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The transition to fatherhood: Exploration of fathers' understandings and perceptions of their experiences of fatherhood

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Running Head: THE TRANSITION TO FATHERHOOD

The Transition to Fatherhood: Exploration of Fathers' Understandings and Perceptions of

their Experiences of Fatherhood

Yael S. Abitbol

A report submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Award of Bachelor of

Arts Honours, Faculty of Computing, Health and Science, Edith Cowan University.

October 2006

I declare that this written assignment is my own work and does not include:

(i) Material from published sources used without proper acknowledgement; or

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Yael Abitbol

Declaration

I certify that this literature review and research project does not incorporate, without

acknowledgement, any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any

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contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due

reference is made in the text.

Signature

Date _____ 17/1/07 _____

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To my family, thank you for being there for me during this time. To my brother, you were my inspiration behind this project. To my father, thank you for your support and encouragement, you are what I consider, the best father one can only wish for.

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The Transition to Fatherhood: Exploration of the Impact of Fatherhood on Men.

Yael S. Abitbol

A report Submitted in Partial requirements for the award of Bachelor of Arts (Psychology)

Honours, Faculty of Computing, Health and Science, Edith Cowan University.

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Yael Abitbol

Abstract

In the last few decades family structures and dynamics have changed dramatically in Australia and resulted in an increase in focus and acknowledgements of the diversity of fathers' roles in society. The transition to fatherhood is a normative life event for many men and may have considerable impact on their psychological development and well-being. However, this aspect of fatherhood has not been addressed adequately in the literature, despite the growing interest and focus on fatherhood. This paper discusses the impact of fatherhood on marital satisfaction and relationships; personal goals and possible selves; mental health and well-being; social interactions and relationships and work involvement. An overview of traditional research of fatherhood is discussed and the way in which the definition of fatherhood has evolved over the last few decades in Australia is explored. This paper illustrates the importance of exploring the transition to fatherhood from the experiences of men themselves using the positive psychology approach and theory of generativity for future reshaping of social policy and intervention programmes.

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Supervisor: Associate Professor Lisbeth Pike

Submitted: August 2006

The Transition to Fatherhood: Exploration of the Impact of Fatherhood on Men.

In the last couple of decades, family structures and dynamics have changed dramatically in Australia (Edgar & Glezer, 1992). According to the Australian Bureau of statistics the nuclear family constitutes only 11.5 percent of families in Australia (ABS, 2003). One parent families have increased by 53% from 1986- 2001 constituting 23% of all families in Australia (ABS, 2003). Moreover, 89% of couple families with children include the natural or adopted children of both parents. However, of the remainder 11 % of couple families, 6% are step families, 4% are blended families and 1% are foster families (ABS, 2003).   In light of these dramatic changes in family structures and dynamics, there has been an increase in focus and acknowledgements of the diversity of fathers' roles in society. As a result, fatherhood today is hard to define as it involves a variety of types such as stepfathers, single father, non-resident fathers, each with their own unique influences on their families.

The transition to fatherhood is one of the major interpersonal transitions during adulthood and may involve the successive stages of planning to have a child, pregnancy, childbirth and taking care of the child (Salmela-Aro, Nurmi, Saisto, & Halmesmaki, 2000). This transition often leads to substantial changes in an individual's life and may have a considerable impact on the father's psychological development and well-being (Salmela-Aro et al., 2000).

The primary aim of this paper is to provide a review of research on the impact and consequences of fatherhood on marital satisfaction and relationships; personal goals and possible selves; mental health and well-being; social interactions and relationships and work involvement. Firstly, this paper will explore the way in which the definition of

fatherhood has evolved dramatically over the last few decades in Australia. The theory of generativity will also be explored to illustrate the importance of conducting research from the perspective of the experiences of fathers for future reshaping of social policy and intervention programmes aimed specifically at fathers.

Background and Context

The concept and definition of fatherhood has evolved throughout history and has resulted in a diversity of roles that fathers adopt today. During the industrial revolution, men began to leave their homes to commute to jobs, and therefore fathers as breadwinners became an important characteristic in the definition of fatherhood (Lamb, 2000). As a result, the sole responsibility of child-rearing was left to the mother and the predominant construction of fatherhood in the 20th century was as breadwinner, a strong but distant model for their children and a biological necessity (Park, 1996). In the 1970s, there was a general shift in the Australian societal values to recognize father's responsibilities to provide for and support their children, as reflected in the increase in research in this area (Fletcher, 2002). Research emphasized that fathers could and should be nurturing parents who were actively involved in the care of their children (Lamb, 2002). Furthermore, research proposed that fathers' involvement with their children were positively associated with desirable children's behaviours such as self control, self esteem, life skills and social and cognitive competence (Yeung, Duncan & Hill, 2000). As a result, the "new" father emerged and was portrayed as one that spends time with his children, believes in egalitarianism, is able to communicate openly and honestly with his children and partner and is able to be emotionally expressive and affectionate (Parke, 2000).

This general shift in societal values and the emergence of the "new" fatherhood

phenomenon was a product of several wider and complex processes as well as economic,

social and cultural changes including: changes in patterns of employment and economic

life, the growing number of women in the labour force and the demand by women for

greater autonomy and equity (Violi, 2000). Inevitably these changes have had a profound

impact on men. Although the new social representation of fatherhood has included this

new father model, the reality is that fatherhood today may involve the combination of the

more traditional father, with this new model. Furthermore, Barclay and Lupton (1999)

proposed that the certain expectations of society as well as the expectations of men and

their partners of the 'new fatherhood" concept are often out of step with the social

structures and family dynamics in Australia. This may be mainly due to the diminishing

social reform and support thus placing excessive and often unrealistic expectations on

fathers to simultaneously be providers and emotional and practical supports to their partners

as well as become more involved with their children. Therefore, at the start of the 21st

century, the changing face of fatherhood becomes a more complex, dynamic and evolving

reality. However, men as husbands and fathers are still gradually coming to grips with this

new reality (Edgar & Glezer, 1992).

A Brief Overview of Traditional Research on Fatherhood

During the 20th century, as the sole responsibility of child rearing was left to the

mother, the constant presence of the mother as the primary caregiver fostered the

assumption that father-child relationships had little impact on child development and was

reinforced by the vast amounts of research throughout most of the 20th century (Cabrera,

Tamis-LeMonda, Bradley, Hofferth & Lamb, 2000). Moreover, during the recent social

changes, other research investigating the impact of the father-child relationship on child development mainly focused on the effects of divorce and the absence of the father on children (Lamb & Tamis-LeMonda, 2004). The general premise from research is that father absence may be harmful to the development of children due to the lack of economic, social and emotional paternal roles available to the child.

A second line of research on fatherhood examined the involvement of fathers with their children in terms of the amount of time that the father spent with the child (Lamb, 2000). However, this line of research only narrowly focused on the amount of time rather than recognizing the quality of the relationships. Other existing literature focused on the certain factors influencing fathers' involvement with their children (Lamb, 2000). To date research has proposed that father involvement is affected by multiple interacting factors operating at different levels during the life course (Lamb & Tamis-LeMonda, 2004). These factors may include psychological factors such as motivation, skills and self confidence (Marsiglio, Day & Lamb, 2000); the child's individual characteristics such as temperament and gender (Lamb & Tamis-LeMonda, 2004) ; social support in terms of the attitudes and expectations of the mothers (Allen & Hawkins, 1999); community and cultural influences and public policies (Lamb & Tamis-Lemonda, 2004).

Much of the research over the past few decades has viewed fatherhood negatively, in terms of having little or no impact on their children, or as fathers' performing their role as a parent inadequately and thus hindering children's development (Marsiglio, Amato, Day & Lamb, 2000). However, with the rise of the positive psychology movement in 1996, an alternative paradigm to that of the deficit approach was proposed to highlight the importance of investigating the positive subjective experiences and positive individual traits

and strengths (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Therefore, in line with the positive psychology movement, the theory of generativity was developed as a more cohesive, positive and value directed approach to investigate the experiences of fathers (Marsigilio et al., 2000). Furthermore, the theory of generativity is used to inform understandings of contemporary fatherhood and to propose an ideal of fatherhood as developmental 'work' in adulthood (Holland, 1998).

The theory of generativity emphasizes the kind of activities and work fathers do in response to the need of their children rather than in response to the role obligations superimposed upon by society (Marsigilio, Amato, Day & Lamb, 2000). Categories of father-work have been defined and developed to reflect the ideal and lived experiences of fathers as they work to contribute to the well being of their children (Holland, 1998). The generative work of fathers involves a sense of responsible caring, a desire to facilitate the needs of the next generation and attention to fostering a fit between men's activities and children's need (Marsigilio et al., 2000). Furthermore, Holland (1998) suggest that further categories of father work include the commitment to provide a secure, trustworthy environment that is responsive to the needs of the children and providing with resources to allow children to develop and learn. Socio-cultural contexts, motivations and life experiences combine to influence men's generative work as fathers (Holland, 1998). The theory of generativity has been developed to facilitate broader understanding of fatherhood, in terms of the strengths that fathers' exhibit and the positive contributions that they provide for further reshaping of family intervention programs and social policy (Holland, 1998).

Although a large amount of literature has been conducted on fatherhood and parenthood in terms of the impact that fathers have on their children and their family on a whole, the consequences and impact of becoming a father has been neglected despite the recent social changes surrounding fatherhood (Eggebeen & Knoeter, 2001). Cabrera, Tamis-LeMonda, Bradely, Hofferth and Lamb (2000) assert that it is important to determine the bi-directionality of the father-child relationship in the development of men during the transition to fatherhood.

Impact of Fatherhood on Men

An overview of literature in this area identifies research being focused on five aspects including the impact of fatherhood or parenthood on marital satisfaction and relationships; personal goals and possible selves; mental health and wellbeing; work involvement and social interactions. The impact of parenthood on marital satisfaction and relationships as well as the impact on mental health and well being has been well researched over the last few decades (Parke, 2000). Similarly, the impact on the way in which parents define and develop their personal goals and possible selves during the transition to parenthood has attracted research in recent years (Strauss & Goldberg, 1999). More contemporary research, includes the impact of fatherhood on men's involvement and obligations to their work as well as to their family (Weston, Gray, Qu & Stanton, 2004). However, little to no research has been conducted on the impact of fatherhood on men's social interactions and relationships (Eggebeen & Knoester, 2001). Each of these aspects will now be discussed in turn with some typical studies presented and explored.

Impact on Marital Satisfaction and Relationships

A vast majority of empirical research has concluded that there is a general decline in marital relationships over the transition to fatherhood (Cox, Paley, Burichnal & Payne, 1999). A study by Cox et al. (1999) investigated the impact of a first child's birth on the marriage across the transition to parenthood. A total of 140 caucasian couples were recruited from prenatal classes in the rural areas of south-eastern states of America. The outcome measures consisted of self-report questionnaires on symptoms of depression and marital satisfaction and observations of problem solving interactions during the prenatal period and at 3, 12 and 24 months after the birth of the child (Cox et al.). A prenatal interview was also conducted to determine whether the pregnancy was planned or unplanned.

The results showed that both husbands and wives reported decreasing levels of marital satisfaction over time (Cox, Paley, Burichnal & Payne, 1999). Moreover, when the pregnancy was unplanned both reported exhibiting lower levels of marital interactions (Cox et al., 1999). The birth of a girl child was reported to result in a decrease in marital satisfaction and positive interactions for both husbands and wives. However, couples were both particularly satisfied with their marriage when the husbands showed positive problem solving behaviours prenatally. An important limitation associated with this study include the sample size involving mainly Caucasian couples from a rural southern areas, thus limiting the generalisability of results. However, as most studies are done only with middle-class, well educated couples this study provides with data from lower class, less educated couples. Another limitation associated with this study was that it only concentrated on a

few factors that may impact on marital satisfaction. Furthermore, the nature of self-reports

may result in participant bias, thus influencing the effects of the findings.

A study by Levy-Shiff (1994) explored other individual and contextual factors that

impact on the marital satisfaction of both men and women. A total of 102 first time parents

were recruited through community health facilities in the metropolitan area. Data was

collected through home visits during the pregnancy period and 9 months after the birth of

the child. The participants were required to complete several self- report questionnaires of

marital adjustment, personality traits, attitudes towards parenthood, maternal and paternal

behaviours, social support and work role (Levy-Shiff, 1994). The results showed that high

levels of maternal involvement in child care contributed to the decline in marital

satisfaction. These findings were concluded to be due to the wives spending extra time in

baby care therefore, reducing the time and energy for spousal activities. Furthermore, men

who viewed themselves as nurturing, caring, and protective experienced less of a decrease

in marital satisfaction. This study has identified certain circumstances in which fathers are

unable to cope with difficult babies including their inability to value parenthood highly.

There are several limitations associated with this study including the small sample size

limiting the generalisability of results. Levy-Shiff (1994) asserted that the predictors that

were selected are not the only one that could be investigated, therefore for future research it

would be beneficial to look at other factors that would contribute to marital change across

the transition to parenthood such as the discrepancies in expectations.

Parke (2002) proposed that discrepancies in expectations may be an important

determinant of postpartum marital satisfaction. A study by Delmore-Ko, Pancer,

Hunsberger and Pratt (2000) investigated the relationship between an individual's prenatal

expectations and postnatal experience of parenthood. A total of 73 middle class caucasian couples were interviewed in their homes and separately by a female researcher during the third prenatal trimester. The participants were also required to complete questionnaires at the third trimester and at 6 and 18 months after the birth of the child. The self-report questionnaires included those on stress, depression, marital adjustment and self-esteem (Delmore et al., 2000). The results demonstrated differences between men's and women's expectations including a smaller proportion of men indicating that they were fearful about the upcoming role as a parent (Delmore et al.). Furthermore, men were found to focus more on playing with, teaching and disciplining the child, rather than how they would cope with the immediate physical and emotional demands.

There are some limitations associated with this study including the small sample size of middle class Caucasian participants, which limits generalisability. Furthermore, the absence of information regarding infant characteristics and temperaments, which have been found in previous research to be an important factor in influencing the quality of marital interactions is another limitation to this study. The use of a female interviewer for the male interviews may produce participant bias and discomfort and therefore, it may be beneficial to use a male interviewer in conducting future research. Although this study found no relationship between prenatal expectations and levels of marital satisfaction, it did highlight the differences between men's and women's expectations (Delmore-Ko, Pancer, Hunsberger and Pratt, 2000).

These studies have identified several factors contributing to the change in men's marital satisfaction and relationships including: whether the pregnancy was planned or unplanned, the gender of the child, problem solving interactions, high maternal

involvement levels with their infants as well as fathers' perceptions of parenthood (Cox,

Paley, Burichnal & Payne, 1999; Levy-Shiff, 1994). Parke (2002) suggested other reasons

for the decline in men's marital satisfaction including the physical strain of child care,

increased financial difficulty, emotional demands of new familial responsibilities and

redefinitions of roles and role arrangements. McDermid, Huston, and McHale (1990)

found greater negative impact on marital satisfaction when there was a discrepancy

between attitudes towards gender role, division of household and childcare duties.

Therefore, those couples experiencing marital difficulties, where those who held traditional

sex role attitudes but are in more egalitarian marital roles (McDermid et al., 1990).

Impact on Personal Goals and Possible Selves.

Personal goals are the consciously accessible and personally meaningful objectives

that many pursue in their daily lives (Samela-Aro, Nurmi, Saisto & Halmesmaki, 2000).

During the transition to fatherhood, men's sense of selves changes and is re-defined (Park,

2002). Possible selves are important for understanding the changes in self-concept that are

likely to occur during the transition to fatherhood (Strauss & Goldberg, 1999). Within the

transition to fatherhood, the actual parent self is evaluated and continually revisited against

the possible parent self (Strauss & Goldberg, 1999). The impact on the way in which

parents define and develop their personal goals and possible selves during the transition to

parenthood has attracted a significant amount of research in recent years (Strauss &

Goldberg, 1999)

A study by Samela-Aro, Nurmi, Saisto and Halmesmaki (2000) investigated the types

of personal goals that parents have and how they reconstruct them during the transition to

parenthood. A total of 348 women and 277 men were required to complete the Personal

Project Analysis questionnaire during the early stages of the pregnancy, and at one and

three months after the birth of the child (Samela-Aro et al., 2000). The results showed that

several of the goals reported by the parents were shared and focused on marital

relationships and home maintenance however, those goals that related to hobbies and the

self were not shared (Samela-Aro et al.). Fathers reported more achievement and property

related goals than the mothers. As this research was conducted in Finland, where women's

position in society and gender beliefs differs vastly from various other countries it therefore

posits limitations to the generalisability of the results to an Australian society. The self-

report questionnaire was simplistic in nature, as it asked for the parents to list three projects

that the parents was currently involved in. Furthermore, self- report questionnaires may

result in participant bias and may limit the effects of the results. Samela- Aro et al.

proposed that the investigations of sub and subordinate goals and of appraisal dimensions

such as importance, stress, support and accomplishment may provide with a different view

regarding the changes in goals during the transition to parenthood. Furthermore, this study

only examined the impact of the transition up to three months after the birth of the child,

however, the transition to parenthood has an impact on parents far beyond the first few

months.

A study by Hooker, Fiese, Jenkins, Morfei and Schwagler (1996) investigated two

groups of children varying in age, thus examining the impact on parenthood beyond the

first few months after the birth of the child. This study examined the impact of parenting

on the self-development of men through the construct of possible selves (hoped-for and

feared scenarios for the future (Hooker et al., 1996). The two groups of parents included

those with children under the age of 12 months (infant group) and those with children

between the ages of 2 years and 5 years (pre-school group). A total of 228 parents were required to complete the Possible Selves Questionnaire which instructed people to list their three most important hoped-for selves and their three most important feared selves (Hooker et al.). The findings demonstrated that mothers and fathers were equally likely to envision the positive side of themselves as a parent in the future. However, mothers were significantly more likely than fathers to have a feared parenting self in both groups of parents (Hooker et al.). The homogeneity of the samples limits the generalisability of these results, and therefore data from more diverse samples will increase the validity and reliability of results. Although this study compares two groups of parents with children under the age of 12 months and children between 2 and 5 year, the simplistic nature of the questionnaire limits the ability to determine more complex goals and changes in possible selves. The way in which personal goals or possible selves changes throughout the transition may provide with further insight to the impact of fatherhood on men.

A study by Strauss and Goldberg (1999) investigated new fathers' actual and possible understanding of selves during pregnancy and one year after the birth. Strauss and Goldberg (1999) defined possible selves as the ideal selves individuals would like to become and; are derived from representations of self in the past and are the cognitive manifestations of enduring goals and aspirations. A total of 56 first time fathers were required to complete pre and post natal assessments consisting of interviews and questionnaires during the last trimester of pregnancy and one year after the birth of the child. It was found that many fathers regarded their roles as fathers of greater importance than their role as a spouse. Furthermore, men's introspective evaluation of how close they were to meeting their ideal selves or possible selves were found to be related to their

adjustment to fatherhood, in terms of child – care involvement, well-being and attitudes

towards child rearing. The use of a small sample size and self report questionnaires limited

the generalisability of results. Using observational measures in addition to self report

measures may increase the validity and reliability of results. The discrepancy between the

way in which fathers viewed their actual and ideal parental roles predicted reports of

postnatal depression not only in mothers but in fathers as well (Strauss & Goldberg, 1999).

In summary, during the transition to fatherhood men's possible selves and personal

goals are changed and redefined. Research has demonstrated that many personal goals such

as those which are focused on marital relationship and home maintenance issues are often

shared between the couples (Samela-Aro, Nurmi, Saisto & Halmesmaki, 2000). However,

fathers' personal goals were found to be focused more on achievement and property related

goals (Hooker, Fiese, Jenkins, Morfei & Schwagler, 1996). Furthermore, during the

transition fathers reported that they regarded their role as a father of greater importance

than their role as a spouse (Strauss & Goldberg, 1999).

Impact on Mental Health and Wellbeing

During the transition to fatherhood, many men may experience distress, anxiety and

even post natal depression (Strauss & Goldberg, 1999). A vast amount of research has

been conducted on the impact of fatherhood on men's mental health and well-being over

the last few decades (Parke, 2000). Although research has indicated that many fathers have

been found to be ill-prepared for the impact of fatherhood, evidence has been found to

suggest that the transition provides fathers with happiness, subjective well-being and life

satisfaction (Barnett, Marshall & Pleck, 1992; Condon, Boyce & Corkindale, 2004).

Furthermore, findings further illustrate that men deal well with the transition of fatherhood

and that their anxieties resolve over time (Buist, Morse & Durkin, 2002). Moreover, research has also illustrated the importance of providing fathers with antenatal information that caters for their needs and past experiences in order to aid with their adjustment to fatherhood (Buist et al., 2002).

Most recently, a study by Condon, Boyce and Corkindale (2004) investigated the changes in mental health and well being of 212 first time fathers. The fathers were required to complete self-report questionnaires covering psychological symptom levels, lifestyle variables and sexual functioning at 23 weeks of pregnancy and followed up at 3, 6 and 12 months after the birth of the child (Condon et al., 2004). The findings demonstrated that men appeared to be ill-prepared for the impact of parenthood, that pregnancy appears to be the most stressful period for men, and therefore may trigger processes of reappraisals of lifestyle and psychological change (Condon et al.). There are however, methodological weaknesses limiting the validity and reliability of the results. Firstly, not all fathers completed the questionnaires, which may have been due to a certain amount of distress and stress experienced by men therefore resulting in sample bias. As a result many of the most distressed men may not have been adequately represented (Condon et al.). Furthermore, the absence of a control group limit the validity of the results, as it would have provided with information regarding whether there were any substantial changes across the different periods of assessment.

An Australian study by Buist, Morse and Durkin (2002) investigated the anxieties that men expressed during the transition to fatherhood, as well as the personal factors associated with that anxiety. A total of 225 first time fathers were recruited from a major hospital in Melbourne between 1995 and 1998 and interviewed at 26 weeks of the

pregnancy. The participants were then required to complete several questionnaires that

assessed their psychological status (Edinburgh Postnatal Depression Scale, Beck's

Depression Inventory, The State Anger and Anxiety scale), the quality of their relationships

and gender role stress at 36 weeks of pregnancy and one and four months postpartum (Buist

et al., 2002). The results demonstrated that fathers deal well with the transition to

fatherhood, and that their anxieties resolve over time. A small number of men were found

to be most anxious about certain aspects of their role as a father in conjunction with the

changing societal role. Buist et al. proposed that many anxieties experienced by fathers may

be missed antenatally as a greater amount of attention is given to the pregnant woman.

Therefore, these findings demonstrate the importance of presenting antenatal information to

fathers in a manner that caters for their needs and past experiences.

A study by Barnett, Marshall and Pleck (1992) investigated the relationships

between fathers' experiences in their work and family roles and their levels of

psychological distress. A total of 300 fathers in a dual-earner families completed several

questionnaires. It was found that the quality of both their work and family roles equally

affects their levels of distress (Barnett et al., 1992). However, it was concluded that

fathers' emotional involvement with their children acted as a buffer against work related

stress. The use of cross sectional data as well as solely Caucasian middle class fathers

limits the validity and reliability of results. Despite these limitations, this study provides

with evidence to suggest that the transition to fatherhood does not necessarily produce

psychological distress in fathers, but provides them with happiness, subjective well-being

and life satisfaction (Barnett et al.).

Impact on Work Involvement and Obligations

Fathers' involvement in their work may change after the transition to fatherhood. There are several conflicting issues for fathers in terms of fathers becoming more serious about their job obligations as a reality for their financial obligations to their families (Parke, 1996). On the other hand, fathers experience increased pressures to participate in child caring and rearing (Parke, 1996). As a result, Fathers' work involvement and obligations have been found to impact greatly on men (Holland, 1995). Furthermore, work obligations have been found to cause conflict for many fathers and their families. However, research has also illustrated various strategies that fathers often utilize in maintaining a balance and in managing the work-family conflict including: complementing their partner's work and family routines (Weston, Gray, Qu & Stanton, 2004), shift work, including children in their work and sharing the domestic tasks such as the transportation of children to and from schools (Holland, 1995).

A few studies have examined the impact of job demands on fathers (Russell & Hwang, 2004). A study by Repetti (1994) investigated the impact of daily job stressors on parent child interactions for a sample of 15 fathers. The fathers were required to describe their job stressors such as work load and negative workplace social interactions as well as their interactions with their children on three consecutive days (Repetti, 1994). Measures of workload were also obtained from the workplace. The results demonstrated that many fathers after a demanding day at work were found to be more behaviourally and emotionally withdrawn during their interactions with their children (Repetti, 1994). The findings also provided with evidence for a direct spill-over from negative feelings

associated with experiences at work to fathers' expression of anger and greater use of

discipline (Repetti, 1994).

Another factor that has a significant impact on the opportunities for fathers to be

involved in family life is their working hours (Russell & Hwang, 2004). A recent survey of

Australian fathers, found that despite various changes in the 'standard' working week for

full-time workers to 35 - 38 hours, many fathers' work hours have increased. However,

their satisfaction with work hours has decreased, and their preference to work fewer hours

has increased (Weston, Gray, Qu & Stanton, 2004). However, in the majority of the well-

being measures conducted, no differences were found between fathers working long hours

and those working standard hours, mainly due to the variability in the results, thus limiting

the validity and reliability of these findings (Weston et al., 2004). Weston et al. further

highlighted that the most important aspect of managing work and family was finding ways

in which work demands complement their partner's work and family routines. Robinson

(2001) asserted that fathers from different professions and family dynamics utilise and

require different ways of balancing the cost and benefits of being a father. The costs of

being a father were found to be in terms of time, energy, finance and career advancement

(Robinson, 2001).

A study by Holland (1995) investigated men's perceptions of men's experience of

fatherhood in a qualitative study, in which 40 fathers participated in ongoing discussion

groups for two hours over seven weeks. The findings highlighted various issues regarding

work and family obligations. Fathers in this study reported work as claiming most of their

available time and further indicated that their work commitments were the greatest barriers

to their involvements in their family life (Holland, 1995). Furthermore, many fathers

reported their desire to be more involved with their families. Many fathers found the work-family conflict to be very stressful, indicating their dissatisfaction with the time demand of work versus time available for their children (Holland, 1995). This study highlighted various strategies in which the fathers reported their attempts of balancing their work and family obligations including: shift work, including children in their work and sharing domestic tasks such as transporting children from schools.

An Australian study by Russell, et al. (1999), investigated the certain barriers that fathers reported to impact on their involvement with their children. A national random sample of 1,000 fathers participated in this study. The results showed that 57% of the responses given were workplace factors such as work demands and work hours. Furthermore, when the fathers were asked what support and information they needed as fathers, the two common responses were greater workplace flexibility and support and better access to advice and education (Russell et al.). This study illustrates the importance of providing fathers with workplace education and support programs as they have they have the potential to increase the level of skills and confidence of fathers.

Impact on Social Interactions and Relationships

Fatherhood may alter men's social interactions and relations in various ways, not just increasing sociability but changing the nature of their social lives (Eggebeen & Knoester, 2001). Interestingly, there has not been a vast amount of research conducted to investigate the impact of fatherhood on social interactions and relationships of fathers. A study by Eggebeen and Knoester (2001) investigated the social connections of three fathering types; men who live with their children, stepfathers, and non resident fathers. In this American study, data was drawn from the national Survey of Families and Households (1987-1988),

which represented a large national sample and used interviews and questionnaires. The findings suggest that fathers living with their children were less likely to be engaged in informal leisure activities such as visiting with a friend, going to a bar, or playing on a team sport (Eggebeen & Knoester, 2001). Furthermore, fathers living with their children were more likely to be involved in community groups, church groups and school related organizations rather than organizations focused on leisure pursuits or self improvement (Eggebeen & Knoester, 2001). However, the data is cross sectional and therefore posses the difficulties in determining differences in father effects which can be influenced by other factors such as the age of the child, their temperament or gender.

Social connections may be an integral part of the way in which men adjust to fatherhood. A study by Levy-Shiff (1999), using longitudinal research explored fathers' adjustments into fatherhood in terms of cognitive appraisals of parenting, strategies of coping and use of support resources among fathers compared with mothers. It was found that fathers used support seeking as coping strategies less frequently and had fewer support resources to use than women (Levy-Shiff, 1999). Furthermore, these resources were found to be less effective in managing the effects of parenting stress (Levy-Shiff, 1999). However, Parke (1996) found that fathers who do seek out support tend to do so from friends who are already parents as well as their own parents. Therefore, social connections with friends who have children may provide fathers with the opportunity to discuss issues that may arise with their children with other fathers or even to participate in joint activities with other families. In short, it may provide them with the essential resources during their adjustment to fatherhood. However, Holland (1995) found that opportunities for men to

engage in discussions are not as widely available, and therefore fathers will be less likely to seek out information on parenting.

<center>Future Research</center>

Although a large amount of literature has been conducted on fatherhood and parenthood in terms of the impact that fathers have on their children and their family on a whole, very little research has been conducted on the impact of fatherhood on men themselves. Therefore, for future research it would be beneficial to further investigate the way in which fatherhood impacts the social, work and personal lives of men. The social interactions and connections that many fathers develop or change during this transition may be of vital importance to the way in which fathers adjust to the transition to fatherhood, and therefore merits further investigation (Parke, 1996). Other important factors that merits further research include the way in which fatherhood impacts on men's self-esteem, self-identity and self-concept as well as the many strategies that man utilise during the transition to fatherhood.

Research on fathers has more commonly employed quantitative research methods, such as self-report questionnaires. Self-report questionnaires have several limitations in that they may result in participant bias thus limiting the reliability and validity of the results. Furthermore, Violi (2000) asserts that in order to gain insight into the way in which men think about being and becoming fathers, a qualitative analysis of their own descriptions of fatherhood may be more useful than quantitative measures.

Despite the various social changes surrounding fatherhood a vast amount of research on fatherhood has been conducted from the deficit approach rather than from the perspective of men themselves. Therefore, investigating fathers' experiences using the

theory of generativity would enable a broader understanding of fatherhood for further

reshaping of social policy and family support interventions. This will further enable to

better cater to the needs of fathers during their transition to fatherhood (Holland, 1998).

In conclusion, the face of fatherhood, in today's society is a more dynamic, complex

and an evolving reality. Throughout the last few decades there has been a major shift in the

way in which the Australian society views, defines, and conceptualises fatherhood

(Fletcher, 2002). As a result of the several social, economical and political changes in

society, a new more nurturing, available and sensitive father has evolved, however it has

not completely replaced the traditional stereotyped father (Violi, 2000). Fatherhood today

is a difficult concept to define, and may include various different types such as single

fathers, stepfathers, non resident father and absent fathers (Parke, 1996). However, despite

of the recent social changes in Australia and thus the recent focus on fathers' well being

and impact on their children and family on a whole, there has been considerably less

amount of literature exploring the way in which fatherhood impacts the lives of men.

Furthermore, positive psychology and the theory of generativity are continuing to gain

empirical validity and popularity, thus providing with a more positive approach to

investigating the experiences of men during the transition to fatherhood.

Therefore, this paper illustrates the importance of exploring the transition to

fatherhood from the experiences of men themselves in terms of the way that it impacts on

their social relationships, work, self-development and psychological well being.

Furthermore, it is also important to identify several ways in which they manage the many

difficult demands that are placed upon them during this period. This will enable and assist

in reshaping of many social policies and intervention programmes to better cater to the need

of fathers as well as to utilise and acknowledge their many strengths and positive

contributions. May it be in the reshaping of antenatal education programs to better cater to

the needs of father or the reshaping and future development of workplace and education

support programmes. With a clearer understanding and acknowledgement of the new

fatherhood that is emerging in the changing family reform, fathers and service providers

will be able to achieve and practice these goals.

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Running Head: THE TRANSITION TO FATHREHOOD

The Transition to Fatherhood: Exploration of Fathers' Understandings and Perceptions of

their Experiences of Fatherhood

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Abstract

At the beginning of the 21st century, the face of fatherhood is a dynamic and complex reality. The aim of this study was to explore father's perceptions regarding their own experiences during the transition to fatherhood. More specifically, this study aimed at exploring the adjustment to fatherhood and the resources and support systems that the fathers utilised in managing their adjustment to fatherhood. A qualitative research design, specifically an approach based on grounded theory was employed. A total of ten white Caucasian fathers, with own biological children under the age of five participated in this study and were interviewed using a set of semi-structured questions to assess the elements of the research questions. The interview was recorded, transcribed verbatim and analysed using thematic content analysis. A total of four dominant themes and nine sub-themes were identified: (1) perceptions about being and becoming a father (role perception, adjustment, influences); (2) father-child interaction (child- management issues and concerns, family-work conflict); (3) relationships (family, social networks); (4) resources and support systems (resources and support currently used, resources required). The findings provide insight into the experiences and the certain changes that the fathers experienced during their transition to fatherhood. Furthermore, this study contributes towards the understanding of how to effectively engage and empower men during their transition to fatherhood and to the development of programs that cater to the needs, strengths and personal development of fathers.

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Introduction

The concept and definition of fatherhood has evolved dramatically over the last couple of decades. The traditional father in the 20th century was conceptualised as a breadwinner, a strong but distant model for their children and a biological necessity (Park, 1996). However, in more recent years there has been a major shift in the way in which Australian society views, defines, and conceptualises fatherhood (Fletcher, 2002). Moreover, as a result of a dramatic change in family structures and dynamics over recent years there has been an increase in focus and acknowledgements of the diversity of fathers' roles in society (Edgar & Glezer, 1992). Furthermore, through social, economical and political changes in society, a new definition of fatherhood has emerged and the "new" father is portrayed as one that spends time with his children, believes in egalitarianism, is able to communicate openly and honestly with his children and partner and is able to be emotionally expressive and affectionate (Parke, 2000). However, at the beginning of the 21st century, the face of fatherhood is a more dynamic and complex reality and may include the combination of these two social representations.

The transition to fatherhood is a normative life even for many men, and one of the major interpersonal transitions during adulthood (Salmela-Aro, Nurmi, Saisto, & Halmesmaki, 2000). The transition to fatherhood may involve the successive stages of planning to have a child, pregnancy, childbirth and taking care of the child (Salmela- Aro et al., 2000). Furthermore, this transition often leads to substantial changes in an individual's life and has a considerable impact on the father's psychological development and wellbeing (Parke, 2002). However, little to no literature has reported an investigation into the impact

of fatherhood on men during the transition to fatherhood, instead focusing on the impact

fathers have on child development or on father involvement.

Traditional Research on Fatherhood

Over the last few decades a large proportion of research on fatherhood has mainly

focused on two prominent areas. Levels of father involvement and father-child interaction

have attracted a significant amount of research, investigating the duration of father-child

interactions (Lamb, 2000). However, a major limitation to this line of research is that it has

focused narrowly on the duration of those interactions using mainly quantitative research

methods, thus, neglecting to recognize and further explore the quality of these interactions.

In fact, more traditional research on fatherhood has commonly employed quantitative

research methods, such as self-report questionnaires thus resulting in participant bias and

limiting the reliability and validity of the results.

The various factors influencing fathers' involvement and interaction with their

children have also attracted a significant amount of research (Lamb, 2000). To date, the

literature has highlighted a number of interacting factors that influence paternal

involvement (Lamb & Tamis-LeMonda, 2004). An important factor impacting on paternal

involvement is motivation and may be associated with, (a) the relationships that fathers

developed with own father and mother; fathers will either model their father's involvement

or compensate for lack of involvement; (b) by reading books on child care before and

during the pregnancy and after the birth (Pleck & Masciadrelli, 2004). Research has

demonstrated that motivation alone cannot ensure increased involvement and that skills and

self- confidence are essential factors (Marsiglio, Day & Lamb, 2000). Fathers' knowledge

about child development has been found to be associated with positive interaction.

Furthermore, interventions designed to promote parenting skills among fathers have been found to increase involvement (Pleck & Masciadrelli, 2004). Another important factor of paternal involvement is the child's individual characteristics such as temperament and gender (Lamb & Tamis-LeMonda, 2004). Social support in terms of the attitudes and expectations of the mothers on their partners is another important factor (Allen & Hawkins, 1999). The diverse array of family types and socio-cultural expectations that shape paternal involvement has only just recently been recognised in the literature, therefore, further exploration of father-child relationships in diverse cultural context will aid in developing further understanding of paternal involvement (Lamb & Tamis-LeMonda, 2004).

A second line of research on fatherhood has focused on the impact of father involvement and interaction on child development (Marsigilio, Amato, Day & Lamb, 2000). Earlier research, especially when the sole responsibility of child care was left to the mother, fostered the assumption that father-child relationships had little impact on child development (Cabrera, Tamis-LeMonda, Bradley, Hofferth & Lamb, 2000). However, a recent general shift in Australian societal values resulted in the recognition of fathers' responsibilities to provide for and support their children (Fletcher, 2002). Furthermore, research proposed that father's involvement with their children was positively associated with desirable children's behaviours such as self-control, self-esteem, life skills and social and cognitive competence (Yeung, Duncan & Hill, 2000). However, more recent research has focused mainly on the effects of divorce and the absence of fathers in the lives of their children (Lamb & Tamis-LeMonda, 2004).

Conclusion drawn from this research was that paternal absence may impact on children in various ways: (a) in terms of an absence of a co-parent resulting in economic

loss and disadvantage (Lamb & Tamis-LeMonda, 2004); (b) social disapproval and social isolation of single mothers which may lead to emotional distress and less adaptive functioning (McLoyd, 1998); (c) the perceived abandonment that children experience which may cause psychological distress (Carbera et al., 2000); (d) conflict between the parents may be detrimental to the well-being and behaviours of children (Finchman, 1998).

Despite the growing interest and exploration of fatherhood in recent years, the impact of fatherhood has been neglected in the literature. Furthermore, Cabrera et al. (2000) assert that it is important to determine the bi-directionality of the father-child relationship in the development of men during the transition to fatherhood.

Impact of Fatherhood on Men

An overview of the literature investigating the impact of fatherhood on men has focused on five aspects: marital satisfaction and relationships; possible goals and possible selves; mental health and well-being; work involvement and social interactions. The impact of parenthood on marital satisfaction and relationship has been well researched over the past few decades (Parke, 2000). Several factors have been identified to contribute to the changes and decline in men's marital satisfaction and relationships including: whether the pregnancy was planned or unplanned; the gender of the child; problem solving interactions; high maternal involvement levels with their infants; fathers' perceptions of parenthood (Cox, Paley, Burichnal & Payne, 1999; Levy-Shiff, 1994); physical strain of child care; increased financial difficulty; emotional demands of new familial responsibilities; redefinitions of roles and role arrangements (Parke, 2002); and a discrepancy between attitudes towards gender role, division of household and childcare duties (McDermid, Huston, and McHale, 1990).

The impact on the way in which parents define and develop their personal goals and possible selves during the transition to parenthood has attracted a significant amount of research in recent years (Strauss & Goldberg, 1999). Research has demonstrated that: (a) many personal goals such as those which are focused on marital relationship and home maintenance issues are often shared between the couples (Samela-Aro, Nurmi, Saisto & Halmesmaki, 2000); (b) fathers' personal goals were found to be focused more on achievement and property related goals (Hooker, Fiese, Jenkins, Morfei & Schwagler, 1996).

A vast amount of research has been conducted on the impact of fatherhood on men's mental health and well-being over the last few decades (Parke, 2000). Although research has indicated that many fathers have been found to be ill prepared for the impact of fatherhood, evidence has been found to suggest that the transition provides fathers with happiness, subjective well-being and life satisfaction (Barnett, Marshall & Pleck, 1992; Condon, Boyce & Corkindale, 2004). Furthermore, findings further illustrate that men deal well with the transition of fatherhood and that their anxieties resolve over time (Buist, Morse & Durkin, 2002). Moreover, research has also illustrated the importance of providing fathers with antenatal information that caters for their needs and past experiences in order to aid with their adjustment to fatherhood (Buist et al., 2002).

A study by McElligott (2001) has found that a high proportion of men attended or wanted to attend antenatal classes with their partners (McElligott, 2001). However, those who did not attend attributed that to unsuitable session times and their belief that the classes were for their partners. Furthermore, a study by Lee and Schmied (2001) found that many

of the men reported being dissatisfied with their experience even though indicating

particular interest in attending antenatal classes.

Research on work involvement and work-family conflict has highlighted two

contrasting issues for fathers including: (a) increased stress over financial obligations to

their families and (b) increased pressures to participate in child caring and rearing (Parke,

1996). However, research has also illustrated various strategies that fathers often utilize in

maintaining a balance and in managing the work-family conflict including: complementing

their partner's work and family routines (Weston, Gray, Qu & Stanton, 2004); shift work;

including children in their work and sharing the domestic tasks such as the transportation of

children to and from schools (Holland, 1998).

Interestingly, there has not been a vast amount of research conducted to investigate

the impact of fatherhood on fathers' social interactions and relationships. However,

fatherhood may alter men's social interactions and relations in various ways, not just

increasing sociability but changing the nature of their social lives (Eggebeen & Knoester,

2001). Therefore, social connections may be an integral part of the way in which men

adjust to fatherhood. Research has demonstrated that fathers: (a) use support seeking as

coping strategies less frequently; (b) have fewer support resources to use than women

(Levy-Shiff, 1999); (c) use resources that are often less effective in managing the effects of

parenting stress (Levy-Shiff, 1999); (d) more commonly seek out support from friends who

are already parents as well as their own parents (Parke, 1996). Therefore, social

connections with friends who have children may provide fathers with the opportunity to

discuss issues that may arise with their children with other fathers or even to participate in

joint activities with other families. In short, it may provide them with the essential

resources during their adjustment to fatherhood.

Despite the various social changes surrounding fatherhood, a vast amount of research

over the past few decades has viewed fatherhood from a deficit approach. However, the

rise of the positive psychology movement highlighting the importance of investigating the

positive subjective experiences and positive individual traits and strengths has provided

with an alternative paradigm for studying fatherhood (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi,

2000). As a result of the positive psychology movement, the theory of generativity was

formulated to investigate fatherhood from a more cohesive, positive and value directed

approach (Marsigilio, Amato, Day & Lamb, 2000). The theory of generativity emphasizes

the kind of activities and work fathers do in response to the need of their children rather

than in response to the role obligations superimposed upon by society (Marsigilio et al.,

2000). These categories of father-work include: a sense of responsible caring; an attention

to fostering a fit between men's activities and children's needs; the commitment to provide

a secure, trustworthy environment and providing with resources to allow children to

develop and learn (Holland, 1998; Marsigilio et al., 2000). Therefore, this theory allows

for a broader understanding of fatherhood, in terms of the strengths that fathers' exhibit and

the positive contributions that they provide for further reshaping of family intervention

programs and social policy (Holland, 1998).

In summary, a substantial amount of research has been conducted on fatherhood over

the last few decades. A vast majority of the literature has focused on the impact that fathers

have on child development, but little to no research has been conducted to investigate the

impact of fatherhood on the men themselves. Moreover, the literature focusing on the

transition to parenthood has been conducted predominately to explore mothers' experiences during this period, neglecting the experiences of men. Furthermore, traditional research on fatherhood has more commonly used quantitative research method. However, Violi (2000) asserts that in order to gain insight into the way in which men think about being and becoming fathers, a qualitative analysis of their own descriptions of fatherhood may be more useful than quantitative measures.

Therefore, the present study aims to address the gaps that are present in the literature on fatherhood. Moreover, as the positive psychology movement and the theory of generativity on fatherhood are advancing in popularity and empirical validity this present study aims to explore the perceptions of fathers' experiences and adjustments to fatherhood through these perspectives, using qualitative methodology. Therefore, the following questions will be investigated:

- How do fathers view and perceive their experiences during the transition to fatherhood?

- How do fathers adjust and manage the challenges that may arise during this transition?

Methodology

Research Design

This study employs a qualitative research design as it provides rich and vivid data nested in real contexts (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The primary aim of a qualitative research design is to explore the meanings, perceptions, assumptions and presupposition and the connections to those meanings that people place on their experiences (Miles &

Huberman). Due to the limited research in this area, an approach based on grounded theory

was utilised. Grounded theory allows for concepts, categories and themes to emerge from

the data and not necessarily from pre-existing theory. Therefore, this approach will further

allow developing or reformulating a theory in this area of interest (Liamputtong & Ezzy,

2005).

Participants

A total of 10 fathers participated in this study and were recruited through a snow-

balling process. There was no previous knowledge of the men's experiences of fatherhood

prior to the recruitment. The fathers were all married and had own biological children

under the age of 5, thus ensuring that they have a current experience and memories of

fatherhood in this early stage of the transition to fatherhood. The participants were white

Caucasian men, aged between 27 and 40 years of age living in the metropolitan area of

Perth. Six fathers had two or three children ranging from 2 -5 years old and four fathers

had only one child ranging from 5 months to 3 years of age. The fathers came from diverse

employment backgrounds including; two builders, construction site manager, earth moving

contractor, computer programmer, social worker, sales consultant, environmental scientist

and in the army services. The partners of the participants were all the primary carers of the

children, with three of the mothers in part-time employment.

Data Collection Procedure

During the recruitments of the participants, the researcher emailed the information

letter to a number of the researcher's acquaintances, family members and work colleagues.

They in turn contacted fathers that they knew that fitted the selection criteria of being in a

marital relationship and having children under the age of five years. Once the potential

father was identified as being interested in participating in the study, the researcher

contacted each father individually. During the telephone conversation the researcher

answered any questions regarding the study. A mutually convenient time and place for the

interview were arranged with the participant. All of the interviews were conducted at the

participant's home, except for two which were conducted at their work place, thus ensuring

a non-threatening and comfortable environment.

The interview schedule included a set of 10 semi-structured questions (See

Appendix C) (Minichiello, Aroni, Timewell & Alexander, 1995). There are several

advantages to conducting semi-structured interviews including: ensuring flexibility in

developing rapport; ensuring suitability to exploring complex and personal issues and in

providing rich data embedded in a certain context (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Smith, 1995).

The semi-structured questions were funnelled from broad and general issues to more

specific ones (Minichiello et al., 1995).

The interview questions were piloted with an acquaintance of the researcher who

was also a father with a young child and within the same age group as the participants.

This allowed checking of face validity and ensuring understanding of the questions prior to

the interviews. Furthermore, the interview schedule was individually reviewed by two staff

members at the School of Psychology at Edith Cowan University, to further determine face

validity and suitability of the questions.

An information letter (See Appendix A) and a consent form (See Appendix B) were

given to each participant to read through and sign prior to the interview. The participants

were also provided with the interview questions (See Appendix C) to read through for a

couple of minutes prior to the interview. The interview began with a broad question of

"Tell me about your experiences of fatherhood" in order to introduce the participants to the topic. This question was seen as non-threatening and thus placed the participants at ease. Other questions included: "What is it like being a father?"; "How do you think you have adjusted to fatherhood?". Several probing questions such as "can you tell me more?" and "can you give me an example?" were used in order to elicit further information. All the interviews were tape recorded and were between 30 minutes to 60 minutes in duration.

At the completion of the interview, the participant was thanked for participating in the interview. Further background demographic information was gathered including the participant's age, occupation, number of children and the age of the children. The researcher's impressions and reflections of the interviews were recorded in a journal after each interview. The interviews were then transcribed verbatim and analysed by the researcher. Overall, the data was collected over a period of two months.

Ethics

Confidentiality of records and anonymity of participants were maintained during this study. Identifiable names of the participants were coded, which was known only to the researcher. Furthermore, all the data and original recordings were securely stored and password protected on the researcher's computer. The researcher's supervisor was the only other person privy to the interview transcripts. The interview recordings were erased and computer files were deleted once the interviews had been transcribed by the researcher. The participants were informed of these ethical considerations prior to the interview. The participants were also provided with contact details of Ngala Family Resource Centre and Men's Place, should they require support.

Analysis

The data obtained from the interviews were analysed using thematic content analysis. The data were displayed using a triple column design with the verbatim transcript of the interview placed in the middle column. On the left hand column, the impressions and thoughts of the researcher were recorded and on the right hand side the themes that emerged from the reading of the transcripts were recorded (Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005). The interview transcript was read several times and important words, phrases or sentences were developed into codes to provide meanings to the descriptive information (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The data were then reduced by clustering similar categories or codes and identifying the most significant themes. A question ordered matrix was utilised to aid the data reduction process, as it allows for viewing the responses of each participant to a specific question (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Findings and Interpretations

The aim of the study was to explore fathers' perceptions regarding their own experiences during the transition to fatherhood. More specifically, this study aimed at exploring their adjustment to fatherhood and the resources or support systems that the fathers utilised in order to manage their adjustments. A total of four dominant themes and nine sub-themes emerged from the analysis of ten interviews including: (1) perceptions about being and becoming a father (role perception, adjustment, influences); (2) father-child interaction (child management issues and concerns, family-work conflict); (3) relationships (family, social networks); (4) resources and support (resources and support currently used, resources/support required).

1. Perceptions about Being and Becoming a Father

    (i) Role Perceptions

Majority of the fathers perceived their roles as a father in terms of not only as a provider and breadwinner as is consistent with the traditional social presentation of fatherhood in Australian society, but also as a supporter, and one that is more actively involved with their children (Parke, 1996, 2000). Some fathers stated a more traditional presentation of fatherhood: *"Just basically, being a father, is being a provider, you got to basically provide and care for them and that and look out for their well-being"* and *"as a parent you are a teacher as well"*. Others stated their perceptions of their roles as fathers as: *"an encourager, provider um, and I suppose as a lover"* or highlighting the importance of being actively involved in the lives of his children: *"I think men are required to spend more time with their children, which I think is only beneficial"*. Therefore, the men in this study defined themselves and viewed their roles not only as the dominant 'breadwinner' father but also as the more nurturing and engaged father.

Research suggests that for many fathers the unrealistic expectations on them to simultaneously be providers and emotional and practical supports to their partners as well as become more involved with their children is a daunting reality that they are still gradually coming to grips with (Edgar & Glezer, 1992). This is evident to a certain degree in the current findings, in the sense that the fathers reported several differing definitions of fatherhood. However, it is evident that the "new nurturing father" is a reality that is emerging with in this group of men, which reflect the recent shift in social construction of fatherhood (Barclay & Lupton, 1999).

(ii) Adjustment

Buist, More and Durkin (2002) proposed that men deal well with the transition to fatherhood and that their anxieties resolve over time. Overall, nearly all of the fathers expressed positive adjustments to fatherhood but recognized that many of their priorities have changed and re-shaped to be more family orientated: "*My priorities have changed.... What I look forward to doing these days is spending time with my family and doing things around the house*". Most of the fathers indicated changes in lifestyle and social interactions as their priorities have changed and re-defined: "*It has changed my life a bit. I don't, I don't surf as much as I used to. I don't spend as much time with the guys as I used to. Our weekends are now very busy with family, family sort of orientated activities*" or "*you tend to think about more what you're going to do with Junior and your wife and probably spend more time with them, and then friends sort of become second priority*". These findings are consistent with the literature and further extend on the current literature to provide with additional information regarding the way in which fathers adjust to fatherhood.

Many of the men have also expressed personal changes in their personality: "*I find that I am not spontaneous. I'm not as selfish*" or "*I have changed, I reckon I've turned more arrogant*". All of the men also indicated personal growth and maturity: "*it is a growth for yourself as well...Another stage in your life*". Many of the fathers attributed their growth and maturity in terms of the responsibilities that they now have: "*I feel like I have grown because there are certain responsibilities now that you have to take on board*". Many of the fathers also found their experiences and adjustment of fatherhood as "*a huge learning experience for yourself*". Another father described his learning process in terms of

caring for the child: "*it was a whole new learning process. How do you bath them? How do you hold them?.*"

Interestingly, much of the current research on fatherhood has neglected to determine the changes in personality, self-identity and self-concept during the transition to fatherhood. Moreover, fathers' own perceptions of self development, maturity and growth have also been neglected in the literature. However, it is evident that men do experience various changes to their personal development and growth and merit further investigation.

(iii) Influences

Many of the fathers have acknowledged the roles of their own fathers in shaping and determining their own perceptions of being a father as well as their involvement with their children. For example, one father stated that: "*I suppose I looked at it like as seeing what my dad has done for me I suppose, and that's what I expect to be done for my children*". Another stated: "*since becoming a father myself, it has helped me to appreciate the role of my father. I admire him and I guess that I've probably modelled behaviours in him that I find admirable, so hopefully that will cascade into my sons just by modelling for them appropriate behaviours*". This is consistent with the literature proposing that an important factor impacting on paternal involvement is motivation and may be associated with the relationships that fathers developed with own fathers (Pleck & Masciadrelli, 2004). Therefore, research indicates that fathers will either model their father's involvement or compensate for lack of involvement (Pleck & Masciadrelli, 2004).

Research, has further demonstrated that skills, experiences and self- confidence are essential factors in father- child involvement and interactions (Marsiglio, Day & Lamb,2000). A few of the men discussed their own past experiences with children as being

important to their adjustment and perceptions. For example, one father stated: *"I consider myself to being a bit more experienced...I'm the youngest of three so I've seen my siblings going through it and feedback from friends about their experiences"*. Another father stated: *"I had friends who had kids or people who are much older than me who had kids.... to be able to share the experiences...it added a whole new social language"*.

2. *Father-Child Interaction*

(i) *Child Management Issues and Concerns*

A major challenge that was expressed by the majority of the men is how to manage their children. One father stated: *"Sometimes it is difficult to know how to actually parent the kids."* Others have stated that *"discipline ...at times is, the hardest factor"* or *"trying to communicate with a child is frustrating because you have to try and get their own language, and they sort of have their mind of their own as well"*. A few fathers expressed some anxieties and stress about not knowing what to do: *"no one ever gave you a manual on what to do...no one ever pulled you aside and told you what to do"*. These findings are partially supported by the literature that proposes that fathers have been found to be ill-prepared for the impact of fatherhood (Barnett, Marshall & Pleck, 1992).

Furthermore, research proposes that despite these anxieties the transition provides fathers with happiness and subjective well-being (Condon, Boyce & Corkindale, 2004). All of the fathers expressed the joy of being a father in terms of their levels of attachment and bonding to their child. For example: *"My attachment with my child is that he brings me a lot of joy. Like I love coming home and seeing him smile and reach out for me"*. Others expressed their joy of being a father as seeing the growth of their child as one father stated:

"having a son, and a family, you get to experience the joy of seeing your child growing up" and *"It's great to see her growing up. I enjoy her company greatly"*.

   (ii) Family- Work Conflict

Parke (1996) proposed that there are several conflicting issues for fathers in terms of increased stress over financial obligations to their families and increased pressures to participate in child caring and rearing. This has been found to be particularly true for all of the fathers in this current study. For example: *"I think financially it's a bit more, bit more pressure on me"*. Some fathers have also indicated that they had to change jobs or increase their work hours in order to provide for their children: *"trying to get some more reliable income in, so I took a job working for someone else now, which is a bit less stress and a bit better money which makes a big difference"*.

Research has indicated that many fathers, after a demanding day at work, were found to be more behaviourally and more emotionally withdrawn during their interaction with their children (Repetti, 1994). This has not been found to be true for the group of men in this study. In fact, many have indicated that they enjoyed their interaction with their children when they returned from work, finding it rewarding. As one father stated: *"even if you go to work and have a hard day, to come home and see the kids at the window is probably the greatest thing... It makes it all worth it.* This is consistent with a study by Barnett, Marshell and Pleck (1992) who concluded that father's emotional involvement with their children acted as a buffer against work related stress.

All of the fathers expressed that the biggest factor impacting their involvement with their children is their work obligations: *"I think that I can get involved in a lot more things with them... Work sometimes takes me a way from that"* and *"you have to try and balance*

work and you have to do extra working hours to try and bring the money home to look after

the kids and then you want to have time to look after the kids". This is consistent with

research on the impact of work involvement and obligation on fathers' adjustment to

fatherhood. Russell and Hwang (2004) proposed that fathers' working hours are a

significant factor that impacts on their involvement in family life. Furthermore, a study by

Holland (1995) found that many men in their study reported work as claiming most of their

available time and indicated that their work commitments were the greatest barriers to their

involvement with their children.

All of the fathers have also recognized that they tend to spend more time with their

children over the weekend. *"I'm quite busy with work so I try to have my weekends to look*

after my daughter". Furthermore, many of the fathers have indicated that they included

their children in day to day activities in order to increase their involvement with them, as

one father stated: *"when I go do the shopping I bring him with me… Like if I have to do*

work, I'll bring them with me and make it fun, like if I am outside cleaning the car, I'll

make it fun and bring the kids and they sort off muck around whilst I am cleaning the car.

They will get the sponge and help me, making it a fun thing instead of making it a chore, so

I make it fun with the kids, so that gives me that extra time with them as well". Research

has indicated that many fathers often include children in their work and shared domestic

tasks in order to balance and manage the work-family conflict, and is supported by the

current findings (Weston, Gray, Qu & Stanton, 2004). The current findings further extend

on the literature and propose that many fathers balance the work-family conflict by

managing their time effectively, and by finding the time, mainly on the weekend to spend

with their children.

The current findings from this study are also consistent with the theory of generativity regarding certain generative work that many men do to contribute to the well-being of their children (Holland 1998). One of the father-work categories that have been defined is the attention to fostering a fit between men's activities and children's needs (Marsigilio, Amato, Day & Lamb, 2000). As the fathers included children in their day to day activities, they did not only increase their involvement with their children, but also contributed to their children's development and growth. As one father stated: *"If I'm doing some building, he's got his tools and he bangs nails in. That keeps him occupied and gives him a sense of achievement like he's contributing."*

3. Relationships

   (i) Family

All of the fathers indicated that their relationships with family members have changed. Some indicating that the relationships with their families have improved, in particular with own parents: *"I think my relationship with my family has gotten stronger... definitely with my father more than anything"*. Some fathers attributed the changes to their relationships with their parents in terms of providing them with grand children: *"I think it has definitely changed my relationship with my parents... they have grand- children to look after now, to dote over and to enjoy and to nurture and to educate as well"*. The fathers also reported changes in relationships with siblings and extended family: *"I think I have become closer with brothers and sisters in law ... we all get together and the kids spend their time together... we spend more time, sort of catching up with the family than we ever did before.*

A vast majority of research has concluded that there's a general decline in marital relationships over the transition to fatherhood (Cox, Paley, Burichnal & Payne, 1999). However, all the men reported changes in their relationships but not necessarily a decline in their love or satisfaction with their partner as research suggests. For example: *"Well our relationship is now shared really. ...it hasn't changed our affection for each other or anything like that at all, I guess it does give us more of a common goal, and you know our lives does revolve around our kids, but between the two of us it hasn't changed."* Some of the men also reported that they have become closer to their partners: *"we have become closer, because of the better communication"*. A couple of the fathers acknowledged their difficulties with their partners in terms of *"lack of time with each other, the tired issue not just for social interaction but for physical interaction"*. This is consistent with the literature indicating that high maternal involvement in chid care reduces their time and energy for spousal activities (Levy-Shiff, 1994)

(ii) Social Networks

Research has proposed that fatherhood may alter men's social interactions and relations, not just by increasing sociability but changing the nature of their social lives (Eggebeen & Knoester, 2001). All the fathers indicated that they have grown closer to friends that have children and apart from those who are single. For example: *"I guess the bulk of my single friends and former drinking buddies, they're just not really on the scene anymore. I mean they're always going to be friends to touch base with but the reality is that we're in different worlds now"* and *"I feel closer to my friends that have children now. I think that we've got a similar bond"*. These findings are partially consistent with the literature in terms of fatherhood changing men's social lives, but not necessarily in terms of

increasing their sociability. In fact, a few of the fathers have indicated that their sociability

has decreased as their priorities have changed to become more family centred: *"you tend to*

think about more what you're going to do with Junior and your wife and probably spend

more time with them, and then friends sort of become second priority." Therefore, the

current findings extend on the literature to describe which relationships have changed and

how they have changed, developed or progressed.

(4) Resources and Support

(i) Resources and Support Currently Utilised

A study by Levy- Shiff (1999) found that fathers used support strategies less

frequently and had fewer support resources to use than women. However, research has also

indicated that fathers who do seek out support tend to do so from friends who are already

parents as well as their own parents (Parke, 1996). Nearly all of the fathers reported that

their families have provided them not only with financial support but also with emotional

support. *"I spoke to my family, especially my mum and dad and my brother, and when times*

would get tough they would help me out". Some of the fathers have indicated that they

have support from friends: *"my friends help a lot, especially if I have any problems"* and

"I've got close friends and most of them bar one are parents anyway, they give advice on

things, little bits here and there". This is consistent with current literature in terms of

seeking support from friends and family.

A common resource that many of the fathers utilised during their transition was

antenatal education. However, many indicated that they found the classes to being geared

more towards their partners: *"I went to that one, and that one only I suppose...it was good,*

it was mainly focused on the women so it really didn't involve us fathers too much , for my

wife, I was there to give my wife support so, yeah I found it good, in the sense that I found

out more about women and what they go through the pregnancy ... I suppose what to

expect ... It would have been good if it catered a bit more to first time fathers". Buist,

Morse and Durkin (2002) proposed that many anxieties experienced by fathers may be

missed antenatally as a greater attention is given to the pregnant women. Therefore, Buist

et al. (2002) highlights the importance of presenting antenatal information in a manner that

caters for their needs and past experiences

Many of the fathers, nevertheless, reported that they were satisfied with the classes,

in terms of it being a learning experience as well as mean of sharing experiences with

others. For example: *"I did learn more then I did know just from being told before hand*

but yeah it did help out... You get to share the experience with other people". These

findings do not fully reflect current research proposing that many fathers are dissatisfied

with their experience of antenatal classes (McElligott, 2001). Furthermore, the findings

extend beyond the current research studies to indicate why they do attend antenatal

sessions. Some fathers indicated that they attended antenatal classes primarily to support

their partners: *I went to all the antenatal classes, every single one of them ...I was there to*

encourage and just to be there as a support".

(ii) Resources Required

When asked what they think would be beneficial for them to aid with the transition

to fatherhood, a very dominant theme was their need or wish for more *"financial support*

from the government". Some fathers indicated that they would like to have more

information regarding child management: *"probably would have been interested in getting*

some sort of information to read and see what was on offer. " Interestingly, when asked

whether they would participate in a fathers' group, much like a mothers' group, many said that they would not be interested. Some of their reasons were: *"I have enough friends that have kids and I think that I am too busy and I wouldn't be able to do it anyways"* or *I don't feel like I need it personally...as I do have my circle of friends which support me."* Therefore, it is evident that many of the men in this group utilised their support systems and resources effectively. This may not reflect the research indicating that resources utilised by fathers were not effective in managing the effects of parenting stress (Levy-Shiff, 1999). Furthermore, the findings in this current study extends upon previous research to highlight the importance of social connections for fathers, as it provides them with opportunities to discuss issues and participate in joint activities with other fathers or families.

Conclusion

This current study has provided with insight into the way in which fathers' perceived their roles as a father; their adjustment to fatherhood and the influences and past experiences that impacted on these perceptions. Interestingly, it was found that this group of men had reported positive adjustment to fatherhood, however indicating changes to their priorities and changes to their lifestyle as their priorities have changed; changes in their personality and increased personal maturity and growth. These findings are consistent with the literature and further extend on the current literature to provide with additional information regarding the way in which fathers adjust to fatherhood (Buist, More & Durkin, 2002). However, much of the current research on fatherhood has neglected to determine the changes in personality, self-identity and self-concept during the transition to fatherhood. Moreover, fathers' own perceptions of self development, maturity and growth

have also been neglected in the literature. However, it is evident that men do experience

various changes to their personal development and growth and merit further investigation.

This study also highlights the importance of the roles of their own fathers and past

experiences in shaping and determining their own perceptions of being a father as well as

their involvement with their children. This is consistent with the literature proposing that an

important factor impacting on paternal involvement is motivation and may be associated

with the relationships that fathers developed with own fathers (Pleck & Masciadrelli, 2004).

Furthermore, research, has further demonstrated that skills, experiences and self-

confidence are essential factors in father- child involvement and interactions (Marsiglio,

Day & Lamb,2000).

Another important finding in this study is that for this group of fathers' child

management and discipline was found to be a major concern and issue in their interaction

with their children. Furthermore, it was found that the biggest factor impacting their

involvement with their children was their work obligations. This is consistent with the

current literature proposing that father's working hours is a significant factor that impacts

on their involvement in family life and that work commitments were the greatest barriers to

the father-child involvement (Holland, 1995; Russell & Hwang, 2004). However, despite

the literature claiming that fathers tend be more behaviourally and more emotionally

withdrawn during their interaction with their children after a hard and demanding day at

work (Repetti, 1994), this has not been found to be true for the group of men in this study.

In fact, it was found that the fathers in this group enjoyed their interaction with their

children when they returned from work, finding it rewarding. This is consistent with a

study by Barnett, Marshell and Pleck (1992) who concluded that father's emotional

involvement with their children acted as a buffer against work related stress.

This current study further highlights the several strategies that fathers employed in

order to increase their interactions and involvement with their children. It was found that

the fathers tended to spend more time with their children over the weekend and included

their children in day to day activities in order to increase their involvement. This is

consistent with the literature indicating that that many fathers often include children in their

work and shared domestic tasks in order to balance and manage the work-family conflict,

and is supported by the current findings (Weston, Gray, Qu & Stanton, 2004). However,

the current findings further extend on the literature and propose that many fathers balance

the work-family conflict by managing their time effectively, and by finding the time,

mainly on the weekend to spend with their children.

The current findings from this study are also consistent with the theory of

generativity regarding certain generative work that many men do to contribute to the well-

being of their children (Holland 1998). One of the father-work categories that have been

defined is the attention to fostering a fit between men's activities and children's needs

(Marsigilio, Amato, Day & Lamb, 2000). As the fathers included children in their day to

day activities, they did not only increase their involvement with their children, but also

contributed to their children's development and growth.

An important finding in this study is that many of the father reported changes to

their relationships with family and friends. Furthermore, the fathers have indicated that

their relationships with family members in particularly with own parents have improved.

Furthermore, the fathers also reported improved changes in relationships with siblings and

extended family. Although a vast majority of research has concluded that there's a general

decline in marital relationships over the transition to fatherhood (Cox, Paley, Burichnal &

Payne, 1999), this was not evident in this current study. The men in this group reported

changes in their relationships but not necessarily a decline in their love or satisfaction with

their partner as research suggests.

Interestingly, the findings in this current study have highlighted the several support

systems and resources that many fathers have utilised during their transition to fatherhood.

It was found that the fathers utilised and received support from family member and friends

and that it was an effective way for managing their stress and anxiety. This may not reflect

the research indicating that resources utilised by fathers were not effective in managing the

effects of parenting stress (Levy-Shiff, 1999). Furthermore, the findings in this current

study extends upon previous research to highlight the importance of social connections for

fathers, as it provides them with opportunities to discuss issues and participate in joint

activities with other fathers or families.

Limitations

Although the findings from this study offer insight into the experiences of fathers

and their use of support systems and resources, there are some limitations that may

influence the validity and reliability of these findings. Firstly, the participants were white

Caucasian men, therefore limiting the generalisability of findings to other cultures and

ethnic groups. Furthermore, it may be that only those who were experiencing positive

adjustment and experiences to fatherhood may have volunteered to participate in this study,

thus resulting in participant bias and therefore, limiting the validity and reliability of the

findings.

During many of the interviews, it was evident that for many of the fathers this was the first time that they have actually thought about this topic, therefore many had difficulties in expressing themselves. As a result, this may have resulted in further participants' bias, in terms of their co-operation and willingness to provide with responses to the questions. However, with the ample amount of data gathered, and with the dominance of themes found, it seems unlikely that this influenced the findings of this study. It may be that it has provided many fathers with further insight into their own experiences.

Implications

The findings in this current study provides with insight into the positive experiences and the certain changes that many of the fathers experiences during this transition to fatherhood. This may be useful to many clinicians and policy makers in developing programs for fathers that cater to their needs, strengths and personal development. Furthermore, this study contributes towards the understanding of how to effectively engage and empower men during their transition to fatherhood.

The findings have indicated that fathers are requiring resources to support and aid them in their transition to fatherhood. As the group of men in this study have indicated that they have attended antenatal classes in preparation for fatherhood and have been somewhat satisfied with the learning experiences that they have acquired. Furthermore, as the general consensus regarding antenatal classes reported was that they were geared towards the women, therefore, it is important to present and provide with antenatal information in a manner that caters for their needs and past experiences.

Future Directions

Although a large amount of literature has been conducted on fatherhood and

parenthood in terms of the impact that fathers have on their children and their family on a

whole, very little research has been conducted on the impact of fatherhood on men

themselves. Therefore, for future research it would be beneficial to further investigate the

way in which fatherhood impacts the social, work and personal lives of men. More

specifically, it may be beneficial to investigate the changes in personality, self-identity and

self-concept during the transition to fatherhood as well as fathers' own perceptions of self

development, maturity and growth as this has been neglected in the literature.

As the social interactions and connections that many fathers develop or change

during this transition have been found, in this study to be of vital importance to the way in

which fathers adjust to the transition to fatherhood, it therefore merits further investigation.

Furthermore, it would also be beneficial to further investigate the resources that fathers

utilise and determine whether or not they are effective in aiding fathers in the transition to

fatherhood. Furthermore, investigation into antenatal classes and its impact on fathers will

be beneficial.

Despite the various social changes surrounding fatherhood a vast amount of research

on fatherhood has been conducted from the deficit approach rather than from the

perspective of men themselves. Therefore, investigating fathers' experiences using the

theory of generativity would enable a broader understanding of fatherhood for further

reshaping of social policy and family support interventions. This will further enable to

better cater to the needs of fathers during their transition to fatherhood (Holland, 1998).

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Appendix A

Information Letter

Project Title: The Transition to Fatherhood: Exploration of First Time Fathers'

Understandings of their Experiences of Fatherhood.

Dear Participant,

My name is Yael Abitbol and I am a student at Edith Cowan University, completing a BA Honours Psychology research project. This research project aims to explore how men view and perceive their own experiences of fatherhood and the support system that men employ during the transition to fatherhood. This study has the approval of the Faculty of Community Services, Education and Social Sciences Ethics Committee (supervised by Associate Professor Lisbeth Pike). I value your unique contribution and experiences to this study and to the further understanding of fatherhood.

The interview will be conducted at a mutually acceptable place and time to be arranged with the researcher and will last for approximately 45 minutes. During this interview, you will be asked to describe your experiences of becoming and being a father and the certain support systems that you have employed during this period. All information gathered will be treated as strictly confidential. The interview will be audio taped and the tape of your interview will be erased. Neither your name nor any other details that may identify you will be used in the research project.

Please understand that your participation in this research is voluntary and you may withdraw from the study or decline to answer any questions at any time. I do not anticipate any discomfort or risks involved in this interview process. Should you do experience any difficulties please do not hesitate to contact Men's Line at 1300 78 99 78 or Ngala Family Resource Centre at 1800 111 545. I hope that this will be a positive and enlightening experience for you.

I would like to thank you for your interest and support. Should you have any questions or concerns regarding this project, please do not hesitate to contact myself (0401 120 256, yael_abitbol@hotmail.com) or my supervisor Dr Lisbeth Pike (6304 5535) at the School of Psychology. Should you wish to speak to someone independent of this study please contact Dr Craig Speelman (Head of School of Psychology at ECU) on 6304 5724.

Yours Sincerely,

Yael Abitbol

Appendix B

Consent Form

Project Title: The Transition to Fatherhood: Exploration of First Time Fathers'

Understandings of their Experiences of Fatherhood.

I_____ (the participant) have read the

information provided and any questions I have asked have been answered to my

satisfaction.

I understand that all information gathered in this study will be treated as strictly

confidential and you will not be identified.

I understand that the interview will be tape recorded, and erased once the interview is

transcribed.

I agree to participate in this study, realizing that I may withdraw at any time, without

explanation or penalty.

Participant_____ Date_____

Researcher_____ Date_____

Appendix C

Interview Schedule

- Tell me about your experiences of fatherhood? What is it like being a father?

- How have you changed since becoming a father?

- How do you think you have adjusted to being a father?

- How did you perceive your role as a father before the birth of your child? How do you perceive your role now?

- How would you describe your relationships with your family now?

- How would you describe your involvement with your children?

- What have been the most difficult aspects for you during this transition?

- How did you manage these difficult situations?

- What do you think will be beneficial for you and your family to help you during this transition?

- What have been the best aspects of being a father?

Examples of probes:

- Can you give me examples of that experience?

- Can you tell me a little more about that?