the mom in a lot of cases and so when a young girl in high school has a baby, there’s a lot of conversation around supporting that mom because the mom needs support and the mom is seen as the primary caregiver. And unless there’s some special meeting where there’s an adult involved and we say that, you know, dad needs support or dad is helping out mom and we need to cut him some slack with his attendance or there needs to be
some special adaptation made because he’s a parent now, I don’t think the assumption is made that the dad necessarily needs any adaptations.

Young mothers often receive special attention because being a mother is obviously visible. Public health interest in pregnant bodies, especially young pregnant bodies, means that young expecting mothers are often given priority attention and care. One young mother, Jesus, spoke about being able to have all her questions answered promptly and receiving priority appointments from her family doctor after learning she was pregnant.

Yeah, they were good on me because I was pregnant, young pregnancy, so they didn’t want to take any chances of anything happening, so they made sure they got me in right away as soon as they could.

Many young mothers also reported receiving care and information after the birth of their child from health nurses. Some of the participants in our study had access to a personal nurse through the Nurse-Family Partnership (Nurse-Family Partnership, 2018). Young mothers who attended a young parent program also had regular visits from nurses who would present on a variety of parenting topics and answer questions. By attending young parent programs, young mothers had opportunities to actively seek information from a variety of interpersonal sources, such as teachers and other students.

Being a father is not as visible, which Kate, a service provider working with young mothers, says explains some of the reasons why young fathers are not subject to special attention or privy to parental privileges automatically.
I think a male would be given the same privileges as a female. I just think that sometimes it might not be automatic. Whereas if you see a young girl with a big belly and then you see her with a baby, you’re not going to question.

Young mothers, especially those with partners who were involved with parenting their children, also recognized that the lack of programs and services for young fathers was problematic. Jade, one young mother whose partner was very involved in the care of their infant, said that the imbalance between the support young mothers and young fathers receive was unfair.

There’s nothing. Nothing. It’s, like, you were frickin’ Mother Mary or whatever, just got pregnant on your own. ‘Cause there’s nothing about young dads. There’s no school for young dads. There’s some young dads actually have custody of their… kids and there’s no support for them. It’s all young moms. Which I don’t like that well, ‘cause…they- uh, it takes two to tango, okay. And uh, we can’t do it on our own all the time.

The lack of services and programs for young fathers impacted young mothers. Jade felt she had to be the primary caregiver for their child since she felt her partner was not well informed on parenting topics and did not have enough information to take on some of the responsibilities. She also felt that her partner had very few opportunities, such as parenting groups and classes, to develop parenting skills. Because Jade was supported as a mother through programming and services like a dedicated school program with daycare and parenting groups, she took on many of the childcare responsibilities. Jade felt that if there were more programs and services for young fathers, perhaps her partner would have been able to take their child to school or to parenting groups with him. Jade’s
experiences showed that not supporting young fathers translated into decreased support for them as a parenting couple.

In general, young fathers described few opportunities to actively seek or scan (McKenzie, 2003) for parenting materials because there was a scarcity of easily accessible information grounds for young fathers. Information grounds are physical and online locations that enable people to share information (K. E. Fisher & Naumer, 2006; Greyson et al., 2017b). Young mothers have access to various information grounds, such as alternative school programs, which young mothers attended while working towards their high school diplomas. Gathering in one location on a regular basis encouraged the young mothers attending the program to form social ties with one another and the service providers. These social ties fostered casual information exchanges in the form of friendly conversations, advice sharing, and storytelling. Meredith described the casual information exchanges that occurred at young parent programs:

Some days they just have, like, a circle of chatting and we just talk about things that are happening or things that - or people will share different information on things that they learned.

Some dads who had the opportunity to experience parenting programs by attending parenting groups catered to young mothers recognized they were missing out on an important information ground. One service provider, Mattea, said that many young fathers began attending a group designed for young mothers because they found it informative but weren’t aware of any father specific programs:
We started getting one dad attending because the mom had a second child and [...] he was very involved and very supportive and so he wanted to come and support her and we did have a chat with our moms and making sure that that was okay ‘cause we didn’t want to change the dynamic too much. And we were open with him as well saying, you know, “Maybe there’s some days you don’t come, just in case we’re having like a private conversation or if you want to use a different room that’s fine.” But we also understood that it’s hard for one mom to bring two kids now [laughs]. [...] I think since we’ve been very open with the moms and with the dads, that it hasn’t overrun the program. The dads have come sometimes but they don’t come every time. [...] Sometimes we find that there aren’t enough support systems in place for young fathers. We understand that there aren’t that many out there sometimes [chuckles] but they are there. And so I think they’re also looking for a little support.

As Mattea pointed out, there are few services available to young fathers even though there is a need for them. Because of the lack of programs available specifically for them, some dads joined programs dedicated to young mothers when they felt comfortable doing so. Mattea also spoke about the negotiations made to include young fathers in the program, and why it worked to allow them to join a young mothers’ group. This topic will be addressed further at the end of section 5.2: Recommendations for creating young father friendly contexts.

Young father Thomas, who joined a mother-focused parenting group as the only father present, found it to be uncomfortable at first but useful because of the support, help and information offered there. He overcame his feelings of discomfort by being open and friendly.
I feel weird sometimes, like, ‘cause a lot of these groups I’ll go to it’s just like mothers and [clears throat] I’m like the only dad there. […] I just, uh… get looks once in a while but I’m a very talkative person so like I like to meet people and say hi. […] And then… [pause] yeah, just meet everybody.

Thomas was able to make the best of the situation by being open and friendly with the other members of the group. However, not all young fathers would feel comfortable attending a group where they are the sole father present. Many young fathers also feel that parenting groups composed primarily of mothers did not meet their needs. When asked about his experiences attending “a group that was mostly young moms,” Markus responded “Yeah I tried once. I didn’t – no.” Markus explained later in his interview that many of the topics talked about in the group came from a mother’s perspective and he did not feel that his experiences were represented adequately. For example, he told the interviewer that many of the young mothers in the group he attended would give each other advice on how to receive more supports by appealing to their gender-specific experiences as mothering women. One of the supports young mothers frequently referenced was the universal child care benefit7. Markus encountered more barriers trying to access the universal child care benefit than the young mothers he knew because his ex-partner was receiving the benefit even though Markus was caring for their children full-time. Markus felt that many services and programs providing benefits assumed that the primary caregiver was the mother, and it took Markus a lot of effort to correct those mistakes. Markus did not feel he had

7 The universal child care benefit was a taxable monthly payment given to “eligible families to help them with the cost of raising children under 18 years of age” (Government of Canada, 2018). On July 1, 2016, the universal child care benefit was replaced by the Canada child benefit, which is “tax free” (Government of Canada, 2018).
access to many of the supports the young mothers at the group were describing, which made him feel further isolated as a parent.

Young fathers like Markus knew that by not having the same access to parenting programs as parenting women, they did not receive the same volume of information as most young mothers. Many young mothers and fathers knew little about parenting and child development when they first learned they were expecting a child; however, with the opportunity to attend parenting programs and services, young mothers quickly developed their parenting knowledge and skills. Ally recounted learning everything about pregnancy from the professionals working at and visiting the alternative school program she attended. When she first found out she was pregnant with her first child, Ally said she knew:

Absolutely nothing. I had never babysat more than, like, once or twice. I didn’t really know anything about infant development. I mean, I knew babies would roll over at like three months, sit up at six months, crawl by nine months and walk at around a year. That’s basically pretty much all I knew.

When asked how she found information on parenting topics, Ally responded that she did not do much research until the baby was born. However, attending a young parent program helped her learn a lot about parenting and child development.

I think the – the [alternative school] Program helped a lot. I mean, like they would help a lot with like pregnancy development and stuff, like they had prenatal classes with a nurse come in and talk to us about prenatal development and stuff and then when I had her and she was in the daycare at like two months old, the
daycare workers there – ‘cause they’re trained in early childhood education, they were constantly, like, talking to us about infant development and I think that’s where I got most of my information.

Ally, like many other young parents, knew very little about pregnancy and parenting before becoming a parent herself. Many young mothers and fathers felt they were unknowledgeable about these subjects when they first found out they were pregnant; however, young mothers were targeted with information more often than young fathers because they were more likely to visit programs and places where professionals were poised and ready to identify them as needing information and give it to them. Young fathers were less likely to be present at parenting programs, which made them less likely to receive information.

Some young dads did not interact or connect with information at programs and services due to systemic barriers. Many parenting programs were hosted during daytime working hours, which forced young dads to make a decision between attending a parenting program and going to work. One young father, Bear, from Prince George spoke about being excluded from a parenting program because it was hosted during working hours. Instead of supporting him as a father to continue in the program, his social worker told him only one parent – the mother – needed to attend. Not only did Bear miss out on valuable parenting information and support by being discouraged from attending the program, but he also missed out on valuable bonding time with his children, who were in foster care at the time of the interview. He said that because his partner went to the parenting program, she “gets to go with her boys and she gets extra two days with them a week.”
Who should be attending parenting programs is systematically gender-biased. Two service providers from a First Nations centered program said fathers were often pushed to work rather than learn about parenting, unlike mothers.

Rebecca: The one thing I see more with males that come here [to the parenting program] is that they tend to not finish because… of work.

Loretta: Yeah, usually the Ministry is pushing them to get a job and whereas it doesn’t push the moms for some reason. Still gender-biased I think a little bit.

Many young fathers who said that they did not have the same opportunities to access information and supports as young mothers did felt frustrated by these inequalities. Markus, a single young father, often felt he was barred from accessing the resources and information grounds that were available for young mothers even though he needed them. Markus said that he “would never dream” of using his single-parent status to look for additional assistance or advice, and “even if I tried to, I would most likely get the response of ‘Well you’re a dad. Deal with it.’ Instead of getting sympathy they’ll be like, ‘Why are you different from me?’” Markus felt that “single dads don’t tell anyone they’re a single dad” [because] there’s nothing to be gained by telling people about it [because] [n]othing’s available.” Markus felt that this may be a cycle; because many young dads did not discuss their needs as parents with others, there were fewer information resources and supports available to them because the need was not obvious, whereas:

[S]ingle moms have a lot more available than single dads. And that’s probably because single moms are very vocal about being single moms whereas all the
single dads I’ve met it’s, like, I didn’t find out they were a single dad until I knew them for a year or, like, it’s just not something dads talk about.

Even though young dads have unfulfilled information needs, these needs often go unrecognized. Another young dad, Darren, felt the same way. He said he knew of a few resources he could direct young mothers to, such as a social worker. However, when asked where he would direct a young dad, Darren said he would tell him to “suck it up” because there is nothing available for young fathers.

Markus’ reflection that dads have to “deal with it” and Darren’s advice to other young fathers to “suck it up” are examples of “masculine gender-role conflict” (Addis & Mahalik, 2003). Addis and Mahalik (2003) explain that adherence to masculine gender norms, such as self-reliance, can produce negative outcomes for men. Although Markus’ and Darren’s experiences fit the prescribed responses for men adhering to masculine norms, they also prevent young fathers like Markus and Darren from seeking much needed information and help. Darren’s advice to young fathers to “suck it up” because no help or information is available for them was perpetuating the value of self-reliance which also impeded him from seeking support. Harris (1995) describes self-reliance as one of twenty-four “gender-role messages” that are “standards for appropriate male behaviour.” Self-reliance is important to doing masculine gender because “asking for help [is] unmanly.” Hearing messages about masculine self-reliance, like Markus did, or perpetuating these messages, like Darren did, reinforces masculine norms about avoiding help-seeking. Such messages can further distance young fathers from seeking the help and information they need to confidently engage as active parents with their children.
For young fathers like Darren, their lack of information seeking was connected to their masculine sense of self. Darren often spoke about parenting as something he, as a father, needed information about. For example, he spoke about not accessing healthcare services for himself because he did not need them, a stereotypically masculine comment that has been noted in previous research on men’s health behaviours (Addis & Mahalik, 2003; Courtenay, 2000b). However, he acknowledged the importance of healthcare in general since he said he would seek it for his son, but for himself because “I, uh, could care less about myself, kind of thing. […] Like, I don’t know, not too worried about myself.”

Darren was not someone who avoids information seeking in general. He described his career planning information seeking process extensively. When asked how he found information about jobs he was interested in, Darren said he looked on college websites using his phone. He also looked “online for three places that will do my forklift certificate. And the price and stuff like that.” Darren also described his extensive information seeking process for learning how to fix a car:

If I need to know how to fix something on a vehicle I use YouTube. […] Yeah, that actually helps a lot. […] Find the problem first and then, say, if you got to change an axle, then you just look up how to change an axle in that certain vehicle and- pops up. […] [F]or [my friend’s] four-wheel-drive axle or his four-wheel-drive driveshaft, I used a video to get that off.

It is unclear to what extent Darren actually sought out information on parenting but did not wish to talk about it. Perhaps young dads were seeking information on parenting more often than they were willing to admit since an admission of seeking help would counter the masculine norm of
self-reliance (Addis & Mahalik, 2003). However, the phenomenon of fathers not feeling open to either searching for parenting information or sharing what they find is a gendered inequality which perpetuates the notion that dads are not natural caregivers to their children.

In summary, although young fathers were included at some programs, these programs were not customized for them and young dads often went with their partners as their supports. Many cases showed that young fathers were excluded from services. Young fathers also experienced tension between adhering to masculine gender norms, which value self-reliance, and seeking the help and information they needed to parent confidently. In the next section, we will take a look at the information resources young fathers have in their communities.

4.3 Inclusion and exclusion from community resources

In this section, I discuss some of the resources young fathers seek information from in lieu of supportive programs and services. Although these resources, places and people satisfy some fathers’ information needs, other young dads said they could not rely on them to provide the parenting information and support they sought. Discussion of the community surrounding young fathers showed that their partners, families, friends, the internet, their own lived experiences and even strangers impacted their information contexts but were not sufficient resources in all cases. Many young fathers faced challenges connecting with information resources and had limited information contexts.

Seeking information from partners

For young fathers, the mothers of their children were a very important resource for actively
seeking information about parenting and about their children in general. Many dads said that the mothers of their children were much more knowledgeable about parenting. Some dads, like Joe Rogers, felt so unknowledgeable about childcare that they transferred child care to their partners rather than actively seeking answers to parenting questions. According to Joe Rogers, this was because:

[My partner/son’s mother is] the only one that’s around him all day, so she knows more about him than I do. [Pause] So if I don’t know what to do, I just ask her or just give him to her and [laughs] she’ll deal with it.

Joe Rogers framed his active information seeking behaviour (McKenzie, 2003) as an admission of incompetence. By saying, “If I don’t know what to do, I just ask her or just give him to her,” he equated seeking information from his partner to giving away the responsibility of caring for his child due to feelings of ineptitude. Joe Rogers admitted that he finds it easier to step away from some parental responsibilities rather than accept that he needed more help or information, even though asking questions and recovering answers could have empowered him as a parent. In this example, active seeking behaviours were framed as disempowering, perhaps because an admission of help is non-normative masculine behaviour (Addis & Mahalik, 2003; Courtenay, 2000a). According to McKenzie (2003) actively seeking information was often framed as a form of control for mothers because they could bypass the noise of parenting information and focus on what they really wanted to know more about, e.g. mothers could receive customized information from their doctors when they asked personal questions. For young fathers like Joe Rogers, actively seeking information required admitting that help was needed, and this countered masculine values of self-reliance (Addis & Mahalik, 2003; I. M. Harris, 1995). Asking for
information and help was equated with an admission of weakness. Rather than ask his partner for help or information, and risk appearing unmanly, Joe Rogers preferred to transfer some parenting tasks and responsibilities completely to her.

For young fathers like Joe Rogers, not actively seeking information because they did not want to admit that they needed help or information reinforced gendered child care practices between them and their partners. Because Joe Rogers was unwilling to seek information which would enable him to perform certain child care tasks, he just gave his son to his partner and expected her to “deal with it”; he relied on his partner to take over any child care task he could not or did not want to perform because he was under informed. By forfeiting certain child care tasks, Joe Rogers reinforced his position as a father, a position stereotypically gendered to have less child care responsibilities.

Some young fathers sometimes presented their information behaviours as active seeking (McKenzie, 2003), but upon further discussion, it became clear that the young fathers’ partners were the ones actively seeking information and then relaying information to young fathers by proxy. Young fathers presented these behaviours as if they were the ones actively searching through the language they used. In the following example, Victor talked about seeking information from a helpline indirectly through his girlfriend. When asked what sources of information he consulted with parenting questions, Victor replied that he phoned the 8-1-1 line. When asked how he found out about this service, Victor said, “Uh [my girlfriend] calls them all the time when she panics.” The interviewer asked Victor if he also calls the line himself, and

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8 8-1-1 is a free phone line run by HealthLink BC (part of the Ministry of Health) which provides health information and advice (Government of B.C., 2017).
Victor responded, “Uh no like she sometimes just passes me on the phone and then I ask the questions and stuff, yeah.” Victor linked his partner’s information seeking through the phone line with his own.

The information seeking experiences of young fathers did not fit neatly into McKenzie’s category of active seeking (2003) because the information seeking behaviours of young fathers relied heavily on a co-parenting dynamic. McKenzie’s model (2003), centered on the information practices of one person, whereas Victor’s description of his information behaviours was collaborative. Young fathers may adopt the active seeking and active scanning behaviours of their partners as their own through fluid, frequent information exchanges with their partners. When their partners tell them the information they have found, this is seeking information by proxy; however, young fathers did not see the information seeking behaviours of their partners as divorced from their own. This may explain why Victor explained his information seeking behaviours the way he did. During an interview with another father, Clinton, his partner was present during his interview and they discussed their experiences as a couple. According to the interviewer’s field notes:

Clinton occasionally looked to Payton for clarification on certain parenting details (e.g., how long their baby was sick). […] For example, when he asked Payton for clarification about certain issues, she told me, “He’s just the father. What do you expect?” and Clinton joked, “I don’t know nothing.”

Clinton admitted to having limited information about parenting; however, his partner served as a reliable and convenient source of that information when he needed it. The relationship was not bi-directional; however, in many cases, including Victor’s and Clinton’s, the fathers relied on
their partners to share information and their information seeking experiences with them, which allowed them to feel like those information-seeking behaviours were their own. However, young mothers did not have the same reliance on young fathers for information. During the interviews, they did not rely on information from their partners, nor did they share the information seeking behaviours of their partners. This dynamic may be the result of young fathers being excluded from many information resources and places. Active seeking and active scanning are agentic modes of information seeking. By adopting the information behaviours of their partners, rather than as presenting their behaviours as seeking information by proxy, a less agentic mode, young fathers may feel that they have power in the ways they seek information.

**Seeking information from family**

Family members and relatives were often referenced as a resource for young fathers when they had specific questions about parenting. Young fathers especially trusted family members who had extensive experience raising children. George explained his reliance on his family to providing him with answers to parenting questions. His family’s knowledge about parenting was derived from experience because his mom “had six kids so… if anybody knows anything about kids…And if she couldn’t answer it, she could point me in the right direction.” Likewise, Bishop Dennis, a young dad, said that his mother was an excellent source of parenting information because “[s]he’s had five kids.” Many young dads said that having practical experience with parenting many children over their lifetime made their parents and foster parents reliable sources of parenting information.

Family was also an important source of cultural knowledge regarding childcare.
Ogre spoke about the advice he received from his mother to massage his newborn, which dove-tailed with the advice he received from hospital professionals.

My mom is […] limited in her literacy so she definitely did not pick that up from a book. She picked that up from her experience, you know, having children and taking, helping – she is an uncertified doula. She has helped a lot of ladies, you know, give birth, so… she’s quite experienced in a lot of the cultural practices we have back in Africa. And I took that as just, you know, her… her own… point of view and did not really make a lot of sense with it, […] but I knew you needed to massage for colic but she mentioned massaging for […] the baby’s healing umbilical cord, you know, to prevent it from causing her a stomach upset. And I did not put the two together, but she was actually saying the same thing as a lot of the materials I got from the hospital teaching. So after the experience, I was a little bit more attentive to, you know, much of the advice she was giving us.

However, for many young fathers, their families and relatives were not a reliable source of parenting information. Reasons for this varied. Some young fathers did not perceive their families to be a source of relevant and reliable information. For others, personal relationships posed a barrier to asking for advice. Some parents had intimate questions that they did not want to share with their families. One participant, Thomas, spoke about not asking advice from his mother because he felt that her parenting information was outdated. He explained his reasoning with an example:

She gives me the wrong advice. Nice lady, but…not the right person to ask [chuckles]. […] Just old fashioned. She gave our son, uh, cough medicine that had
alcohol in it or something. […] You’re not supposed to give it to infants and he
was an infant and- just- just stuff like that. […] I don’t- she’s not the best person
to ask for anything.

Other fathers, like Victor, avoided asking their families for information about
parenting because they wanted to find information from other sources. From Victor’s
description, this decision helped him and his partner maintain a sense of independence:

I didn’t really seek out family or friends’ information particularly some people
like, you know, some of [my girlfriend’s] friends, not her mom and dad, but never
really like went to family and friends kind of to get this kind of information. Kind
of me and her just figured out on our own type of thing.

Later in his interview, Victor said he was receptive to parenting advice given to him by
family and friends during casual conversations, so perhaps how parenting information is shared
is important. Many young fathers said they received information “by proxy” when family and
friends identified them as in need of certain advice. However, Victor benefited from non-directed
monitoring through interactions with his family, even though their advice was not information he
actively sought.

Whenever you’re around the family and friends, you know, just conversation
comes up and you get to talking about, you know, things that are going on so
yeah, things that I’m comfortable with talking about, you know, about things that
are going on. […] My uncle and dad just tell me a lot of things that I should not
do, you know, like shouldn’t be leaving the baby without any clothes and stuff ‘cause the weather’s just really different here and yeah.

Preferring to seek information via certain information seeking modes over others may be connected to masculine norms. By preferring to seek information via non-directed monitoring during casual conversations with family or after being identified as in need of certain information by family members, young fathers did not have to seek help or information actively. Seeking or scanning information actively from their family members may be perceived as an admittance of needing help, which would counter the masculine value of self-reliance. Seeking information through “non-directed monitoring” or “by proxy” may be especially important for young fathers who perceive that their behaviours will be monitored and assessed whether they are adhering to masculine norms. Asking for parenting help from a father or an uncle, as in Victor’s case, may cause a situation in which his help-seeking behaviour is ridiculed or ignored in order to show him that asking for help about parenting is not normative masculine behaviour. Not only would he find no answers to his parenting questions in such a circumstance, but his masculine sense of self would be reprimanded, which could make him feel humiliation. Even fear of this occurring could prevent young fathers from feeling safe enough to ask their family members certain parenting questions.

**Seeking information from friends**

One young father in the study, Jim, spoke about the importance of having a friend, who was also a young dad, to exchange parenting information with. Jim gave an example when he asked his friend a question about his daughter’s development because he knew he was experiencing a
similar developmental stage with his own child.

I can ask [my friend], like, I was asking him the other day I was like uh, ‘cause his baby’s starting to crawl but ours hasn’t yet and ours is two years older or two weeks older. And I’m, like, you know, “How did you do it? How did you teach her to crawl?” and stuff like that and just, you know, put her on her stomach for a lot longer and stuff like that. Uhm, so that I can really ask him and, you know, tips.

Jim’s story of sharing parenting information with another young dad shows that young fathers could be valuable information resources for each other. However, many of the young fathers in the study did not know other young fathers. Many young mothers met at young parent programs and meeting there on a regular basis provided them with opportunities to form bonds and exchange parenting information. By not having access to services, young fathers did not have the same opportunities to make friends with people in similar circumstances with whom they could share information.

Unlike young fathers, young mothers in the study had many opportunities to connect and bond with other young parenting women. These interactions often included information exchanges where experienced young mothers served as experts for other mothers encountering parenting and child development milestones (Greyson et al., 2017a). For example, when young mother Rose was asked whether there was anyone in her life who gave her unsolicited advice, Rose said that “it’s more me giving the advice about being a parent, honestly.” She explained:

I don’t know where it came from, but I just have all this knowledge […] so I have my best friend and she’s older than me. But she just had her baby… uhm, I think she’ll be
two this summer. So she’s always the one asking *me* about everything and, like, I’m helping her.

Because Rose had her child earlier than her best friend, Rose was a valuable source of information as her friend encountered various parenting and child development milestones. Because she had been a mother for several years, Rose was acknowledged as a valuable parenting resource among her friends. Other young mothers had similar experiences and would often be asked for guidance or advice when their friends became pregnant.

**Seeking information from the internet**

Many young fathers did not feel like they could seek advice from people close to them, such as their partners, relatives and friends. In their circumstances, access to supportive parenting programs was vital but often unavailable. Young fathers often said that they did not feel comfortable asking professionals parenting questions. This was especially true when young fathers were worried about being stigmatized or judged based on their questions. For example, one dad spoke about avoiding professional opinions and instead opted to seek information from the comfort and safety of his home. When asked where he was able to find information about Fetal Alcohol Syndrome for himself and his children, Bishop Dennis said he “already learned everything about it” that he wanted to know and that he did not access any formal help or services for information. Instead, he “just stayed home. […] Just stayed home and learned- read books, looked it up on the internet.” Bishop Dennis actively sought information about Fetal Alcohol Syndrome on the Internet and by reading books, but as an alternative to actively seeking information in public from interpersonal sources. It is probable that Bishop Dennis feared the possibility of stigma and judgement if he asked for information about a sensitive topic like Fetal
Alcohol Syndrome from professionals or service providers. Many young fathers did not know where to go for services, information or help and their apprehension about reaching out was compounded when their questions or concerns were sensitive.

Google was a very popular information resource among young fathers. Although many young fathers said that they used Google to find information, their responses indicated that they actually used Google to find leads to useful information resources, including links to websites, videos and other media. However, it is noteworthy that few young fathers distinguished between the sources they found using Google and Google itself. When asked where they found information, young fathers said “Google” rather than specifying that they found information on a website listed in their Google search results. As illustrated in the quotes below, young fathers such as Jim used Google to browse through the information available on the internet:

Thankfully there’s uhm, uh, there’s not much that the Internet can’t tell us nowadays. If we don’t know anything, like, we figure something out. Like, what’s going on, quick Google and that, yeah, thankfully.

Many young fathers’ extensive use of Google to search for information extends previous findings that young people are comfortable using the internet to find information (Prensky, 2001). Although none of the young fathers in the study avoided internet use, some young fathers did not have easy or regular access to the internet. These fathers did not find online searching to be easy or accessible. One such father, Elmo, visited the local library or community centre to browse on the Internet. However, he noted this was challenging:
It’s difficult sometimes. Like, sometimes when we had to find out one little thing and we got to go all the way to the library to use the Internet to find it out. So it’s very difficult sometimes.

Even though many young fathers took “Googling” for parenting information for granted, this privilege was not equally available to all young parents. Fathers such as Elmo, who do not have convenient internet access, had to find alternative sources to answer their questions, such as asking professionals and healthcare providers for advice. However, these alternatives were not as convenient as Google.

Young fathers did not have access to the same online resources as did young mothers. Sometimes the informal information exchanges that occurred at young parent programs transferred to online platforms, such as Facebook. Young mothers who attended young parent programs benefited from these additional online information resources. One young mom, Meredith, said that Facebook provided a space for moms from her group to share information and allowed her to actively scan the Facebook group for health information.

People will add things on that are happening or, like, uhm… once in a while there’s this dentist who will do fluorides for the young parents’ teeth so they’ll say when and where to go for that and stuff like that. And then… yeah, and I guess for… communicating with other parents about their… ‘Why your child is doing this and why my child isn’t’ and stuff like that.
Many of the young fathers in the study said there are few programs dedicated to young fathers, and none of the programs mentioned had dedicated space attended by the fathers on a regular basis. The absence of such a space created difficulties establishing online information grounds for young fathers. For young mothers, the online groups and forums were an extension of the young parent programs they attended on a regular basis.

Young mothers also had a variety of mother-centered apps at their disposal. By using apps such as BabyCenter, young mothers encountered information on a daily basis, which left many young mothers with few unanswered questions. Due to daily feeds on her mobile app, Jessica felt that she did not need to actively seek or scan information very often because she felt well informed.

I have the BabyCenter app online. And I always read like what’s happening. They have this whole thing where like they tell you what’s happening day to day kind of thing. So it’s very nice. I like to read it. I don’t look for information really. I just kind of sometimes read day to day.

Jessica’s experience and the experiences of other young mothers who encounter large amounts of parenting information regularly differ from that of young fathers. Young dads did not report having daily exposure to parenting information through mobile apps targeted to fathers.

Many young fathers sought out answers to their parenting questions using the internet. Using Google often supplemented or even made up for a lack of information young fathers received from partners, family members and friends. However, young
mothers reported having more online opportunities to seek parenting information. Young mothers often created online groups or forums which acted as extensions of the young parent programs they attended regularly. Young mothers also used the wide array of mother-centered apps available on mobile phones. The young fathers in the study did not report having access to online groups or forums or having parenting apps on their phones. Even though the internet helped supplement or make up for the lack of information resources for young fathers, young mothers still had more developed online information contexts.

**Seeking information from lived experiences**

Some young fathers spoke about learning parenting techniques while babysitting earlier in their lives. Young fathers often did not acknowledge this experience as information seeking behaviour. Some young dads, including Victor, framed this experience as a way of “naturally” learning how to take care of babies and children.

I come from a big family so […] I learned a lot from my father, I guess, I would say. My dad’s got nine children altogether and uh… yeah so, you know, just being around the oldest of six of them with my mother and just, you know, having that, you know, experience around all these children just kind of came along with me and it’s kind of like natural to me, I guess. I dunno. It wasn’t – everything just feels natural when I’m taking care of my baby so yeah.

Many young dads presented fathering as something that was “naturally” learned. Other fathers spoke about “naturally” knowing how to be fathers as if it was something inherently intuitive.
One young father, Darren, spoke about not needing to seek information on parenting because it was something he just knew how to do. He said, “it just kind of just came to me naturally, all this parenting stuff.” When asked what he meant by “stuff,” Darren explained that he did not need anyone to help teach him “how to change a diaper, feeding, stuff like that, holding” because he “just knew.”

Similarly, several young mothers reported learning how to parent by taking care of younger siblings. Some young mothers, like Jbiebs, became very experienced with childcare early in their lives because their parents were absent. When asked who asks her for parenting advice, Jbiebs responded, “Surprisingly, my mom does. ‘Cause I’ve been raising my brother.” Jbiebs also babysat her friend’s brother and cousin and would give her friend’s mother parenting advice:

[The mother] always asked me, like, “Oh what do I do, my baby is teething?” And I’m, like, okay, well I just told her. Like, give him frozen waffles or whatever. Like it helps ‘cause that’s what I did with my little brother.

Like young fathers, young mothers spoke about naturally learning or knowing how to parent because of lived experiences caring for young children earlier in their lives. This knowledge often helped young mothers like Jbiebs feel confident about their parenting skills. Young fathers did not discuss whether their previous child-rearing experiences gave them increased confidence about parenting their own children as much as young mothers did. Some young fathers felt ready to approach certain parenting tasks, such as changing diapers, because of their previous experience, but they did not think that these experiences made them experts. This varied from the experiences of young mothers, who often felt well versed in parenting skills and confident
enough to advise other mothers they knew (Greyson et al., 2017a). These ideas will be discussed further in the section titled, “Sharing information.”

**Information seeking by proxy from strangers**

Young parents are often perceived as needing parenting information. Previous studies have shown that young mothers are often perceived as being in need of information and services to help them navigate through pregnancy, birth and parenting (Carson et al., 2017; Greyson, 2012; Greyson et al., 2017a; Greyson et al., 2017b; Mann et al., 2004; O'Brien et al., 2018). Data showed that young mothers were often thought of as information needy or “poor” by others who offer unsolicited advice (Greyson et al., 2017a; O'Brien et al., 2018). When asked who offers her unsolicited advice, one young mother, Jbiebs, said, “Like, a lot of people. A lot of people did that. Like, ‘Oh you’re supposed to do this, oh you’re supposed to do that.’” Many other young mothers reported hearing advice from strangers on the bus, which they frequently used to access school and daycare for their children.

Similar to young mothers, young fathers were perceived to be in need of information about parenting by others. Because of this perceived information need, young fathers also received unsolicited advice from strangers. Sometimes this advice was welcomed, and other times it felt invasive. Young dad, Ryan, said advice was more likely to be welcomed if the advice-giver had experience with children. However, most young dads wanted to make parenting decisions independently. When asked about whether he received advice without asking for it, Ryan said:
All the time. [Laughs] […] Uh, always the old people on the bus, which doesn’t bother me. But sometimes if uh- sometimes I’m just not in the mood and say, “Oh, just, like- this is my daughter. Like, I’m her parent. I’ll parent the way I want.” But most of the time I just listen. Sometimes it’s some good advice. […] But there’s a lot of younger people too who try and give me advice that don’t even have kids. And then it’s- I don’t really like that. I mean, some of it, sure, it’s good advice. Like, I’ll listen to it, but I most likely won’t do it. Like, it’s- like, I’ll retain it. I’ll remember what you’re saying. If I need to use it one day, then sure. But yeah, lots of people try and tell me how to parent kind of and I’ll parent the way I want to parent.

Young dads were often skeptical of advice they received from others, especially when they did not know the advice-giver’s parenting expertise. Hans Solo said, “I don’t really like getting advice just from anybody. I mean, like, if it’s - besides my mother or my dad. Other than that, anybody else, no.”

**Not connecting or interacting with information**

A significant number of young fathers spoke about not wanting or needing to seek information about parenting. Some fathers said they did not feel comfortable seeking information about parenting, especially when the information source was a person or a group of people. Mike said he found it difficult to receive advice or information from service providers because:

    I’m pretty shy, right. I don’t like talking to new people. That’s why I’m, like, ahhh! [Laughs] Yeah, I hate talking to people I don’t know, right. I usually just
Some fathers may not have acknowledged that they could have benefitted from additional parenting information. One young father, Hans Solo, said he did not feel the need to seek information on parenting because he was “fully loaded” with everything he felt he needed to know about baby care. This young dad also felt confident that he would be able to find information resources if he felt like he needed them.

I think I’m educated enough to be a dad for now. Like if I needed more work and somebody called me, then I’d, like, ask around about parenting advice and all that, like parenting programs and stuff. […] But right now I think I’m – I’m loaded, I’m fully loaded for watching the baby.

Another reason why some young fathers excluded themselves from parenting information was that they often had complicated relationships with people they needed information from, and that created barriers to effective communication. One case that illustrates the difficulties of sharing parenting information between young parents was that of Kara, Ashley and Joe Rogers. Kara and Joe Rogers split up after having a son together. Later, Joe Rogers began dating one of Kara’s friends, Ashley, who was also a young mother with a daughter. This new relationship caused tension between Kara and Ashley. However, according to Kara, she and Joe Rogers often experienced barriers to communicating information about their mutual son. To receive information, Kara would contact Ashley because:

Joe Rogers does not listen to me and he ignores me all the time. Ashley will keep me updated now. […] She’ll listen to me when I offer better structures or better situations or
like, things to handle it, so if [my son]’s freaking out there’s something that I do here that maybe she could try there and she tries it, or she’s just like, “Well, I have tried it and it doesn’t work for me,” and like, she’ll communicate with me. […] But mostly it’s just between me and Joe Rogers that things are hard and it’s because Joe Rogers is just so stubborn and is like, “Whatever, like this is how it works. You’re- you’re full of it,” type deal. So, it just makes it difficult.

Kara found it easier to contact Ashley since Joe Rogers often experienced issues with his mobile phone. Ashley also “[watched] [Kara’s son] 90% of the time while Joe Rogers [was] at work” so she was able to respond to Kara’s questions and concerns about their son. However, in addition to these logistic barriers, Joe Rogers chose to exclude himself from information contexts where he could learn more about parenting his son. Joe Rogers stopped participating in follow-up interviews when he began dating Ashley, so we did not have the opportunity to gain his perspective on the matter or to understand why he decided to remove himself from the information exchanges between his ex-partner and current partner concerning his son. Joe Rogers may have avoided information exchanges with his ex-partner about his son because he and his ex-partner were experiencing tension in their interpersonal relationship. Joe Rogers was either not receiving information about his son at all, or he was relying on his new partner, Ashley, to serve as a mediator between him and his former partner. However, Ashley also had an uncomfortable relationship with Kara. Despite the tension both Ashley and Joe Rogers experienced with Kara, ultimately Ashley was the one who exchanged information with Kara. Joe Rogers left the information exchanges up to the mothers because he assumed that staying up-to-date with parenting information was a woman’s priority, not a man’s. The likely consequence of distancing themselves from information about their children is that fathers like Joe Rogers
remove themselves from active roles in their children’s lives. Such information behaviours perpetuated gender inequalities within this parenting triad where women were active parents and men were not.

Some young fathers found themselves unjustly excluded from parenting information. Thomas was not receiving information about his children, who were in foster care. His former partner, and the mother of his two sons, Lisa, was deemed unfit to take care of the children and had moved to another province. According to Thomas, Lisa reported that she did not wish for Thomas to be the children’s guardian, and instead asked that the boys be in the custody of their on-again-off-again foster parents. Thomas was not permitted to have his children live with him. During his interview, Thomas was confused about his status as a parent since he was regularly excluded from receiving information about his children and how to gain guardianship of them. When asked about whether he felt he was getting the information he needed, he replied, “No. My lawyer couldn’t give me a straight answer. The social worker’s not calling me back. I can’t call my ex. [Pause] I don’t know, so…” Thomas was working hard to gain custody of his children by meeting all of the family court requirements, including attending a parenting course. Nevertheless, he felt he was not being supplied with enough information to meaningfully fight for the custody of his own children, which he found very discouraging. The way certain information about Thomas’ children and their custody arrangements was withheld from Thomas could also be perceived as a form of surveillance. Several scholars have noted that young fathers often face stigma from service providers, professionals and society in general regarding their ability to parent effectively. When young fathers encounter barriers to gaining custody of their children because they lack the information they need to navigate the system effectively, they must rely on MCFD mandated visits with their children, which allows services and programs to
monitor their parenting behaviours. Thomas had a difficult time articulating the situation in greater detail during the interview since he appeared to know very little himself.

Young fathers described feeling excluded from parenting information in various ways. Some young dads excluded themselves, either because they felt shy about asking for help or because they felt prepared enough to be parents or because of uncomfortable parenting dynamics. Other young fathers, such as Thomas, were excluded from information because of their roles as fathers. Cases such as Thomas’ showed that excluding fathers from services could have serious consequences for families.

Sharing information

According to Addis and Mahalik (2003), many men are more likely to seek information or help if they have opportunities to share their findings or experiences with others. David, a service provider who hosted a successful parenting program in a British Columbian town, said that sharing information enabled fathers to evaluate the usefulness of the information they found. By sharing it with others, young fathers felt like they were being helpful.

If they believe it, if they were bought in, they probably want the affirmation from others that what they found is good. […] But once they can share it and other people are going, “Yeah, it’s great,” then that reinforces that program too. So say he’s second week in, he’s going to go, “I’m going to go back.” […] So many times they see themselves as the degradants of society. Like, they’re always taking from society, taking from society, so any chance we have to make them feel like, “Hey, you just gave back to society,” and they said, “Hey, I brought
something nice to group and it was valuable and they liked it. Hey, I just contributed to society. I might actually be a good person.”

David described the information sharing that occurred at the dads’ group he hosted as an act of altruism. Information sharing could be a powerful affirmation that a young dad was doing something right when the information he found and shared was valued by others.

The young fathers who said they shared parenting information often did so with family, friends and colleagues. Young fathers described their information sharing interactions as very casual, something that happened while they were actively scanning - rather than actively seeking - parenting information. Jonah described one of his information sharing experiences in the following way:

Um when I went to – when I was doing [skills training program], I met this guy there who his girlfriend was pregnant around the same time as mine so I gave him the information about [two parenting programs]. [Pause] And he went to both of them with his girlfriend.

Another young father, Ryan, said he shared parenting information with friends and family who were expectant parents. As a young father who had around three years experience raising his child on his own, Ryan advised his friends and family members who were about to become young parents:

“What should I do” kind of ‘cause most of my friends that come to me are- have- just having kids. Like, her uncle’s due date’s any day right now. Um, so he’s
always asking, like, my opinion.

Many young fathers referred those who came to them for information to others who they deemed to be more knowledgeable. For example, George explained why he sent his friends with parenting questions to a professional:

I think I’d probably do my best to help first ‘cause I have… had a lot of young um, parents come to me and ask a lot of stuff. But generally, uh yes, I’ll give every little bit of information I can. And then um… mostly, like, my support worker, I’d send them to her. And she’s much better at finding, you know, the information and then she’ll pass it on. Or I’ll ask her if she can help me find the information and then I’ll pass it on.

George’s explanation shows that although he wanted to be helpful by sharing information with other young parents, he did not think he knew enough to be as supportive as he wanted to be. When asked whether he had ever been asked for parenting advice, Fred, a young father from Prince George, said that he was occasionally asked for his advice on parenting and that he would “try to give advice” and he was “pretty good at giving advice sometimes, but not all the time.” As briefly discussed in the section titled “Seeking information from lived experiences,” young fathers not valuing their own lived experiences and the knowledge that came from them contrasted findings of young mothers. In an analysis of young mothers and their information worlds, Greyson, O’Brien and Shoveller (2017) found that young mothers’ parenting knowledge was often acknowledged by their peers due to their lived experiences. Many of the professionals in the lives of these young mothers stereotyped them as ignorant on parenting topics. Within their peer groups, however, young mothers “conferred a form of lay expertise” (Greyson et al.,
2017a) regarding childcare and parenting. This difference between young mothers and young fathers perceived knowledge about parenting, either of themselves or by others, likely reflects gendered assumptions about women being more often perceived as natural caregivers than men.

Feeling like they did not know enough to be supportive or helpful may be why other young fathers did not share parenting information with others. Perhaps the affirmation that David, the service provider who hosts a dads’ group, spoke about is an important way to build confidence in young fathers. In a group, young fathers are able to exchange information and give each other affirmation that their parenting information is useful.

**Summary**

This section analyzed the resources, places and people involved in young fathers’ information seeking since they did not have the same access to young parent programs and services as young parenting women. Although young fathers sought information from a variety of sources, including their partners, their families, their friends, the internet, their lived experiences and even strangers, not all young fathers had these resources in their lives. Even young fathers who were able to access information from these resources did not always find the information they received to be trustworthy or useful. As we have seen from examples in section 4.2: Inclusion and exclusion from services and programs, many young fathers would appreciate having access to services and programs similar to those provided for young mothers. In the next chapter, I return to young parent programs and services and discuss how they could be improved to include young fathers.
5. Interventions to improve young fathers’ information contexts

This chapter features recommendations from young fathers and service providers regarding what can be done to improve the information contexts of young fathers. First, I demonstrate that young fathers and service providers working with young parents want and need access to better interventions, such as parenting information, programming and groups (Section 5.1). This section will build on the arguments made in section 4.2, which addressed the challenges young fathers face due to unequal access to young parent programs and services. Second, I propose characteristics identified by young fathers and service providers that reveal important ways to make intervention accessible and helpful to young fathers (Section 5.2).

5.1 When there is a need, but no way

Young fathers indicated a need for information before and after the birth of their children. One young father, Bear, did not know how to identify whether his partner was in labour.

I didn’t really know what to do when she went into labour so… She said she was just getting stomach cramps and they kept getting worse so I just told her, I said, “Go in then.” […] We went to the hospital and they told me that she was in labour.

Although Bear did not say so himself, having so little information about birth probably made him and other fathers like him feel unable to help or advise their partners during labour. It may be difficult for fathers to become involved in the birth and parenting of their children if they do not understand what is going on. As one young dad named Jim phrased it, for dads “there’s no
really, like, book- or, you know, something to, like, look at and be, like, ‘Okay, there’s this, and this is that.’” Even though resources for dads existed, they were not easy to connect with in many dads’ limited information contexts.

Other young fathers, such as Thomas, received misinformation from inaccurate sources. He had first seen pregnancies and birth on television. Thomas had misconceptions about how long his partner’s labour would take because his experience did not match what he had previously seen in popular videos. When popular media are the primary way young fathers learn about pregnancy, birth and parenting, they are likely to have misconceptions, since many popular representations of these subjects are dramatized and not portrayed accurately (Martins & Jensen, 2014). However, many young dads indicated that these media were often their first and sometimes only exposure to these topics.

Many of the stories young dads told indicated that they would appreciate having a space to share information with other dads. In his interview, Jim said he was thankful that he had a friend who was also a young dad with whom he could exchange questions and advice. He said that it would be ideal however if he had the opportunity to attend a group with other young dads.

You can meet other dads out there in the world and that’s what we’re stuck with. It’s […] just going out there and just meeting other dads […]. Uh, so there’s really nothing out there for the young dads […], like, thankfully from the prenatal class my friend, like, that’s the only way I can be, like, “Oh, does your baby do that?”, ‘cause uh, we hang out after work and stuff like that. So there’s really no programs and stuff like that. […]

Victor said he often saw opportunities for programming available for mothers, but not for
fathers. He would have appreciated having more activities to go to with his son.

You go around your community and you see a lot of different *moms* and, you know, a lot of things for moms. But you don’t really see much things about, you know, children with their— the fathers and stuff.

Many young fathers expressed having unmet information needs as parents. Their stories indicated that many of those needs could have been met by welcoming, father-friendly, flexible interventions, such as parenting groups organized for young fathers. Likewise, several service providers discussed the importance of either creating parenting programming specifically for young fathers or creating opportunities for young fathers to engage with already established parenting programs. Ruby, who worked at a mothers-only parenting program, said that there should be efforts made to offer supportive and informative programming for young fathers since those opportunities were available for young mothers. Ruby said young mothers were often better supported than fathers. Many services created exceptions for young mothers with extenuating circumstances, such as supportive housing options for both mom and baby. She said she’s “never seen that offered to a boy,” even if he was a single parent. Ruby perceived the policies to be sexist because of the stereotypical assumption that young fathers were not involved parents:

There’s really kind of that assumption that the boys can’t do it. […] I know of a couple young men, throughout doing this for as long as I have, that would have made okay fathers had that same system been provided to them that would be provided to a young woman in terms of a group home setup with a family model and keeping that together. But that opportunity’s just never, it’s not even looked
at, right? It’s often they’ll pull a kid and they start looking at the grandparents or the... and not even realizing that that 17-year-old boy might definitely be capable of doing it with the right support. […] They instantly go to “Will your mother take them? Will his parents take them”, right? They don’t even look at that young man if- if he’s a young parent as well.

Ruby said that many people assumed that young men were not adequate parents. Not only are such assumptions sexist, since they prejudice an entire sex, but such assumptions also do not consider that parenting men do not have enough opportunities to develop their parenting skills. Because they do not have the same access to information, help and support that young mothers do, young fathers are at a disadvantage. Expectations that they would be as skilled at parenting as young mothers, who have services and information resources created for them, are unjustified. There need to be more parenting programs for young men in order to allow them to build parenting skills the way young mothers are able to. Service provider, Vince, who often worked with young fathers, said developing services for young fathers would make a positive difference in their lives and the lives of their children. He thought dad groups which teach parenting skills such as “prep or discipline or different things that are going to come up in a father’s life that you don’t have any clue how to handle” would be beneficial for young parenting men. Vince said relying on the Internet for information as a father is not satisfactory because it is easy to “get railroaded really fast by people giving you their opinions on how to do things” and “you can find what you want on the Internet to support your beliefs and biases.” However, a dads’ group would be an information ground to disrupt some of those beliefs and biases and enable the young father attendees to think about parenting in new ways in a supportive environment. Vince said that could include:
Looking classes; you could do all types of different classes. You could do talking groups. You could have, like, I don’t know, sports outings where you could take your – or the father and the kid could go out or kids could go out and do – play basketball or different things like that or go to events or movies where you could support the kids’ and fathers’ interactions and whatnot.

Regardless of the structure of the groups, Vince said the steady support of them “could help fathers and mothers that are struggling.”

Engaging young men in parenting programs has the potential to create positive change in their lives and in the lives of their partners and children. As Alina, a coordinator of an organization offering parenting programs to young women, said, “We try to engage fathers as often as we can and – and boyfriends or you know, their partner, because we know that, you know, the best, biggest shifts and the biggest pieces are when all members of the family are engaged.” Supporting young fathers means supporting young families.

In the next section, we explore the visions young fathers and service providers working with young parents have to improve current and potential information interventions for young parents.

5.2 Recommendations for creating young father friendly contexts

Some of the participants in the Young Parents Study suggested ways to make information contexts friendlier for young fathers. The suggestions discussed in this section are not comprehensive; they are simply a compilation of recommendations based on data from the Young Parents Study. The recommendations to improve young father programming include:
• A welcoming atmosphere;
• Availability of one-on-one supports;
• Regular access;
• Accessible scheduling;
• Incorporating a “learning by doing” philosophy.

Young fathers and service providers differ in their options whether programming for young mothers and fathers should be joint or separate. All the recommendations discussed can be implemented at pre-existing services, or they can be applied to the designs of new programs.

**Welcoming atmosphere**

Many young fathers and service providers said that creating awareness that fathers are welcome is one of the most important characteristics of a successful intervention. Many programs which have historically had high numbers of young mother participants and low numbers of young fathers attending encounter what Greyson, O’Brien and Shoveller (2017) called a “double bind”: the service providers at such programs want to customize the programming to the participants attending, which tends to be young mothers. Service providers try to appeal to young mothers by organizing “feminized” activities like crafting and organizing special lectures on women’s health topics such as contraceptive use (Greyson et al., 2017a). However, customizing the space and the programming for young women “inadvertently [made] fathers feel unwelcome” (Greyson et al., 2017a).

Some programs that tried to cater to both young mothers and fathers still had low numbers of young fathers attending since young fathers did not realize that they were welcome.
For example, one service provider specifically named a program which encouraged young fathers to attend as an example of one of the few organizations in British Columbia that catered to young fathers. However, one young father, Victor, named that specific program and said, “I don’t- I don’t think they have programs for dads.” When young fathers were not explicitly welcomed, many assumed they were not invited to participate because many programs were for mothers only. Based on the experiences of young fathers, it is important to clearly and consistently welcome young fathers to programs.

David and Grant, two service providers working at a successful program for fathers, said that simple alterations could be made to make a service or program welcoming to young fathers. First, programs could communicate and advertise their program in venues that are assessable and frequently used, like Facebook. Using popular social media sites could help attract new and regularly attending men to events. Adding personal touches, such as photos from previous events, to communications could create an atmosphere that welcomes fathers. David, a service provider who works for a fathers’ program, says that photos are important to attracting young fathers to a program because “it’s art. […] They’re looking at an image that they can relate to as opposed to a couple of lines.” Adding photos featuring young fathers also proves that young fathers are welcome to use the resources and attend the programs. Because service providers have found that photos are a powerful way to send messages to young fathers, displaying father-friendly images at programs and services was an important way to welcome them. As previously discussed in section 4.1: Inclusion and exclusion from information documents, photos which only featured parenting women gave young fathers a strong impression that they were not welcome at parenting programs and services. Careful selection of photos that include positive
images of parenting fathers could be used to advertise parenting programs and entice more young father attendees.

David and Grant also suggest introducing a man’s voice to programs that are meant to be open to parenting men. Grant says this can be as simple as changing the voice on the answering machine at a program.

Another simple thing that people have done is like just changing the voice on the answering machine to a male voice and suddenly they found that more men were leaving messages and the women still left their message. They didn’t care whose voice it was but changing it to a man’s voice on the answering machine just kind of gave them a little shift in their mind. “Oh, there’s a guy there.”

Leaving material produced for men in the space, such as magazines which target men, could also help young fathers feel more welcome. Making the space open for young men is vital to making them want to spend time in it. Grant and David also spoke about the importance of avoiding a feminized décor in a space which is meant to be open to both women and men. When asked what made a space feminized, David said that “it’s pink, there’s pictures of women all over the place.” Grant added that a feminized space might also feature “breasts and breastfeeding on the wall.” Grant explained that it’s “not that that’s bad to have breastfeeding pictures on the wall but at least have some pictures of guys cuddling their kids or something or something that just says, ‘Hey, I’m welcome here too’ […] as opposed to, ‘This is awkward.’” According to David, making dads feel welcome is a matter of creating a “neutral space so that […] I’m not like gasping when I walk in from his perspective going, ‘Oh no.’” David and Grant agree that the
décor of a space can greatly impact how welcome young fathers feel when they come to a program or service.

The décor of a space is reflective of its residents or clientele, especially if the residents or clientele have input on the appearance of it. In a discussion about the parenting program spaces, a young mother explains that the parenting programs are oriented around the tastes of the mothers because they are decorated by them. In the interview, the two interviewers remarked that many young parent programs are “so sort of feminized” because of the “very, very pink flowers […] like, lots of pink and flowers and sort of stereotypically, like, super feminine stuff,” to which the young mother, Mary, replied, “Well, you know what though? It’s funny because you say that, but the girls decorated it themselves.” The young parent program spaces are reflective of the clientele who use them. By not having young fathers present at the spaces and decorating them according to their styles and tastes, the spaces did not feel like they were for them. Asking young fathers to contribute to the décor of a room where they come for information or programming would help them feel like they are part of the community.

David and Grant learned that fathers felt more welcome at parenting programs and services when they perceived it was normal for them to be there. Oftentimes, service providers were excited to see young parenting men come to the program or come to them for parenting information. When service providers made it known through their excitement that few men use their space or services, the new father may have felt that it was strange for him to be there.

Grant: The other thing that used to happen too is like guys would almost get attacked sometimes when they’d come in the door like, “Hey, whoa, it’s so great you’re here. We have a guy! Everybody we have a guy!” […] That’s what used to
happen and we used to think like, “We just want them to know they’re so appreciated,” but now what I’ve watched David doing is like, “Hey, how’s it going man? Welcome.” Just like, “Hey, it’s normal that you’re here,” you know? […] We’re not making a big fanfare about it.

David: We do that inside still, “Hey, we got a guy! Right on!” [Laughs]

Grant: But that again says, “No, like hey, it’s not abnormal that I’m here. I’m just another guy that just came through the door.” That kind of shift I think has kind of normalized it for guys too.

Fostering a welcoming space for young fathers will allow them to enjoy seeking services and information in the space. Creating a space where young fathers feel comfortable interacting with other fathers, service providers and young mothers will create rich information worlds and information grounds that young fathers can engage in to enrich their parenting knowledge and confidence.

**Availability of one-on-one support**

A few service providers in the study stressed the importance of providing an opportunity for one-on-one support for young fathers at programs and services. Ruby, who works at a young mothers’ program, saw a lot of individualized supports available for young mothers, and said this kind of guidance was lacking for young fathers.

It’d be fabulous to see like a young parent outreach worker for boys like [organization] has here [for young mothers]. To see a family development worker
for boys, right? And again, how- what organization would be best at pursuing that. [...] Letting those kids have some advocacy and support around the court system and- and knowing how to manage it, right? It’s a very unknown, scary thing for these girls and they’re well supported. I can only imagine what it would be like for a 17-year-old who wants to be part of his kid’s life to- to fight this system.

Ruby said that many young mothers who were connected with services had the opportunity to connect with knowledgeable professionals who could inform them and help them achieve their parenting goals. Young fathers would benefit from the same opportunities.

Grant and David believed that one of the ideal ways to support a father and connect him with the right opportunities was to connect him with the right person. Grant said that young men especially benefit from being connected with a person, not just a service.

I think especially for young guys, if I can not only recommend them to a service but give them a name and say, “Hey, T. works over here at Family Justice. I know T. I trust T. T’s a good guy. Talk to T. Tell him Grant sent you.” Like, that kind of handoff goes a long ways, especially with the younger fellas, just because they are… they are so… so tough to get over the threshold to services. Even just getting in the door to here is such a chore for many of them.
Grant explained that this kind of handoff supports young fathers find the help and services they need. David agreed that this sort of handoff works well because “you’re not going to a place, you’re going to a person.” Being connected to a person, whom young fathers can build a relationship with, ensures that they develop a support network.

Grant, David and Ruby stressed the importance of having service providers ready to provide information and one-on-one assistance to young fathers. Young fathers were oftentimes unacknowledged as needing help and information; others were worried about admitting that they needed help or information. Some extra attention from service providers could help them access the information and services they need. Grant explained that service providers need to “do whatever we can do to just kind of hop them over the bridge” and connect young fathers with services because young dads “are just that much more vulnerable and really struggle with putting [themselves] in those awkward situations.” According to Grant and David, that vulnerability and sense of awkwardness made it difficult for them to “follow through” with help and information seeking. Service providers can aid young fathers by holding them accountable to their expressed desires for help and information by urging them respectfully by saying, for example, “Well, there you go, talk to them right now. Book the appointment,” or, “Why don’t you fill out this referral form right here and I’ll sign it and send it in for you.” That kind of one-on-one support showed young fathers that their information needs were valid and that they were making positive parenting decisions by seeking counsel. Providing young fathers with the opportunity to access one-on-one support allowed parenting men with particular information needs to find individualized supports.
Regular access

Some of the young fathers in the study had opportunities to attend parenting programs at some points in time, but meetings did not occur regularly. Many of young parent programs for men were pilots that ended after a few sessions when funding ran out. Other times the programs were cancelled when attendance quotas were not reached by a certain date.

Jim and many other young fathers found that the young dads’ program they were attending did not schedule meetings on a regular basis. This contrasted with the young mothers’ program Jim’s partner attended on a weekly basis.

Uhm, there was one [parenting program] that we went to a little while ago. It was actually same sort of thing as the young moms’, but for young dads. Uhm, and the problem is that they don’t think the young dads need it so much. So when I went there… uh, ‘cause hers is every week, and so she told me about it. She’s, like, “Oh, yeah, go to this thing,” so I went and it was really, really cool. Like, another one of my friends who’s a single dad, […] him and his daughter went to it and I went to it and […] one of the guys I went to school with a long time ago, we all hung out and stuff like that and it was really cool. But uh, it wasn’t till the end of it that I was, like, “Oh, when are we coming back next?”, and he’s, like, “Oh, it’s not, you know, we only have it every, like, once every three months or once every four months” because there’s not funding or anything for it.

Jim said that young fathers’ programs were not scheduled on a regular basis because “they don’t think young dads need it so much” [emphasis added]; Jim did not specify who he meant by
“they.” The lack of consistent programming for young fathers reflects the beliefs of policymakers, funders, and society in general that the needs of young dads are not as serious as those of young moms. Jim enjoyed meeting with other young fathers and forming an information ground that enriched his information context. However, the benefits that dads gain from information contexts designed for them are under-acknowledged. Because the benefits of young father programs are often under-valued and under-acknowledged, it is difficult to secure funding to continue hosting such programs. Bear enjoyed attending a prenatal program for men before his children were born, but lack of funding meant that the program was short-lived.

It’s kind of hard to find groups for just fathers. […] They shut that one down because I think there was not enough funding for it. I think that’s why ‘cause I tried to go there ‘cause it’s a three-week-long program. The second week I tried to go back and they said they were done. […] And they said that there’s just not enough funding. I think that’s the reason why. […] It was a good program. That’s where I met most of the guys around here.

Bear saw many benefits of having a prenatal class designed for men, such as meeting and connecting with other fathers in the community and addressing father-specific parenting concerns. However, these benefits were not enough to secure funding and keep the program running.

Young fathers’ programs often found it difficult to deliver regular programming due to unsecure funding. Service provider Grant, who has been running consistent programming for fathers for two decades, explained how he was able to secure funding year after year. He said
that his fathers’ program is one of the few in Canada with multi-year contract funding. Grant said:

What happened originally was [parenting program] got their funding for the school side of things and the support side of things and then once they started doing the dad stuff, they said, “Can we carve some of this money off and call this ‘dads’ and this ‘moms’?” […] And that’s kind of where it started and luckily [the Ministry of Children and Family Development] just said, “Yeah, whatever. Make it happen.”

Grant explained that the funding for the young parent program is “still one big contract […] but there’s this dads’ allotted money and the moms’ support allotted money.” Grant said this money granted the program stability. However, Grant and his colleagues applied for additional grants wherever and whenever possible to supplement the government grant. Grant stressed that it’s important to “do different things” to secure funding and that even “a bit of contribution from the community” helped. Grant noted that it was also important to stay vigilant at year-end and term-end cycles when governments and agencies have additional funding left to award to programs and services.

Because programming for young fathers is so contingent on funding, David, a service provider from a successful parenting program dedicated to fathers, said it is important to begin programming when the program’s existence can be guaranteed for an extended period of time. Many service providers, including David, said that it takes time to build a steady clientele with men, so ending a program after a few months is premature. Ending the program made the fathers who had been attending the program feel like they were losing a support system. Losing a support system they had come to rely on was difficult for young fathers.
If it’s something that we’re really passionate about, we want to get a year or two because it’s got to have traction, it’s got to have – you know, you gotta see where you’re really at and sometimes you’ll get traction, things will get moving, you’ll see something going really great and then your funding is gone, done. […] And I don’t want to drop people off a cliff.

Regular meetings are something many young fathers would like to see offered by the programs they attend. Service providers would like to provide long-term programming as well, but the ability to do so is contingent on consistent funding.

**Accessible schedule**

General parenting programs are often scheduled during day-time office hours. Several young fathers found the hours of parenting programs to be a barrier. Young fathers often felt obligated to find and keep a job in order to support their families. Being a good worker and working during the day often meant that they could not attend day-time parenting classes. When asked whether he experienced any barriers or issues as a parent trying to access services, one young dad, Bear, said he found it very difficult to schedule work and a parenting class. According to Bear, his social workers told him he had to choose between work and the parenting class. This was a difficult choice for Bear since attending the program would enable him to spend time with his children who were in foster care at the time. However, Bear’s job was not flexible and he relied on it to make ends meet for his family. Bear was afraid of losing his job since it had taken him a long time to secure it due to an ongoing medical condition. Because he had to work during the day, Bear hoped “they’d come up with a program where it’s for *after* work, like if they could choose to do it after work but they don’t.” Instead of trying to resolve
scheduling conflicts and create more evening or weekend classes which young fathers like Bear could attend, the social workers told Bear and his partner that only one of them needed to come to the parenting classes, implying that only Bear’s partner had to attend. Bear found these barriers to be very unfair since there were waitlists to get into afternoon parenting programs.

When Bear was finally able to get into an afternoon parenting class, he found that his workplace did not acknowledge the importance of his role as a parent when they threatened to fire him if he chose to attend such a program.

When [the parenting program] accepted me, I got a call, and they said that I could start in the afternoons and, like, “Oh, okay, I’m pretty tired and smell like sawdust but okay.” [Chuckles] Yeah. And my boss started wondering how come I had to keep leaving every day early so I tried to explain to him that- but he said that I had to choose either the job or to be a father and I didn’t know what to do at the time so.

[…] It kind of made me mad a little bit ‘cause to me it felt like…I don’t know, they were being, like, unfair so… that’s why. And a couple other fathers were actually feeling that too so- we- we just ended up stopped going [to the program] and I just kept working.

Such practices perpetuated the gendered notion that a father’s priority should be to provide for his family financially and materially rather than emotionally and relationally. In Bear’s case, the importance of attending a parenting program and expanding his information context was unacknowledged by both the organization hosting the program and his workplace. However, some service providers at organizations acknowledged that the timing of young parent programming could be discriminatory towards fathers. Two service providers from a First
Nations organization said that they have often seen fathers face such barriers to programming. Speaking to the attendance at programs she runs, Rebecca said that “the one thing I see more with males that come here is that they tend to not finish because… of work.” Her colleague, Loretta, agreed that “usually the Ministry is pushing them to get a job and whereas it doesn’t push the moms for some reason. Still gender-biased I think a little bit. […] And that’s a bit of a problem for the dads, I think.” When asked what consequences a young dad faced when he wasn’t able to complete the program, Rebecca answered that the program would “discharge them and let them know that they can re-refer if there comes a chunk of time where they would be able to do the program.” Although Rebecca and Loretta recognized that timing was a problem for fathers trying to finish a parenting program, their organization did not have any helpful solutions. Discharging a father who cannot attend a program due to work hours and expecting him to come back when his work hours have at some point somehow changed is not taking responsibility for the hours not being flexible enough in the first place.

The service providers at one successful fathers’ program suggested hosting young fathers’ parenting programs during evenings and weekends so that dads are less likely to have work conflicts. However, Vince, a service provider at a youth organization, says hosting programs after hours was not an option for organizations that did not have the adequate funding to support additional staff hours and open facilities.

There’s lots of, um…there’s lots of organizations that operate after – after the 9:00 to 5:00 hours. It’s just whether there’s funding available for that type of programming. There isn’t – there’s nobody doing really that type of programming in town and so it just – I’m sure if, say, MCFD [Ministry of Child & Family
Development in BC] or SDSI [Ministry of Social Development & Poverty Reduction in BC] or some government agency was able to – started putting out funding for that specific parenting programming, I would hope that the organization that received that contract would do it after hours or have some after hours. I know that Parenting after Separation, that’s through Ministry of Justice, when that was running it was done usually at night or on weekends so parents that were working could go to that.

Hosting programming at convenient times of the day and regularly are both reliant on consistent funding. In order to secure funding, government ministers need to realize the importance of parenting programs for young fathers, not just young mothers.

Incorporating a “learning by doing” philosophy

Young fathers and service providers working with young fathers spoke about the importance of creating programming and information interventions that enable fathers to learn new skills or tips by doing something as opposed to learning by listening or conversing. Many fathers, like George, said that “learning by doing” is optimal. After being asked whether reading pregnancy and parenting books was helpful for him, George said that although reading was helpful, learning by doing was most effective:

I mean, learning [with my] hands was obviously the way to learn. […] Uh, I understood more of it and… how to deal with it properly.

Some young fathers spoke about young mothers’ programs being unsatisfactory for them because they did not enjoy sitting down and talking about their parenting experiences or
concerns. Instead, they were interested in programs where they could do an activity with their children and learn something about parenting in the process. Knowing that many fathers preferred learning by observing, Grant and David consciously modelled fathering skills in their programs. Grant said that modelling fathering behaviours was important for their clients because “some of these guys […] have not had healthy parental dad involvement [in their own lives], [so] it’s almost like we are being a bit of a dad to them and then say, ‘Okay, what I’ve done to you, go do that to your kids.’” Grant and David also created a culture at the program in which the men attending their program were encouraged to “mentor each other” as well. Grant explained that many “guys learn best by watching and like that’s why we do this Saturday morning dads’ and kids’ breakfast.” Grant explained that the Saturday morning program for fathers and their children was a way “to get dads together with other dads with their kids” so that they could learn from the facilitators and each other. Grant admitted that many dads he meets at the program “don’t know what to do with their kids. Like, they just - they’re a little lost.” However, many of the dads will learn new skills, techniques and ideas for interacting with their children by observing how other fathers behave with their children. Grant gave an example:

[S]ome guys will walk in the room and they’ll see this other guy laying on the ground on his belly, you know, eye to eye with his kid and he thought, “Oh, never thought of doing that. You know, maybe I’ll do it.” Next week you’ll see them laying on their tummy, playing with their kids in the blocks or something. That’s how guys learn. […] It’s kind of by watching and thinking, “Maybe I’ll try that next time.”
Grant said that establishing programs where fathers can observe and learn from each other in an environment which encourages a “learning by doing” philosophy can give many unsure fathers the confidence they need to navigate fatherhood more confidently and easily and be more involved with their children. Using a metaphor where fatherhood is like a car with missing parts or a driver with no direction, Grant explained that programs are able to metaphorically install those missing parts or provide navigation:

Daddying [sic] for a lot of these guys is like driving without a map or steering wheel. They know the car’s moving but that fear and sort of that uneasiness and that sheer panic, so […] maybe we’re going to put a steering wheel in your car [chuckles] and they give you a little bit of a map as to where to go.

Providing opportunities for dads to play and bond with their children while also watching how other dads interact with their children created a useful information ground for young fathers. Creating environments for this to occur at fathering programs is an important step to building confidence with parenting.

**Together or separate?**

Young fathers, mothers and service providers differed in their opinions regarding whether programs for young mothers and fathers should be hosted together or separately. For those who thought young fathers and young mothers should have separate programming, there were concerns that the relationships between parenting men and women could cause unnecessary drama and stress in a group setting. Kate, a service provider working with young mothers, said
that having fathers join young mothers’ programs would cause social and emotional disturbances.

I think if they [fathers] were to be in the same program as the girls, the social and emotional piece would be a bit much. […] From what I understand, in some cases there’s a lot of relationship dynamics that happens with these young relationships and in some cases the same person is… the same male is the father for several of the moms, in some rare cases but it does happen. So, to throw that in the mix in the classroom setting… would make it quite difficult to handle all the social-emotional stuff that would happen around that, I would think.

Some young fathers, like Joe Rogers, also thought having joint programming would be problematic.

I don’t think it would be a good idea to mix teen parents together. […] No, I think that would be a horrible thing to do. [Pause] There’d be a lot of drama.

Some service providers, like Vince, who works with both young mothers and young fathers at an organization for youth, suggested keeping mothers and fathers separated in long-term programming, such as school programs, but creating joint classes for short-term or weekly programming.

Grant and David, who have been providing programming for fathers for many years, hoped that they could move to a mixed gender programming model. When asked whether they thought it [was] valuable for young dads to have resources and parenting programs designed primarily for them, Grant replied:
I used to think that having something tailored just for dads was the answer. The more and more I think about it, [...] what I really want is there to be parenting programs that, you know, make moms feel comfortable and dads feel comfortable. And so they use different strategies that engage mom and different strategies that engage dad.

Grant explained that oftentimes dads still think of parenting programs as something moms do. This gendered perspective presents dads from acknowledging that they are parents too. Grant aimed for parenting programs “to be a place where when [young fathers] see ‘parenting,’ they think, ‘Eh, I’m a parent. That’s for me.’” In order for this to happen, Grant argued that “all the different service providers out there to do a better job of making dads feel comfortable, making dads feel like they’re supposed to be there and that they’re safe when they’re there.” Grant said that it is not only the role of parenting programs to engage fathers in parenting because a variety of programs and agencies can engage fathers as parents:

I want Parks and Rec to do a better job of catching dads and saying, “Hey dad, we want you to be out there playing with your kids.” We want mental health to do a better job of kind of capturing dads and saying, “Hey dad, it’s okay to not be perfect and have all your ducks in a row. You’re welcome here.” We want Public Health to say, “Hey dad, we want you at prenatal classes and at this and that.”

Once “dads are feeling comfortable and welcomed to all these different services,” Grant said there would cease to be a need for specialized parenting programs for fathers. He thought that would be a positive change “because we’ve done our job of helping to kind
of make places be a little more holistic in the sense that it captures moms and it captures dads. [...] It’s going to be a work in progress but that’s kind of my ultimate dream.”
Grant hoped that programs specifically for fathers are a temporary solution which progresses towards gender-neutral parenting programming.

The opinions on whether programming for young mothers and fathers should be joint or separate differ. Decisions about who is included and excluded from young parents’ program should be made carefully to ensure that both mothers and fathers have their information and support needs met.

5.3 Summary

In this chapter, I discussed the importance of developing services and programs that include young fathers. In section 5.1, I provided evidence that young fathers want and would greatly benefit from services and programs designed for them. In section 5.2, recommendations were presented based on the advice and opinions of young fathers and service providers working with young parents. These recommendations included:

- Maintaining a welcoming atmosphere by explicitly inviting young fathers and making their presence visible in the space;
- Developing opportunities for one-on-one support, such as appointments and informal meetings with professionals and service providers who can guide and advise young fathers;
- Preserving regular access through continued programming and stable program funding;
- Creating an accessible schedule of programs on evenings and weekends;
• Incorporating a “learning by doing” philosophy at services and programs.

Young fathers and service providers could not agree whether programs for young fathers should be co-hosted with young mothers’ programs. Whichever route young fathers’ programs and services decide to take, designing programs to be useful and comfortable for young fathers is a priority.

6. Discussion

This thesis is the first attempt to learn about the unique information practices of young fathers. Young fathers have unique information needs because of their age, gender and parental status. The combination of these characteristics and experiences makes their information needs different from those of other youth, women and other parents, including young mothers. Although young fathers have unique information needs, their information contexts are limited. The information contexts of young fathers are less developed than the information contexts of young mothers due to multiple levels of exclusion from parenting information resources. This thesis has provided evidence of young fathers’ exclusion from many information documents, services and aspects of the community that are available to young mothers.

An analysis of the information materials at some of the places providing services to young parents shows that young fathers are often excluded from information documents about parenting. Displaying posters that show only parenting women and not men can give young fathers the impression that that information on the poster is not meant for them. In some cases, the information and resources displayed at parenting program sites contained negative messages about men, which could have negative effects on young fathers. For example, posters about the
effects of domestic abuse were observed in service spaces. Service providers often mentioned that the most easily accessible programs for men are anger management programs to prevent or deal with the occurrence of violence. The prevalence of these services and the lack of any other kinds of services perpetuated stereotypes about men being angry and violent. Many of the young fathers in the study spoke about their desire to attend programs in which they could learn more about bonding with and caring for their children. However, even though this need was sometimes unacknowledged and father groups were formed and advertised, (as seen in Photo 6 depicting a poster giving information about a fathers’ group) these efforts were not maintained.

Young fathers also experienced overwhelming exclusion from parenting programs and services. Although young fathers were included at some programs, such as pre-natal classes and young parent support groups, these programs were not designed for them. In fact, many of these programs targeted young mothers; young fathers were welcomed as their partners’ supports. Many cases showed that young fathers were excluded from services. Some young fathers encountered barriers to services because of policies or regulations, such as hours of operation. Some young fathers spoke about their unwillingness or resistance to seeking help. Their descriptions demonstrate the tension between seeking parenting information and help while adhering to masculine gender norms like self-reliance.

Although many young fathers encountered barriers when trying to access services and resources, some were able to find the information they needed by consulting interpersonal sources, such as partners, family and friends. Previous research indicates that people often consult interpersonal sources of information, even if these sources are not as reliable when
compared to other formal sources such as professionals and published materials (R. M. Harris & Dewdney, 1994). Young fathers who did not have trustworthy or accessible interpersonal information resources often used the internet search engine Google to find answers to their parenting questions. Some young fathers also reported being more comfortable searching for information about sensitive parenting topics on Google in order to avoid judgement. In one particularly poignant case, a young father was completely excluded from information about his children taken into foster care. Not being informed by the professionals handling his case not only left him in a position where he was unable to parent but he was also unable to adequately fight for his rights to parent his children.

Young fathers and service providers advised how to create young father friendly programming. Many of the suggestions are already implemented at young mothers’ programs and simply need to be extended to young fathers. Hospitable staff and spaces which reflect young fathers’ tastes and styles, as well as those of young mothers, are important to help young fathers feel welcome. Other tips include the availability of one-on-one support when young fathers need specialized advice or guidance, regularly hosted programming, and accessible schedules, which include evening and weekend programming, to accommodate working fathers. Young fathers and service providers also advised incorporating a “learning by doing” philosophy into the programming that would allow fathers to learn from each other and be active in trying new techniques.

This thesis was the first attempt to understand the everyday life information practices of young fathers. This analysis had several weaknesses, which should be addressed in further research on young fathers and their information contexts. First, I had a small sample of young
fathers, which limits the generalizability of my findings. Second, since most young father participants were recruited through snowball sampling by their partners who had already participated in the study, their information contexts were influenced by those of their partners. Since the young mothers recruited for the study were engaged in services that were often not available to their partners, the young fathers in the study were aware of the programming available to young mothers. This insight may have influenced the young fathers’ information contexts and views about parenting resources and services and accentuated their sense of exclusion.

However, analysis has made several important contributions. Building on the consolidative work of Courtright (2007), this thesis has added to the field’s current understanding of context by using longitudinal data from the Young Parents Study. The data provided insight into the changing information behaviours of young parents as their social, cultural, and economic situations altered. Interviews and observations were recorded over the course of five years, during which time the young parent participants experienced many transitions and milestones, such as graduating high school, finding paid employment, ageing out of services, and moving. These transitions shifted the networks that young parents used to locate information.

To date, most studies of the help-seeking behaviours of men focused on men’s health (Addis & Mahalik, 2003; Courtenay, 2000a). My thesis has revealed that help-seeking has the potential to impact studies of men’s help-seeking practices beyond health. This study contributed to discussions of men’s help-seeking practices through an intersection with information-seeking practices. This intersection allowed me to explore the gendered dynamics of young fathers’ help
and information practices related to parenting. Many young fathers identified strongly with masculine gender values, such as self-reliance, which prevented them from seeking the help and information they needed to become more confident and engaged parents.

The importance of understanding the information contexts of young fathers cannot be underestimated. My thesis exposed the many barriers young fathers face to accessing parenting information because of social, cultural, structural, and institutional factors. I argued that because of these barriers, young mothers and young fathers have unequal access to parenting resources, which created inequities of parenting knowledge between them. As a consequence, these gendered knowledge inequities intensify the gendered practice of the mother being the primary caregiver for a child. Improving service provision and promoting equal access to parenting resources for young fathers will empower them to be more confident and more active parents.
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Appendices

Appendix A: Literature Search Process

To find background material about this subject, I conducted a literature search. I searched several databases, including PubMed, Wiley Online Library, and Google Scholar using combinations of the following search terms: “young,” “teen*,” “adolescent,” “father*,” “dad,” “info*,” “search,” and “service*.” An asterisks (*) was added at the end of relevant words to include any related terms (e.g. “father*” would include the terms “fathers,” “fathering,” “fatherhood,” and so on). I also limited my search to articles published within the last 20 years (since 1997) to make sure that the research is not outdated. Since searching the information practices of young fathers yielded no results, I broadened my search to include articles about young father services and information technology use from other disciplines outside Information and Library Science, including Social Work, Sociology, Philosophy, Nursing and Psychology. Since this topic has not been well explored and finding articles by searching databases yielded few results, I found most of the articles in my literature review by citation chasing in the bibliographies of the most relevant articles.
Appendix B: Young Parents Study coding nodes extracted for this analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NODE NAME</th>
<th>NODE DESCRIPTION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender Roles, Norms, and Expectations</td>
<td>Discussions related to gender roles, norms, and expectations for self and others (including children). Includes discussions about conforming and non-conforming gender roles and expectations for all genders. Does not include discussions about sexuality (which are coded under Sexuality node), or gender identity (which should be coded as an Attribute).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information Behaviours/Practices</td>
<td>Includes YPs, SPs, and SSOs’ discussions about information needs (met or unmet); seeking (for self or others); encountering (“bumping into” - e.g., bus ads, Facebook feed); avoiding (e.g., throwing away, tuning out, avoiding a source); assessing (how good, reliable, useful, accurate); or sharing with others (in person or online).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parenting Support</td>
<td>This node covers discussions about where participants can receive or give support, assistance, and information as parents or expecting parents. Absences of parenting support are also relevant. Includes both formal (e.g., professional) and informal (e.g., friends and family) supports. Also covers more theoretical discussions about parenting supports.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix C: Coding nodes used for analyzing interviews in this analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NODE NAME</th>
<th>NODE DESCRIPTION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>McKenzie's Model NOS - Young Fathers</td>
<td>This node captures any discussion related to young fathers and McKenzie's model which does not fit into the child nodes below</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YFs - Actively Seeking</td>
<td>Includes references to <em>young fathers</em> &quot;actively seeking&quot; information (McKenzie, 2003). Active seeking is a direct mode of connecting and interacting with parenting information and includes practices such as conducting a search to find a desired source and asking pre-planned questions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YFs - Actively Scanning</td>
<td>Includes references to <em>young fathers</em> &quot;actively scanning&quot; for information (McKenzie, 2003). This information behaviour relies on staying alert and attentive to opportunities where one could find information. Active scanning includes activities such as browsing, finding opportunities to ask &quot;spontaneous questions,&quot; active listening in situations where information may be relayed (e.g. parenting groups, outings with other parents, at a seminar or class).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YFs - Non-directed monitoring</td>
<td>Includes references to <em>young fathers</em> encountering information unexpectedly while not seeking or scanning information. This node includes information behaviours such as hearing useful advice while chatting with friends, reading non-parenting material and finding useful information (e.g. newspaper).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YFs - By Proxy</td>
<td>Includes references to <em>young fathers</em> finding out about information resources from another source. Possible intermediary sources can include partners, family, friends and service providers. This node also includes references to young fathers being identified as needing information and resources, being referred to a certain resource or service or being given advice without asking for it. This node includes instances where young fathers are passively connecting and interacting with information.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Node Description</td>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>YFS - Not seeking</strong></td>
<td>Includes discussion about <em>young fathers</em> not connecting or interacting with parenting information, services and resources. Includes references to young fathers explaining that they do not need parenting information, services and resources. This node also includes references to young fathers being by-passed with parenting information, either intentionally (e.g., through maternal gate-keeping) or unintentionally.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>McKenzie's Model NOS - Young Mothers</strong></td>
<td>This node captures any discussion related to young mothers and McKenzie's model which does not fit into the child nodes below</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>YM's - Actively Seeking</strong></td>
<td>Includes references to <em>young mothers</em> &quot;actively seeking&quot; information (McKenzie, 2003). Active seeking is a direct mode of connecting and interacting with parenting information and includes practices such as conducting a search to find a desired source and asking pre-planned questions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>YM's - Actively Scanning</strong></td>
<td>Includes references to <em>young mothers</em> &quot;actively scanning&quot; for information (McKenzie, 2003). This information behaviour relies on staying alert and attentive to opportunities where one could find information. Active scanning includes activities such as browsing, finding opportunities to ask &quot;spontaneous questions,&quot; active listening in situations where information may be relayed (e.g. parenting groups, outings with other parents, at a seminar or class).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>YM's - Non-directed monitoring</strong></td>
<td>Includes references to <em>young mothers</em> encountering information unexpectedly while not seeking or scanning information. This node includes information behaviours such as hearing useful advice while chatting with friends, reading non-parenting material and finding useful information (e.g. newspaper).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>YM's - By Proxy</strong></td>
<td>Includes references to <em>young mothers</em> finding out about information resources from another source. Possible intermediary sources can include partners, family, friends and service providers. This node also includes references to young fathers being identified as needing information and resources, being referred to a certain resource or service or being given advice without asking for it. This node includes instances where young mothers are passively connecting and interacting with information.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interventions for Young Fathers</td>
<td>Contains discussion about existing, planned and idealized interventions for young fathers. Includes discussion about what interventions currently exist for young fathers. This node also captures young fathers' sentiments about what kinds of information, resources and services they would like to have access to. Young mother's sentiments about the kinds of information, resources and services that should be available for young fathers is also captured. Additionally, this node also includes service providers' opinions about what programs for young fathers should be like and how they could be structured.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interventions for Young Mothers</td>
<td>Contains discussion about existing, planned and idealized interventions for young mothers. Includes discussion about what interventions currently exist for young mothers. This node also captures young mothers' sentiments about what kinds of information, resources and services they would like to have access to; also includes service providers' opinions about what programs for young mothers should be like and how they could be structured.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix D: Coding nodes used for analyzing photographs in this analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NODE NAME</th>
<th>NODE DESCRIPTION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Text - NOS</td>
<td>This node captures text appearing in the photographs which does not fit any of the other options below</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Address mothers</td>
<td>The text in the photo addresses mothers, either explicitly (using words like &quot;mothers&quot;) or implicitly (using terminology relevant to mothers); these addresses may be stereotypical in nature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Address fathers</td>
<td>The text in the photo addresses fathers, either explicitly (using words like &quot;father&quot;) or implicitly (using terminology relevant to fathers); these addresses may be stereotypical in nature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender-neutral address</td>
<td>The text in the photo is gender-neutral and addresses both mothers and fathers; it is not apparent from the text that either mothers or fathers are the intended audience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Images - NOS</td>
<td>This node captures images appearing in the photographs which do not fit any of the other options below.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Include mothers</td>
<td>This node contains photographs which show images of mothers. These images can be found on various media and informational objects, including brochures, posters, books, artwork.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Include fathers</td>
<td>This node contains photographs which show images of fathers. These images can be found on various media and informational objects, including brochures, posters, books, artwork.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Include both mothers and fathers</td>
<td>This node contains photographs which show images of both mothers and fathers. These images can be found on various media and informational objects, including brochures, posters, books, artwork.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Include neither mothers nor fathers</td>
<td>This node contains photographs which show images of neither mothers nor fathers. These images can be found on various media and informational objects, including brochures, posters, books, artwork.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Objects - NOS</td>
<td>This node captures objects appearing in the photographs which do not fit any of the other options below.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>For mothers</strong></td>
<td>This node contains photographs which contain objects designed for mothers (or women in general) or which assume mothers (or women in general) to be the primary consumer. This node also contains objects which are gendered by design, including objects which are dyed pink, decorated with feminine designs or made for a woman's body. Such objects can include menstruation products and breastfeeding paraphernalia.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>For fathers</strong></td>
<td>This node contains photographs which contain objects designed for fathers (or men in general) or which assume fathers (or men in general) to be the primary consumer. This node also contains objects which are gendered by design, including objects which are dyed blue, decorated with masculine designs or made for a man's body. Such objects can include men's shavers and beard trimmers and other objects marketed to men.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>For ungendered users</strong></td>
<td>This node contains photographs which contain objects not designed for anyone of a particular gender. This node also contains objects which are gender-neutral by design.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>