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Exploring Fatherhood from a Man's Perspective

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Clinical Psychology

Coventry University, School of Health and Social Sciences
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May, 2004

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Acknowledgments

I would like to thank the fathers who shared their experiences with me despite the demands on their time and to those partners who took on those demands while the interview took place. To my colleagues in the health services who helped move this research forward. To Dr Amanda Gatherer and Dr Helen Brittain for their support, advice and humour throughout the process and Dr David Giles, whose expertise and reassurance eased the burden on numerous occasions.

Thanks to all my family and friends who I love dearly who have supported and encouraged me to follow my dreams, particularly Ian, who shares my life and my passion for learning, Nic and Alex, who continue to teach me about motherhood and myself, Dr Amanda Sacker without whom I may not have had the courage to 'go for it' and Carol, who always has time to listen.

Special thanks to Charlotte, who shared this journey with me and from whom I have learnt so much.

Declaration

This research was carried under the supervision of Dr. Amanda Gatherer (Clinical Director, Coventry University), Dr David Giles (Senior Lecturer, Coventry University) and Dr. Helen Brittain (Clinical Psychologist, North Warwickshire PCT).

This research is all the candidate's own work. None of the material has been used before, or has been submitted to any other university. To date none of the individual papers have been published. Chapters 1, 2 and 3 are going to be submitted to the journal *Fathering: A journal of Theory, Research, and Practice about Men as Fathers*, for publication (Appendix A). Proposed authorships are as follows:

Chapter 1:

Dabney, J. & Gatherer, A. Hurdles and barriers to developing and maintaining paternal involvement.

Chapter 2:

Dabney, J., Giles, D., Gatherer, A & Brittain, H. The emotional impact of being a new father: A Grounded Theory study.

Chapter 3:

Dabney, J. & Giles, D. Communicating using narrative on an internet discussion site for fathers.

Summary

Exploring Fatherhood from a Man's Perspective

The aim of the research was to explore fatherhood from a man's perspective. How do fathers respond emotionally when they experience fatherhood for the first time? What influences these responses? When fathers feel unable to share difficulties with their partner do internet discussion sites provide an effective medium for fathers to access support and advice? Given the important role fathers play in the lives of their children, what factors might lead them to disengage and cease contact? These questions are addressed within the thesis.

Chapter 1 provides a review of the literature and aims to focus on exploring the father-child relationship from the father's perspective and potential hurdles and barriers fathers may have to negotiate when developing and maintaining involvement with their child.

Chapter 2 details the main paper. This Grounded Theory study explores the salient emotional experiences of nine fathers, three to six months after the birth of their first child. Emotional responses appear to be influenced by the father's personal history and the social and interpersonal context. Feelings of attachment to the child are linked to the early attachment experience at birth and subsequently to interplay between instability, turmoil and positive change or growth. Methodological issues and clinical implications are discussed.

Chapter 3 details the brief paper. A topic area on an on-line internet discussion forum for fathers was examined in detail using narrative analysis. Findings revealed evidence of significant emotional expression, yet limited empathic emotional or informational support. Two types of contributors were identified, those using a 'conversational' dialogue and those only expressing their views/experience. Future research and developments within the internet are discussed.

Chapter 4 offers a reflective review of entering a father's world as a researcher and includes reflections on the research process, my role as a researcher and the research findings.

CHAPTER 1:

HURDLES AND BARRIERS TO DEVELOPING AND MAINTAINING PATERNAL INVOLVEMENT

Abstract

Research has established that fathers have an important role in the lives of their children (Lamb, 1997) and in the relationship between mother and child (Trowell & Etchegoyen, 2002). Literature assessing the importance of the child to the father tends to focus on the impact of divorce and the father's experience of loss in the quality and quantity of paternal involvement. This review of the literature aims to focus on exploring the father-child relationship from the father's perspective and potential hurdles and barriers fathers have to negotiate when developing and maintaining involvement with their child. The importance of societal attitudes to paternal involvement, the values and beliefs of the mother, the psychological effects and practical constraints of separation, the implications of remarriage and demographic predictors to disengagement are discussed. Limitations of the research literature and potential directions for further research are offered.

1 Introduction

The initial aim of the literature review was to examine the literature relating to a father's perspective of being a father. This perspective was seen to include the father-child relationship, the relationship the father has with the mother of the child, being a father within an occupational/social sphere and psychological and personal issues. The studies which emerged from a preliminary search of the literature tended to focus on a number of specific areas. These included, a mothers' view of the involvement of the father and how a father might influence both a child's normative developmental process and the development of later psychopathology. A large proportion of the literature was related to the effects on family members of separation and divorce and within this area were many studies exploring statistical, survey and demographic trends of paternal involvement prior to and following the break down of the parental relationship. A small number proposed and/or tested out theoretical explanations of paternal involvement.

In terms of the father's perspective of being a father there was a noticeable absence of studies focusing on how, for example, the father-child relationship might impact on the positive development or mental well-being of a father. However, there were a limited number of qualitative studies which provided fathers with an opportunity to express their views and experiences, with the majority of these studies being located within the separation and divorce literature.

At this point it became evident that a father's lack of involvement, their absence and disengagement, both while residing with their child and following separation and divorce were recurrent themes for fathers themselves and within the literature

as a whole. Whilst continuing to retain a view from the father perspective, these themes stimulated a number of questions which served to narrow the focus of the literature review presented here. These were, why fathers leave their children, the impact this might have on the father, what factors seem likely to be predictive of engagement/disengagement and theoretical explanations of father involvement. With this specific focus, related material was organised under the title heading: hurdles and barriers to developing and maintaining paternal involvement.

In summary, literature selected for the purpose of addressing this review included, general demographic/statistical papers, literature addressing societal attitudes to paternal involvement, psychoanalytic thinking on a father's role whether present or absent, studies of separation and divorce which include a number where fathers' self-report on their experiences and literature relating to specific models and theories of paternal involvement.

1.1.2 Introduction to Literature Review

There is little doubt that fathers have a positive contribution to make to their children (for extensive review see Lamb, 1997). Positive paternal involvement throughout childhood and adolescence has been associated with cognitive functioning (Nugent, 1991), competence, empathy, self-confident, less stereotypical behaviour in terms of gender roles (Radin, 1994), intelligence, academic achievement, social maturity, more self directed behaviour in girls (Gottfried, Gottfried & Bathurst, 1988), a reduced incidence of clinical depression, eating and anxiety disorders (Caron, 1995; Scarf, 1995; Silverstein & Rashbaum, 1994; Warshak, 1992) and fewer behavioural problems in boys (Mosley & Thomson, 1995). Indeed a number of studies have suggested that if boys have little or no relationship with their fathers and continue to live with their 'unmarried' mothers after divorce they are more likely to be more socially immature, aggressive, delinquent, defiant and psychologically or emotionally disturbed compared to their male peers (Buchanan, Maccoby & Dornbusch, 1997; Furstenberg & Cherlin, 1991; Hetherington, 1991; Parke, 1996). It has also been suggested that a father can provide a more positive and assertive model to 'protect' a child from a mother who is clinically depressed (Buchanan & Seligman, 1994). There are other factors besides the loss of contact with a father per se which can impact on children including, changes in finances, location away from a support network, the level of monitoring of children's activities and firm consistent control. It could also be argued that difficult children can also put a strain on adult partnerships. In addition, many emotional, behavioural and academic problems of children and parenting skills in adults may predate the time of separation. It is important to note that although children from divorced families are two to three

times more likely to have severe psychological and behavioural problems than those from non-divorced families, 70% to 80% of these children become reasonably competent and well adjusted individuals following a period of adjustment (Hetherington, 1993).

Within the psychoanalytic literature, Trowell and Etchegoyen (2002) provide an explanation of how the presence of a 'father' figure contributes to the emotional development of both the child and the parents from the formation of the extended family unit. The father provides the mother and child with some relief from each other, with a focus outside of their "symbiotic-merged relationship", giving the child another person of significance and vice versa. This can free mother and child to feel negative towards each other because there is someone else there to look after them (the baby)". A father can "give weight to the child's separate reality" (p103), enable a discovery of the self by seeing the relationship between its parents, provide a prototype for 'a relationship' and a parental model of communication (Trowell & Etchegoyen, 2002).

The father has an important role within an intact family. However, this is difficult to maintain when divorce or separation occurs. There is considerable evidence that the continuation of a close father-child relationship is enormously beneficial to the child (see meta-analysis by Amato & Keith, 1991). However, research has confirmed that following parental divorce or separation there is a decrease in the quantity and quality of contact between children and their non-custodial fathers over time. A number of studies have shown a pattern of modest contact immediately after the separation, followed by a sharp decline in a father's involvement in child rearing after around twelve months (Arditti & Allen, 1993;

Dudley, 1991; Kruk, 1991; Stephens, 1996; Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980) and as time progresses (Bloom, Hodges & Caldwell, 1983; Jacobson, 1978; Koch & Lowery, 1984).

Statistics provided by the National Survey of Children (Furtenberg, Morgan & Allison, 1987) and the National Survey of Families and Households (Seltzer, Schaefer & Charng, 1989; Seltzer, 1991) detail the extent of paternal 'disengagement.' It appears that for 52% of divorced families with children aged 11-16 the last contact between fathers and their children had been at least one year before. One quarter had not had contact over the previous five years, with the proportion rising to 64% among those separated for 10 years or more. On average only one out of every six children had weekly contact with their father following divorce or separation (Furstenberg, Nord, Peterson & Zill, 1983). Seltzer (1991) reported that post divorce contact appeared to have increased over the 1980s; however, his figures confirm that the vast majority of children (60%) will have little or no contact with their fathers. It is important to acknowledge that there will be times when the involvement of the father has a direct or indirect negative impact on the children, particularly in cases of abuse or domestic violence and in these cases the primary consideration is safety rather than continued involvement.

In summary, research has established that fathers have an important role in the lives of their children (Lamb, 1997) and they can also enhance the relationship between the mother and child (Trowell & Etchegoyen, 2002). However, any causal link between a child's tenuous or absent relationship with their father and later psychopathology may ignore a number of social and environmental factors and characteristics of the relationship predating separation. The literature, which

focuses predominantly on the impact of divorce, indicates that the majority of fathers (and their children) experience a loss in the quantity and quality of paternal involvement. What can the literature tell us about the hurdles and barriers a father might experience which impede the development and maintenance of a relationship with their child?

1.2 The Resident Father

1.2.1 Society's attitude to father involvement

Despite the evidence of the importance of fathers, the way a society views the role of father and fatherhood may serve to demean its status. As a consequence this may present an unworthy goal to which a father might aspire. Fagin and Hawkins (2001) describe social and economic obstacles to father involvement created by employment and work policies and practices and Robertson and Williams (1998) argue that to have any effect on the relationship between fathers and their children this will require a massive change in the 'whole macho culture of the workplace'. This being said, many fathers may view their work as an escape from the demands of home life, as a source of fulfilment and a way of maintaining a robust self esteem. They may enjoy a position of authority and power within the work place and enjoy the role of 'provider' within the family. One might question to what extent the 'macho culture' is driven by father's themselves, within a society which demeans their status within the family.

A review of parenting literature reveals a negative representation and the reinforcement of a societal belief that fathers are naturally inferior to women when

caring for children, that they play a subordinate role in parenting and are family providers whose family involvement is voluntary (Lamb, 1997). In a review of parenting manuals, fathers tend to be portrayed as inadequate, jealous, reluctant and rejected (Luchetti, 1999). On the other hand, mothers are often idealised and their love presented as the most perfect a child can receive (Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1997). These idealised beliefs about motherhood and a father's inferiority as a parent appear to be reflected in divorce laws with almost 90% of mothers in the United States being awarded full custody following divorce (Nielsen, 1999). Fathers do not seem to contest mothers' claim to parenting superiority (Warin, Solomon, Lewis & Langford, 1999) and the importance of the father's role appears reliant on the attitude of the child's mother to that role. It is possible that fathering is more sensitive to the influence of interpersonal or environmental factors because Western cultural norms reinforce and support the importance of the mother-child relationship (Fagan & Hawkins, 2001).

One could suggest that there is pressure from a range of sources on mothers to continue to fulfil the role of resident carer. There may also be a lack of trust in the father by the mother, and a lack of confidence by the father, that they will be able to take on more responsibility for their child, if this has been delegated to the mother in the past. The mother may simply have a sense of wanting to protect her child rather than lack of trust being a result of any animosity towards her ex-partner. Given greater education, economic independence and employment of women and an increasing acceptance that fathers can be nurturers to their children, it is possible that there will evolve a change in the general perception of marriage, divorce and single parent families.

1.2.2 Mother as facilitator or gatekeeper to the father-child relationship

Winnicott (1957) argued that there is “no baby without a mother and usually it depends on what mother does about it whether father does or does not get to know his baby” (p.81). A woman may have difficulty promoting a relationship between her partner and her baby, particularly during the first months after birth. Co-parenting requires both parents to tolerate the link between their partner and the baby which excludes them, with the father being most at risk of exclusion. According to a psychoanalytic perspective, how well either parent is able to manage this change in dynamics is influenced by how their own parents communicated when they were very young infants. It is suggested that these experiences are stored at an unconscious pre-verbal level (Balint, 1993). It seems a mother’s relationship with the child’s father will be partially influenced by her own expectations (conscious and unconscious) of the role of the father and how she experienced her own father, as mediated by her mother, back through generations. This inability to include the father (or child) is thought to generate feelings of exclusion, hatred, envy of the fused pair, and loss. Therefore, how the child experiences his or her father will depend on how the mother presents him to the infant (Trowell & Etchegoyen, 2002) and even though a father may be physically present he may be vulnerable to denigration in his absence (Nielsen, 1999), and, as McDougall (1989) illustrates, may be excluded to the point of being “lived as symbolically lost, absent or dead in the child’s inner world” (p209). It is suggested that throughout the course of the child’s development a mother can explicitly or implicitly encourage or discourage the child to engage with the father (Beebe, Lahmann & Jaffe, 1997). Trowell and Etchegoyen (2002) propose that both the

mother and/or father may experience difficulties negotiating a new family structure if either one has had a very close relationship with their own mother or where their father has been excluded or denigrated.

The psychoanalytic perspective offers a useful contribution in terms of understanding possible dynamics which may impede the development of a father-child attachment; however, it implies a recurrent pattern of interaction immune to a rapid succession of significant social changes which have taken place of the past thirty years affecting expectations of one's role as a mother or a father and the views of others to those roles.

In a UK study of fathers, work and family life, Warin et al. (1999) identified pressures on men to be 'more involved fathers' while at the same time both parties having the assumption that parenting is something women do better. Women wanted greater involvement from the father, but only on their terms. The authors noted mothers were reluctant to give up their more involved role and suggested that the "authority of the mother-carer role depends on a devaluing of men's contribution to parenting". They noted that the paternal role was on the whole confined to aspects of fathering that are "visible, allowed and acknowledged including play, football, outings and having fun" and suggested that women often acted as "gatekeepers, keeping men in their place or on the sidelines" of the family, within a role which appeared to be closely linked to their role as provider which served to earn them their place within the family. This provider role places fathers in a position of authority, a role they valued and wished to retain. However, there was a conflict in terms of the responsibility to provide *and* to be involved which created a "double burden" for many fathers (Warin, et al., 1999; p. 38).

A limitation of many studies of father involvement is that the focus of researchers fails to capture the many points of contact and interaction that fathers have with their children. These would include brief moments of contact, when providing transport, coaching with sports activities and playing games. These are often not recorded which may serve to undervalue and under represent paternal involvement.

In summary, society's attitudes to fatherhood may be reflected in the structure and constraints of the workplace, within popular literature and in the child custody laws and practices. It is also suggested that Western values reinforce and support the importance of the mother-child dyad, which validates her authority to facilitate or restrict a father's involvement with his child, a process which appears to be dependent on how she perceived the role of father. A trans-generational dynamic of mother-child, father-child attachment behaviour, which Trowell and Echevoyen (2002) propose as being predetermined, may in fact be influenced by significant social and cultural developments, as has been experienced in Western culture over the past 30 years. Mothers may experience a number of pressures from different sources to fulfil the role of primary carer within the family unit and men may feel reluctant to take on a more active involvement and responsibility. However, research assessing paternal involvement may be overlooking subtle, yet important aspects of child care. As the personal values of men and women interact with social and cultural values this may challenge existing perceptions of both the mother and father role.

1.3 The Non-Resident Father

Researchers investigating the difficulties fathers face maintaining a relationship with their children tends to focus on married fathers and the effects of separation and divorce. Although divorced fathers may be relatively easy to contact via court records, this method of recruitment fails to account for the experiences of unmarried fathers. Their number is significant with more than one third of births in 1996 occurring outside marriage, double the proportion in 1971. In spite of the increase in the incidence of lone parenting over the last 25 years, the majority of children continue to live in a family with two parents, 80% in 1996-97 as opposed to 90% in 1972 (Office for National Statistics, 1998), which suggests that these unmarried fathers do have experience of residing with their children prior to separation. Recent evidence suggests that unmarried fathers may experience more profound post separation difficulties¹ (Smart & Stevens, 2000) and as such merit further investigation.

1.3.1 The psychological effects of divorce and separation

What factors might impede the development or maintenance of paternal involvement following separation and/or divorce? It seems that the decision to divorce often comes as a shock to the husband (Jordan, 1996). In three quarters of divorces, it is women who make the decision to separate (Campbell & Pike, 2002;

NOTE: ¹ Currently family law in the UK does not automatically give an unmarried father parental responsibility, he has to apply for a Parental Responsibility Agreement, with his partner's consent. If she does not agree he can apply to the court for a Parental Authority Order. On separation he can apply for a Parent Responsibility Order which is granted automatically with a residence or contact order (Smart & Stevens, 2000).

Funder, 1992), often having considered this option up to four years before taking the final decision to end the marriage (Jordan, 1996).

As well as being less likely to initiate separation or divorce, it also appears that marriage has more to offer men; they are more attached to marriage, may find it harder to adjust to single status, are more strongly attached to their former partner and have more severe personal and emotional problems initially post-separation (Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1986).

To compound these difficulties, a traumatic outcome for many men at separation is the loss of their father role. The “sorting out and re-organising of a new role with their children is a task which for some men is the longest and hardest struggle” (Campbell & Pike, 2002; p.47). Despite small increases in joint custody there have been no increases in paternal custody (Kalmijn & DeGraaf, 2000) and for approximately 90% of fathers, they will become the non-primary parent. (Meyer & Garasky, 1993). This infers that 10% of mothers will also share this change of residency. The emphasis within the related literature is to describe a father’s experiences following divorce, which may or may not reflect those experienced by non-resident mothers.

The psychological impact of separation on the non-custodial parent is well documented. They may feel ostracised, anxious, without roots and suffer from loss, depression, poor work performance and disturbed sleep (Greif & Kristall, 1993). Other researchers have identified high levels of anger, considerable angst, hurt and devastation, difficulties understanding their feelings, a lowering of self-esteem and confidence (Lehr & MacMillian, 2001; Reynolds; Gilmour; In

Campbell & Pike, 2002; p.101), feelings of loss, grief, sadness, inadequacy, incompetence (Campbell & Pike, 2002; Jordan, 1996) and pervasive and ongoing loneliness (Ambrose, Harper & Pemberton, 1983) in non-custodial parents. Reactions to the disruption of an attachment (desire for proximity and separation protest or distress) were evident when access to children was restricted (Slater, 1999). For non-resident fathers, Campbell and Pike (2002) suggest that current ideas about masculinity may influence the expression or suppression of emotional responses and may provide an explanation as to why “loneliness, compulsive competition and lifelong emotional timidity” (p.102) result in isolation and a reluctance to seek professional support prior to or following separation.

A limitation of the majority of studies which describe the negative attitudes, feelings and reactions of men to separation is that the source of data was anecdotal, accumulated from work with fathers in therapy following separation, or participants were members of a post divorce support group, those involved in outreach programmes for single fathers, or volunteers identified by court records. Jordan (1985; 1996) provides a rare example of a longitudinal study monitoring the impact of divorce on fathers over time, even though he obtained responses from only 38% of his original sample. It is difficult to know whether fathers who were not contactable, who do not get approached (including a growing number of unmarried fathers who experience separation and do not appear on court records) or do not wish to participate fair better or worse than fathers represented within these studies.

1.3.2 The double challenge of being a father, not in residence

Fathers often feel inexperienced, and lacking in knowledge and direction when attempting to form a new family relationship with their child. Planning time with children and the uncertainty of what to do with them resulted in varying levels of distress and fathers directing their time and energy into recreational activities (Arendel, 1995; Nicholls & Pike, 2002), the range of activities being limited by financial limitations as a result of poor income and child support payments (McMurray & Blackmore, 1993). Not sharing a residence with one's children may make it difficult to take a parental role rather than that of an adult companion.

However, although competent and well-behaved children may elicit 'authoritative parenting' from non-residential fathers, Amato & Gilbreth (1999) conclude that a father's 'authoritative parenting' (providing emotional support, praising children's accomplishments yet disciplining children for misbehaviour) was the most consistent predictor of adolescents' adjustment and feelings of closeness to their father. Although contact was a necessary condition, it was not sufficient on its own for a close relationship to develop. How often fathers see children is less important than what fathers do when they are with their children. The constraints of traditional visitation arrangements have been proposed as one explanation of why many men who see their children frequently do not engage in authoritative parenting. Research indicates that many non-resident fathers have primarily a recreational relationship with children (Amato, 1987). Because of time constraints, most fathers want to ensure that their children enjoy themselves. This may be a difficult goal given that research suggests that the more time spent with children the greater the levels of satisfaction for the father (Kalmijn & DeGraaf, 2000) and the more likely he is to engage in supportive rather than conflictual interaction

(Almeida, Wethington & McDonald, 2001). Perhaps to reduce the likelihood of conflict and increase mutual satisfaction, many fathers take their children to restaurants or the cinema but do not engage in 'authoritative' practices. They may also tend to be over lenient and indulgent (Hetherington & Jodl, 1994). In a meta analysis of 63 studies exploring non-resident fathers and children's well-being, Amato and Gilbreth, (1999) argue that "although enjoyable, these activities may contribute little to children's development if there is an absence of authoritative parenting" (p.15 of 29: Internet accessed). Indeed many non-resident fathers complained that the constraints of visitation arrangements meant that they had little more than a superficial relationship with their children. However, they concluded that even under conditions of regular visitation, non-resident fathers still need to be highly motivated to undertake the paternal role and have the necessary parenting skills to be effective parents to benefit their children. Friedman (2002) found that one of the most important issues for 15 non-resident fathers attending a post divorce support group was how best to meet the needs of their children and how to deal with the anger being expressed by them. During discussions it became clear, in line with Amato and Gilbreth (1999), that being a 'routine' rather than a 'Disneyland' father was better in terms of their children's adjustment to divorce (p.170).

Although the importance of frequency of contact has been demonstrated for fathers, researchers need to develop theoretically-based measures to adequately assess the quality of the father-child relationship. For example, the concept of 'authoritative parenting' is a complex concept which is currently being measured by a small number of questionnaire items. Using observational data to develop a

more comprehensive and theoretically driven measure may help to address the different aspects of this concept such as support, limit setting and non-coercive discipline (Amato and Gilbreth, 1999).

1.3.3 Perceived lack of interest by the child

Another reason for a father to disengage is when they perceive their children as not being interested in maintaining contact. The father, feeling rejected by his children, may respond by rejecting them. This appears to be more likely when the costs outweigh the benefits and when a father finds that the 'costs' of staying involved are too great, he may stop visiting (Greif, 2001).

1.3.4 Feeling alienated and without a sense of paternal authority

Simon (1995) conducted in-depth interviews with eight non-residential divorced Caucasian, middle to upper class fathers with most reporting disengagement ideation, although only one had ceased contact. He identified a number of factors which he argued contribute to disengagement ideation or behaviour. The need to protect oneself against feelings of inadequacy and unimportance as a result of chronic and difficult interactions with their ex-wives, feeling powerless to influence their children's lives, experiencing intense grief reactions due to multiple unresolved losses and feeling devalued, marginalised and oppressed by the legal system, which they felt reduced them to an economic unit and undermined their role as a father. Fathers in the study regarded the system as biased in favour of the mother, with their involvement seen as only peripheral with anything other than

economic involvement being viewed as suspicious. Simon (1995) also noted that 'vigilant anxiety' (being acutely aware of any potential disruptions to access) and a sense of 'chronic embattlement' were common among men who remained involved with their children. The views of participants in this small study represented fathers able and willing to seek legal representation when their partners are unsupportive of their continued involvement with their child(ren). They were from a middle to upper-middle class income group, well educated and committed to active post divorce parenting. No details were provided giving the reasons for the reluctance on the part of their ex-spouses.

An important factor to emerge from a longitudinal study of 300 newly divorced couples was a father's sense of 'paternal authority' (Braver & Griffin, 2000). This, the authors state, "...is what drives the system of paternal engagement and disengagement" and losing this leaves fathers "feeling as if the child was in no real sense *theirs* anymore. The child *belonged* now to someone else, someone who, not uncommonly, despised and disparaged them". They felt they had no real right of parenthood and felt embittered that "society was asking them to assume the responsibilities of parenthood without the benefits" (p.254). The findings of this study formed the theoretical foundation for an intervention developed by the authors for divorced fathers called DADS FOR LIFE. They state that they were looking for 'mitigating circumstances' (p. 251) to the claim that fathers are only 'weakly attached' to their children and contend the implication that 'fathers are characteristically bad, lack a sense of responsibility and abandon their emotional, financial and physical involvement without sufficient cause'. The focus and the tone of the article reflect this objective.

It is clear from the literature that following separation and divorce the vast majority of fathers will become the non-primary parent. For many they will be significantly affected psychologically by what appears to be the unexpected loss of a marital relationship and their existing role as a father. Developing and/or maintaining an authoritative approach to parenting may prove challenging given the restrictions around visitation, reduced resources and perhaps their parenting skills. They may feel they lack parental authority, alienated and powerless and/or that their children are not interested in them. Many consider disengaging from their children. There are other reasons why fathers disengage from their children, for example, because they feel inadequate parents because of difficulties with substance misuse, or by being unemployed they are unable to pay child support. However, many non-resident fathers struggle to manage their own emotional distress, deficits in communication, their children's emotional needs, the restrictions of the visitation arrangements, finding somewhere 'home like' where they can see their children and the loss of recognition by others that they are anything other than a financial provider. Socialised to appear strong and inexpressive they may consider any expression of 'weakness' to be inappropriate, and thus may resist seeking help or support.

1.3.5 The impact of the ex-partner on the father-child relationship

There is considerable evidence to indicate that a cooperative relationship with the child's mother is related to access, day to day contact and the maintenance of engagement between father and child, with the reverse also being indicated (Ahrons, 1983; Ahrons & Miller, 1993; Arditti & Allen, 1993; Arendell, 1995;

Braver & Griffin, 2000; Campbell & Pike, 2002; Dudley, 1991; Furstenberg et al., 1987; Grief, 1995; Kruk, 1991; Lewis, Maka & Papacosta, 1997; Minton & Pasley, 1996; Nicholls & Pike, 2002; Seltzer & Brandreth, 1994; Stephens, 1996; Willett, 2001). These studies indicate that women orchestrate men's relationships with children and women's control over children is much more pronounced when fathers and children live apart, for example when mothers have control over younger children's schedules and construct guidelines within which non-resident fathers may spend time with the children (Seltzer, 1994).

A major cause of stress identified from the case reports of two fathers undertaking psychoanalytic therapy was the behaviour of their ex-wives, who are seen as "intentionally restricting access ... and brainwashing children" (Friedman, 2002; p. 167). Mothers discourage contact by, denying or refusing access, not having children ready or available for the access visit or changing the arrangement at the last minute, confrontation or conflict with the father at the time of the access visit and criticising the father to the children (Kruk, 1993). Gardner (1987) described the blocking of access or undermining the father role as 'parental alienation syndrome'. Indeed, Kalmijn and DeGraaf (2000) identified a considerable number of separated or divorced mothers who were satisfied when there are few or no visits to the father. The resident parent can have considerable power to change a child's positive memories of the non-resident parent (McDougall, 1989; Nielsen, 1999). Children fill in gaps in their memory with information provided by those who they love and trust which can sometimes bear little resemblance to the facts (Nielsen, 1999). In a review entitled, 'Demeaning, Demoralizing, and Disenfranchising Divorced Dads', Nielsen (1999) suggests that as a result of this re-written family

narrative a family can “bury itself in its own fairy dust by creating false memories about people or events that threaten what the family *wants* to believe” (p.161).

Fathers can sometimes disengage from their children following an accusation of child abuse which is subsequently found to be false. A number of fathers recruited from a support group, Parents Without Partners, reported being falsely accused with this typically being done by a mother who was angry with the father (Greif, 1997). Following an investigation over a number of months and the father being exonerated, the relationship with the child had usually been affected by the accusation and the separation, with a resumption of the relationship proving difficult.

Fathers who find the tasks of parenting especially onerous or painful may respond by disengaging from their non-resident children and limiting their participation in childrearing after divorce (Hetherington, Cox & Cox, 1978; Lund, 1987). When there is a high level of conflict between the ex-couple, the non-custodial father may react by avoiding contact with the child in order to avoid further conflicts with their ex-partner (Furstenberg & Nord, 1985). Two further reasons cited for fathers' absence and disengagement from their children were the resident parent wanting a clean break (Kruk, 1993) and a lack of validation of their role not only by their ex-partner but by their ex-partners' families (Greif, 1985). Simon (1995) found evidence that many fathers, faced with a conflictual relationship with an ex-partner, an inability to influence events relating to their children's lives and intense grief reactions, contemplate closure or escape through disengagement or avoidance.

Many of the studies which attempt to understand the process of disengagement rely on the self reported accounts from fathers who are experiencing challenges to their

involvement. There is evidence that there is a favourable bias by non-custodial of their own behaviour and an unfavourable bias toward their ex-partners behaviour (Braver, 2000), evidence supported by the findings of a longitudinal study by Jordan (1996). These accounts are also taken from fathers who feel motivated to verbally express their views either through therapy (Friedman, 2002), accessing the support of a self help group (Greif, 1997) or by agreeing to participate in a study where divorced fathers have been selected from court records (Kruk, 1993), although in the latter study the precise response rate was not detailed.

1.3.6 Feelings of persistent animosity

However, fathers have a contributory role in co-parenting relationships. Jordan (1985; 1996) found that over a ten year period following divorce fewer men blamed themselves or took responsibility for the relationship ending and there was an increase in attribution of blame towards their ex-wives. However, there was also evidence of continuing attachments to their marriage, and their ex-wives and their children. He suggests that this attachment can manifest in different ways, such as ambivalence, resistance, avoidance and/or closeness. Those who had wanted the relationship to continue also tended to become very intense in their criticism of their partner (Jordan, 1996). Jacobson, McDonald, Follette, and Berley (1985) noted that couples seem to develop 'attributional sets', prior to and following separation, that maximise the negativity and minimize the positivity in their spouse's behaviours, ignoring behaviours that might disconfirm their beliefs and focus on the behaviours that might confirm them.

Schuldburg and Guisinger (1991) reported that on an adjective check-list these husbands described their former partners in highly negative and deviant terms compared with descriptions of themselves or of their current partners. This animosity did not moderate in the first three to five years of remarriage, and may, in terms of their parenting responsibilities, affect negotiations towards an effective co-parenting relationship. Jordan (1996) found men unaware of marital difficulties, unprepared for separation and traumatised by it, yet reporting coping well one or two years later, despite clearly indicating that they were experiencing deep levels of loss, rejection, bewilderment and physical stress symptoms. He concludes from this that there may be a brief period of time following separation when men acknowledge the degree of their distress and might be “ready and willing to accept help to reflect on the need to make changes within themselves” (p.58).

It appears to be a reality that fathers need to make every effort to foster and maintain a co-operative relationship with their ex-partner, while managing their own feelings of animosity towards her, if they are to maintain a continuing involvement in the lives of their children. This may be facilitated by a father’s recognition and acceptance of responsibility for the failure of the relationship, an examination of his conflict resolution and attribution style and a greater willingness to reflect and learn from his experiences, seeking legal and emotional support if necessary. Research suggests that avoidance of contact with the child’s mother because of conflict or with the child themselves because of the father’s own distress appears to reduce involvement and increase the likelihood of disengagement.

1.3.7 Demographic characteristics of the father, ex- partner and child

There is conflicting evidence from studies attempting to identify demographic characteristics which might predict the involvement of non-resident fathers. Fathers with less education, financial instability, and lower socioeconomic status tended to be less active than those with more education, higher incomes and higher socioeconomic status (Furstenberg et al., 1983; Willett, 2001). However, Nielsen (1999) suggests that if the mother is well educated she is more likely to be more controlling and possessive about her role as mother and less willing to accept a lowering of her standard of living following divorce. Nielsen (1999) argues that being well educated is no guarantee that the mother will be supportive of the father's relationship with his children after divorce.

Although fathers are more involved in child rearing when they have sons (Marsiglio, 1991; Morgan, Lye & Condran, 1988), evidence of greater involvement with sons than daughters after divorce is mixed and perhaps dependent on the mode of involvement. Some studies have found no relationship between characteristics of the children and contact with the non-custodial father (Furstenberg et al., 1983; Koch & Lowery, 1984; Tepp, 1983). However, Wallerstein and Kelly (1980) report that boys had more father contact than girls soon after the divorce, although 18 months after the divorce, the sex of the child was no longer significantly associated with the amount of contact. Other studies have reported that a father's contact with daughters decreased rapidly over time (Hess & Camera, 1979) yet when non physical contact is assessed, fathers tend to be significantly more likely

to talk with daughters on the telephone than they are with sons (Cooksey & Craig, 1998).

The age of the child is an important predictor of contact and involvement (Willet, 2001). Older children, 10-13 years old, are more likely to initiate contact with their fathers and to communicate by e-mail, depending on the time since the divorce. Younger children, 6-9 years old were more likely to experience greater father involvement, depending on the distance between homes (especially for younger children). Wallerstein and Kelly (1980) concurred this finding in relation to younger children, finding that children between 2-8 years old saw their fathers the most. However, those between 9-10 years of age saw them the least, with adolescents having a frequency of visits somewhere in between. Age of child as a factor for disengagement was not identified by Lewis, et al. (1997) who noted that when comparing engaged and disengaged Greek fathers there were no apparent differences in relation to the age, number and gender of their children, their spouse's age, the length of their marriage, separation and divorce or their economic status or working hours. In terms of the father's age, Puster (2002) found the levels of involvement by adolescent fathers' were influenced by many of the same factors that influence adult fathers' involvement levels including the distance a father lives from his child, relationship variables involving the child's mother, and less strongly, their sense of competence as a parent.

1.3.8 Effect of father or mother's remarriage

What effect would a mother or father's remarriage have on a father's engagement with his child? Paternal involvement appears to be dependent a number of factors. If the resident mother remarries it is suggested that this may increase the difficulties and stresses of balancing old and new family relationships and serve in the longer term to decrease the paternal involvement after separation (Seltzer & Bianchi, 1988). Men who are currently cohabiting and men who are not involved in any relationship are less likely to see non-residential children than are men who have remarried (Seltzer, 1991). It may be that men who are most linked to traditional family life / norms are most likely to maintain ties with their previous offspring as well as these fathers being more likely to be economically stable and able to pay child support. Indeed if a father marries a wife who shares his strong family values this may serve to facilitate his involvement with his children (Seltzer, 1994). In a more recent study, Manning & Smock (1999) questioned 402 non-resident fathers and concluded "non-resident fathers who form new unions (spouse or cohabiting partners) do not subsequently see their non-resident children less often than fathers who do not form new unions ... Instead it is the number of new children (particularly new biological children) that reduces the odds of fathers' frequent in-person contact with non-resident children" (p.87). Cooksey and Craig (1998) concur with this finding and state "when men father additional biological children (unlike additional stepchildren), biological children they fathered at an earlier time tend to be displaced ... This is termed 'the crowding out effect' rather

than a reaction to, an increase of new parental responsibilities within a new family unit" (p.198).

In summary, the current literature suggests that involvement by a non-resident father appears to be positively related to a father's education, socio-economic status and financial stability yet negatively related to a mother's level of education. The evidence of a relationship between involvement and the sex of the child is mixed with new evidence indicating that the mode of involvement may be an important consideration. The age of the child as a function of geographic location appears to be related to paternal involvement; however, the age of the father does not appear to provide any added difficulties. The remarriage of the child's mother appears to lead to a decrease paternal involvement, yet the remarriage of the non-resident father can increase involvement with his children until he has children of his own with his new partner.

1.3.9 Degree of involvement prior to separation

It is commonly assumed that the relationship between the father and his child will reflect the relationship which existed prior to separation and/or divorce, providing a pattern of *continuity* of involvement (for review see Lewis, et al., 1997). Wallerstein and Kelly (1980) found patterns of post-divorce involvement to be surprisingly varied, 25% of the fathers in their study growing more distant from their children in the space of five years, but another 25% growing closer. This is consistent with the findings of Hetherington (1979) who proposed a *discontinuity hypothesis*. She found some non-custodial fathers who had been relatively

uninvolved with their children during marriage became concerned fathers following divorce, while others who had been intensely attached withdrew from their children.

Kruk (1991; 1992; 1993) also found evidence of *discontinuity*, in terms of a “strong inverse relationship of involvement” following separation (Kruk, 1991; p.201). Using court records to recruit participants, he interviewed 80 non-custodial divorced fathers, half of whom were engaged in, and half were disengaged from, their children’s lives. He found more ‘disengaged’ fathers reported high levels of involvement, influence and attachment to their children, that their family role was the most satisfying during the marriage and that their fathering role was a central component of their identity. Almost all described their relationship with their ex-spouse as unfriendly or non-existent; all reported experiencing active discouragement of contact and the majority experienced lasting feelings of loss and depression following visits to their children. Disengaged fathers appeared to be suffering grief at the loss of contact and of their pre-divorce paternal role and stress severe enough to result in the development of new physical and mental health problems. According to Kruk, “a father’s disengagement from their children’s lives after divorce results from a combination of structural constraints and the father’s own psychological response to the absence of their children and the loss of the pre-divorce father-child relationship” (p.195).

In a study by Lewis, et al. (1997) methods used by Kruk’s 1991 were adopted to test the discontinuity hypothesis. Of 40 divorced couples contacted from the records of two lawyers, 20 couples agreed to be interviewed separately to establish inter-parent reliability. All participants were selected from a geographically

contained community in Greece to control for the effects of physical distance between family members. Their findings identified a pattern *continuity* of involvement, with the post-divorce relationship between the father and his children reflecting the relationship which existed pre-divorce. However, a Greek father's adoption of a more traditional, 'provider' role, with lower levels of paternal investment may have created looser attachments and as a result Greek fathers may not have faced the same problems of loss experienced by the respondents interviewed by Kruk (1991). The findings from these studies seems to suggest that it is possible for different cultural practices to produce different levels of paternal engagement and disengagement, and conclude that paternal disengagement is more complex than has previously been argued. It is possible that the availability of an extended family network may provide the child with a number of attachments, including his or her father, which taken together provide a secure base for development and/or support for the separated father.

A more recent investigation by Lambert (2000), using data from 1,965 parents responding to the National Survey of Families and Households to assess long-term effects on parental well-being, provides evidence for a more complex pattern of pre and post-divorce involvement as a function of residency. In line with Kruk (1991) higher levels of involvement pre-divorce generally were predictive of reduced well-being for the non-resident parent but tended to act as a buffer for the residential parent. It seems that having your children living with you can help ameliorate some of the negative affects of divorce, even if that involvement is reduced post-divorce. However, if you are not the resident parent, your well-being

is likely to be affected whether or not you decide to remain engaged with your children and particularly if you had a close relationship before divorce.

Greif (2001) aptly summarises the difficulties facing a non-resident father, “It takes a committed, loving and loved father to overcome the obstacles to contact. It takes a mother who is invested in the father’s remaining involved with the child, and it takes a child who communicates that the father is valued” (sic) (Greif, 2001, p. 75).

1.4 Conclusions

This review of the literature identifies a number of potential or actual hurdles and subsequent barriers to developing and maintaining paternal involvement. It is not an exhaustive review; however it does include factors identified as central to this process.

Given the weight of evidence that fathers can fulfil a role which positively enhances the development of their children, their importance and involvement appears not to be reflected in, and supported by, occupational practices and policies, the popular literature and in child custody laws and practices. These attitudes may be inextricably linked to the attitudes both the father and mother have of themselves and each other. It is recognised that there are, of course, situations where a father has a negative effect on children, particularly in cases of domestic violence or abuse and in these cases safety considerations are more important than a father continued involvement.

It has been suggested that Western values reinforce and support the importance of the mother-child dyad, which validates her authority to facilitate or restrict a father's involvement with his child, a process which appears to be depend on how she perceived the role of father. However, this process and the view her partner takes of his role as father may be influenced by their social and cultural context. As the personal values of men and women interact with social and cultural values this may challenge existing perceptions and lead to an evolution of the mother and father role.

Following separation and divorce the vast majority of fathers will become the non-primary parent. They may experience difficulties exerting parental authority, loss of recognition by others that they are anything other than a financial provider, feelings of emotional distress, loss and powerlessness. Others may feel inadequate parents because of difficulties with substance misuse, or because they are unable to pay child support. Many fathers disengage or consider disengaging from their children. The literature provides compelling evidence that father-child involvement is facilitated when there is a cooperative relationship between parents. A father may need to address personal issues which may have contributed to the ending of the parental relationship and if necessary seek legal and emotional support to manage his distress and animosity towards his ex-partner.

Paternal involvement by a non-resident father appears to be influenced by a range of demographic factors, including the father's and mother's level of education, socio-economic status, financial security and the age and sex of the child. More recent research has included the mode of communication when assessing the extent of paternal 'involvement'. Differing effects of the father or mother's remarriage on involvement have also been identified.

A number of limitations were identified in the studies included in this review. There was a paucity of longitudinal studies providing an understanding of the impact of divorce on fathers and none exploring the process of engagement and disengagement pre and post divorce. There were issues of sampling including the exclusion of 'unmarried' fathers from studies recruiting from court reports, and limitations within the data of using a self-selecting sample. The convenience of this recruitment / research strategy may be reflected in the number of studies

relating to post divorce studies and statistics. Many of the studies used a clinical samples or case studies and participants recruited from self-help groups. Response rates were not always reported and no explanations were given to explain a poor response rate or suggestions as to how this might impact on findings. As a result of this review it has become apparent that when interpreting research based on self-report measures that sampling issues, favourable and unfavourable bias and the attribution of blame and responsibility are taken into account.

Men have traditionally been difficult to recruit for research studies (Daly, 1992), although this may be related to a lack of creativity and/or flexibility on the part of the researcher. Non-resident fathers, particularly if they are 'unmarried', provide an even greater challenge to researchers as they may be difficult to locate and interview, be reluctant to express their feelings about paternity by denying they have children who live elsewhere, they may have no emotional ties to children they see infrequently and may not even know they are biological fathers. Furthermore, research investigating paternal disengagement uses a range of definitions for example, 'no direct physical contact with children for at least one month' (Kruk, 1991; Lewis, et al., 1997), 'a father wanting no contact with his child' (Greif, 1995), 'occasional or no contact' (Dudley, 1991) and 'not seeing, talking or corresponding with a child for more than one year' (Cooksey & Craig, 1998). A clear, detailed definition would be helpful when evaluating findings from a number of studies. It appears there may have been an assumption in earlier studies that absence means uninvolved and/or uncaring, despite the possibility that there may be telephone, e-mail or letter contact between a father and his children and the 'occasional' contact may be an extended visit during school holidays. In addition,

the theoretically-based measures developed using observational data are needed to adequately assess the quality of the father-child relationship rather than the frequency of contact.

The research by Kruk (1991;1992;1993) suggests that the closer the relationship with the child, and the more central this is to a father's satisfaction within a marriage and their identity, the greater the sense of loss when access is blocked or resisted following divorce or separation. Further research is needed to gain an insight into the dynamics between the mother, father and child roles adopted within the family unit to create this degree of attachment separation on the part of the non-resident parent and to explore the concept of 'gate-keeping' on the part of the resident parent. Future directions for research might include an exploration of, a) the degree to which the child is used to distract from difficulties in the marriage or the child's mother feels threatened or diminished in her role by the father's successful engagement with the child, b) the difficulties a father might experience negotiating the initial family structure and c) the impact that social and cultural factors may have on this process. There is also little research focusing specifically on the experiences of non-resident mothers and the difficulties they face given that they are no longer the primary parent and as such are not adopting the 'idealised mother' role. Given the predominance of studies in the area of divorce and separation there is a noticeable lack of studies focusing on the effects of separation on paternal involvement as a result of a father serving a prison sentence or being sent overseas with the armed forces.

To date research has tended to neglect the benefits of fatherhood for fathers, for example, the attachment a father might have for his child, how fathering might

effect adult men's growth or maturity and what might facilitate positive growth. Utilising both quantitative measures and qualitative methods to assess whether there are positive internal changes in "nurturance, affiliation, instrumentality, identity and self esteem" (Hawkins, Christiansen, Pond-Sargent & Hill, 1995, p. 54) would be a fruitful endeavour. Current research also offers very little insight into what factors encourage some men to continue to act like fathers even when they no longer live with their children or why this level of involvement is generally higher in non-resident fathers compared to non resident mothers.

It is important to recognise that current research appears to carry the implicit assumption that high paternal involvement is always positive for the child and emotionally rewarding for the father. However, studies by Lewis et al. (1997) with Greek fathers reinforce the notion that there is no single father role. Indeed, Lamb (1997) suggests that a successful father in terms of his children's development is one who's, "role performance matches the demands and prescriptions of his socio-cultural and familial context" (p.14). Both low and high paternal involvement may have positive or negative effects depending upon the circumstances.

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CHAPTER 2:

THE EMOTIONAL IMPACT OF BEING A NEW FATHER: A GROUNDED THEORY STUDY

Abstract

There has been a recent increase in the number of qualitative studies which have explored the experiences of the expectant or new father. However, the emotional impact of fatherhood, as viewed from the man's perspective, is often a by-product rather than the focus of this research. Research suggests that practical considerations override emotional considerations during the immediate post-natal period. This study explores the salient emotional experiences of nine fathers, three to six months after the birth of their first child using a Grounded Theory approach. A theoretical model was developed and captures the dynamic inter-relationship between novel experiences and emotions. Emotional responses appear to be influenced by the father's personal history and the social and interpersonal context. Feelings of attachment to the child are linked to the early attachment experience at birth and subsequently to interplay between instability, turmoil and positive change or growth. Methodological issues and clinical implications are discussed.

2.1 Introduction

Fatherhood is on the political agenda. The activities of the Child Support agency have highlighted the importance of involving fathers, even if this is only in terms of financial support, in the responsibility of raising their children. There is a realisation that there are costs, both societal and personal, of fathers not being significantly involved in the lives of their children. A goal of the Institute for Public Policy Research's 1991 report *The Family Way* was to improve education and support for fathers. However, unlike Nordic countries where despite continued opposition from conservative ideology intimate father-care is generally accepted and desired (Carlsen & Larsen, 1993), in the UK, the conventional attitudes of the mother as primary carer (Lupton & Barclay, 1997) and the superiority of motherhood are still dominant (Burgess & Ruxton, 1996).

Research in the UK has tended to fall into three categories; the transition to fatherhood, fathers and their relationship with or impact on their infants, and men's experiences of fatherhood in single-parent or remarried families. Developmental psychologists have set out to measure the effects fathers have, or their absence has, on their children using a range of outcome measures such as self esteem, self control, moral, sex role and intellectual development (for extensive review see Lamb, 1981). Early quantitative research tended to construct a view of fatherhood, where a father's role complements rather than emulates a mother's role, in line with traditional gender roles. More recently and using a qualitative approach to explore the highly contextual nature within which fatherhood is experienced, research suggests that parenting styles of mothers and fathers within couples are

remarkably similar and where fathering differs from mothering this is more strongly associated with situation than with gender (Lewis, 1996). When men take on similar levels of responsibility to mothers for young children, approaches to parenting become indistinguishable (Gbrich, 1987). There are not only benefits to the child of paternal participation, it can also increase marital satisfaction (Burgess & Ruxton, 1996) and fathers can develop socially, and psychologically through participative parenting via a process of 'generativity' (Hawkins & Dollahite, 1997; Snarey, 1993).

2.1.1 The involvement of fathers

In a comparison of father involvement over time, Lewis (1986) found the greatest changes between 1960 and 1980 were related to the 'husband's' help in the period after childbirth and his willingness to get up at night. However, in general, Lewis found men in his sample had little involvement in childcare. The reasons they gave were partly because they did not feel competent, partly because they 'couldn't be bothered' and partly because they were being excluded by their wives.

Nonetheless, the growth of dual earner families appears to be related to an increase in time that fathers spend with their children and carrying sole responsibility for the children, with these fathers reporting that they took sole care of their child(ren) for twice as long as fathers in single earner families (Crouter, Perry-Jenkins, Houston & McHale, 1987). It is suggested that the capacity and motivation of men to care and become involved with their children increases around the time of birth (Hawkins, Christiansen, Pond-Sargent & Hill, 1995). Furthermore, if the father and child form a secure bonding and attachment at this formative time, there is a greater likelihood that the man will focus his capacity for caring and involvement

within the family throughout the life-cycle, rather than through work and altruistic endeavour (McKeown, Ferguson & Rooney, 1998).

2.1.2 Transition to Fatherhood

Early research exploring the transition to fatherhood and the effects of this on men tended to focus on fathers' psychopathological responses (Cath, Gurwitt, & Ross, 1982), regarding this transition as a crisis rather than a normative process of adaptation (Feldman & Nash, 1984) or a positive emotional experience providing opportunities for personal growth (Dienhart, 1998). However, research since the 1970s have reported some of the more positive aspects of fathering (Lamb, 1981).

In an extensive review of fatherhood research, Lupton and Barclay (1997) conclude that the research, from developmental and social psychology and the field of family health and welfare, fails to explore men's own experiences and pathologises fatherhood, "positioning fathers themselves either as variables having 'effects' upon their children or as troubled fathers, subject to a range of social, psychological and physical difficulties requiring expert assistance"... "The emotional ...dimensions of fatherhood ... the affective, sensual, intensely embodied dimension of fatherhood" being underplayed or lost in academic literature (Lupton & Barclay, 1997, p60-61). A more phenomenological focus is needed, one which takes account of paternal growth and maturation, the motives, feelings, attitudes and hopes of most fathers and the barriers to self-development to provide a broader model of paternal care (Hawkins & Dollahite, 1997).

Perhaps as an attempt to reflect a more accurate and insightful picture of fatherhood, there has been a recent increase in the number of qualitative studies which have used semi structured interviews to explore the experiences of expectant or new fathers. This research includes fathers' experiences of pregnancy confirmation (Draper, 2002), their levels of empathy during the pregnancy itself (Pistrang, Picciotto & Barker, 2001) and their relationship with the fetus (Sandelowski & Black, 1994), the birth experience (Chandler & Field, 1997; Hallgren, Kihlgren, Forslin & Norberg, 1999; Somers-Smith, 1999) and the transition to fatherhood (Barclay & Lupton, 1999; Henwood & Proctor, 2003; Paine, 1999). Qualitative research drawing on the principles of Grounded Theory have also focused on particular stages of new fatherhood, for example, pregnancy (Barclay, Donovan & Genovese, 1996; Donovan, 1995), making plans during pregnancy regarding employment and childcare decisions (Johnson, 2001), fathers' experiences during labour and birth (Chapman, 1992; 2000; Walker, Hall & Thomas, 1995), the transfer home of premature infants (Gibbins & Chapman, 1996), the first two months following birth (Anderson, 1996) and when both parents return to full-time employment (Hall, 1994).

Over half of these qualitative studies of fatherhood, recruited and interviewed couples about their experiences while just under half focused solely on exploring the man's perspective. Those studies using a Grounded Theory approach have tended to be carried out in the US, Canada or Australia, with no similar studies using this approach being carried out in the UK. They provide a range of findings, on a variety of issues, however, for those where there is a similar focus, such as men's experiences during their partner's first pregnancy, these are difficult to

compare within the nursing literature as details of the methodologies used are sketchy with researchers employing different methods of data collection (longitudinal versus cross sectional).

The above studies aimed to explore in part the emotional impact on men throughout pregnancy, from conception to birth. During the time around the birth or peri-natal period, the main focus of research appears to reflect the practicalities of the birth with attention focused on, for example, the experience of labour and the perceived support provided to women by their partners, the health status of the child and mother, the impact of particular medical interventions and observations of early interactions between father and child. It has also been suggested that emotional considerations may be put on hold during the immediate post-natal period as parents concentrate on caring for the newborn child (Clulow, 1982).

The current study aims to explore how fathers view the emotional impact of being a father now that their child is between three and six months old. The use of a qualitative methodology aims to produce a more insightful representation of this experience and will enable participants to convey the salient issues for them about their experiences. Furthermore, a Grounded Theory approach aims to generate a theory from the data, and provides a theoretical framework upon which to examine existing or create new information and/or provision relevant to new fathers.

2.2 Method

2.2.1 Design

The research used a qualitative methodology and a Grounded Theory approach. Grounded theory was seen as being most appropriate as it moves beyond a description of emerging themes to the development of theory and is well suited to the exploration of relatively under researched phenomenon. The procedure used was as described by Charmaz (2003) and Giles (2002). New fathers were interviewed three to six months after the birth of their child using open or semi-structured interviews and invited to describe the emotional impact of being a father.

Participants

First-time fathers eligible to take part in the study were fathers of a healthy baby or babies with no evidence of congenital anomalies and delivered in hospital. English was their first language. All participants were identified by ward staff, Community Midwives or Health Visitors as being eligible for the study and initial contact was made by them. All fathers in this study were reported to be the child's natural father. Nine participants were interviewed. All participants were new fathers and were from a White British ethnic background. At the time of the interview, three to six months after the birth, eight of the fathers were working full-time and one was the primary full-time carer. The age range of participants was 24 -39 years.

2.2.3 Ethics

Ethical approval to carry out this study was granted by Warwickshire Ethics Committee in May, 2003 (Appendix B) and extended to include an additional health profession and a third hospital in August, 2003 (Appendix B). In line with

Ethics Committee requirements, information regarding the study, issues of confidentiality and the right to withdraw was given and consent was gained at recruitment, and prior to interview (Appendix C and D). Participants were provided with a series of contact numbers for future reference should they require further support or advice (Appendix E).

2.2.4 The Researcher

At the time of the study, the researcher, a mother of adult children, was employed by a local Primary Care Trust as a Trainee Clinical Psychologist in the final year of a three year doctoral course. Having worked with a female client in the past with post traumatic stress disorder following childbirth and previous research experience using, in part, a qualitative approach, she was originally interested in studying the decision process that results in women electing to have a caesarean section for their second births. The influence of the father on this decision was raised within the literature, which stimulated her interest in how a father experiences both childbirth and subsequent parenthood. Given the dearth of literature in this area and in other areas relating to the 'male' experience of fatherhood, it emerged as a fruitful area of study.

2.2.5 Procedure

Recruitment was carried out using three methods. Firstly, Community Midwives made contact with fathers either directly or via their partners during routine post-natal home visits. Secondly, ward staff made contact with individual new fathers directly on the ward following birth and asked if they were interested in taking part in research relating to the experiences of being a new father. The third method

involved Health Visitors approaching families in their area and making either direct contact with fathers or indirect contact through their partners. In all cases a Research Participant Information Sheet was given (Appendix F) and consent sought (Appendix C) to make contact with the father either immediately or when the child reached three to six months old. It is not possible to report the exact number of fathers who were approached directly by Health professionals, either in the community or on the wards. However, information about the study was included in 300 discharge packs given to all parents by Community Midwives at a point ten days following the child's birth. There was no mechanism to enable the targeting of first-time parents; this was left to the discretion of the Midwife to introduce the study to the mother and/or father where she thought appropriate. Following three methods of recruitment, a total of 17 fathers returned consent forms agreeing to be contacted when their child was between three and six months old. When there was a significant delay between recruitment and telephone contact, it had been a condition of ethical approval that the researcher should contact each participant's G.P to check on the health status of the child before contacting the family. Four of the 17 fathers provided incorrect details of their family practitioner and it was not possible to obtain clearance to contact. For one father no one at the surgery was willing or able to verify the health of the child. Furthermore, despite obtaining health clearance, three fathers then failed to return calls to arrange an interview. As a result nine out of the 17 fathers were contacted directly and arrangements were made to interview, all taking place in the participants' homes. Four participants had the sole responsibility of their baby during the interview. Prior to the interview each participant was briefed on the purpose of the study, confidentiality, access to and storage of data. Each

participant was asked to provide their consent to continue with the interview (Appendix D). Both before and after the interview the participant was given an opportunity to ask any questions or express any concerns they may have. Contact with participants and data generation took place alongside the analysis over a period of five months.

2.2.6 Data sources

Interviews ranged from 1 ½ to 3 ¼ hours, averaging 2 ¼ hours. Each interview was digitally recorded and later transcribed verbatim by the researcher. Debriefing was not taped. Research notebooks and ‘Memos’ containing reflective accounts of the interview process and analytic records of the process of analysis and model development were maintained throughout the study.

2.2.7 Data collection and analysis

Grounded Theory techniques are regarded as “suitable for studying individual processes, interpersonal relations and the reciprocal effects between individuals and larger social processes” (Charmaz, 1995b, p.28/29). The researcher followed more recent developments in Grounded Theory outlined by Charmaz, (2003) and Strauss and Corbin (1990) where results emerge from neutral questioning and analysis is based on open rather than pre-conceived categories. The experiences, assumptions and biases of the researcher are seen as shaping data generation, content and analysis (Charmaz, 1995b). Data was collected and analysed simultaneously and ceased when ‘saturation’ occurred, when the data no longer created new categories (Giles, 2002). Three types of sampling were used during the data collection and analysis process (Appendix I). These were: open sampling

to collect initial exploratory data relating to the research area, relational sampling to gather material to build on emerging categories and, theoretical sampling to validate the core categories within the theoretical model (Chamberlain, 1999).

2.2.7.1 *Open sampling / Open coding*

Three participants were interviewed in depth using a Free Attitude Interview technique designed to elicit data by asking only one initial question and remaining an active listener using reflection, summarising and by asking for clarification (Oskowitz & Meulenberg-Buskens, 1997; p. 86). Participants were asked, “Can you describe the emotional impact on you of having a child of 3-6 months old?” Following transcription, the data were then coded by generating line-by-line codes (Charmaz, 1995a) or, if lines in the transcript failed to suggest any codes, ‘meaningful units’ (Rennie, 2000) were extracted (Appendix G). Following this process of naming and categorising actions or events within the text, these initial open codes were then grouped by meaning to form “broader, conceptual categories” (Giles, 2002; p. 170). An indexing system was employed using ‘category cards’ containing referenced examples of open codes contained within the data, as suggested by Pidgeon and Henwood (1997).

2.2.7.2 *Relational sampling / Axial coding*

Relational sampling involved four further participants being interviewed to support, elaborate or develop new categories. Data were analysed and provided richer existing, and a number of new, categories. A process of ‘axial coding’ (Strauss & Corbin, 1999) was used to develop new overarching categories or ‘higher order categories’ (Giles, 2002) with a higher level of abstraction (Appendix

H). The researcher remained alert to patterns and links within all levels of data throughout the course of analysis and recorded observations in both a written and diagrammatic form.

2.2.7.3 *Theoretical sampling / final analysis*

For the final stage of analysis the transcripts of two final interviews were examined to test the validity of the relationship between the higher order categories, the core processes and the adequacy of the emergent theory. Texts were examined for instances where the categories or processes were different in order to modify or elaborate theory if necessary. It was also used as a further test of theoretical saturation (Appendix I for stages in the Grounded Theory process).

2.2.8 Methodological issues

A number of methods were used to address the issue of verification, a term regarded as more appropriate than reliability and validity given the nature of qualitative research (Cresswell, 1998):

- The use of a research diary, or reflective memos, to capture thoughts, feelings and observations during the process of research.
- An 'audit trail' (Miles & Huberman, 1994) was maintained detailing the formation of codes, categories and theory and the links made with the original interview data.

- **Memos of the analytic process, to break down categories before the completed analysis to explore implicit, unspoken and abstract meanings at each stage of analysis.**
- **Regular meetings with other researchers using a Grounded Theory approach where all stages of data collection, analysis and theory formation were subject to peer review.**
- **The literature review delayed until the conceptual analysis was completed to avoid researcher bias, in accordance with Charmaz (1995b).**

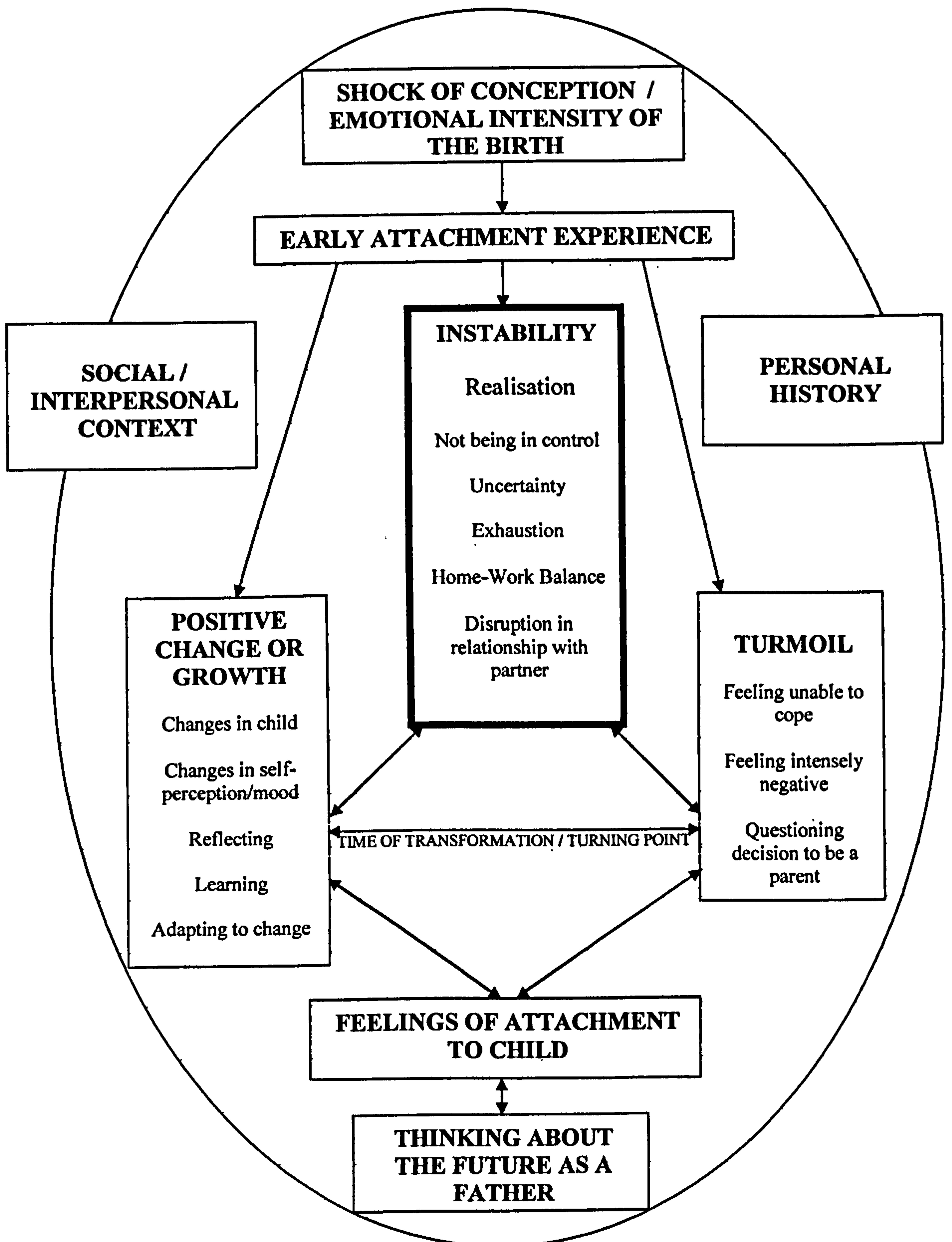
2.3 Analysis and Discussion

2.3.1 Model: The emotional impact of being a new father

Following a process of axial coding, twenty eight higher order categories (Giles, 2002) emerged and 10 core categories. These categories formed the basis of a theoretical model (page 52) representing the emotional impact of being a new father of a three to six month old child. As a result of theoretical sampling, the model was refined to take account of a number of new insights. The model represents the narratives provided by participants rather than representing a definitive process.

The way a new father appraises, and subsequently responds to, completely novel experiences requiring novel responses appears to be influenced by his **personal history and the social and interpersonal context. The shock of conception and emotional intensity of the birth** elicits a range of powerful emotions, both positive and negative which interact with the initial or early attachment experience which can elicit reports of positive personal growth or turmoil. These experiences give rise to a state of **instability**, to include, the *realisation* that expectations are being challenged by reality, times or periods when he will *not feel in control* or will feel controlled, *uncertain* about what to do, his role or his importance. He will feel exhausted by the lack of sleep and the extra demands on his energies and will become aware of *balancing the demands of home and work*. A new father's *relationship with his partner will be disrupted* and feel strained and there will be a reduction of tolerance between the couple, exacerbating instability.

2.3.1. A theoretical model representing the emotional impact of being a new father of a three to six month old child



There will be times or periods of **turmoil** when a father *feels unable to cope* and *feels intensely negative*. He may *question his decision to become and remain a parent*. There may be a gradual shift towards, an oscillation with, or sudden transformation or turning point to a state of **positive change or growth** facilitated or triggered by *changes in the baby, reflecting on better ways to manage current turmoil, learning from experimenting/experience, adapting to, rather than resisting, change, positive changes within the relationship with partner and changes in self perception/mood*. With increasing positive change or growth there is a corresponding reduction in the state of instability and/or degree of turmoil, and the father experiences increasing **feelings of attachment to his child** whose responses further reinforces a father's positive growth as a father. Increasing feelings of attachment can create turmoil relating to work, relationships or increasing anxiety for the well-being of the child. However, a father may experience difficulties feeling positive about his new status and feeling close to his child and may require additional support from others in order to facilitate his relationship with his child. A father will **think about the future as a father** in line with his perception of, and degree of attachment to, his child.

2.3.1.1 Social / Interpersonal Context

Barclay and Lupton (1999) found early experiences of fatherhood appeared to be more closely related to difficulties meeting social expectations and roles than any individual deficits. In the current study the interview data revealed the importance of the social and interpersonal context, for example, encouragement from others to be included in all possible aspects of parenting in order to feel valued and

competent. Early positive experiences were treasured memories for those who experienced them:

...one of the best things that will be with me all my life – was I gave Beth her first feed ... the nurse made sure I held her and there's no feeling on this earth like when you hold your baby for the first time. It's unbelievable; you'll never forget it (H)

However, fathers described times when they felt excluded, dismissed as incompetent or irrelevant and/or pressured to conform to a stereotypical role as only a supporter of the mother and provider for the family, by others including professionals.

I went to every appointment with Megan and again you were just completely ignored completely and almost they thought, you know, you've got her in to this mess (E)

There was a reliance on others outside of the family unit to provide a bench mark of what was normal. Success or failure to access accurate information, particularly from medical professionals, to allay concerns, or enlist practical help and support particularly during times of emotional turmoil was a source of enormous reassurance or further distress:

Sally's mum spent a week up here and it was absolutely brilliant ... It just takes a huge weight off, she doesn't have to do a lot ... (H)

I remember feeling guilty ... until Megan's cousins husband and he's got three kids and he said 'I bet when you leave the house in the morning, you

think what a relief, cause I did' and you think oh I'm not on my own – somebody else felt like that as well. (E)

... we were phoning the health visitor, the doctor, taking him in every week... they weren't paying enough attention, they weren't being supportive ... we didn't know, we didn't understand. (A)

The quality of the marriage has been identified as a stronger predictor of parental functioning for men than for women (Feldman & Nash, 1984) and key to the adaptation to fatherhood (Cowan, Cowan, Coie & Coie, 1983). The importance of the parental relationship was apparent in the present study when partners, in particular, appeared to provide a pivotal role in facilitating the father-child relationship in part by encouraging the father's involvement with the child by supporting her partner and sharing and validating any negative feelings he might have:

I was trying to detach myself from it because I was like 'no, I can't deal with it' ... and it wasn't until Jenny actually pointed this out to me that I realised ... then we all of a sudden started talking about it (D)

On the other hand it was not unusual for new fathers to feel isolated with his difficulties, unwilling to burden his partner, let down by professionals, experience unhelpful interference, criticism or unnecessary demands from family and friends and/or unable to confide, other than superficially, in work colleagues. There was also a feeling that the community would not be supportive towards you as a parent if you could not stop your child crying.

2.3.1.2 *Personal history*

It was evident from the interview data that there were a number factors which seemed to influence a father's thoughts and emotions during this period of transition. These included fears and anxieties resulting from genetic or childhood physical health problems, having prior experiences with children, and his perceived maturity. Furthermore, every father talked about how being a parent had lead to an evaluation of their own parents and their experiences of being parented.

Coltrane (1995) describes how caring for young children can "expose men to developing and discovering a more emotional/caring side of themselves which can include sadness/loss surrounding their relationship with their own father" (p.273). This was the experience for the four fathers who reported a troubled relationship with their own father or no relationship at all. A generally positive relationship was reported as increasing optimism that they, now fathers themselves, were also competent, a negative relationship increased the desire to provide one's own child with the attention, financial security and/or the emotional support that was lacking for them:

...my dad was a father who didn't have much time ... there is just no way, no way that I'm going down that path, no way ... I'm not going to be afraid to tell him that I love him. I'm not going to be afraid to pick him up in my arms and swing him round and all that sort of stuff and sit down and talk to him about things... I think you learn by your parents' mistakes ... (A)

I want her to have a proper dad, one perhaps that I didn't have ... I think the past has always been there, lying dormant until she was born ... (G)

2.3.1.3 *Shock of conception and the emotional intensity of the birth*

All fathers in the present study reported taking a conscious decision to have a baby. For the seven of fathers conception happened almost immediately after the decision to try for a baby despite the expectation that this would be more difficult than it was. For two fathers successful IVF treatment and/or a long period of infertility made this experience more intense. All fathers described the experience as a shock:

So we've tried for the best part of eight years ... I conditioned myself that I would never have a child ... I didn't actually prepare myself for it. It was almost like out of the blue ... which is a shock to the system, believe you me (laughs) a nice one though. I was running round the ceiling for about four days (laughs). (B)

Birth appeared to elicit the most intense emotional reactions from fathers. With one exception, participants reported the most extreme ecstasy and euphoria, pride in how one's partner had coped and amazement at the miracle of creating life. Fathers were visibly emotional when recalling this experience. Some fathers had nursed an acute fear of abnormality or physical health problems during pregnancy, linked to their own or their partner's experiences of these. A healthy baby was greeted with huge relief:

I was totally away, ecstatic ... It's like all that comes at once when you see he's OK and everything's in the right place and the baby's fine. It's like all the weight's off your shoulders ... a massive adrenalin rush ... (B)

2.3.1.4. *Initial / Early Attachment Experience*

Although Greenberg and Morris (1974) suggest that it is a universally innate response for fathers to feel love at the first sight of their infants following birth, Lewis (1986) argues that events surrounding the birth can have a profound effect on a father's feelings towards his child and may result in psychological distancing. In this study the birth experience did appear to interact with the initial or early attachment experience eliciting reports of positive growth or turmoil. For this father there was evidence of a strong connection being there from birth:

... when you're stressed out and you feel like everything's out of control – it's like something brings a balance and I can't put a name to it but he's your flesh and blood. He's your baby and it seems to make everything all right ... I think part of it is very instinctive. It just feels you know – he can cry as much as he wants 'cause he's my baby. I think if it was somebody else's baby you'd put it back (laughs). (E)

However, three fathers recalled feeling afraid during the birth for the safety of their partner and/or child. One father reported a traumatic birth which indeed did create significant difficulties throughout the early months of fatherhood:

The surgeon was panicking so naturally I started to panic ... Jenny was going, she was going – she was off. She was dying ... I was in tears I was crying. I said to her 'breath with me, breath with me and then all of a sudden she was breathing and I was just like 'whoa' ... I can remember it so clearly in my head it's unbelievable and I probably will do for the rest of my life because it's something that I don't want to go through again ... It

didn't feel like mine ... even now I'm just, she's four and a half months old and I'm only just coming round to her. I'm only just taking her as mine.

(D)

Despite these difficulties, there is little evidence identifying a critical or sensitive period for establishing father to infant attachment (Jones, 1985).

1.3.1.5 *Instability*

All fathers described the arrival of the baby initiating a state of instability and creating a ripple effect of unpredictability and disorder. A time of enormous change and challenges for which all had felt unprepared for. Fathers described shock or realisation, when the reality of their experiences does not match their prior expectations, for example, when medical professionals were considered incompetent, when feeling unsupported and left to 'just get on with it', expecting to be deprived of sleep, yet being unprepared for the demands on time and energy:

... feeding at 8pm, 10, 1.30, feed him at 3 and then he wouldn't sleep again until 5 (A)

They're not predictable, you can't plan when the baby's going to cry, want feeding. You can never really do anything, you half do something and stop and start ... I've had a couple of weeks off when the baby was born and that's when it starts really hitting you how hard it's going to be. (B)

There is a realisation that the baby is the main focus for attention and that everything revolves around the baby rather than the needs of the parents. There are new restrictions and unless sacrifices are made in terms of the father's needs this

will place a greater burden on his partner. Along with his partner there is an intense awareness of new responsibilities and an anxiety to 'get things right':

*We don't want to fail him ... you're always anxious I think at the start ...
he's completely and utterly helpless and dependent on you both ... you own
him to do everything right for him (E)*

All fathers described many times, particularly when the child cries, when they have felt controlled by the baby, were aware of not being in control, of not knowing what to do or what the child wants:

*I think it's because it's out of your control. You haven't got any control
over him, have you? He's a baby; he's a human being. You can do certain
things for him but when you don't know what he wants (E)*

It was evident from the interview data that during the birth and the initial post-natal period fathers often felt uncertain as to what they were supposed to do, how they could contribute, experiencing the feeling of being surplus to requirements, useless, a spare part or redundant.

*... she feeds him and the way he looks at her, you know, into her eyes ... yes
I suppose you do feel a little bit helpless and rejected. You feel that if you
weren't here it wouldn't matter ... you do feel a bit of a spare part ...
you've done your work nine months ago... I just felt a bit useless for the
first 11 weeks and ratty. (A)*

Feeling exhausted was an important component of the instability and served to reduce tolerance and increase sensitivity. It was often unrelenting, overwhelming

and experienced to, a degree that had not been expected prior to the birth of the child:

I find I'm doing my bit when I get home and doing my bit at the weekend to give my wife a break and I just feel absolutely and physically exhausted ... I was half expecting that but it's just harder than what I thought it would be ... I've never been late getting up for work but these three months I have. My wife gets up in the night and sees to him when I've got to go to work. I still wake up when I hear the baby crying, still broken sleep, it's still the same, you don't have to get out of bed (B)

All participants reported a disruption in the relationship with their partner which was unexpected and for some disturbing. A loss of intimacy, the focus being on the new baby rather than each other, differences in priorities and tiredness increased the intensity and frequency of conflict within the partnership.

Before we would laugh it all off ... But you're so dragged down it doesn't become a joke anymore, you can't muster a joke up and give a sarcastic one liner ... it turned into big slanging match, something out of nothing, just petty things ... (A)

We argue a lot more, definitely. Sometimes to the point of screaming at each other out of nothing but we're just tired you know and it's just silly things ... it could be anything starting an argument ... (E)

The imbalance between the demands of home and work led all fathers (including the father who chose to be the primary carer) to reconsider the role of their work

and its importance for the new family unit and how their work currently fits with their wish to be involved with their child. This often created a dilemma:

I started to get a little bit panicky about the job security and stuff ... Right you want a family – you want your wife to be able to bring up your children whatever, but you've got to pay for it; you've got to be working – providing and it is one of the main thoughts that goes through your head. ... It's like a paradox; you want to spend time with the family but at the same time you've got to build your career and sort of you've got to build your career a bit and reinforce your status within the company to make sure you know, that you will be around – you'll be earning - you'll be able to provide for a family. (H)

The dilemma is not surprising given the social and economic obstacles to father involvement created by employment and work policies (Fagin and Hawkins, 2001).

Work was often described as a mixed blessing, providing an escape from a crying baby, a way of recharging energies to enable the father to take over childcare in the evening, a way of providing and contributing, yet something that also got in the way of being close to and involved with one's child.

2.3.1.6 *Turmoil*

The majority of fathers had had the experience of facing a challenge for which they did not feel they had the capacity to cope, this resulted in a state of turmoil.

Triggers included fears for the unborn child, a caesarean section, a traumatic birth,

intrusive work demands, escalating conflict with partner, the baby's persistent crying and increasing exhaustion:

It took me a long time and I'm just coming round to it now... but I haven't coped very well with it ... I've found it hard to cope with the crying. (D)
...like a five week interrogation. White noise with someone in your face all the time. A nightmare (A)

Feeling intensely negative and struggling with negative emotions were encapsulated in the category of turmoil, for example, reaching breaking or crisis point, feeling burnt out with intense anxiety, being at one's wits end, feeling helpless in the face of distress, lost, tearful, a failure, tormented, rejected, at a stage of desperation, fearful / traumatised, and alienated or hostile towards the baby. Six fathers reported having become emotionally detached and occasionally feeling relieved to be going to work in order to cope. Most fathers, at least initially, contained their anxiety and fears by becoming task focused, mechanistic and robotic which helped them to regain a sense of control. It was not unusual at this time for fathers to question the decision to become a father and, even fleetingly, yearn for their pre-baby life. Five fathers regarded a new baby as a potentially divisive rather than unifying force within a relationship urging caution to those considering parenthood.

2.3.1.7 *Time of transformation / Turning point*

Six fathers described reaching a time of transformation or a turning point following a period of turmoil when they experienced a sudden, noticeable and positive change in circumstances and personal growth. These included, overcoming fears

either by supporting a partner during labour or spending more time with the baby, recognising a partner's distress and this spurring the father on to become more actively involved, a more contented baby as a result of successful feeding, an improvement in the symptoms of colic, the diagnosis and resolution of physical health problems and the development of a routine.

... at this point about 6-7 weeks, you started realising that you needed to take some weight off your partner else you are going to come back and find her hanging from the loft cause you can see that she is really, really at her wits end (A)

Once we got her on the bottles it was, within the space of two or three days, she was a different baby. That was the turning point (G)

I started properly loving her I suppose, really when she stopped screaming with her colic (D)

It's like if someone took Alex away when he was about 12 weeks old and brought someone back who was different ... once he started to have some bottle feeding ... a total change (A)

2.3.1.8 *Positive change or growth*

Successful resolution of the difficulties and dilemmas creating instability or turmoil appeared to depend on a number of positive inter-related changes taking place within and between all members of the family unit. Changes in the child, the perception the father has of himself, becoming more confidence, competent and insightful from reflection, learning, adaptation and a readjustment of expectations.

Anderson (1996) refers to a turning point in the father-child relationship when it becomes more interactive. Fathers in this study described the significant positive emotional effect on them when their child became responsive and rewarding. There was a feeling of getting something back for the sacrifice, feeling valued and involved and tasks being made easier and more enjoyable when the baby is happy. Early indications of recognition, of becoming 'Dad' to the baby, were extremely rewarding and stimulated greater reciprocal interaction between father and child:

It's amazing I've got a little one that knows who I am and there are no pre conceptions and no opinions formulated and he just accepts who I am and loves me for who I am (C)

She'd been keeping you awake and she'd smile at you and you'd forget about all the lack of sleep, I thought to myself she's smiling at her dad you know... brilliant that was and it just went out of your head that she's kept me awake all night (G)

... more like a baby than a machine that you just feed and change with no personality ... you do feel that's a bit of a turning point and now he's trying to talk more ... I can see it getting better and better ... I think if he just stayed as he was (laugh) it would be a nightmare. (E)

Anderson (1996) also found a baby smile was "highly attractive, fascinating, and rewarding" and encouraged fathers to "enter into a reciprocal exchange with their infants" (p.88).

Throughout the early months all fathers in the study described a time of rapid learning. Learning from mistakes, recognising what helps, developing skills and

expertise, gaining experience and confidence, learning from the baby and working as a team and pulling together to develop a routine which accommodates the needs of each member of the family unit.

I'm just getting into learning ... what is a real cry and what isn't ... what's just a moan cry to be picked up ... which seems I'm progressing as a dad ...

(B)

I remember ... it took me three quarters of an hour to sterilise some bottles ... like a surgical instrument at first ... you do tend to relax as time goes on.

(B)

Fathers noticed changes within themselves, having a change of priorities, feeling more protective, having a greater sense of self preservation, feeling more confident and more content. For one father the long wait for a child had a particular significance:

I've got to be honest ... it's nice going out and we're a family ... With some of my mates, it's like welcome to the club...you feel more whole as a male ... you've got a son. You just feel more complete. (B)

I always thought kids were pretty boring ... every day Ella's doing something different, smiling, laughing and the next day I go in and bore people at work about it (G)

I was amazed with myself ... I didn't think I would be able to like rock the baby to sleep ... baby talk ... I didn't think I could do that, I thought that'll be stupid ... but it just comes naturally ... I haven't tried to do it, it's just happened. Like changing nappies, I can do that with my eyes shut now ... before the baby you can't picture yourself, you don't think you'll cope in that way. But I found that part quite easy. (B)

Anderson (1996) identified the category 'making room for the baby' when fathers of two month old infants made changes in their work and social/personal time in order for them to be physically and emotionally more available to their infants. Fathers in this study reported having to make these and other adjustments to adapt to the change in circumstances. Significant adjustments, such as changing job, work patterns or career path to fit around a more demanding home life, were reported by four new fathers. In addition, fathers reported adapting to a loss of intimacy, less time for themselves and having a greater motivation to resolve conflict or change their usual pattern of response:

... I didn't expect for us to fall out sort of every day, like we do but now that we've gone seventeen weeks, whatever, down the line, you adapt to it ... I've sort of accepted it now, that there's going to be some sort of conflict and I try to modify my behaviour to avoid it, you know. So rather than arguing back, I tend to shut up and accept it and the argument then doesn't happen... (H)

Fathers were aware of reflecting on their experiences of being a new parent which stimulated the development of a new empathy for their partners and other parents in a similar or a worse situation. Three fathers considered the baby to have brought improvements to their relationship with their partner, a uniting force, a bond or glue and serving to improve the quality of communication between them.

2.3.1.9 *Feelings of attachment to the child*

Anderson (1996) describes categories of “becoming connected” following the birth and “establishing a closer connection” in the first two months, occurring when the father perceives his infant as “more responsive, predictable, and familiar to them” (p.88). The model proposed in this study also identified a more complex attachment pattern. Deeper feelings of attachment were noted when fathers were encouraged or supported by their partner and others to get involved and share in bottle feeding and/or bathing the new born infant. The strength of attachment to the child appeared to be related to the stage of positive change or growth, and seems to develop in line with an emerging reciprocally satisfying relationship and alongside the values and expectations of their partner:

It felt like, ‘I recognise it’s me dad, I feel all nice and safe with him’. Felt like you’d bonded as such. (B)

It was nice to know that I could settle her down, mum couldn’t ... and Nan would come round and she couldn’t settle her then I would, it was quite nice to think that she was building that bond with me, you’d think does she recognise me ... but then you’d get her off to sleep and she’d be looking all comfortable and cosy and you think ... she knows who her dad is ... (G)

As the bond or attachment deepens there is an increase in the distress of separation and a re-evaluation of the work home balance:

I’d jack work in tomorrow if I could to be with him. I see it as a big inconvenience. Definitely. (E)

2.3.1.10 *Thinking about the future*

Fathers described feeling optimistic, worried, thoughtful or more prepared for the future. Depending on their past experiences some fathers had a view of the future as unpredictable and did not wish to look too far ahead. However, all fathers had given some thought to the type of father they wanted to be and most had a clear vision of their role in the future, defined by their own experiences of being parented, as a father providing attention, emotional support, encouragement yet not pressure and financial security. Feelings of optimism were expressed at being more experienced and relaxed with any future children and excitement at the prospect of increasing involvement in play activities as the child grows:

I'm looking forward to when he grows up a little bit more and we can do more together as a family ... I'm looking forward to when I can play with him, Christmases and things like that, when he understands. (B)

In line with Fein (1976), fathers who felt able to change or curtail the demands of their work visualised or had adopted a more 'non-traditional' role involving a high degree of involvement with their child. Those fathers who had concerns about the security of their jobs and/or who felt that being a provider was the central to their perception of a 'good father', tended to visualise more of a 'breadwinner' role emphasising financial responsibility, being more supportive of their partner yet less directly involved in childcare. A large proportion of fathers had considered moving in the near future to an educationally or socially 'better' area.

2.4 General Discussion and Implications

Through this research a theoretical model has been developed which represents the emotional experience of being a new father. This makes a significant contribution to the literature on fatherhood in that it uses fathers' accounts, three to six months after the birth of their first child, to capture the dynamic inter-relationship between, and reasons behind, different emotional states. This model provides a framework upon which to develop or explore evidence-based or theory driven information and/or provision for prospective and new fathers.

A number of aspects of the model echo findings of other studies and models relating to early fatherhood. Within the model proposed in this study there is interplay between a state of instability, turmoil and the development of, transformation or turning points towards, positive change or growth. These findings endorse those of Anderson (1996) who focused specifically on the development of the father-child relationship within the first two months after the birth of the child. She identified three major developmental categories, 'making a commitment' (willingness to invest and take responsibility for nurturing the infant despite the difficulties), 'becoming connected' (at the birth and later, establishing a closer connection) and 'making room for the baby' (making changes in work/social and personal time). Anderson (1996) also makes reference to the importance of changes in the baby triggering a 'turning point' in the relationship and to periods of turmoil, particularly following a difficult birth. Therefore both studies highlight the clinical importance of, a) acknowledging that fathers having differing needs at different times, b) providing fathers with direction, opportunities and support to

develop relationship with the baby and c) addressing fathers concerns early when they are most salient. Given the impact of a difficult birth, it would also be prudent clinically to target fathers with this experience and also those where post-natal depression in their partner is indicated. Research to evaluate any proposed intervention would be essential to enable clinicians to provide an evidence-based service (for discussion see Fagin & Hawkins, 2001).

Compared to previous research on men's experiences during pregnancy, the most salient difference identified within the current study appears to be the impact the presence of the child has on the father, intensifying his emotions, towards more positive change and/or personal growth yet potentially also creating greater turmoil. In a study by Donovan (1995) only a small proportion of fathers described positive development or personal growth. Ambivalence, identified during pregnancy, did not appear to be as prominent after birth, yet anxiety, adjustment, changes in the relationship with partner and a need to know (gaining information, advice from others) continued to be an issue for new fathers. Health services have an important part to play not only in supporting the father, but providing him with accurate information and advice thus strengthening the parental relationship and thus improving the quality of care provided to the child.

Early research tended to focus on the difficulties of transition and psychopathological responses to fatherhood (Cath, et al., 1982). The present study found evidence of an interaction between positive and negative aspects of being a new father, more complex than the earlier literature suggests. There was a general trend by the time the child was three months old towards a more 'generative fathering',

described by Hawkins and Dollahite (1997) as caring for and contributing to the life of the next generation and a desire to be physically and functionally present in the home, with one participant choosing to be the principle carer with fatherhood being central to his identity. In line with Diehart (1998) and Lamb (1981) there was evidence between three and six months following the birth of personal growth and maturation and a desire to care for the next generation before and despite the impact of cultural forces. In line with Hawkins, et al. (1995) there was also evidence that depending upon the circumstances surrounding the birth, participants in the present study had the capacity and motivation to care for and be fully involved with their children at this time. There was little evidence of maternal gate-keeping in the early months, such as where mothers feel they have to supervise paternal involvement. However, as Barclay and Lupton (1999) state, new fathers can find the birth and the early months, “disappointing and frustrating”, more disrupting and “much more difficult and distressing than they had expected before birth” (Barclay & Lupton, 1999; p.1019). In the present study many of the fathers also described having these thoughts and feelings at some time, although these and other negative emotions, particularly towards the child, had tended to be suppressed. The availability of emotional and informational support by health professionals for fathers from conception until at least three months post partum would a) give institutional support to the importance of the father, b) prepare the father for the events surrounding the birth and provide guidance on a useful role, c) highlight the effects of breast feeding, physical contact and interaction, d) normalise and/or validate emotional distress and negativity, and e) direct fathers towards useful services.

The present study found evidence of fathers being excluded by health professionals, even in their own homes. This is in line with the findings of Obeid (1997), who concludes that the result of Health Visitors concentrating efforts almost entirely on women, reinforce and perpetuate the attitude that it is only women who can provide childcare for children. A requirement of all health professions should include an examination of attitudes and assumptions that serve to alienate the father, for example, that he is not interested in being involved, that it is the mother who is primarily responsible for the child, that an absent father is an uninvolved, uncaring father, that fathers cannot be traumatised by a birth and that excluding the father can affect the view the father has of himself and his role within the family.

All of the participants in the present study reported gaining confidence and skills through increasing the amount and the sensitivity of their contact with their child. This involvement facilitated the movement between uncertainty or emotional negativity toward positive change and personal growth. Lamb (1997) commented how this can have the opposite effect when paternal involvement is inhibited if men have a fear of incompetence or failure because a lack of skills or experience. Services need to be sensitive when 'offering help' as this may infer that a father is unable to solve his own problems and evoke feelings of failure and shame. Providing evening anti-natal classes, or 'becoming (or being) a parent' group sympathetic to fathers can help to foster what they report to be an intense interest and intention to be involved, and allow an opportunity to discuss and practice relevant skills. There is also a need for appropriate material for boys and men reflecting men's experiences, concerns and interests.

The use of the Grounded Theory approach and the findings from this study has highlighted a number of methodological issues and ideas for further research. Although this study attempts to understand the emotional experience of being a new father, data were gathered during one extended interview and were limited to retrospective accounts, which can be subject to distortion. However, objective reality is not the aim; rather it is to gain an account of the subjective experience of each participant. It is possible however, in any future research to obtain ongoing descriptions from fathers perhaps via video, audio diaries or via e-mail. The study also represents only one aspect of fathers' experience, within a specific cultural context and can only provide a picture of historical change when pieced together with other similar studies. Future research might involve testing out the proposed model by interviewing fathers at regular intervals before, during and beyond the three six month criteria for inclusion.

Participants in this study were all Caucasian men between 24 and 39 years of age, all were either married or were in long term, established relationships and all infants were the result of a planned pregnancy. Research indicates that transition is considered less severe when the parents are older (Hobbs & Wimbish, 1977) and if the parents have been married for a longer period of time before conception (Russell, 1974). This may have affected the degree to which, or the timing at which, fathers experienced positive changes or personal growth.

While the sampling techniques used in a Grounded Theory approach do not require randomness or aim to generalise findings, participants were volunteers approached,

in accordance with the requirements of ethical approval, by either Community Midwives, hospital based staff or Health Visitors directly or indirectly via their partners. There may have been effects of female gate-keeping which were difficult to assess and control for. Further research is required to test and strengthen the theoretical assertions which are generated by this methodological approach.

It is acknowledged that within a qualitative approach to data collection, the type of data will not only depend upon the questions asked but on the interaction between researcher and participant. It is important to consider potential implications for the research process and on the findings of the researcher being female, in her forties and a mother of adult children. There may have been an assumption on the part of the participants that I would not tolerate or be able to tolerate the full range of emotional experiences. They may have been reluctant to fully explore difficulties within the relationship with their partners because of embarrassment, or that I would be more likely to identify with or be supportive of a mother's perspective. In my attempts to be accepting and focused on the father's experiences there may have been an inclination to minimise or a failure to explore fully the central role played by their partners. It was noticeable how within the model they are subsumed within the category of social/interpersonal context. Faced with a health professional, fathers may have wanted to present a picture of having had a tough time yet reassure me that things were coming together and that there was nothing for me to worry about or to report back to the health visitor. Again further research is required to test the robustness of the theoretical categories proposed by the model presented here.

Testing out the model with new fathers from a range of ethnic and cultural backgrounds, of differing ages, length of relationship with their partner and whether conception was planned or unplanned rather than focusing the criteria for inclusion primarily on the child's age would be a useful endeavour. Fathers are important, valuable and deserving of recognition, understanding and respect. We have a duty to reflect this in our research and clinical practice.

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CHAPTER THREE:
COMMUNICATING USING NARRATIVE ON AN INTERNET
DISCUSSION SITE FOR FATHERS

Abstract

This study aims to provide a greater insight into the experience of fatherhood by examining in detail the use of narrative within one topic area on an on-line internet discussion forum for fathers. The material extracted is appropriate for narrative analysis as it is characterised by personal anecdote presented within a wider social-cultural context. There was evidence of significant emotional expression from fathers, yet limited empathic emotional or informational support. Two types of contributors were identified, those wishing to interact using a 'conversational' dialogue and those wishing to 'sound off' and express their views/experience. Future research and developments within the internet are discussed.

3.1 Introduction

The internet has increasingly been used by health professionals to provide self-help treatment for a variety of health concerns and client groups (Carlbring, Ekselius & Andersson, 2003; Devineni, 2003; Scogin, 2003; Zetterqvist, Maanmies, Strom & Andersson, 2003; Zuckerman, 2003) and peer supervision and a method of reflection for clinicians (Newby, Bushell, Cotter & Nangle, 2004). The use of discussion forums, or mutual aid groups, within specialised websites has also added a new dimension to the availability of advice and support.

This medium provides us with a novel and exciting area of research, as King and Moreggi (1998) point out, “text that is conversational in nature, as it exists on the Internet today, is a new phenomenon” produced by the lack of any “local, real-life consequences for on-line social activity” and as a result “people often feel free to express themselves in an unrestrained manner” (p.80/81). It seems that the Internet encourages people to behave in ways that they would not in real life (Parks & Floyd, 1996; Reingold, 1993; Sproull & Kiesler, 1991) with ‘an *apparent* reduction in concern for self-presentation and the judgment of others’ (Joinson, 1997; p.44). When the nature of the discussion might be considered shameful such as surviving sexual abuse (Finn & Lavitt, 1994), people can be selective about which aspects of themselves they make public.

Research to examine the content of this new form of communication is gradually emerging. (Bowers, 1997; Jones & Lewis, 2001; Kraut, Steinfield, Chan, Butler & Hoag, 1998; Sharf, 1997; Winzelberg, 1997). In terms of the benefits to participants, Humphries and Rappaport (1994) suggest that within these groups there is an expectation that participating will provide emotional support, a sharing

of personal experiences and a way of finding out new ways to help cope with their shared problems. Membership is considered empowering through the experiences of autonomy, control of the group and a sense of being experts on one's own problems. If people experience the disadvantages of participating (misunderstandings, projection and a lack of boundaries) they are most likely to stop using the forum. However, it is difficult to track this drop out rate and the degree to which these difficulties are experienced (King & Moreggi, 1998).

Davies and Lipsey (2003) voice concern over the increase of pro-anorexia or 'Ana' websites, written almost exclusively by young women who are suffering from anorexia to promote weight loss. They advocate a detailed examination of these sites by professionals to gain a greater insight into the thoughts and beliefs of a particular group who may be able to express themselves more freely in this medium than they can when engaging face to face. It is important to stress that little is known to what extent the medium itself plays a role in producing the kind of discourse within it.

3.1.1 Fathers use of the internet

According to eStats (1999) an internet statistical service, in 1998 there were over 37 million adults who use the web on a regular basis, over two thirds were male and of these 30% had one or more children (Grant, Hawkins & Dollahite, 2001). This represents approximately 7 million fathers. Given that men are generally considered to be more comfortable communicating with Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) and reluctant to engage with health professionals or self help groups (Levine & Pitt, 1995; Palm, 1997) this medium would seem to offer a source of information not readily available within the literature and support often

perceived as targeted towards their partners. This greater willingness to engage was confirmed in a study by Salem, Bogat and Reid (1997) when it was noted that men participated and self-disclosed at the same rate as women in an Internet self-help forum for depression.

3.1.2 The Internet website

Fathers Direct, a UK based information centre for fatherhood, was set up as a registered charity in 1998 by a group of mothers and fathers with professional qualifications and expertise in family support and social care, research, training and consultancy, communications and business development. It receives funding from the government, including the Home Office and a number of private charitable foundations and trusts. The Fathers Direct website (www.fathersdirect.com) provides information to fathers and aims to promote strong and positive relationships between all children and their fathers or other male carers. It is an open, general audience website, intended for users of all ages. Fathers Direct monitor the site and advise users, when contributing to the website, to provide a pseudonym rather than their own name and to be cautious revealing any personal information.

This study aimed to a) gain insight into a web based discussion group for fathers, b) explore what might motivate individuals to contribute and, when they do, how they communicate with others within this medium, c) assess what sort of support may be available for fathers via this forum and d) given their reluctance to access conventional services, assess whether it would be appropriate for health professionals to suggest that a father access such a support system.

Method

3.2.1 Data collection

The data used in this study were collected from a discussion forum of the Fathers Direct website accessed on 10.08.03. On the date of access there were 121 discussion topics available for discussion (Appendix J). In the interests of brevity, a descriptive cross-sectional analysis of the discussion forum itself is included in Appendix K. This provides the context within which participants expressed their narrative. A qualitative analysis to examine one specific discussion topic within the forum was carried out to illustrate the function of narrative within this medium. 'Why does my partner hate me' was selected as being one of two topics with the greatest number of 'threads' or replies (n=6), for the length and content of contributions in terms of the illustrating the narrative and by the degree to which it represented a range of users. This material is seen as appropriate for narrative analysis as it is characterised by personal anecdote presented within a group discussion and a wider social and cultural context.

3.2.2 Qualitative analysis

3.2.2.1 *Narrative analysis*

Creating a narrative or a story around our experiences helps us gain a meaning and understanding of them. Narrative is a primary means of restoring a sense of order to our lives (Murray, 2003). We have our own narratives (our narrative identity) based on different social relationships or situations in our lives. We also

experience the world through stories told by others (Sarbin, 1999), making ours socially constructed and developed through social interaction. This provides a shared way of making sense of the world when it is obscure or unusual or inconsistent (Murray, 2003) It is also important to consider that when we tell our story, how we present ourselves will depend on who we are telling, the relationship we have with that person/audience and the social/cultural context (Murray, 2003). The process of narrative analysis is detailed below:

3.2.2.1 Guidelines for Narrative Analysis (adapted from Murray, 2003)

Descriptive Phase		What am I trying to understand? What are the participants trying to say? Why are they trying to say that?
	Step 1	Read thoroughly to familiarize with structure/content
	Step 2	Prepare short summary identifying beginning, middle and end
	Step 3	Highlight key issues and links between different parts
	Step 4	Sub-plots? and connections between these
	Step 5	Read across summaries to get an idea of main issues
	Step 6	Develop coding frame. Capture overall meaning of narratives and various issues raised within each
Interpretive Phase		Aims to reveal underlying structure of narrative accounts that shape the way we understand/explain our actions and the actions of others
	Step 1	Connect narrative accounts with literature
	Step 2	Be aware of the impact of theoretical assumptions and own assumptions and beliefs
	Step 3	Look at the structure and organisation of the narrative
	Step 4	How does the broader social context intersects with personal narrative?
	Step 5	How does the structure of the full narrative account connect to the broader context?
	Step 6	Look for more oppositional narrative, e.g., 'them' and 'they'
	Step 7	Look for collective stories and a more social narrative, e.g. 'we' and 'us'
	Step 8	Look for powerful dominant societal narratives

3.3 Analysis and Discussion

3.3.1 Narrative analysis of a single discussion topic

The complete discussion topic appears in two parts and consists of six postings. The original message from 'Andrew' was posted on 20th May 2002, entitled, 'Why does my partner hate me?' and initially stimulated a conversational dialogue with 'Paul' (Extract A: Page 90). These first three postings are in contrast to those replies posted later from 'Brendon', 'David' and 'Alex' which appear to be less responsive, interactive and only tenuously connected to the discussion appearing to have the purpose of presenting an opinion to an audience rather than encouraging dialogue between participants (Extract B: Page 96). These two distinct parts will be presented separately to illustrate key narrative constructions within the data. Data is presented in italics and remains unedited. Bracketed numbers refer to the relevant line number in extracts A and B.

3.3.1.1 *Conversational dialogue – facilitating understanding?*

A number of key narrative constructions emerged from the written dialogue between Andrew and Paul (Extract A: Page 90).

3.3.1.1.1 Structure

In his first message, Andrew begins with a progressive structure (Gergen & Gergen, 1986), where his life is moving forward following the birth of his daughter and the emerging relationship with her. Yet he then appears to move towards a more regressive narrative when he describes the deterioration of communication between himself and his partner (4-13).

3.3.1.1 Extract A: Conversational dialogue between Andrew and Paul

	Why does my partner hate me? - Andrew - 20/5/2002
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13	<i>Our baby was born 12 december last year and she is calm precious and wonderful. I took an active supportive role in the birth- which went well- & I'm involved as much as possible in her care. I do not find this a chore, I love it, it is more like therapy after a stressful day at work, we get on really well and she loves to be cuddled and sung to. Im worried about my partner, it feels like I cannot do anything right. I work hard all day, come in spend time with the two of them, and tidy up , do the washing up, get the dinner on and help out with the baby. but still I am nagged at. I always make the peace, which inevitably means me admitting some kind of wrong doing even if I don't think I am to blame. I have tried talking -but it gets us nowhere. I realise there is an element of depression/exhaustion at play here but I feel like my partners personal emotional punchbag. I love them both but I am now at the point that I think that it would be better if we seperate but I will miss my daughter & fear her being brought up to hate me, (I'll have no rights as we are not married) I want to be a part of her life. I can already feel myself disengaging - despite the fact that I love them both and would do anything for them- I have had enough passive aggressive abuse. please help</i>
14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25	PRODUCER Paul - 3/6/2002 <i>Hi Andrew Our baby was born 6 weeks premature, 11th May, she is also calm and beautiful and we are all currently adjusting to life back home as she has just come home from the hospital the other day. Since she was born I too feel that I have become something of an emotional punchbag for my wife. We have talked about this and she says that when we are apart she misses me and yet when we are together I just annoy her, for no particular reason. Sometimes I do the wrong thing or say the wrong thing, I'm only human after all, and all hell breaks lose. I too thoroughly enjoy the involvement of looking after our beautiful daughter, but half the time my wife and I end up arguing about what I'm doing and it's getting to the point where I don't want to do anything beacuse we end up arguing in front of our daughter, (okay when the child can understand what's going on, but not so good when all they can understand is anger). The nurses and support staff have all said hormones are still in play but It sounds like you are going through pretty much the same thing and it's been almost 6 months for you! Have you spoken to any of the support staff at the hospital where your chlld was born? If so I would love to know what they said.</i>
26 27 28 29 30 31 32 33 34 35	RESPONSE TO REPLY FROM ANDREW - 5/6/2002 (Andrew's Response to Paul's Reply) <i>Dear Paul Thank you for your reply, it is good to know it isn't just me going through this...though i'm sorry to hear you are getting it too! In answer to your question, we had a water birth at home...which went extremely well but neither of us has had much contact with the midwifery team since. (when we rang the hospital about some other problem, they informed us that we would have had more support if the baby had been born in hospital!) Things came to a head recently and finally after much suggestion, my partner has spoken with the health visitor -who is going to arrange some counselling to help her adjust to the changes and provide her with a chance to 'offload' without harming our relationship. We will also probably take some counselling together. I still feel there is along way to go but thinking about what is at stake keeps me going.</i>

There is a sense of Andrew feeling ‘stuck’ in the current situation, of not knowing how to explain his experiences in a meaningful way. In his reply Paul, a less experienced new father, describes moving through the same progressive and recessive phases arriving at a turning point, or ‘epiphany’ (Crossley, 2000) when he attempted to find meaning for the changes in his wife’s behaviour by asking her (17) and support staff at the hospital (23). He offers this path to Andrew as a possible way out of his confusion and distress.

However two weeks later, Andrew has appeared to move on. Andrew has redefined his goals and found a solution (to encourage his partner to seek help) (13) which has enabled him to move forward and re-present a more progressive narrative (Murray, 2003).

3.3.1.1.2 Looking for meaning

Andrew appeared to be reaching out to elicit more established social narratives to make sense of his experiences (Murray, 2003) when they seemed confusing and inconsistent with his expectations. He alludes to worrying about his partner (4), later referring to 'an element of depression/exhaustion' (8). One could suggest at this stage that he is checking out with other fathers whether the current discord in his adult relationship is, in part at least, a result of his partner's pathology. The ending of Andrew's narrative is left open or unfinished indicated by the words, 'please help' (13). Andrew appears to be checking out his narrative against those of a group (fathers) to which he now belongs in order to gain clarity, understanding and/or advice.

In his reply Paul, is also experiencing a situation outside his existing narrative (20-21), challenging his current understanding of his world. As a result he checks his narrative with that of professionals at the hospital (23) to create a new meaning to his experiences which includes information about hormones potentially affecting his partner's behaviour. He shares this with Andrew and details of how his wife feels, how she reacts towards him and the lack of logic that she ascribes to this behaviour with Andrew. Two days later Andrew replies and the situation has progressed positively from his point of view. Using the discussion forum may

have enabled him to clarifying the issues for himself in terms of where he feels the difficulties lie, with his wife (4 & 8). He replies:

Things came to a head recently and finally after much suggestion, my partner has spoken with the health visitor -who is going to arrange some counselling to help her adjust to the changes and provide her with a chance to 'offload' without harming our relationship. We will also probably take some counselling together
(Andrew: 31-34)

There is no mention of sources of support from friends or family in either posting with counselling providing 'therapy' for his partner, while he earlier describes receiving 'therapy' from his daughter 'after a stressful day at work' (3). When Andrew replies to Paul and states, 'I'm sorry to hear you are getting it too!' (27) there is a sense that something is being done to him, rather than the situation being as a result of the dynamics between himself, his partner and their daughter. This reflects an externalisation of responsibility, reinforced by Paul, and leaves the way he makes sense of the situation unchallenged. Nevertheless, Andrew appears to recognise that he may share some of the responsibility when he refers to couple counselling.

3.3.1.1.3 Encouraging dialogue

There are several instances where dialogue has been encouraged. Andrew ends his initial message with 'please help' and Paul then encourages Andrew to engage in a further dialogue, for example, 'Have you spoken to support staff at the hospital where baby was born? If so I would *love* to know what they said.' (24-25). This

gives a strong sense of Paul wanting to keep the dialogue going to create a reciprocal relationship within this medium.

3.3.1.1.4 Emotional language

Andrew initially uses a wide range of language to express his love, worries, fears, unfairness and frustrations. However, although Paul encourages dialogue in his reply, when he describes his situation and his behaviour he qualifies or reveals comparatively little of any emotional impact this has had:

.... Since she was born I too feel that I have become something of an emotional punchbag for my wife. We have talked about this and she says that when we are apart she misses me and yet when we are together I just annoy her, for no particular reason. Sometimes I do the wrong thing or say the wrong thing, I'm only human after all, and all hell breaks lose. I too thoroughly enjoy the involvement of looking after our beautiful daughter, but half the time my wife and I end up arguing about what I'm doing and it's getting to the point where I don't want to do anything beacuse we end up arguing in front of our daughter... (Paul: 15-21)

In response, Andrew replies to Paul by setting out his text like a formal letter, making it clear for whom it is intended, 'Dear Paul, Thank you for your reply' (26), perhaps putting the relationship into a more conventional context. Andrew makes it clear that he wants to answer Paul's question (27) yet from the tone of his second contribution as opposed to his first, it contains less emotional and more task

focused content. One can only wonder if he would he have responded if a clear question had not been posed.

Paul entitles his reply to Andrew; 'PRODUCER' which infers how Paul may perceive or wish to portray his current status and exclamation marks are used by both contributors to infer empathy and bewilderment:

The nurses and support staff have all said hormones are still in play but it sounds like you are going through pretty much the same thing and it's been almost 6 months for you! (Paul: 23-24)

... it is good to know it isn't just me going through this...though i'm sorry to hear you are getting it too! (Andrew: 27)

...(when we rang the hospital about some other problem, they informed us that we would have had more support if the baby had been born in hospital!) (Andrew: 31)

3.3.1.1.5 Sharing and normalising experiences

Paul shares his experiences of relationship difficulties with his partner since the birth of their child. He attempts to normalise and link with Andrew's experiences using the phrase, 'I too feel ...' , the same analogy, '... that I have become something of an emotional punchbag for my wife' (16) and 'It sounds as if you are going through pretty much the same thing' (23-24). He shares Andrew's close relationship with his child, 'I too thoroughly enjoy the involvement of looking after

our daughter' (19) and the wish to withdraw from involvement because of the conflict it seems to create.

This is an example of a reciprocal written dialogue on a specific topic within a discussion forum. One could suggest that the change in tone in dialogue, from emotional to more task focused was a result of one or more of a number of factors for Andrew, an increased awareness of the audience and the tone of Paul's reply, relief or discomfort at having expressed emotion, no longer feeling at a point of crisis or having to wait two weeks for a reply.

3.3.1.2 *'Sounding Off'*

The final three respondents to the discussion topic appear to have the aim of presenting advice, explanations for difficulties, solutions and/or personal experiences rather than encouraging dialogue between participants (Extract B: Page 96). They all appeared to have been triggered to write by the original message as no references are made to Andrew's reply or to other contributors.

3.3.1.2 Extract B: ‘Sounding off’ - Presentation of an opinion versus
conversational dialogue

36 37 38 39 40 41 42 43 44 45 46 47 48 49 50 51 52 53 54	<p>You aren't alone..... Brendon – 11/6/2002</p> <p><i>God we could have the same life. My child is 7 weeks old and I have had a similar experience. I am worried constantly about the almost immediate instability in the relationship between my partner and I after the birth. It's almost ironic that every book, midwife, doctor and commentator talks about active, involved fathers and yet when push comes to shove the moment you try it's a torrent of emotive comments or "Who do you think you are". I've had everything from "It's not going to work" to "I'm going home" to "This child will have no contact with your family" the list goes on. I try my best (and I probably succeed as much as I fail) with helping out, housework, comforting and watching the child but it always is interpreted as wrong or "not gentle enough" or "inconsiderate". I've noticed an almost pathetic, subservient role emerging in my own behaviour that is now just saying whatever to avoid an argument or my wife's wrath. I work hard during the day (as my wife does with the baby) but I agree that we are considered them emotional punching bags of the mother and we just have to cop it. I am at a loss as to what to do. You keep saying to yourself that it will pass and things will get better but I can see no end. I could not bear to be separated from my baby boy (my wife is foreign and would likely take off immediately if we split) but so far I've lost 6kgs and can't remember the last time I laughed. Sooner or later something will give, I hate to say it as well but thoughts of separating from my wife are increasingly filling my mind for both mine and the child's sake. Thankfully my work provides an external counselling service which (although I never thought I would) I am going to use – that or just sink into an ever increasing spiral of depression. Funny isn't it – that for all the joys of looking into your baby's eyes and wondering just what's going on in there – there can be so much sadness as well</i></p>
55 56 57 58 59 60 61 62 63 64 65 66 67 68 69 70 71 72 73 74 75 76 77 78 79	<p>Why your Partner may hate you – David - 4/7/2002</p> <p><i>Andrew, There are many reasons why this can be and it's not uncommon. 1) Getting rid of the DNA father : your partner may think that was all she wanted you from you and now wants to just enjoy "her" baby on her own. 2) Resentment - your partner may really resent the lack of freedom and the extra responsibility she has now lost and you are having to pay the price. Also your coping with a job and loving all the new chores when she finds them harrowing can really piss her off and this how she shows it. 3) Real post-natal depression 4) You have changed in her eyes and she does not like the change. For example she may not like the way you give in and it may be better you just getting her to go out or you and baby going out for a walk ? In all of the above your relationship pre the baby are vital, really analyse what it was like ? Was it secure, was the baby planned by both of you and has her plans turn out right re her career and the effect on her body and life ? If things were hunky dory then remember the old saying " This too shall pass". Don't row in front of the baby, even they pick up the aggression in voices and do not like it ? Take time apart, let her go out, take the baby out for a long walk on your own, take her out for a social night out and especially to meet other people. You have rights assert them don't be trampled on, try getting someone to look after the baby and just go out for a long walk and air your feeling openly and honestly, tell your partner you love her and the baby but do understand her new persona (ie in man talk -her new found aggression and unreasonableness). All in all, the worst thing you can do for the baby is to leave it and walk out. Many many kids are messed up as they feel or are told that their dad abandoned them, don't do that for the most precious thing in your life. Once you walk out or "abandon the mother and child ", remember, you are now labelled the typical Nethandral man dropping sperm off all over the place and running. The law is totally against you - accept it and learn to avoid conflict, aggression (at all costs never be aggressive again the law is totally against you even more if you lose it !). Welcome to parent hood and the art of making sacrifices. Be constructive : Suggest counselling, or just see one on your own. Speak to the health visitor on your own or away from the mother, perhaps suggest that your partner may be suffering from post-natal but in denial. Just think - what is best for this baby? This too shall pass, we were fine before and can be again</i></p>
80 81 82 83 84 85 86 87 88 89 90 91	<p>Alex - 30/7/2002</p> <p><i>here's a familiar story! I well remember going through exactly the same thing - my kids are 4 and 7 now and I am on the way to an (amicable) divorce. from my experience, I can only say one thing - DON'T stop talking. make sure you put your point of view across, point out that while things have changed, you have not, nor have your feelings for her. you may be the peacemaker now in order to get through the day, but she won't thank you for it later. your partner is dealing with a whole new horizon and is probably not enjoying the sudden shift in her life perspective. while it may seem hard to do, you have to remind her of where YOU fit into all of this, that you are willing to be an equal partner in your daughter's nurturing, but that you haven't suddenly taken on the punchbag role. it may be that your partner feels trapped by her new circumstances and feels her freedom is being withdrawn, so she lashes out at the nearest thing - remember above all YOU are the nearest thing and as a result you're going to take a lot of undeserved flak. don't be afraid to point this out as well! keep talking. make sure you put your side of the situation across at all times, and refuse the punchbag role! good luck!</i></p>

3.3.1.2.1 Matching the Regressive Narrative (I feel as bad you)

Brendon immediately matches Andrew's regressive narrative giving an account of the post-natal parental relationship, the pressures for fathers to be actively involved and his inability to develop a role for himself while feeling excluded or criticised by his wife from the care of their child. Brendon attempts to communicate a clearer picture and a greater insight into relationship between himself and his wife by including dialogue:

... its a torrent of emotive comments or "Who do you think you are". I've had everything from "It's not going to work" to "I'm going home" to "This child will have no contact with your family"... the list goes on. I try my best (and I probably succeed as much as I fail) with helping out, housework, comforting and watching the child but it always is interpreted as wrong or "not gentle enough" or "inconsiderate". (Brendon: 39-43)

He echoes Andrew's early attempts to keep the peace by the adoption of a 'subservient' role. He includes the term 'we' to indicate a collective narrative, one he regards as an experience that is shared with other fathers and 'but I agree' to link into Andrew's story:

I've noticed an almost pathetic, subservient role emerging in my own behaviour that is now just saying whatever to avoid an argument or my wife's wrath. I work hard during the day (as my wife does with the baby) but I agree that we are considered them

emotional punching bags of the mother and we just have to cop it. I am at a loss as to what to do. You keep saying to yourself that it will pass and things will get better but I can see no end. (Brendon: 43-47).

Brendon is also looking for an answer and appears stuck and unable to move forward. His strong use of emotional language (52-54) portrays a father who is very distressed and depressed in his current situation.

3.3.1.2.2 The dominant social/cultural context

Brendon concurs with Andrew (10) when he writes about his thoughts of leaving and his fears of being separated from his child:

I could not bear to be separated from my baby boy (my wife is foreign and would likely take off immediately if we split) ... I hate to say it as well but thoughts of separating from my wife are increasingly filling my mind for both mine and the child's sake. (Brendon: 47-51)

One could suggest that that being unable to fulfil his goal of developing a paternal narrative or to continue within a married narrative now that he has a child, he considers reverting back to a familiar narrative, that of a single man.

David, ostensibly a staff member at Fathers Direct, makes only a passing reference to his own paternal status and experience (75-76). Rather than presenting his own experiences of fatherhood, presents Andrew (and other fathers including Paul and

Brendon) with a number of established and dominant social and cultural narratives from a child's, societal and legal perspective in the hope that Andrew and others in a similar situation will use these to make sense of their current circumstances and formulate new goals (of staying rather than leaving). He uses vivid imagery and highly emotive words and phrases to convey his values and beliefs (and the values of the website?) about fatherhood:

All in all, the worst thing you can do for the baby is to leave it and walk out. Many many kids are messed up as they feel or are told that their dad abandoned them, don't do that for the most precious thing in your life. Once you walk out or "abandon the mother and child ", remember, you are now labelled the typical Nethandral man dropping sperm off all over the place and running. The law is totally against you - accept it and learn to avoid conflict, aggression (at all costs never be aggressive again the law is totally against you even more if you lose it !). Welcome to parent hood and the art of making sacrifices. (David, 70-76)

David reveals an interesting attitude to aggression. Given that Andrew (or Paul) has given no evidence that he has behaved in an aggressive way; David would seem to imply that aggression is giving in to natural, and therefore inevitable, anger, something one should learn to avoid. He offers a wide range of explanations to Andrew, ranging from his partner's selfishness, jealousy or post-natal depression to suggesting that Andrew (and Brendon?) may be acting in a way which is too sympathetic (60-61; 67). David appears to present his narrative to someone who he considers has less experience as a father and is in a position of lesser authority

within the website. He writes in a commanding, authoritative manner throughout the reply and his continual use of 'you' or 'your' indicates that David is imposing his narrative on Andrew rather than the shared narrative provided by Paul and Brendon. He fires questions for Andrew to ask himself rather than respond to:

In all of the above your relationship pre the baby are vital, really analyse what it was like ? Was it secure, was the baby planned by both of you and has her plans turne dout right re her career and the effect on her body and life ? If things were hunky dory then remeber the old saying " This too shall pass". (David 62-64)

It is hard to imagine how Andrew might feel if the above questions were answered in the negative. David goes on to provide an exhaustive list of dos and don'ts (61-75) and suggests counselling as an option:

Suggest counsellling, or just see one on your own. Speak to the health vistor on your own or away from the mother, perhaps suggest that your partner may be suffering from post-natal but in denial. Just think - what is best for this baby? (David, 76-78)

It is interesting that David concludes by reinforcing Andrew's view that the responsibility for the difficulties lies with his partner and if she refutes this she must be in denial. It would surely be in the child's long term interests to include rather than exclude the mother from any discussions. Fathers Direct, as a charity, aims to promote strong and positive relationships between all children and their father/male carer. Is this contribution a method of monitoring the site and promoting this aim? His contribution certainly does not lack emotional fervour or condescension towards new parents.

In addition to normalising Andrew's experiences, Alex's posting (80-91) seems to summarise much of the advice contained in the other replies, often using capital letters to add emphasis to the points he feels are important. As a more experienced father he appears to use the benefit of hindsight to present a more balanced view, incorporating a mother's perspective (84-88). One wonders if being 'on the way to an 'amicable divorce' may serve to reduce the face validity of his advice, and raise anxieties for Andrew.

3.3.1.2.3 Modelling behaviour?

Brendon reflects Andrew's reluctance to become engaged with counselling services (34-35; 51-52) yet he appears to have accepted that counselling may provide a viable alternative option to separation. In seeking an external source of support (a works counselling service) he is, in effect, accessing a different social relationship to develop a new narrative identity (Murray, 2003) in order to prevent 'an ever increasing spiral of depression' (53). In effect he models the acceptability of counselling for himself to Andrew who is at a point of considering joint counselling. There is an implicit issue (that it is the mother who should remain the primary carer) within the text, which goes unchallenged by all participants reflecting a current powerful dominant societal and cultural narrative. This is in line with idealised and uncontested beliefs about motherhood and the superiority of the mother as a parent (Warin, Solomon, Lewis & Langford, 1999).

3.4 Conclusions

Using narrative or telling a story was an effective method for fathers to communicate and share their experiences with other fathers. It provided a human connection or bond between individuals when the dialogue involved an 'I've been there too' element. Narrative analysis provided a useful means to analyse these types of data.

One could suggest that fathers in crisis are more likely to communicate a more emotional narrative. Andrew had coped alone before reaching a point when he experienced disengagement ideation. One could hypothesise that it is the father who has experienced a regressive post-natal narrative and has come through the crisis, yet remains in touch with the emotionality of their difficulties, who is best able to provide a helpful empathic response to someone like Andrew. The replies in this study did not score highly on these two axes as they were descriptive, authoritative, moralising and/or highly individual. That being said, one could argue that having had the opportunity to post a message on this forum, Andrew found that experience helpful in itself, irrespective of the responses.

This study has identified a number of different functions offered by an internet discussion group. There was evidence that in general contributors appeared to be able to express themselves in an unrestrained manner (King and Moreggi, 1998), both emotionally and vociferously. There did not appear to be a reticence to express emotional difficulties in this forum despite new fathers generally preferring to seek emotional support from their partners (Zelkowitz & Milet, 1997) and being

reluctant to confide, other than superficially, in work colleagues (Dabney, 2004). In terms of the benefits of group membership described by Humphries and Rappaport (1994), this study found some evidence of emotional support and concern being shown between contributors and a sharing of personal experiences. However, although there was evidence of informational support, enabling participants to find new ways of coping with their shared problems, this seemed to be imposed rather than shared and may influence the degree to which fathers feel empowered within the group. Given the balance between those contributors who were seeking support and empathically responding and those wishing to express their views/experiences, the internet discussion group may provide fathers with a cathartic opportunity rather than a valid source of support per se. The functions provided by a discussion group of this kind are perhaps similar to those provided by a 'gentleman's club', where the boundaries of political correctness are challenged and where there is a hierarchy of status, experience and expertise.

There is some evidence of monitoring content within the website. On a recent visit to the website it had been restructured and redesigned to include a 'Rant of the Month' board, which provides a space for 'sounding off', perhaps encouraging a greater degree of interactive dialogue within other discussion forums within the site. However, longitudinal research using both qualitative and quantitative methods would be useful to monitor in the nature of communication within this medium both from outside and within the website. Further research is required to evaluate the degree to which fathers feel less isolated using this medium and whether text based online communication can enhance face to face communication

and if it does, by what process. Should a health professional suggest that a father's access such a support system? The study found evidence that the forum, in its original format, provided fathers with an opportunity to freely express themselves emotionally, and a limited source of empathic emotional and informational support. This may provide more than is currently available to the father from health professionals or from those within his social or occupational sphere and as such may provide him with a useful additional, and perhaps, more appealing resource. This web site appears to have evolved over time, a result of a drive to increase usage. Depending upon the staff's management of the site and the manner in which they respond to contributors, it is possible that it will improve as a resource as a greater number of more diverse fathers respond to the concerns and experiences of other fathers.

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CHAPTER 4:

ENTERING A FATHER'S WORLD AS A RESEARCHER

4.1 Reflections on the Research Process

4.1.1 Choice of Research Topic

I was originally interested in studying the decision process that leads an increasing number of women to opt for an elected caesarean section for a second birth. The role of the woman's partner in that decision was raised within the literature and I became increasingly interested in the experiences of men in terms of childbirth and subsequent parenthood. My search for literature and information provided to fathers took me to a large local bookshop and I was surprised and dismayed that the content of parenting texts did not appear to have moved on in the years since my own children were born. There was very little for a father in the way of preparatory literature, and the general message appeared to be that a father's role is to provide support for the new mother and a lot more help in the home.

When examining current research it supported my initial impression that the parenting literature reinforces a societal belief that women are superior when caring for children, the responsibility for children lies with the mother and fathers play a subordinate role in parenting (Lamb, 1997). Furthermore, fathers tend to be portrayed within parenting manuals as inadequate, jealous, reluctant and rejected (Luchetti, 1999). It appeared that there was a lack of appropriate material for boys and men which reflected men's experiences of fatherhood, their concerns and

interests. I came across an extensive review of the fatherhood research by Lupton and Barclay (1997) who conclude that much of the academic literature tends “to pathologise fatherhood” and underplay or lose the “emotional ...dimensions of fatherhood ... the affective, sensual, intensely embodied dimension of fatherhood” (p.61). I was intrigued, my focus shifted, I set out to explore the world from a new perspective, my journey often reminiscent of the first time I travelled in a glass bottomed boat.

On later reflection, I realised that there may have been another motivating force behind my decision, to not only study a father’s experience of being a new father, but, to focus on the time between three and six months after the birth of the baby. My parents emigrated from the UK to Australia before I was born and my mother, unhappy with her life overseas, returned to give birth to me in the UK. My father had to stay to sort out their business affairs and did not return to the UK until I was six months old. I wondered if I wanted to see what he had missed!

4.1.2 Recruitment difficulties

The difficulties recruiting fathers has been widely reported in the academic literature (Hops & Seeley, 1992; Lewis & O’Brien, 1987; Phares, 1997). Is it that fathers are disinterested in being involved in research? Suggestions have included fathers being neglected because of the attitudes of researchers who assume that father are not involved in their children’s lives (Phares, 1997) or excluded as a result of conducting research during men’s working hours (Lewis & O’Brien, 1987). It is noteworthy that many British men are deeply interested in and moved by their experiences of pregnancy and birth and wish to be included in services

offered by health professional, to the extent that when anti-natal classes are held in the evening, they are fully booked for months in advance (Burgess and Ruxton, 1996).

Gate-keeping is a theme which has arisen both in the literature review, which details potential hurdles and barriers to developing and maintaining paternal involvement, and within fathers' accounts relating to the attitudes of health professionals to their involvement. As a researcher I also felt that this may have been in operation (exclusively by females) during the recruitment process and when attempting to arrange the research interviews. These experiences enabled me to identify with the fathers' difficulties gaining access to a 'female world'. It was a condition of ethical approval that prospective participants, fulfilling the criteria for inclusion, should be first approached by a health professional rather than directly by the researcher. In my original research proposal my brief paper required a large number of participants and I opted to visit post-natal wards to speak directly to new fathers identified by ward staff as being interested in participating in the study. However, ward managers considered that it was inappropriate to disturb fathers during 'couple only' time in the evening when fathers would usually attend, and suggested that information about the study could be given to Community Midwives to give to the mother, or if possible, directly to the father, during routine post-natal home visits. Furthermore, recruitment at a second hospital was blocked by a Nurse Manager at the last moment due to "too much research going on here". Three months and three participants later, I extended the criteria of ethical approval to include Health Visitors, who subsequently agreed to approach families in their areas where they thought the father 'might be interested'. Agreement was also

given for a third hospital to be included in the study. Here the ward staff were happy for me to recruit on the ward, with the ward staff initially approaching fathers to gauge interest. The number of participants increased quickly.

Given the variation in recruitment success and following discussions with participants, I do not think that fathers were disinterested in taking part. I wondered if the Community Midwives (and the Ward/Nurse Managers), a) felt protective of the family unit so soon after the birth of the child and did not want to burden them, including the father, with any more demands, b) saw the study as having little relevance to them given that the fathers were to be interviewed at least three months after the birth, c) did not have the time, d) felt uncomfortable including the father in their discussions or acknowledging the emotional impact on the father, e) saw their main responsibility to be towards the new mother or f) gave the information to the mother who was then responsible for passing this on, third hand, to the father.

I was aware that the more interested the health professionals were (as indicated by the number of questions asked about the study), the more involved and motivated they were to recruit. It was difficult to ascertain whether Health Visitors approached father directly or indirectly through their partner and how involved the partner had been in the decision to participate. The importance of partner co-operation (or the partner taking responsibility for the activities of the father) was highlighted by Price (2001) who found that attendance at an evening father's group was maximised when mothers encouraged their partner's to attend.

A high proportion of fathers in the study recruited by Health Visitors had had the experience of having no relationship or a troubled relationship with their own father. Had Health Visitors picked up on an unusual level of emotionality, where the experience of childbirth had evoked memories from the past? Often cited as problems for quantitative research, the prevalence of these difficulties did not present any difficulties. The aim of the study was to understand the subjective emotional experience of being a father, with sampling techniques used in Grounded Theory not requiring randomness or aiming to generalise findings.

Gate-keeping by the partners of two fathers may have been in operation during several unsuccessful attempts at various times of the day to contact the father himself to arrange an interview. Comments from partners reflected a desire for the father to be with them rather than involved in research, for example, “he doesn’t spend enough time at home as it is”. There were a number of fathers who were “working away” or “working long hours”, whom I was unable to contact directly to confirm that they no longer wished to take part in the study.

4.1.3 How the fathers experienced the interview

Creating a narrative or story can help construct and reconstruct our experiences in our own minds and at our own pace, providing a way of restoring a sense of order (Murray, 2003). Fathers appeared to gain a greater clarity about their experiences, recognition of their achievements, a more balanced view of the reasons behind some of the difficulties they had faced and an opportunity to express very difficult feelings, which for one participant appeared to bring relief:

“... But it’s even now telling you all about it again; I feel a bit ‘pew’ as though things have come off my – a weights been lifted off my shoulder” (Transcript D)

I verbalised my reflections on an audio tape after each interview and later transcribed these in a reflective diary. I recorded a number of observations of non verbal behaviour which indicated how two participants conveyed how they were experiencing the interview. The recording also captured some evidence of transference.

“...really believing that his partner might die was pretty powerful (I clear my throat on the tape). Interesting in a non-verbal sense (am I now intellectualising?) - how he seemed to have something stuck in his chest, clearing his throat and he kept tapping it for quite a while, while we were talking early on. Then he seemed to yawn a lot and it was interesting how this made him look tearful. His eyes welled up quite a few times and he finds it difficult to talk about his emotions ... trying to hold it together and then taking about how he feels about the baby ...” (Following interview with D)

This participant was interviewed during the relational sampling phase of the Grounded Theory approach to data generation, when the interview is more focused. His verbal and non verbal behaviour made me aware of the restrictions of applying the techniques too rigorously:

“... it was a bit mechanical at first – difficult to get into the interview – only hearing very superficial answers. He was trying to

get into the interview yet there was something missing – an emotional tone. It was fascinating that when he began talking about his own experiences (at the end of the interview I had asked, “is there anything that we haven’t covered that you think might be relevant?”) the baby, who had been very fidgety for about half an hour and not really settling, having something to drink, spitting bits out, being sick on the floor, all of a sudden snuggled down and went to sleep. He put on a fleecy jacket (protection?), appeared to settle into the settee and talked about how hard he had found it to talk to anyone about his experiences ... ” (Following interview with F)

In retrospect it may have been more effective to have begun with an invitation to describe the emotional impact of having a child of 3 - 6 months old. However, during the debriefing period he had told me that he needed to get to know me before he felt able to talk about how he felt. This may have been the case for a number of fathers as it was observed that the last 45 minutes for them tended to provide the most ‘emotionally rich’ data. Interviews ranged in length from 1 ½ to 3 ¼ hours this observation providing a strong argument for including a warming up period in future research and having a longer, extended interview with this population.

Partners either were out of the house leaving the father responsible for the baby during the interview, stayed upstairs with the baby or took the baby out with them. The quality of audio-recording was dependent upon whether the baby was asleep or awake and the presence of the baby did present a distraction for one father:

v. difficult to talk in any depth with baby in the room, became a way of distraction when emotional content increased, definitely a third person in the room (me!). Almost 6 months old so more engaged and communicative ... (Following interview with C)

Partners commented on how important it was for fathers to be given a voice, how their partner had “never talked to me for that long” or “I was tempted to bring the baby monitor downstairs”.

4.1.4 Degree of disclosure

My experience interviewing fathers reflected the experiences of Lupton and Barclay (1997) who state that fathers in their study were “quite open in expressing the strong feelings of love they felt for their children, and their distress at not being able to spend much time with them” (p.144). I found fathers eager to talk in detail about a range of emotions from anger, desperation, fear, helplessness and resentment to love, euphoria, pride and protectiveness. Many described the impact that a child had had on their intimate relationship with their partner and shared experiences and feelings that they had been reluctant to discuss with their partners for fear of burdening them further. For example, one participant described his experience of childbirth being “tarnished” by being unable to move from “the tail end’ during the birth and being very distressed and shocked by witnessing his partner losing a significant amount of blood and the nurses “scooping it up with their hands”. Two other participants talked of their hostile feelings towards their partner’s families who had been unnecessarily demanding and unhelpful rather than supportive of the new family.

4.2 Reflections on my role as researcher

4.2.1 How I experienced the interviews

During the interviews I was there as a researcher, a therapist and a fellow parent. When reflecting on this during the transcribing and analysis process these three roles were used interchangeably in a way that seemed to enhance interaction and the generation of data. Being an older, female researcher did not seem to present any noticeable difficulties, even when the discussion moved to more sensitive material, for example the impact of the child on the sexual relationship of the couple. Being a receptive listener may have been a more influential personal characteristic. Oskowitz and Meulenberg-Buskens (1997) advocate that in order to generate valid data, respondents need to risk voicing their feelings. They argue that it is crucial that the researcher needs empathy and compassion in order for a mutually trusting relationship to develop.

I was asked on occasions if I had children and fathers seemed reassured that I had appeared to have survived even the teenage years. I occasionally experienced maternal feelings towards the father or the couple, particularly when the narrative included an experience of neglect from a parent or a professional:

“Isolated – not living near partner’s parents and looking for support and someone to replace mother figure (depressed and psychologically absent from participant as a child) – talked about wanting an experienced Heath Visitor and rather than just giving them ideas, having someone who could really listen to them - me?”

(Following interview with H)

There were times when I wanted to soothe and heal when a participant described the emotional coldness of his mother and when I felt frustration when told of out-dated attitudes of some fellow professionals. I shared the losses and gains in reverse, as the interviews coincided with my son leaving home. I identified with accounts of desperation and feelings of failure (following many disturbed nights with my own 14 month old son) and was not shocked by one participant who experienced very aggressive thoughts towards his son, although I was aware of remaining acutely vigilant for potential risk. I found myself looking at the tape recorder to remind myself that this was a one off interview, that the purpose of the interview was to generate data for research purposes and that it was appropriate to use basic engagement skills to facilitate rapport. I seemed to adopt additional roles during the interview process, scribe, validator, facilitator and coach. During the interviews I became increasingly respectful of the strengths and competencies fathers have, moved by how deeply affected emotionally they are when they become fathers and aware of the power of others to facilitate or alienate them. Regular supervision and debriefing phone calls following each interview to my academic supervisor were a valued and essential support throughout the research process.

4.2.2 How I experienced Grounded Theory approach

Given the privileged access I had into the father's world, I was sensitised to a father's experience of being 'excluded' or 'dismissed'. Reducing a large data set using Grounded Theory techniques into 'line by line codes', 'meaningful units' and finally 'a model', meant that an individual's story was immersed alongside with other stories. I felt a strong sense of responsibility to reflect events, experiences

and emotions important and salient to each participant and at times I felt restricted and constrained by the approach and the word count.

Furthermore the process of analysis at times felt surreal, carrying out a mechanical and systematic process, yet needing to be emotionally engaged in the data, while at the same time thinking creatively about how concepts might or might not relate to each other. Doing Grounded Theory well requires a quantitative researcher to unlearn, at least in part, research skills taught and developed in the past, for example, challenging issues of generalisability, the timing of a literature review and the layout of the research to best present the data, rather than to use an established format. Regular meetings with a 'Grounded Theory' group provided enormous emotional and academic support and reassurance throughout.

4.3 Reflections on Research Findings

4.3.1 The model

The model reflected the emotional experiences of both the fathers and myself as the researcher. I shared the fathers state of instability (including realisation, not being in control, exhaustion, home-work balance, disruption in relationship with partner), turmoil (feeling unable to cope, intensely negative, and questioning my decision to do Grounded Theory) and positive development or personal growth (the developmental stages of the research, increasing confidence/mood, reflecting, learning and adapting to restrictions). I also developed feelings of attachment to the data set and when I describe the model visually I cannot help reaching out with

both arms and creating a cradle shape, to envelope the imaginary entity, wishing to perhaps add a more nurturing context, in the past and the present. The physical connection I have with the model represents the importance to me as a clinician of a supportive and facilitative environment and appears to be reflected in my non-verbal behaviour.

It is apparent from the model that I remained focused on the man's perspective, and in doing so seemed to relegate the new mother to the periphery. It is possible that having had the experience of childbirth and motherhood, this perspective held less fascination for me, enabling me to stay focused.

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Appendix A

Publication criteria for journal –

**Fathering: A Journal of Theory, and Practice
About Men as Fathers**

Fathering: A Journal of Theory, Research, and Practice About Men as Fathers

(ISSN: 1537-6680)

Fathering will be published three times each year beginning in 2003 (February, June, and October).

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Alan J. Hawkins, Ph.D., CFLE, Brigham Young University

Purpose and Scope

Fathering: A Journal of Theory and Research About Men as Parents publishes peer-reviewed, empirical and theoretical papers addressing *all* aspects of fathering. *Fathering* is a multidisciplinary, peer-reviewed journal devoted to the promotion of knowledge about fathers and families as well as knowledge of practice with fathers. The journal publishes original articles that are theoretical, empirical, practice-oriented, or based on comprehensive reviews of the literature.

Fathering is intended for teachers, students, and practitioners involved in the behavioral and social sciences and whose interest in or whose research examines any intersection of men's lives and the parenting role in the broadest sense. Thus, sociologists, social workers, psychologists, mental health practitioners will find *Fathering* a valuable resource for advancing their knowledge about men-as-parents issues.

Along with original articles (approximately 6,000 to 10,000 words), *Fathering* will routinely publish brief reports (approximately 2,500 words) and book reviews (approximately 750 to 1,000 words).

Call for Papers and Instructions to Authors

Fathering: A Journal of Theory, Research, and Practice About Men as Fathers invites submissions of scholarly articles and essays dealing with all aspects of fathering. ***Fathering*** is a multi-disciplinary, peer-reviewed journal devoted to the promotion of knowledge about fathers and families as well as knowledge of practice with fathers. The journal publishes original articles that are theoretical, empirical, practice-oriented, or based on comprehensive reviews of the literature. Some of the topics included in the journal are fathers' roles in dual-earner families, paternal involvement in divorced families, step-fathers' roles in blended families, father presence/absence and its impact on children, child-custody issues, measures of father involvement, fathering in the context of marital relationships, co-parenting issues, consequences of becoming a father for men, outcomes of intervention programs on fathers and families, and fathers' social-emotional involvement in their children.

Submission Guidelines

- Submission implies that the article has not been published elsewhere, nor is under consideration for publication by another journal.
- Manuscripts will be reviewed anonymously. In order to insure anonymity, each copy of the manuscript should include a separate title page with the author(s)' name(s) and affiliation(s), and these should not appear anywhere else on the manuscript. Footnotes that identify the author(s) should be typed on a separate page. Author(s) should make every effort to see that the manuscript itself contains no clues to the author(s)' identity.
- Since the reviewers will not return manuscripts to the editorial office, the editorial office will not return manuscripts to their authors. Authors should keep a copy of the manuscript to guard against loss.
- Authors must send a computer disk copy and a hard copy of the manuscript prepared in MS Word for PC following acceptance of the manuscript for publication. Disks will not be returned to authors.
- Upon acceptance of a manuscript, authors must sign and return a copyright agreement.
- Authors should submit four (4) typed, double-spaced copies of their manuscript to:

Dr. Jay Fagan, Editor
Temple University, School of Social Administration
Ritter Hall Annex, 5th floor
13th Street and Cecil B. Moore Avenue
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19122

- In addition to submitting four paper copies, authors are encouraged to submit an electronic version in MS Word for PC attached as a file to an email addressed to the

editor. Electronic submission can greatly speed the review process. Send the copy to JayFagan@mensstudies.com.

Manuscript preparation:

- Authors should prepare manuscripts according to *the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (5th edition). Instructions on how to prepare tables, figures, references, and abstracts appear in the *Manual*.
- All copy must be typed, double-spaced (including indented material, tables, footnotes, and references) on 8 1/2 by 11 inch white opaque paper. Allow margins of about one and one-half inches all around.
- All manuscripts must include an abstract containing a maximum of approximately 100-150 words typed on a separate sheet of paper. List up to six key words on the same page immediately below the abstract

Appendix B

Ethical Approval



GEORGE ELIOT HOSPITAL NHS TRUST

George Eliot Hospital
College Street
Nuneaton CV10 7DJ
Telephone 024 7635 1351
Facsimile 024 7686 5175
Email enquiries@geh-tr.wmids.nhs.uk
Website www.geh.nhs.uk
Direct Line
Direct Facsimile

VP/JB
14th May 2003

Ms. Jackie Dabney
C/o Psychology Services
Coombe House
George Eliot Hospital

Dear Jackie

Re: Study entitled – The emotional impact of becoming a father: A grounded theory analysis

I am writing to confirm that the George Eliot Hospital NHS Trust will indemnify the above study, subject to the provisos given below.

The study must be approved by the local research ethics committee in accordance with the guidance contained within HSG (91) 5. The Trust's staff participating in the study in the course of their NHS employment will be covered by the NHS indemnity as outlined in HSG (96) 48. The only rider to this would be the very unlikely or rare event that an employee acted in bad faith or was grossly negligent.

Regards


Mr. David Lingwood
Acting Chief Executive


Dr. Vinod Patel
Director of Audit, Research & EBP

NHS GEORGE ELIOT HOSPITAL NHS TRUST

George Eliot Hospital
College Street
Nuneaton CV10 7DJ
Telephone 024 7635 1351
Facsimile 024 7686 5175
Email enquiries@geh-tr.wmids.nhs.uk
Website www.geh.nhs.uk
Direct Line
Direct Facsimile

VP/JB
15th May 2003

Ms. Jackie Dabney
C/o Psychology Services
Coombe House
George Eliot Hospital

Dear Jackie

Re: Study entitled – The emotional impact of becoming a father: A grounded theory analysis

The Research & Development Committee has had the opportunity to review the above project and is happy to grant Trust permission for the study to commence.

The trial will be entered onto the Trusts' database and if applicable, entered onto the National Research Register (NRR).

Before commencing, and in accordance with the Research Governance Framework, you must send copies of all REC approval documents (plus amendments) to the R & D Department. You must also provide the department with results and notify us of any resulting publications for dissemination around the Trust. Similarly, if at anytime details relating to the research project or researcher change, the R & D department must be informed.

If you have any queries relating to this or any other study, please do not hesitate to contact me. The Trust wishes you success with your research.

Yours sincerely,



Dr. Vinod Patel
Director of Audit, Research & EBP

c.c. Paul Himilton, Chairman – Warwickshire Research Ethics Committee



West Midlands South Strategic Health Authority
(Including Coventry, Warwickshire, Herefordshire & Worcestershire)

WARWICKSHIRE RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

Lewes House,
George Eliot Hospital,
College Street,
Nuneaton
CV10 7DJ
Direct Line 02476 865244
Fax 02476 865058
E-Mail pat.horwell@geh.nhs.uk

Dr. J. Dabney,
5 High Street,
Upper Gravenhurst,
Bedford
MK45 4HY

Warwickshire Local Research Ethics Committee
Approval Letter
(LREC-approved Study)

RE 565 The emotional impact of becoming a father

Dear Jackie,

I am pleased to advise you that your application to participate as a Local Investigator in the above RE-approved study was reviewed by the Warwickshire Research Ethics Committee at their meeting on 26th February 2003 has now been approved. The Committee works in accordance with ICH/GCP guidelines

Please quote our RE reference number and title in all correspondence.

Yours sincerely

 
.....
Paul Hamilton (Chairman)


.....
Date

Thursday, 31 July 2003

Ms Jackie Dabney
5 High Street
Upper Gravenhurst
Bedford
MK45 4HY

George Eliot Hospital
College Street
Nuneaton CV10 7DJ
Telephone 024 7635 1351
Facsimile 024 7686 5175
Email enquiries@geh-tr.wmids.nhs.uk
Website www.geh.nhs.uk
Direct Line
Direct Facsimile

Dear Jackie

Re: Study entitled - The emotional impact of becoming a father: A grounded theory analysis.

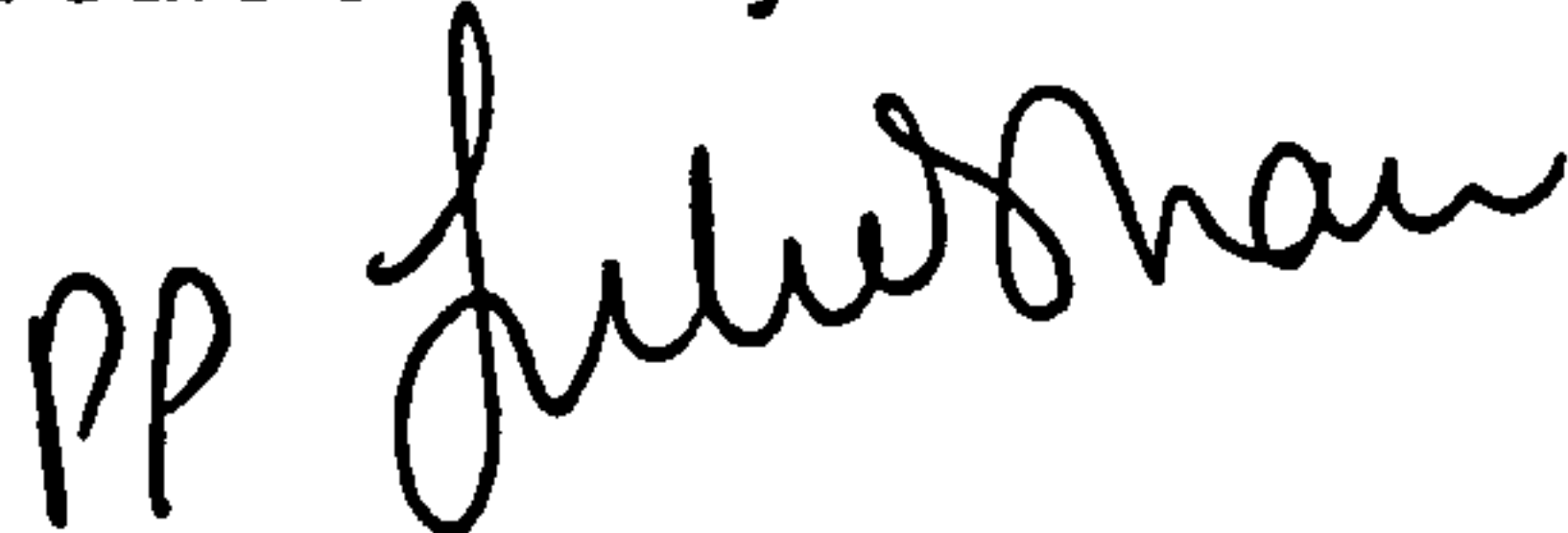
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The trial will be entered onto the Trusts' database and if applicable, entered onto the National Research Register (NRR).

Before commencing, and in accordance with the Research Governance Framework, you must send copies of all REC approval documents (plus amendments) to the R&D Department. You must also provide the department with results and notify us of any resulting publications for dissemination around the Trust. Similarly, if at anytime details relating to the research project or researcher change, the R&D department must be informed.

If you have any queries relating to this or any other study, please do not hesitate to contact me. The Trust wishes you success with your research.

Yours sincerely



Dr Vinod Patel
Director of Audit, Research & EBP

Cc Paul Hamilton, Chairman – Warwickshire Research Ethics Committee



*West Midlands South Strategic Health Authority
(Including Coventry, Warwickshire, Herefordshire & Worcestershire)*

WARWICKSHIRE LOCAL RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

Lewes House
George Eliot Hospital,
College Street, Nuneaton
CV10 7DJ
Direct Line 02476 865244 Fax 02476 865058
E.mail pat.horwell@geh.nhs.uk
Our Ref : PH/PAH
Your Ref :

21st August 2003

Jackie Dabney,
Trainee Clinical Psychologist,
School of Health and Social Sciences
Coventry University
Priory Street,
Coventry
CV1 5FB

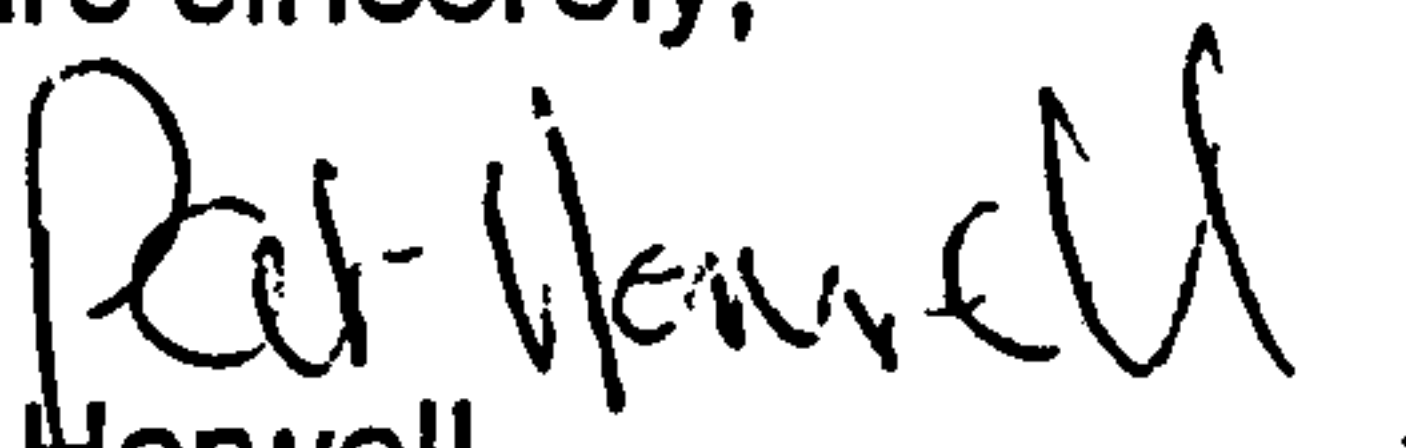
Dear Jackie,

RE 565 The emotional impact of becoming a father

Further to your letter dated 18th August, The Chairman is happy for you to extend the recruitment to the Warwick Hospital provided you have Management permission from the R & D Department beforehand.

Kind Regards,

Yours sincerely,


Pat Horwell

Administrator - Warwickshire Research Ethics Committee

Please quote reference RE .../MREC... on all correspondence in order that a speedy response may be delivered

Appendix C

Consent Form - At Recruitment



Our ref

Your ref

Date

CONSENT FORM

I give my consent for Jackie Dabney to contact me by telephone in three to six months time with details of how I can participate in the above study. If I do not wish to participate at this time I can withdraw, without giving any reason, without my legal rights being affected.

Contact Number:

Home..... Work

Prior to contact being made, I give my consent for Jackie Dabney to contact my child's health visitor to check that everything is well and that it is appropriate to call you.

Child's name:

My GP's name is:

His/Her address:

.....

Name (please print).....

Signature..... Date

Appendix D

Consent Form – Before Interview

Programme Director
Doctorate Course in Clinical Psychology
Dr Delia Cushway
BA (Hons) MSc PhD AFBPS CPsychol
School of Health and Social Sciences
Coventry University
Priory Street Coventry CV1 5FB
Telephone 024 7688 8328
Fax 024 7688 8328 or 8784



Our ref

Your ref

Date

CONSENT FORM GIVEN PRIOR TO INTERVEIW

I give my consent for Jackie Dabney to interview me. I understand that I can withdraw at any time, without giving any reason, without this affecting my rights in any way.

I also understand that all information which is collected about me during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential. All material will be stored with an identification number rather than my name so that I cannot be recognised from it. The researcher alone will have details of which participant has which code number. This information will be kept in a locked cabinet. Audio tapes/recordings will be erased after the information has been converted to written text.

Name (please print).....

Signature..... Date

Appendix E

Contact numbers given at the end of the interview

CONTACTS

Your GP

Your Health Visitor

Relateline

Couple counselling, information and support for adults dealing with relationship issues
0845 130 40 10 www.relate.org.uk

Samaritans

Providing confidential support to anyone in emotional distress

08457 90 90 90 08457 90 91 92 www.samaritans.org

Parentlineplus

Parenting help and information

0808 800 2222 0800 783 6783

www.fathers.direct.com

Discussion groups for fathers.

Appendix F

Research Participant Information Sheet



Our ref

Your ref

INFORMATION SHEET

STUDY TITLE: The Emotional Impact of Becoming a Father

Date

14th April, 2003

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Here is some information to help you decide whether or not to take part. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask us if there is anything you do not understand or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. Thank you for reading this.

What is the purpose of the study?

A number of studies have explored the emotional impact on men throughout their partner's pregnancy, from conception to birth. It has also been suggested that emotional considerations may be put on hold in the time just after birth as parents concentrate on caring for their new born child. The current study to be carried out between April, 2003 and January, 2004, aims to gain an understanding of the emotional impact on fathers during the period between 3 and 6 months after the birth of their first child.

The results from the study may provide a guide to developing or exploring:

- a) Relevant ante-natal provision which meets the needs of prospective fathers, as well as mothers
- b) Written material, given during the pregnancy and after the baby has been born which may better prepare fathers for the challenges ahead
- c) The need for post birth groups for new fathers, providing support, a forum for the expression and sharing of personal experiences and a potential social network

Why have I been chosen?

You have been chosen because you are a first time father. It is anticipated that there will be between 60- 65 participants, 50 in a group choosing to completing either a diary, communicate via e-mail or text messaging over the period of a week (Study 1) and 10-15 who will be asked if they wish to be interviewed (Study 2).

Who is organising the study?

I am a second year trainee undertaking a research project as part fulfilment of the requirements for my Doctorate in Clinical Psychology at the Universities of Coventry and Warwick. I will be supervised by two academic supervisors from the course and a clinical psychologist based at the George Eliot Hospital.

Do I have to take part?

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you are interested in taking part you will be asked if you mind the researcher telephoning you in two months time to ask you if you still wish to take part in

the study. The Community Midwife will ask you for a contact number either at home or at work and permission to contact your child's health visitor via the GP to check that everything is well and that it is appropriate to call you.

At this point we will seek your consent to continue. Even if you decide to take part in either Study 1 or 2 you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason.

What will happen to me if I take part?

For Study 1 you will be asked if you are happy to be interviewed, at your home or at the hospital, at a time convenient to you (which can include a time in the evening or at the weekend). It is likely that the interview will take between 1 and three hours and if you wish, the interview can take place over one or more meetings. The interview will be recorded using an audio tape machine. For Study 2 you will be asked if you wish to either complete a diary, use e-mail or text messaging over the course of any week between 3-6 months after the birth of your baby.

In both studies you will be asked to think about the emotional impact of being a new father, in terms of your feelings about yourself, your relationship with your partner, your child, your family, the professionals and your friends and work colleagues. A copy of the results of the study will be available to all participants on request following completion of the research.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

The study aims to explore emotions in relation to your new role as a father. This may cause strong emotions to come to the surface for some participants. You, and all participants, will be provided with contact numbers of local services and organisations that can be contacted should you wish to talk further about how you feel or about your particular situation.

Will my taking part in this study be kept confidential?

All information which is collected about you during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential. All material that you provide either via interviews, diaries, e-mails or texts will be stored with an identification number rather than your name so that you cannot be recognised from it. The researcher alone will have details of which participant has which code number. This information will be kept in a locked cabinet. Audio tapes/recordings will be erased after the information has been converted to written text. Any information I provide in a journal or e-mail will be held in an anonymised form and can be returned or destroyed as I wish.

Who has reviewed this study?

This study has been reviewed by the University of Coventry's internal ethics procedure and Warwickshire and Coventry local Research Ethics Committee.

Contact for further information

If you have any questions or concerns please do not hesitate to contact me, Jackie Dabney, Trainee Clinical Psychologist, through the Doctorate Course in Clinical Psychology at the University of Coventry (Tel: 024 7688 8328). The administrator will take a message and I will return your call as soon as I can.

Appendix G

An example of Transcript with Open Coding

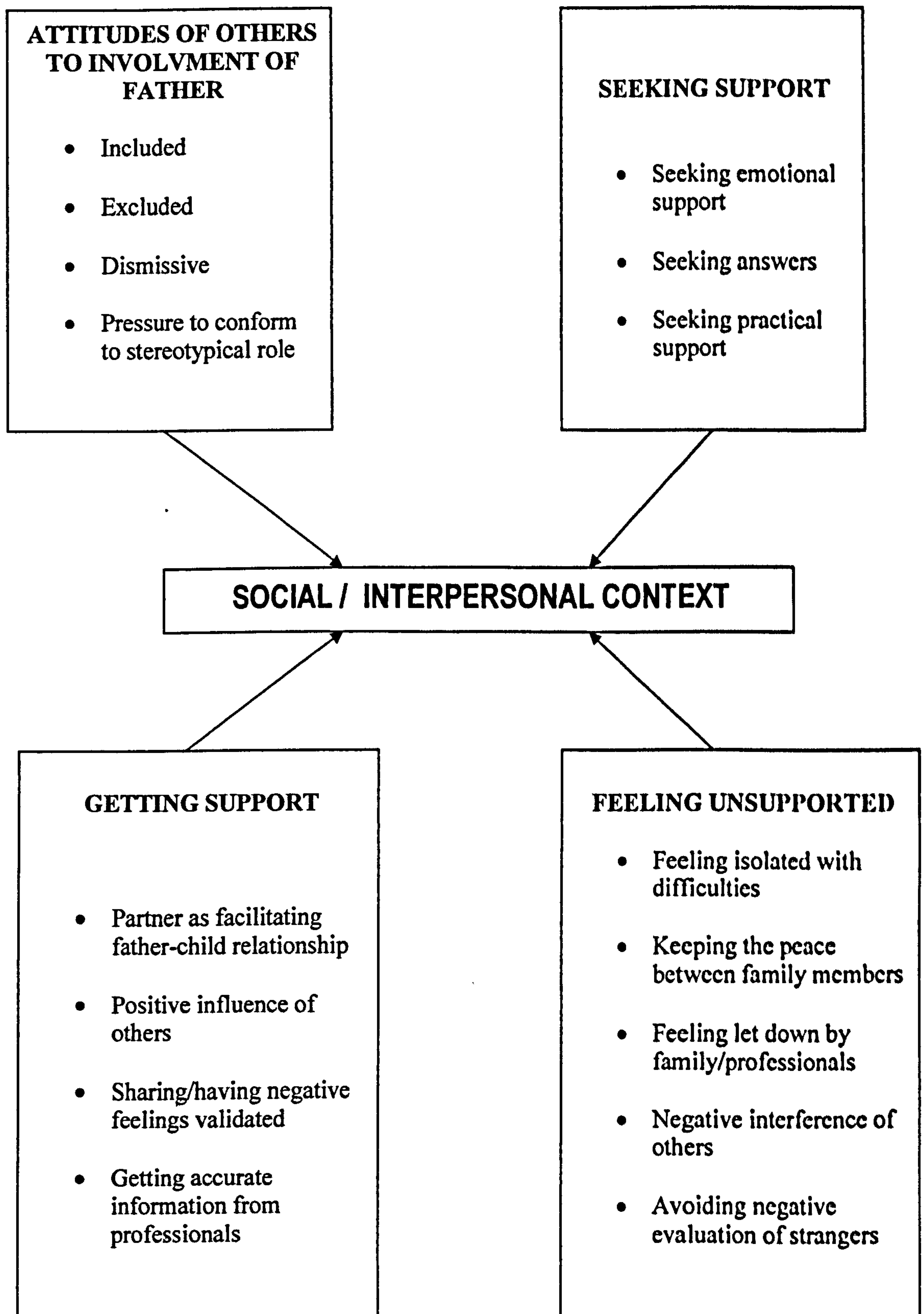
From Participant B – 30.09.03

<i>Talking to resolve conflict</i>	I think so, yes. But when we had a chat last night I could see some
<i>recognition of partner's perspective</i>	of her points of things I do wrong It's a change to my lifestyle,
<i>wanting recognition that adjustment takes time</i>	basically, like I said to her last night, you've got to give me time to adjust.
<i>accepting one's own limitations</i>	At the end of the day the baby's only three months old,
<i>fatherhood generally a good experience</i>	you're not going to change 33 years in three months are you? So ...but in general, I've got to be honest it's a good experience, I'm glad we've got a baby. I've wanted eight years for it, I didn't realise how hard it would actually be, it was a lot harder than I expected it to be.
<i>glad to have a baby, long wait to be a father.</i>	
<i>Acknowledging greater difficulty of task</i>	
<i>Note: My assumption!!!!</i>	<i>What bits?</i>
<i>Importance of lack of sleep and prevalence of tiredness.</i>	Ummm one of the big ones is the lack of sleep and feeling so tired all the time. One of my main arguments is that I go out to work, work eight, nine hours whatever and work on Saturdays and I feel that all the stuff I do is for the family, out earning the money. I know it's the old fashioned way and the wife in there looking after the baby and I find I'm doing my bit when I get home and doing my bit at the weekend to give my wife a break and, I don't know, you just feel absolutely and physically exhausted, to be honest. I was half expecting that anyway but it's just harder than what I thought it would be. It isn't forever, so ... it's just while they're very young.
<i>Self perceived importance and difficulty of providing financially for family</i>	
<i>Taking a more traditional role plus giving wife a break</i>	<i>You were expecting that you would be tired?</i>
<i>feeling physically exhausted, yet only half expecting this</i>	I was expecting to be tired, but I didn't realise how tired. I've never been late getting up for work, but these three months I have. My wife gets up in the night and sees to him when I've got to get up for work. I still wake up when I hear the baby crying, still broken sleep it's still the same, you don't have to get out of bed.
<i>Anticipating improvements with age of baby</i>	<i>Do you get back to sleep?</i>
	So so. Within about half an hour or so. That is the main change feeling so tired. Probably spend less time bonding between each other, as a couple. I say that, but we spend more time talking to each other than we did, if that makes sense.
<i>More tired than expected.</i>	
<i>Unexpected tiredness</i>	
<i>Negative impact of broken sleep on father</i>	
<i>Invisible contribution</i>	
<i>Tiredness main change</i>	
<i>Acknowledging a reduction of (?intimacy) bonding with partner</i>	
<i>Noticing changes in amount of verbal communication. Seeking validation</i>	

Appendix H

An Example of Axial Coding

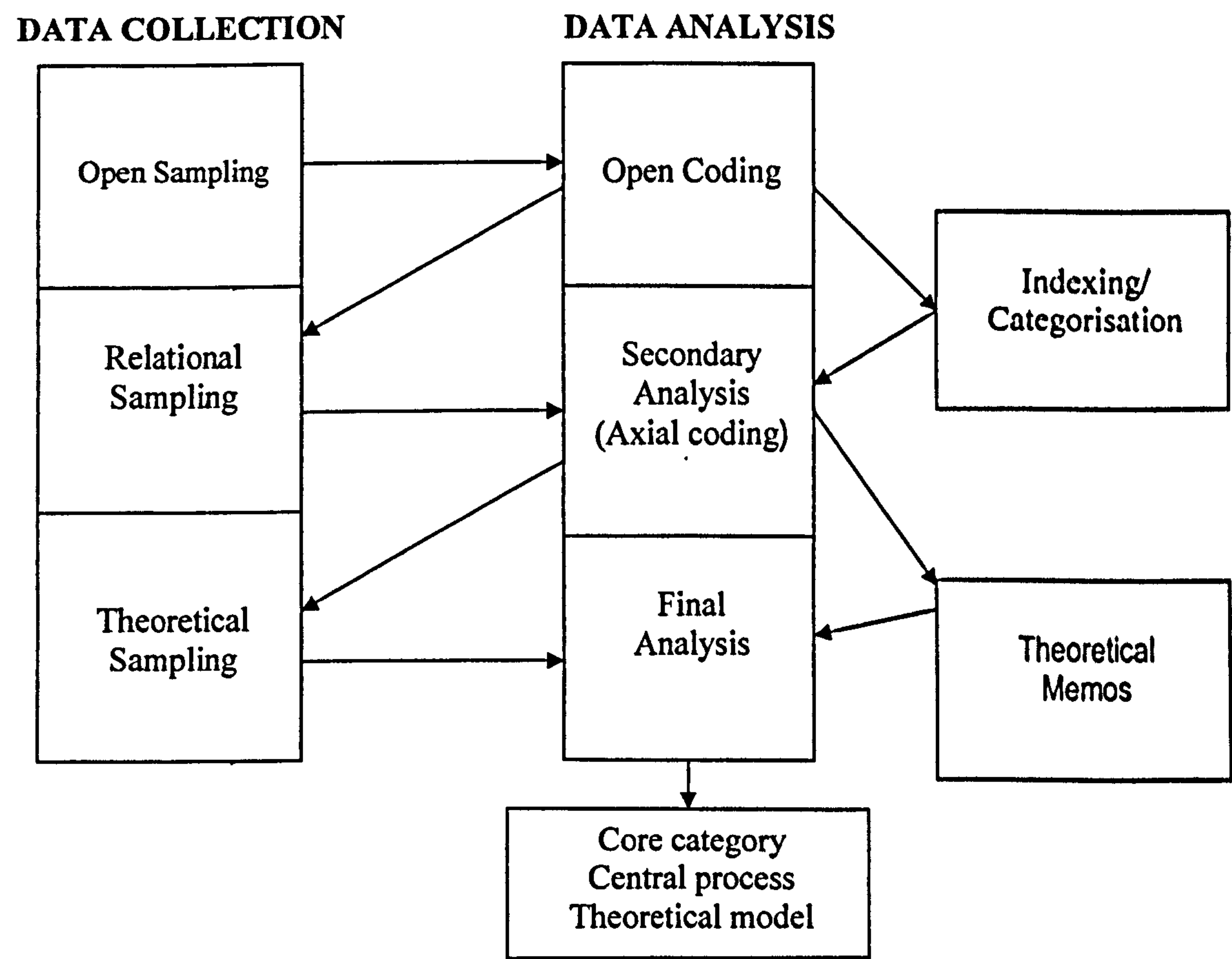
EXAMPLE OF AXIAL CODING



Appendix I

Stages in the Grounded Theory Process

Stages in the grounded theory process (Giles, 2002)



Appendix J

**One topic extracted from Discussion Forum at Fathers Direct Website
on 10.08.03**

DISCUSSION TOPICS - www.Fathersdirect.com 10.08.03

- weight loss after child birth (0 threads)
- Women & MEN editor, Manchester Evening News (0 threads)
- Baby Carriers (0 threads)
- Mail Money Making --- Earn at least US \$37.968.750! (0 threads)
- Mail Money Making --- Earn at least US \$37.968.750! (0 threads)
- No win situation? (0 threads)
- Calling all House husbands (0 threads)
- one child by wife & one by an affair- HELP (0 threads)
- help needed (0 threads)
- million Dads March (0 threads)
- million Dads March (0 threads)
- MK Family Rights Initiative (0 threads)
- TV doc on older dads (0 threads)
- Families needed for Channel 4 documentary series (1 thread)
- Seeking dads for interview (0 threads)
- Has fatherhood changed you? (1 thread)
- Punishment (1 thread)
- Need idea of sleep schedule for 9 month old (1 thread)
- Miss (0 threads)
- BBC series looking for WORKING PARENTS (0 threads)
- BBC series looking for WORKING PARENTS (0 threads)
- r6 (0 threads)
- r6 (0 threads)
- Dads of kids with Hydrocephalus (0 threads)
- women in the men's world (1 thread)
- BE IN NEW ITV SHOW (0 threads)
- BE IN NEW ITV SHOW (0 threads)
- Steve Biddulph 'Raising Boys' Talks (0 threads)
- Channel 4 is looking for stay at home Dads (0 threads)
- Sympathetic pregnancy or the Couvades Syndrome in fathers (0 threads)
- E-MAIL PROCESSORS REQUIRED IMMEDIATELY!! Earn \$2,000-\$6,000 per month (Part-time) (2 threads)
- What are my rights as a father? (1 thread)
- How do I feel sexy again after a c-section? (1 thread)
- Sex life after baby? (1 thread)
- Thomas The Tank Engine (0 threads)
- Father to be maybe? (0 threads)
- stay at home dads I need YOU!! (0 threads)
- stay at home dads I need YOU!! (0 threads)
- atheist/religious couple (2 threads)
- househusband wage (1 thread)
- ALL DADS PLEASE READ (1 thread)
- looking for teen dads (0 threads)
- How do men feel about working with children? (2 threads)
- unplanned vs. unwanted (2 threads)
- trying to do the right thing (0 threads)
- Please help papa (0 threads)
- Please help papa (0 threads)
- Possible Paternity (0 threads)
- Possible Paternity (0 threads)
- Does your child have a social worker? (0 threads)
- Do kids watch too much TV? (0 threads)
- older dad wanted (0 threads)
- Share the burden of raising twins (1 thread)
- Thoughts on what's out there. (0 threads)
- Terrified Grandparents (0 threads)
- Help!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!! (4 threads)
- SCHOOL PROJECT (2 threads)
- Lambeth fathers project (0 threads)
- Why don't divorced men get free theatre tickets? (1 thread)

- Why don't divorced men get free theatre tickets? (0 threads)
- Channel 5 seeks recently divorced fathers (0 threads)
- Teen dad wanted for magazine article (0 threads)
- Are you a single father who's been abandoned? (0 threads)
- How long until she is sexy again? (2 threads)
- I can't stay in my marriage but don't want to let my son down. (3 threads)
- Channel 5 seeks lone fathers (0 threads)
- Participate in a nationwide survey on children's health (0 threads)
- Feature writer seeking interviewee (0 threads)
- Morning Sickness (2 threads)
- single father - juggling life (0 threads)
- The thought of a second child makes me feel sick! (2 threads)
- Next babies (0 threads)
- interviewees required (1 thread)
- Baby Whisperer - Unsettled babies! (1 thread)
- Hoping to get talking with other dads with baby due October (2 threads)
- driving in pregnancy (0 threads)
- Parents, step-parents and Stress! (0 threads)
- Why does my partner hate me? (6 threads)
- BBC - The Nation's Favourite Food (0 threads)
- Sharing housework (3 threads)
- Pre-teen sons? (0 threads)
- What's wrong with me!! (2 threads)
- Passport? What Passport? (2 threads)
- Atheist Upbringing (4 threads)
- my husband seems to be frightened of looking after our son (2 threads)
- Refreshing to see a site like this (1 thread)
- Looking for Dads who have given up work (or would like to). (5 threads)
- Tax break for new father (2 threads)
- Men Talk... TV documentary series (1 thread)
- afraid im not gonna be a good dad (2 threads)
- Infant mortality and the press [WARNING: grim reading] (0 threads)
- relationship changes after becoming a parent (0 threads)
- Help Needed with New Book (1 thread)
- BBC Looking For Working Parents (0 threads)
- help for fathers (0 threads)
- screaming baby????? (3 threads)
- Dads wanted for research project on fathers' experiences (6 threads)
- Top Gadgets - you decide? (0 threads)
- Working at home with a family? (0 threads)
- Working at home with a family? (0 threads)
- No Contact (3 threads)
- To work or not to work (2 threads)
- Dads to be? (3 threads)
- Dads... (1 thread)
- Juggling work and children (2 threads)
- Is it me? (3 threads)
- Nightmare situation ! (1 thread)
- thought I'd say hello (2 threads) Introduction to site
- Mothercare????? (6 threads)
- Fatherhood Robbed (3 threads)
- Fathers Day (4 threads)
- Swimming (1 thread)
- Breadwinner vs. childcare (3 threads)
- State pensions for Househusbands (3 threads)
- Fatherhood and work (4 threads)
- Dads in the media (1 thread)
- Men in childcare (5 threads)
- Paternity leave (3 threads)

(121 discussions)

Topics underlined – Research related

Appendix K

A Descriptive Cross-Sectional Analysis of Discussion Forum

BRIEF PAPER: *A descriptive cross-sectional analysis of a Discussion Forum*

On the date of access to the discussion forum, messages had been posted over a period of approximately two years, between 24th April, 2001 and 23rd June, 2003. There were 121 topics in total, 45 (33%) topics aimed at recruiting fathers for research, academic and media projects and 13 (10%) advertisements. Although there were a number of postings made by users with names of an ambiguous nature (x, cki, anonymous or ??), 50 topics appeared to have been generated by 'fathers', 4 by the staff at Fathers Direct and 4 by 'women'.

When examining why fathers might post messages on the forum, there appeared to be a number of motives. For example, asking other fathers to help, to respond with same/similar experience, for advice/'pearls of wisdom' on finances, childcare, partner's behaviour (particularly leading to feelings of exclusion/withdrawal), and access rights following separation, etc. Attempting to elicit sympathy, reassurance (having concerns about competence having had an abusive childhood), others views on a difficulty ('How did you handle this?'), posing a dilemma (What should I do?), venting frustration/anger or just telling their story with no apparent expectation of a response although written with an assumption that their story would be read ("am i asking too much??. ... what do you feel ... Im totally messed up by all this. I just want to see my baby, thts").

Although initial postings by women were unusual (seeking advice, a father's perspective or to highlight anti father bias in the media), 12 posted replies to a number of topics. It appeared that women were more likely to reply and provide a normalising or advice function when the message from fathers contained emotional dilemmas (leaving or staying with partner, unplanned and unwanted pregnancy, staying at home or returning to work, "have I got depression") or criticism of their partner (not losing weight after birth).

Three members of staff at Fathers Direct, with a mixture of journalistic/writing, training and research expertise, had posted messages seemingly with the purpose of stimulating discussion

on current issues for fathers (e.g. men in child care or paternity leave) or advocating another website (www.dfes.gov.uk/dadsandsons). They also played a role in discussions by posting replies to messages. In the case of the 'Webmaster', he provided general and legal advice/suggestions, encouragement to take a more assertive stance as a father, reframing experiences more positively and linking users to other more specialised websites. There was also an example of him giving a father a ticking off for suggesting that 'women had lost the plot by wanting to go back to work after having a child'. The second member of staff provided advice, relevant research findings and statistics within replies and a third seemed particularly interested when they related to balancing home/work demands, and replied using personal experiences. It is difficult to ascertain whether the role of the staff is to move discussions forward and also to cut discussions if they are seen to have run their course, adopting a house-keeping role to keep the items or topics fresh. There was no evidence that replies from staff members did anything to deter other respondents with only one topic having the last reply from this source.

There were a number of messages which did not attract any replies. One related to a father who was disputing paternity and another asking his partner to consider a termination. Three further examples involved a father venting his anger and frustration over his partner's parents not taking more responsibility for bringing up their grandchild, a father asking for contributions towards legal costs to regain custody of his child and a father engaging in an emotional dialogue regarding access to his daughter following a separation with his partner. It is possible that the majority of these messages would have been outside of the experience or may have violated implicit values of other users. Over time it appeared that the number of research or advertisement related topics increased constituting 80% of the 20 most recent messages on the forum.