

92  
63

THE IMPACT ON MEN OF THE TRANSITION TO FATHERHOOD:  
A PHENOMENOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION

---

A DISSERTATION

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS  
FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY  
IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF THE  
TEXAS WOMAN'S UNIVERSITY

COLLEGE OF EDUCATION AND HUMAN ECOLOGY

BY

BRUCE DROBECK, M.S.

---

DENTON, TEXAS

MAY, 1990

Copyright c Bruce Drobeck, 1990

All rights reserved

## DEDICATION

In memory of my father, Bill Drobeck. His spirit lives on in my life and my work. The birds singing in the morning and the beat of the ocean waves are always there to remind me of his love for sound and rhythm. As he often said, "It don't mean a thing, if it ain't got that swing!"

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First, my gratitude goes to the men who participated in this study and shared their experiences of fatherhood with me. Without their openness and cooperation, this study would not have been possible. Likewise, a special thanks goes to the childbirth educators at Irving Community Hospital who opened their classes to me so that I could seek volunteers for my study.

My appreciation goes to my committee members Bill Anderson, Glen Jennings, Merry Evenson, and Dan Forrister. A special thanks goes to the chair of my committee, Ron Fannin, who provided much needed support and guidance throughout the research process.

My everlasting gratitude to my parents, Bill and Barbara Drobeck, who taught me that nurturance has no gender. To my father who taught me the nurturing power of music and song. To my mother who taught me the nurturing power of books and words.

Finally, my gratitude and appreciation for my wife, Sharon, and my children, Rachelle and Sean. It is their love and support that sustained me through the sometimes solitary experience of conducting this research. It is my own experience as a husband and a father which gives special meaning to this research project.

# THE IMPACT ON MEN OF THE TRANSITION TO FATHERHOOD: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION

BRUCE DROBECK

MAY, 1990

## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate the impact on men of the transition to fatherhood. A qualitative, exploratory approach was used to gather data. Based on a phenomenological perspective, this study focused on first-time fathers' subjective experience of the pre- to postpartum transition to fatherhood in terms of how they perceived themselves as being affected by this experience.

The sample consisted of 30 white, predominantly middle-class fathers who were enrolled in prepared childbirth classes. Two in-depth interviews were conducted with each subject. The first interview took place during the last trimester of pregnancy, and the second interview took place 12 to 16 weeks postpartum. Interviews were audiotaped and transcribed, and data were analyzed by looking for emerging themes and commonalities.

Five major conclusions were derived from the data. First, men perceived themselves as taking on more responsibility and maturing in the process of becoming fathers.

The second conclusion was that the transition to fatherhood impacted how men perceived their work and careers. This impact was twofold in that first-time fathers not only took their work more seriously but were also looking for ways to balance work and family demands.

The third conclusion was that men developed an image of themselves as fathers during the transition to fatherhood. This process began during pregnancy, or earlier for some men, as they considered the kind of father they wanted to be with their children.

A fourth conclusion was that men were impacted by their relationship with their infants in that they experienced a bond with their children that strengthened over time.

A fifth conclusion was that the transition to fatherhood impacted men by giving them more of a sense of fulfillment and purpose in life. As such, the process of becoming a father represented a significantly meaningful experience.

Overall, it was concluded that the men in this study underwent a transformation of identity during the transition to fatherhood. In the process of nurturing, protecting, and providing for their children men came to perceive themselves as fathers and came to redefine their world in terms of fatherhood.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

DEDICATION .....	iv
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	v
ABSTRACT .....	vi
Chapter	
I. INTRODUCTION .....	1
Statement of the Problem .....	2
Statement of Purpose .....	3
Research Question .....	4
Delimitations .....	4
Definition of Terms .....	4
Theoretical Framework .....	5
Biological and Social Issues in Fatherhood .....	5
Developmental Issues in Fatherhood .....	7
The Phenomenological Approach .....	9
Summary .....	11
II. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE .....	12
The Developmental Origins of Fathering .....	15
Expectant Fatherhood .....	17
Men's Responses to Childbirth .....	20
Longitudinal Studies of the Transition to Fatherhood .....	22
Summary and Conclusions .....	24
III. METHODOLOGY .....	27
Sample .....	27
Procedures .....	28

Pilot Study .....	28
Interview Guide .....	28
In-Depth Interviews .....	29
Data Analysis .....	30
Summary .....	31
IV. FINDINGS OF THE STUDY .....	33
Introduction .....	33
Impact on Self .....	33
Taking on More Responsibility .....	34
Growing Up and Maturing .....	35
More Conservative/Less Impulsive .....	36
Change in Priorities .....	38
Impact on Work and Career .....	39
Taking Work More Seriously .....	39
Balancing Work and Family .....	40
Perceptions and Feelings about Fatherhood: Prepartum ...	41
Developing a Fathering-Image .....	42
Fathering-Image: More Involved than their Fathers ....	43
Feeling Unprepared for Fathering and Fatherhood .....	46
Perceptions and Feelings about Fatherhood: Postpartum ..	48
Impact of Father-Child Relationship and Bonding .....	49
Guilt and Disappointment .....	52
Feeling Like a Father .....	53
The Meaning of Becoming a Father .....	55
Summary .....	57
V. DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS .....	59

Overview of the Study .....	59
Discussion of Findings .....	59
Impact on Self .....	59
Impact on Work and Career .....	61
Perceptions and Feelings about Fatherhood: Pre- and Postpartum .....	63
The Meaning of Becoming a Father .....	66
Relevance of Current Study to Previous Research .....	67
Conclusions .....	68
Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research ...	70
Implications for Research and Practice .....	71
Theoretical and Social Implications .....	72
Summary .....	74
REFERENCES .....	76
APPENDIX	
A Interview Guide .....	82
B Demographic Data Form .....	85
C Consent Forms .....	87
D Parenting Resources and Information .....	91
E Coding Categories and Subcategories .....	93
F Matrix Chart .....	95

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

The role of American fathers has changed considerably since the seventeenth century. The patriarchal fathers of the colonial period typically worked at home and had a central role in their families. Although they ruled in an authoritarian manner, they were directly involved in the day-to-day experience of their children and family (Rotundo, 1985).

With the advent of industrialization in the late 1800s and early 1900s, men left home for long periods of the day to work in factories (Nash, 1965). As a result, fathers and mothers took on distinctly separate roles with fathers responsible for providing for the family and mothers responsible for the daily care of the children and the home (Rotundo, 1985). The place for modern fathers shifted to "out there" in the world of work, and they became more alienated from the feminized world at home (Dubbett, 1979).

As more women join the work force and more men become involved in pregnancy and childbirth, the role of fathers is once again being redefined (Fein, 1978; Grossman, Eichler & Winickoff, 1980; Phillips & Anzalone, 1982; Rotundo, 1985). This new role for fathers, which Rotundo (1985) calls "androgynous" fatherhood, allows men to directly care for children, as well as

provide for their families. From this new or "emergent" perspective on fathering, the only parenting activities that men are necessarily excluded from are lactation and gestation (Fein, 1978).

### Statement of the Problem

A major assumption within the emergent perspective is that men are impacted by their involvement in fathering in that they can grow and develop from this experience (Benedek, 1970; Erikson & Erikson, 1981; Fein, 1978; Grossman et al., 1980; Osofsky & Osofsky, 1984). However, in spite of the increased involvement of men in pregnancy and childbirth, there has been a lack of research on the effects of the transition to fatherhood on normal males (Fein, 1978; Osofsky & Osofsky, 1984).

Of the few studies conducted on the transition to fatherhood as a normal developmental stage, much of the focus has been on men's psychosocial adaptation to single stages of this transition, e.g. expectant fatherhood (Einzig, 1980; May, 1982; Soule, Standley, & Copans, 1979; Obrzut, 1976;), labor and childbirth (Cronenwett & Newmark, 1974; Greenberg & Morris, 1974) or men's postpartum adjustment to fatherhood (Russell, 1974; Ventura, 1987).

A few longitudinal studies have examined the transition to fatherhood as it occurred from pregnancy to after the birth of the child. Such studies rendered a more accurate reflection of this transition as a process over time (Entwistle & Doering, 1981; Fein, 1976; Galinsky, 1981; Grossman et al.,

1980). However, most of these studies have utilized quantitative measures and/or have examined this transition from the perspective of the researcher rather than the subject. As such, none of the published studies explore in any depth men's subjective experience of the transition to fatherhood in terms of how they perceive themselves as being affected by this experience.

### Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study was to explore the impact of the transition to fatherhood on men. A qualitative, exploratory approach was used to gather data. This approach was based on a phenomenological perspective (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984) and focused on first-time fathers' subjective experience of the pre- to postpartum transition to fatherhood in terms of how they perceived themselves as being affected by this experience. In-depth interviews were conducted during the last trimester of pregnancy and 12 to 16 weeks after the birth of the child. Interviews were audiotaped and data were analyzed by looking for emerging themes and commonalities (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984).

By exploring men's pre- to postpartum experience of the transition to fatherhood the present study can offer a greater understanding of this transition as a process over time. Furthermore, this study can ascertain how men are affected by this transition and if and how they perceive themselves as growing and maturing from this experience. Such information can provide insight into adult male development in general (Ryff, 1985). By learning more

about this major life transition, social scientists and those in the helping professions can be more effective in aiding and supporting men in becoming fathers regardless of how they perform their roles.

### Research Question

The open-ended interview that was used in this study was divided into two sections: a prepartum interview and a postpartum interview. The research question which guided this study was as follows: What is the impact of the transition to fatherhood on first-time fathers based on their interpretation of this experience?

### Delimitations

The sample for this study consisted of 30 first-time fathers, from 22 to 42 years of age. The sample was limited to volunteers who lived in the Dallas-Fort Worth area and had attended prepared childbirth classes. The sample was also limited to men who were natural fathers residing in intact families.

### Definition of Terms

Transition to Fatherhood. For the purposes of this study, the period of time from the last trimester of pregnancy to 12 to 16 weeks after the birth of the child.

Intact Family. A family in which the father and mother are married, are the natural parents, and live with the children in the same home.

First-time Fathers. Men who are experiencing their first full-term pregnancy as expectant fathers.

### Theoretical Framework

This section will discuss the theoretical framework of this study and is divided into three areas: biological and social issues in fatherhood, developmental issues in fatherhood, and the phenomenological approach as a method of exploring the transition to fatherhood.

#### Biological and Social Issues in Fatherhood

It has been argued that in order to achieve reproductive success, early fathers had to remain close to the mother and child to help provide nutrition for mothers while they nursed their young. Based on this argument, the origin of the role of father as provider for the family is rooted historically in the physiological demands of lactation placed on the mother (Lancaster, 1985).

The biological argument for parenting behaviors must be reconsidered in light of more recent cultural inventions such as the baby bottle and infant formula (Lamb, Pleck, Charnov, & Levine, 1987). These inventions make it possible for men to assume major infant care activities beyond the provider role and for women to assume breadwinner roles outside the home. Direct paternal involvement is a luxury afforded by the more affluent times of recent history (Lamb et al., 1987). As such, many new fathers in our society are

becoming involved in child care without the biological constraints experienced by their ancestors.

However, in spite of the increased freedom for parental roles, the actual experience of becoming a father in our society remains a biological and social enigma. The woman's experience of pregnancy and childbirth is clearly grounded in the physiological requirements of gestation and labor. Unlike the mother who experiences pregnancy directly through changes in her body, the expectant father experiences pregnancy on a second hand basis. As such, becoming a father is an "act of imagination" until the child is born and the reality of his/her otherness is encountered (Jessner, Weigert, & Foy, 1970).

Concomitant with the lack of physiological milestones for the transition to fatherhood is the lack of clear social guidelines for fathers-to-be. Traditionally, male children are prepared for occupational roles rather than parental roles (Rossi, 1968). Whereas young girls are encouraged to learn "how to mother" as they grow up, boys receive little or no training on how to father (Parke, 1981). The more recent phenomenon of prepared childbirth classes prepare fathers for the actual birth of their child but do little to prepare them for fatherhood (Wente & Crockenburg, 1976).

The current study can provide more insight into the biological and social experience of the transition to fatherhood in terms of what this experience means for men.

### Developmental Issues In Fatherhood

In his developmental perspective, Erik Erikson (1963) hypothesizes that at certain stages of life men and women must concern themselves with the task of supporting and guiding the next generation. Erikson calls this developmental stage "generativity vs. stagnation." He warns that if a person in this stage does not succeed in nurturing offspring or some creative endeavor, he or she will experience a kind of "personal impoverishment" (Erikson, 1963, p. 267).

In the past, women were more likely to directly express generativity through child rearing and men were more likely to express generativity through work and mentoring relationships (Levinson, 1978). However, Erikson notes that fathers, as well as mothers, are impacted by parenthood and that modern fathers are expressing generativity through direct interaction with their children: "When you see young fathers going around holding babies in a perfectly natural and lovely way . . . we may as well recognize it as a paternal expression of a generative drive which in the past we may have called maternal" (Erikson & Erikson, 1981, p. 269).

Another developmental theorist and researcher, Daniel Levinson (1978), argues that adult men undergo several major life transitions in their personal development. Levinson discovered that there are three major periods in male adulthood: early adulthood (age 22 to 40), middle adulthood (age 45 to 60),

and late adulthood (age 65 to 80). Each major period is marked by transitional periods: the early adult transition (age 17 to 22), the midlife transition (age 40 to 45), and the late adult transition (age 60 to 65). Each period and transition has particular tasks which lead to further development when mastered.

Two issues which remain central throughout a man's life are the life structure and the dream. The life structure is composed primarily of a man's work and family, both of which provide a sense of identity. The dream is an "imagined possibility" of the kind of life one wants to live. The dream is first formulated in young adulthood and later shaped and adapted to the limits of the life structure.

It is during young adulthood, from approximately age 22 to 40, that a man must build a stable life structure based on his work and his family. Because young adulthood is typically the stage in life when men have the task of developing a family as well as a career, this age group is considered particularly appropriate for the present study on the transition to fatherhood. Likewise, men in this young adult group are in the same age cohort of the post-war "baby-boom" generation and have had similar cultural experiences.

In accordance with Erikson's developmental theory, as well as the assumptions of other theorists (Benedek, 1970; Osofsky & Osofsky, 1984), the present study assumes that fatherhood is a normal developmental phase for

men which offers the opportunity for growth and maturation. The present study also acknowledges that the transition to fatherhood can be stressful and lead to a crisis for some men (Benedek, 1970; Dyer, 1963; LeMasters, 1957). However, as Erikson (1959) has pointed out, growth and stress are not mutually exclusive, but often interrelated. As such, fathers can experience anxiety and stress during the transition to fatherhood and grow from this experience as well.

By examining how men perceive themselves as changing during the transition to fatherhood, the present study can ascertain if fathers view themselves as growing from this experience, and if so, how they view themselves as growing. Furthermore, by exploring men's subjective experience of this major life transition, a greater understanding of male adult development in general can be gained from this study (Ryff, 1985).

### The Phenomenological Approach

The current study used an exploratory, qualitative method in gathering data. This qualitative method was grounded in the phenomenological approach (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984). Phenomenology as a discipline is concerned with understanding human experience, the meaning of this experience for the individual, and the connection of experience to the everyday world (Giorgi, 1971; Ryff, 1985). As such, the phenomenologist examines

phenomena from the viewpoint of the subject, allowing the subject to describe experiences from his/her own perspective (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984).

A major assumption of phenomenology is that human behavior is a product of how people define their experiences (McLain & Weigert, 1979). Therefore, from the phenomenological perspective, the use of in-depth interviews to gather subjective data is a valid means of understanding human behavior and experience (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984). This is in contrast to many quantitative methods of gathering data, which assume that only so-called "objective" measures of observable behavior are valid means of understanding human beings.

The phenomenological approach to research also contrasts with most quantitative research in that hypotheses are made after the data is gathered rather than before. Thus, the phenomenologist attempts to suspend beliefs and preconceptions about the phenomenon being studied with the goal of allowing the subject to fully describe his or her own experience (Ihde, 1977). It is only after all information is gathered that the phenomenological researcher sifts through the data in search of emerging themes and commonalities (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984).

With its emphasis on understanding human experience and the meaning of this experience, the phenomenological approach is most appropriate for the present study on men's subjective experience of the transition to fatherhood.

Secondly, due to the lack of data on this subject, an exploratory phenomenological approach is needed to develop valid assumptions and hypotheses that will lay the groundwork for future studies.

### Summary

As more women join the work force and more men become involved in pregnancy and childbirth, the role of fathers is being redefined (Fein, 1978; Grossman et al., 1980; Phillips & Anzalone, 1982; Rotundo, 1985). However, in spite of the changes in the role of fathers, there is a lack of research on how normal males are affected by their involvement in pregnancy and childbirth during the pre- to postpartum transition to fatherhood (Fein, 1978; Osofsky & Osofsky, 1984).

The purpose of this study was to explore the impact of the transition to fatherhood on men. A qualitative, exploratory approach was used to gather data. This approach was based on a phenomenological perspective (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984) and focused on first-time fathers' subjective experience of the pre- to postpartum transition to fatherhood in terms of how they perceived themselves as being affected by this experience.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

As a topic of research, fatherhood is a fairly recent discovery. The traditional perspective of the 1940s and 1950s assumed that fathers were peripheral figures in the family and rightfully belonged in the breadwinner's role. The lack of research on fathers during that era reflected the social assumption that mothers were the central figures in child rearing (Fein, 1978).

In the 1960s, as increasing numbers of women joined the work force and fathers became more involved in childbirth, researchers began to look more closely at the role of fathers in child development (Lamb, 1981). Much of the research in the 1960s focused on the impact of fathers' absence on child development, and it was found to contribute to poor grades, confused sexual identity, and delinquency, especially in boys (Lamb, 1981). From this research perspective, fathers were no longer viewed as distant, remote figures but were being considered as having some indirect impact on early child development.

A more recent phenomenon in fathering and the research on fathering is what Fein (1978) calls the "emergent" perspective. This perspective assumes that men are psychologically capable of fully caring for their children and the only parenting behaviors they are necessarily excluded from are lactation and

gestation. From the emergent perspective on research, the father's role has evolved from a secondary status to that of full parent.

Although there has been an increasing interest in research on fatherhood, the majority of studies have focused on the impact of fathers on child development (Lamb, 1981). By comparison, there have been few studies that investigate the effects of fatherhood on men (Fein, 1978).

Early studies conducted on the effects of fatherhood on men began with the theoretical notion that becoming a parent represented a time of "crisis" for men and women (Dyer, 1963; Hobbs, 1965; LeMasters, 1957). For example, LeMasters (1957) argued in his seminal study that the transition to parenthood constituted a crisis since adding a new member to the family forced a reorganization of the system. LeMasters defined crisis as "any sharp or decisive changes for which old patterns are inadequate" (1957, p. 353). He found that 83% of the couples he interviewed reported "extensive" or "severe" crisis in adjusting to their first child. Dyer (1963) replicated the LeMaster's study but found only 53% of the couples in his study experiencing severe or extensive crisis. In a similar study, Hobbs (1965) found that none of the couples in his sample experienced the levels of crisis that LeMaster (1957) and Dyer (1963) reported.

Relevant to the research on crisis reactions to fatherhood were early studies that focused on fatherhood as a precipitant of psychopathology in men.

Zilboorg (1931) published one of the first reports of postpartum depressive reactions to new parenthood concluding that parenthood simply represented too great an emotional burden for the mothers and fathers in his study.

Freeman (1951) and Curtis (1955) conducted some of the earliest psychiatric studies of pregnancy as a precipitant of emotional problems in men. Curtis (1955) described a number of expectant fathers who experienced difficulty in coping with their wives' pregnancy with symptoms ranging from depression to acting out behaviors. Freeman (1951) reported six cases of men with pathological reactions to pregnancy, but argued that pregnancy does not cause mental illness but may precipitate it in men who are predisposed to such a reaction.

Trethowan and Conlan (1965) were among the first writers to discuss men's physical rather than emotional reactions to expectant fatherhood. They labeled these physical reactions the "couvade syndrome" and described it as a state in which physical symptoms of psychogenic origin occur in expectant fathers which are somehow connected to the pregnancy. They compared the couvade syndrome to the rituals of so-called primitive societies in which men mimic the symptoms of their pregnant wives. Examples of the couvade syndrome were revealed in case reports of expectant fathers with such symptoms as swollen abdomens and labor pains. The authors argued that some of the underlying dynamics of the couvade syndrome are the expectant

father's anxiety about childbirth, his ambivalence concerning the marriage, and his envy of his wife's pregnancy.

It is apparent that early research on the impact of fatherhood on men focused on crisis and/or abnormal reactions to this transition period. There has been a general lack of research on normal males' adjustment to fatherhood (Osofsky & Osofsky, 1984). The remainder of this chapter will review the relevant emergent literature on the transition to fatherhood which examines men's psychosocial adaptation to fatherhood as a normal, developmental phase. This part of the literature review is divided into the following sections: (a) the developmental origins of fathering, (b) men's adaptation to expectant fatherhood, (c) men's responses to childbirth, and (d) longitudinal studies of men's adaptation to fatherhood.

### The Developmental Origins of Fathering

Ross (1975) argues from a psychoanalytic perspective that the origins of a man's identity as a father begin in early childhood with his identification with his caretaking mother. According to Ross the child is envious of his mother's ability to reproduce and wishes to bear and nurse babies as she does. However, as the child grows older, he represses his "maternal desire" in order to identify with his father. Benedek's (1970) concept of the origins of father identity is similar to Ross's in that a man's sense of "fatherliness" does not simply originate from experiences with the mother, but that these memories

become integrated with memories of the boy's early experiences with his father.

Based on theory as well as research, it appears that as men become fathers, they grapple with their identification with their own fathers in an effort to develop a basis for giving and receiving love and nurturance in relationship with their own children (Benedek, 1970; Einzig, 1980; Galinsky, 1981; Liebenberg, 1969; Ross, 1975; Valentine, 1982). It has been argued that when a man can identify with a tender, loving father, he can come to terms with his previously repressed "maternal desires" (Ross, 1975) and express his fatherliness in a nurturing manner (Benedek, 1970). However, if a man identifies with a punitive, aggressive father, it will be difficult for him to express his tender feelings as a father, and the nurturing aspects of his identity remain repressed (Benedek, 1970). Nonetheless, several studies have discovered that many men who had poor relationships with their own fathers had a strong desire for a better relationship with their own children (Einzig, 1980; Fein, 1976; Soule et al., 1979). Furthermore, some men believed that the nurturing they received from their mothers served as a basis for their ability to nurture their own children in spite of the fact that their fathers were not particularly nurturing (Grossman et al., 1980).

## Expectant Fatherhood

Barnhill, Rubenstein, and Rocklin (1979) met with expectant fathers in groups to discuss their experiences during pregnancy. Most of these men were first-time fathers who were attending prepared childbirth classes. Based on the group discussions, the authors found that there were three tasks for expectant fathers to achieve prior to childbirth. The first task of decision-making was in terms of either deciding to have a child or ex post facto accept the reality that they were going to have one. The second task was that of mourning the loss of personal freedom and loss of time with their wives. A third task for expectant fathers was empathic responding in terms of being supportive of their wives and nurturant during pregnancy and labor.

May (1982), in contrast to Barnhill et al.'s (1979) open-ended approach, conducted semi-structured interviews in exploring first-time expectant fathers' adaptation to expectant fatherhood. May (1982) discovered that men go through three phases of involvement during expectant fatherhood: the announcement phase, the moratorium phase, and the focusing phase. The announcement phase takes place when the pregnancy is first confirmed and is characterized by joy and excitement if the man desires a child but pain and shock if he does not.

During the moratorium phase, which lasts from approximately the 12th week of pregnancy to the 25th week, a man puts conscious thought of

pregnancy aside. At this time, the pregnancy is not yet real to him since he does not experience the physical changes himself and does not see the visible evidence of pregnancy in his wife.

The focusing phase ends the "not real--not mine" quality of the moratorium phase. At this time, the father begins to redefine himself as a father, and the world around him is redefined in terms of his future as a father.

Although May (1982) did not discuss the relationship, it is likely that her three phases of father involvement are related to Barnhill et al.'s (1979) three tasks for expectant fathers. For example, the decision-making task of accepting the pregnancy appears to correspond with the announcement phase that May (1982) described. Likewise, it is possible that the task of mourning that Barnhill et al. (1979) described is primarily an unconscious process that corresponds with the moratorium phase during which men put conscious thought of the pregnancy aside. The third task of empathically responding to the pregnancy seems related to the focusing phase in that men are more capable of responding empathically once they have begun to accept the reality of the pregnancy.

Galinsky (1981) described in some depth the process whereby expectant father's redefine themselves as fathers. Galinsky called expectant parenthood the "image-making" stage because it was discovered that during pregnancy,

expectant mothers and fathers begin to consciously or unconsciously cull through "images" of parenting in the process of forming their own image of themselves as parents. These images are based on past and present experiences, as well as expectations for the future. Relevant to this image-making process, Einzig (1980) discovered in her study that several expectant fathers were experiencing conflict between the traditional images of fathering they had learned as children and the more androgynous role they were trying to create.

Beyond the phases and tasks for expectant fathers, several studies have found that expectant fathers' emotional experience of pregnancy is often marked by a heightened mixture of hope, fear, joy, anxiety, and envy (Einzig, 1980; Grossman et al., 1980; Liebenberg, 1969; Obrzut, 1976; Osofsky & Osofsky, 1984). It has been argued that men experience more ambivalence than women during pregnancy, due to their lack of preparation for fatherhood and the fact that the culture has no clear guidelines for expectant fathers (May, 1982). Likewise, expectant fathers take longer than their wives to identify with pregnancy, due to the lack of physiological guide marks for men (Jessner et al., 1970).

Obrzut (1976) conducted one of the first non-clinical studies that explored how first-time expectant fathers defined fathering, how they prepared for fathering, and their feelings about fathering. Obrzut (1976) found, in general,

that expectant fathers believed that "providing" was an essential aspect of fathering. However, a large percentage of these fathers believed nurturing and caretaking were important aspects of fathering as well. The expectant fathers in this study prepared extensively for fathering and assumed the father role by using such techniques as role play and fantasy. Obrzut (1976), like May (1982), found that feelings of "fatherliness" developed slowly for these fathers as a process over time.

### Men's Responses to Childbirth

Greenberg and Morris (1974) conducted one of the first studies to explore the impact of the first newborn on the father using the concept of "engrossment" as a point of reference. Engrossment was defined as the father's sense of absorption, preoccupation, and interest in the infant. Greenberg and Morris compared two groups of first-time fathers: fathers who had their first contact with the newborn in the delivery room and fathers who had first contact with their infants after birth, when the child was shown to them by nursing personnel. Based on questionnaire data, it was found that both groups of fathers (birth-attenders and non birth-attenders) showed evidence of strong paternal bonding or engrossment with their newborns. The behavioral and emotional display of engrossment was indicated by some of the following: (a) visual awareness of the newborn, (b) tactile awareness of the newborn, (c) a strong attraction to the newborn, and (d) an increased sense of

self-esteem experienced by fathers when seeing their newborns for the first time. Engrossment was not particularly affected by whether or not the father was present at birth. However, the authors noted that ambivalent fathers were often pushed "over the threshold" through early contact with newborns resulting in the release of engrossment.

Cronenwett and Newmark (1974) also examined fathers' responses to childbirth in relation to childbirth education as well as presence at delivery. Their sample consisted of 152 fathers who were not necessarily first-time fathers. The fathers were divided into three groups: (a) prepared attenders at childbirth, (b) unprepared attenders, and (c) non-attenders. Using a self-contained questionnaire, Cronenwett and Newmark found no significant differences among groups of prepared attenders, unprepared attenders, and non-attenders in terms of their response to their infants. However, fathers who were present at delivery reported a sense of self-esteem with respect to their involved role with their wives in childbirth. Also, fathers who were present at delivery and/or attended childbirth classes rated their overall experience during childbirth significantly higher than the other fathers.

In contrast to Cronenwett and Newmark's (1974) findings, Nicholson, Gist, Klein, and Standley (1983) found no significant relationship between father involvement in childbirth and labor and fathers's ratings of the childbirth experience. They surmised that the consequences of father

involvement in pregnancy and childbirth vary according to how involvement is conceptualized, and the type of father involvement most beneficial to father, mother, and infant may depend on specific characteristics of the couple.

### Longitudinal Studies of the Transition to Fatherhood

Longitudinal studies which examine men's adaptation to fatherhood as it occurs from pregnancy to after the birth of the child are rare. Most studies have focused on pregnancy or childbirth, but not both. Fein (1976) conducted one of the first longitudinal studies on the transition to fatherhood by utilizing questionnaires and interviews with 30, middle-class first-time fathers both before and after the birth of their child. He found that men decreased significantly in their levels of anxiety from prepartum to 6 weeks postpartum, and by 6 weeks postpartum, they had settled into their roles as fathers. Fein discovered that the development of a coherent role suitable for both parents was important for new fathers' postpartum adjustment, regardless of the kind of fathering role chosen. The men who had the most difficult adjustment were those who were unsure of what kind of involvement they wanted with their children. As such, Fein noted that men should be encouraged to participate in their family lives in ways that meet their needs and the needs of their wives and children.

Entwisle and Doering (1981) utilized a more heterogeneous sample than Fein (1976) by interviewing both blue collar and middle-class primiparous

couples. The fathers in their study who were present at the birth of their child were enthusiastic about the experience, with almost one fourth of those present describing an "ecstatic, peak experience" (p. 105). The authors found that fathers' adaptation to fatherhood was based primarily on their level of preparation, their previous experience with baby care, and the quality of the birth experience. A positive birth experience was a strong predictor of father attachment with his child.

Grossman et al. (1980) conducted a longitudinal study of the transition to parenthood including first-, second-, and third-time fathers. The authors noted that first-time fatherhood seemed to have substantially more psychological impact on men than later pregnancies calling for more of their adaptive capacities. However, they also found that most men in their study had adapted to their new roles by 2 months postpartum. Relevant to the current study, Grossman et al. found anecdotal evidence that many of these new fathers experienced growth in themselves, although the authors did not pursue this issue in any depth.

In contrast to Grossman et al.'s (1980) exploratory approach, Miller and Sollie (1980) concentrated primarily on measuring three aspects of the transition to parenthood: changes in personal well-being, personal stress, and marital stress. Their sample consisted primarily of middle-class couples from prepared childbirth classes. Measures were taken during mid-pregnancy, when

the baby was 5 to 6 weeks old, and when the baby was between 6 and 8 months old. Based on their findings, the authors concluded that new parenthood includes a slight to modest decline in personal well-being and some increase in personal stress over the first year of parenthood. It was also found that new mothers were more likely to view their marriages in a negative way than new fathers.

Miller and Sollie (1980) surmised from their study that new mothers feel the changes during parenthood more keenly than fathers. Other studies have offered support for this hypothesis in that mothers tended to report more stress in new parenthood than fathers (Russell, 1974; Wilkie & Ames, 1986). However, in a more recent study, Ventura (1987) found that a majority of the new fathers in his sample also complained of the stress of carrying out the multiple roles of parent, spouse, and worker.

### Summary and Conclusions

The emergent literature on the transition to fatherhood as a normal developmental stage is not only sparse, but it is also fairly disjointed in that each study tends to lack a connection with other studies. In spite of this situation, several tentative conclusions can be drawn in tying the threads of research together.

First, it appears that there are several developmental tasks and stages that men undergo in becoming fathers for the first time. A major task for an

expectant father is to accept and identify with the pregnancy and begin to redefine himself as a father. This process requires a man to fantasize or imagine the kind of father he wants to become by culling through various images of fathering that he has learned through past and present experiences. However, based on the research, this process takes time to develop and most men do not begin to seriously redefine themselves as fathers until the latter stages of pregnancy when the physical reality of the pregnancy is most evident. In this manner, men appear to differ from women in that they experience more ambivalence during pregnancy and take longer to identify with their role. Based on these findings, the current study explored men's experience of expectant fatherhood during the last trimester of pregnancy when they were more likely to identify with the pregnancy and with their roles as fathers.

Secondly, the literature suggests that men are impacted not only by pregnancy, but they are impacted by childbirth and infancy as well. The men in these studies display a keen interest and involvement with their newborns regardless of attendance or non-attendance at birth. However, there is evidence that men who are highly involved in pregnancy and childbirth have a stronger sense of father identity and self-esteem about their roles and show higher levels of attachment to their infants.

A third tentative conclusion that can be derived from the research is that men experience some stress and anxiety concerning pregnancy and childbirth.

However, most men have adapted to their role as fathers within 6 weeks to 2 months after the birth of their child. Therefore, the current study conducted the second interview at 12 to 16 weeks postpartum when men could be expected to have less stress and anxiety and in a better position to reflect on their experience of fatherhood.

A fourth relevant issue that can be derived from the research is the fact that fathers see themselves in the provider role but also want a nurturing role with their children. The potential for conflict between these two roles is illustrated in a quote from an expectant father:

I believe that fathers should be more involved and active in the division of responsibilities. I am basically a very traditional kind of guy, so how it is going to work is kind of a conflict with what I really believe should be done. . . . We're both caught in the modern problem, the difference between things that we really feel that probably comes from our background and what we want to do. (Einzig, 1980, p. 146)

It can be concluded that the research provides some objective understanding of the different stages of the transition to fatherhood in terms of the structural phases and tasks as well as men's emotional responses to various aspects of this major life transition. However, the pre- to postpartum subjective experience of becoming a father in terms of how men perceive themselves as being affected by this process remains virtually unexplored.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to explore the impact of the transition to fatherhood on men. A qualitative, exploratory approach was used to gather data. This approach was based on a phenomenological perspective (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984) and focused on first-time fathers' subjective experience of the pre- to postpartum transition to fatherhood and their interpretation of this experience.

#### Sample

Subjects consisted of 30 first-time expectant fathers who had been enrolled in prepared childbirth classes and had volunteered to take part in this study. Most of the subjects had completed childbirth classes at the time of the first interview. All of the subjects' wives were in the last trimester of pregnancy. The men in this sample were volunteers from local childbirth classes in the Dallas-Fort Worth area. The subjects ranged in age from 22 to 42 years, with an average age of 28. The subjects were all white and predominantly middle-class.

## Procedures

### Pilot Study

Prior to the study, pilot interviews were conducted with two expectant first-time fathers who had enrolled in childbirth classes. Based on these interviews and the relevant research literature, the original open-ended interview was refined and expanded to include four aspects of the impact on men of the transition to fatherhood: (a) impact on self, (b) impact on work and career, (c) perceptions and feelings about fatherhood, and (d) the meaning of becoming a father.

### The Interview Guide

As a result of the pilot study, the open-ended interview used in this study was divided into four general areas of questioning: These areas were: (a) How has becoming a father affected you personally? (pre- and postpartum question); (b) how has becoming a father affected your work and career? (pre- and postpartum question); (c) have you thought about the kind of father you want to be? (prepartum question). How would you describe the relationship you have with your child? (postpartum question); (d) what has becoming a father meant to you personally? (postpartum question).

Probes were used when appropriate to further explore these areas and clarify meaning. The interviews were divided into two sections: a prepartum

interview and a postpartum interview. The interview guide used in the current research is presented in Appendix A.

### In-Depth Interviews

Data were obtained by interviewing 30 subjects twice during the transition to fatherhood. The first interview took place during the last trimester of pregnancy, and the second interview took place from 12 to 16 weeks postpartum. Each interview took approximately 1 to 2 hours to complete. The interviews took place at the convenience of the subjects at a time and place of their choice. Although most fathers chose to be interviewed at home, three of the fathers chose to be interviewed at their offices. All of the interviews were conducted in private with only the subject and interviewer present.

The researcher began each interview by establishing rapport with the subject through non-threatening conversation. The purpose of the study was explained, and the subjects were asked to sign a form giving permission to interview and audio-tape (Appendix C). The subjects were reminded that they could discontinue their participation in the study at any time. The subjects were also asked to complete a demographic information sheet (Appendix B).

Each interview was audiotaped. One prepartum interview could not be used in the data analysis due to malfunction of the tape recorder. Likewise, one subject who participated in a prepartum interview, declined to take part in the postpartum interview. Therefore, out of 30 subject protocols, the

prepartum interview of one subject and the postpartum interview of another subject were not available for analysis, leaving 28 complete data sets.

The interview followed the guide while also allowing the subjects some latitude in describing their own experience as fully as possible. After each interview, the interviews were transcribed. A list of resources for information and support were made available to the subjects (Appendix D).

### Data Analysis

All data were coded and analyzed using procedures outlined by Bogdan & Biklen (1982), and Taylor and Bogdan (1984). During the initial phase of analysis, each transcript was read twice, and a list of significant statements, feelings, and ideas were identified. After reviewing the theoretical orientation, the research literature, and the research question, this list was then consolidated into a preliminary coding system based on recurring themes and commonalities. The codes were organized within the framework of the four general areas covered in the revised interview guide.

After generating the preliminary coding categories, each code was assigned a number. Each transcript was read for a third time in order to test the workability of the coding categories and all data were assigned a preliminary coding category number. During this phase of analysis, coding categories were modified with some new ones being developed and other categories being discarded. Based on this process, a final coding category list

was developed. Transcripts were read for a fourth time with all data coded according to the final coding list.

Finally, the data were cut up and placed in folders according to major coding categories. The major categories were the four general areas covered in the interview: (a) impact on self, (b) impact on work and career, (c) perceptions and feelings about fatherhood, and (d) the meaning of becoming a father. Coding subcategories were developed by looking at patterns and themes within each major category. The coding categories and their subcategories are listed in Appendix E.

In order to identify who said what and in what context, a matrix chart was also developed using the coding categories and subcategories. The categories were listed vertically on the left side of the chart. A series of 30 boxes were placed horizontally at the top of the chart, with each box representing a subject. A column was drawn for each subject from top to bottom of the chart. In this manner, check marks could be placed at the appropriate categories for each subject. The matrix chart is included in Appendix F.

### Summary

The current study was designed to explore the impact on men of the transition to fatherhood. Qualitative, in-depth interviews were used to obtain data. First-time fathers were interviewed twice during the transition to fatherhood. The first interview took place during the last trimester of

pregnancy, and the second interview took place from 12 to 16 weeks after childbirth. A content analysis was used to identify themes and commonalities.

Based on a pilot study and relevant research literature, the interview guide was expanded and refined to cover four major aspects of the impact on men of the transition to fatherhood: (a) impact on self, (b) impact on work and career, (c) perceptions and feelings about fatherhood, and (d) the meaning of becoming a father. These four aspects became the major coding categories for data analysis. Coding subcategories were developed by looking at patterns and themes within each major category.

## CHAPTER IV

### FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

#### Introduction

Based on a qualitative analysis of interview data, the impact on men of the transition to fatherhood can be divided into four major areas: (a) impact on self, (b) impact on work and career, (c) perceptions and feelings about fatherhood, and (d) the meaning of becoming a father. This chapter will describe the findings in each of these four major areas.

#### Impact on Self

Most of the men in this study indicated some changes in themselves as a result of becoming a father. Those who did not readily identify any internal changes in themselves, could often identify behavioral changes which were indicative of a change within themselves and how they perceived the world. For some of the men the changes in themselves were quite obvious and dramatic. For others, the changes were more subtle and mundane. Several related themes emerged in the area of self-perceived change: (a) taking on\* more responsibility, (b) growing up and maturing, (c) becoming more conservative and less impulsive, and (d) change in priorities.

### Taking on More Responsibility

For 19 of the men in this study, one of the most significant changes that they saw in their lives was that of taking on more responsibility. For some of these fathers, the process of taking on more responsibility meant that they were becoming more responsible as people. For others, it meant simply that they had another person to take care of who was totally dependent on them. Either way, many men began feeling this sense of responsibility during pregnancy as they anticipated their role as fathers:

Yeah, its just the idea that you are going to have your own baby and just realize that its going to be 18 years or so or more of responsibilities and guardianship. (#14)

For some expectant fathers, the feeling of impending responsibility was perceived as a positive motivation for personal improvement and growth:

Now that I've got a baby coming its an entirely different relationship developing and its just boosted everything on up. Its escalated up to a much higher level, its reaching a conscious level that everything is getting better and I've got to perform right along with it. (#21)

However, not all fathers perceived the responsibilities of fatherhood in a positive manner. One expectant father who was anticipating the loss of free time and spontaneity in his life stated:

You just think that everything in your life is going to change like that in one instant. I went through times that I thought that this is the end of my life. (#22)

The sense of responsibility that first-time fathers thought about during pregnancy became reality after the birth of their child. Another subject, who had been out of work during his wife's pregnancy, described the immediacy of the responsibility he felt after he became a father:

I think I'm very conscious of my responsibilities now. And having been out of work for 4 months now. I just have to lower my sights. I can't hold out for the exact position I want. (#3)

### Growing Up and Maturing

Twelve of the men in this study perceived themselves as "growing up" or "maturing" as a result of becoming a father and taking on new responsibilities. Some expectant fathers saw themselves as already beginning to change in this manner during pregnancy:

I've grown up a lot real quick, I think. I've got a lot less time for my toys. . . . Even before the baby is here its changed me a lot . . . just more stable, I guess, its ah, well I used to go to the races 2 nights every weekend. I don't go to the races much anymore. Just not spending money anymore like I used to. (#5)

For others fathers, the sense of growing up and maturing came after the arrival of their child. For example, when asked what it felt like to be a new father, one respondent explained:

Being responsible, I do feel that. . . . Maybe me just growing up a little bit more; him forcing me to grow up more. (#12)

Some men saw themselves as moving into another generation and finally becoming an adult as well as a father:

I think it might have changed my self-image a little. I've been thinking about myself more as an adult. (#13)

One 27-year-old father, who still saw himself as a "kid," described how he was having difficulty seeing himself as a father and moving into another generation:

It just something that takes a little bit of time getting used to. I never thought of myself as a dad I've always thought of myself as a son. (#11)

#### More Conservative/Less Impulsive

Eight of the fathers in this study described themselves as becoming more "conservative" and taking fewer risks in their lives as a result of becoming a father. These changes were exemplified in a variety of ways, and for most of these fathers, the changes were more apparent after the birth of their child rather than during pregnancy.

Some men described how they were more likely to consider the consequences of their behavior after they became fathers:

I'm a lot less likely to do something impulsively. . . . I would think about things a lot more and more about their impact than before. (#27)

One father gave a behavioral example to illustrate how he took fewer risks and thought about things he would not have considered before becoming a father:

You think about 10,000 different things. I don't even drive home with a beer from the golf course any more. That's how deep I've gotten into it. A D.W.I. would put a hardship on the family. (#7)

Another respondent noted a similar change in that he took fewer chances in his car than he did before he became a father:

I don't drive as fast as I used to. If I make somebody mad and they try to run me off the road, well I've got the baby in the car. (#32)

One new father, who could not perceive any internal changes in himself, described how he had become more financially conservative as a result of fatherhood:

Not anything different about my values or anything like that . . . well to give you a concrete idea, I've changed my investments somewhat. I'm not quite as speculative in my stock selections. That's just one very concrete example, but it kind of to me is a picture of what is going on in a lot of areas. (#26)

### Change in Priorities

Nine first-time fathers saw themselves as having a change in priorities in that their needs became secondary to the responsibility they felt as fathers. For some fathers, this change in priorities occurred during pregnancy. One subject described how his life had already changed as an expectant father as the due date grew closer:

I'm scheduled to go to the Tetons just for fun, but my wife and I can't go. I'm supposed to go to a dove hunt, but I'm not going to leave her. At first I thought, damn I'm missing a lot already, but I thought I better get used to it. But this is far more important than a trip to the Tetons or a dove hunt. (#7)

Other fathers saw their priorities change after their child was born. As fathers of infants, they had someone who was totally dependent on them. For some, this meant that for the first time in their lives their own needs were placed second to that of another person. One father described this change in himself as such:

Maybe the only thing in my thinking of doing things is, "What's he need before I do this? What can I do for him before I do for me?" I think that changes a little bit later on, but right now he's the number one priority. (#23)

### Impact on Work and Career

The transition to fatherhood also impacted how men perceived and related to their jobs and careers. In the process of becoming a father, 19 men reported changes in one or more of the following aspects of their work and careers: (a) taking work more seriously, and (b) balancing work and family.

#### Taking Work More Seriously

Eight of the men in this study noted that as a result of becoming a father they were taking their work more seriously and putting more effort into their jobs. Some fathers noticed this change in themselves during pregnancy as they anticipated the increased responsibility of fatherhood:

I've been in this line of work for 10 years now, and its just the first time in my life that I ever felt the need to do everything right. I've actually started in the last 6 months to perform better at my job. (#21)

Another father reported, in a postpartum interview, that fatherhood had impacted his perception of his job and the amount of responsibility he had at work:

I probably feel more of a need now to advance at work and to do a good job and to make more money and stuff like that. . . . I think that is probably the biggest way its affected me personally. Maybe it just so happened that the situation at work that they gave me more

responsibility, and it just so happened that we had a baby at the same time. (#11)

### Balancing Work and Family

In the process of becoming fathers, 10 men in this sample noted that they perceived work differently in terms of the hours they were working. These fathers were looking for ways to reduce or restructure their work hours in order to achieve a balance between work and family. Some of these fathers began thinking about how they could change their work hours during pregnancy as they mentally prepared for the arrival of their child:

I think its changed me, the outlook I have taken on work. And being a CPA, we can work outrageous overtime. . . . In that aspect I think I've just realized that I need to one, just not work that amount of overtime, or two, just find a job elsewhere. (#15)

After the birth of his child, one new father noted how he had altered his work schedule in order to have the involvement that he wanted with his infant:

The times when he wakes up, and he's hungry, and he's wanting to be fed, and its hard just to say here he is I've got to go. . . . There's times that I didn't get to work until 8:45, and it was just playing with him and just getting out of the house. I'm not a workaholic, and I can't imagine getting more involved with your work than you are with your family. (#10)

Several fathers had changed jobs before their child was born or were planning on a career change as a result of becoming a father. For these men, changing jobs or careers was necessary in order to have the time they wanted to be at home with their families:

I'd hate to miss it when they take the first step. . . . I've just recently changed jobs and that's one of the reasons I changed jobs. Where I was before was too demanding and too many hours, and its because we were having a baby, and I didn't want to miss out on this. (#25)

Another expectant father, who had been in the music business for 8 years, was in the process of pursuing another career in order to be home more often:

I don't want to be away for me because its important for me. And I don't want to be away for the kid. I don't want to be one of those drop-in dads . . . in the summer we might be gone 6 to 8 weeks at a time. But when I think about 2 months of a child's life when they are developing like that, boy that is a whole bunch of stuff I'm going to miss that I'm not sure I want to miss. (#32)

#### Perceptions and Feelings about

#### Fatherhood: Prepartum

A major finding of this study is that men go through a process of developing an image of themselves as fathers during the transition to fatherhood. This process is evident during pregnancy as men try to imagine

themselves as fathers and think about the kind of father they want to be with their children. The following section will discuss three themes relevant to the development of a fathering-image: (a) The process whereby men come to identify themselves as fathers, (b) the image that men have of themselves as fathers, (c) the anxieties and concerns that expectant fathers have about fatherhood.

### Developing a Fathering-Image

During the prepartum interviews, most of the men in this study reported that they had given some thought to the type of involvement they wanted with their children. Many of them had been considering their relationships with their own fathers in thinking about how they wanted to relate to their children. For example, when asked if he had thought about the kind of father he would like to be, one subject responded:

I have thought a lot about that. . . . I know what I want to try to avoid.

Of course everything goes back to your experience with your own father.

(#27)

Some expectant fathers observed other contemporary fathers as they put together an image of themselves as fathers. One man recalled this process as beginning long before his wife was pregnant:

I'd say that I thought about it for a number of years. You know when you are out and you see men react with their kids and you say well "that's

good or I would never say that to my kids." You kind of put together a little profile of what you would like and what you wouldn't like and what's good and bad. (#14)

Some men were very determined and systematic in gathering information from as many resources as possible in developing their own identity as fathers. One expectant father described how he went through such a process:

I started out . . . I was going to become the ultimate authority on how to become a dad. So I got all these books from the library and read them. . . . I was going to become the book authority on how to be a dad. And then I was going to watch other dads and see that I don't make the same mistakes. So I would watch what my friends were doing. . . . Then I said "let's take a look at my dad and see the things he did." (#19)

#### Fathering-Image: More Involved than their Fathers

All of the fathers in this study wanted to be involved with their children in a meaningful manner. However, 19 of the men in this sample stated or implied that they would like to be "more involved" with their children than their fathers were with them. The intent of being "more involved" than their fathers had several interpretations for these men. For some men, "more involved" meant being more directly involved in the day-to-day care and raising of their children. The following expectant father answered as such:

I want to be involved with my kids. I don't want my wife to raise my kids. . . . Well, my dad was always the disciplinarian and the ultimate threat . . . "wait until your dad gets home." I don't want it to be like that, where my wife takes care of the kids, and I'm just home at night sitting around talking for 30 minutes and then going to bed. I want to be more involved I think than my Dad was in raising us. (#15)

For many of these fathers, being more involved means being actively involved in their children's lives from the earliest stages of development. Several men recalled that their own father's involvement began when they could play sports or go fishing. One man described how he wanted to differ from his own father in this regard:

As it grows up, trying to stay as involved . . . as you were the day it was born . . . It always seemed like my mom was always there and my dad wasn't . . . I want to be there and be more involved in more activities as they grow up . . . I guess the earliest thing I can remember about my dad is maybe when I started little league and getting into those kind of activities. (#23)

Several expectant fathers defined being "more involved" as being more open and communicative than their fathers were with them. One informant, who remembered his father as being emotionally detached and distant when he was growing up, described how he wanted to be different with his child:

As far as our relationship goes, I look for things to be very open and candid and a lot of talking, with a lot of talking about feelings. (#4)

Most of the men who stated that they wanted to be more involved than their fathers were with them did not have negative feelings towards their fathers. Indeed, the majority of the men in this sample described a fairly positive relationship with their own fathers. However, they were expressing a need to build upon what they had experienced by establishing a closer relationship with their own children. The following quote illustrates this theme:

Yeah that is something that I want to concentrate more on being more of a direct influence or direct support instead of having to tell dad about it after the fact. I never felt bad about my relationship with my dad. I want to take something that was good for he and I and improve on it, you know, with my kid. Just make it that much better. (#21)

An effort was made to clarify the meaning of "involvement" for these fathers by asking them what they actually anticipated doing with their children, many of these men imagined themselves participating in activities that are associated with older children:

I thought about having a little boy and teaching it what I do. And having it play football and going out on the weekends to play football and baseball. (#18)

Another respondent stated:

Some, you know fishing, hunting, that kind of stuff. Teach them what I know. (#8)

Another expectant father was looking forward to going back to school in 5 or 6 years so he could spend more time with his child when he/she is older:

I could spend more time with my kid when the kid is like 5, 6, or 7 at a real formative time and get involved with PTA and things like that. (#4)

However, many fathers were less clear about their anticipated involvement with their infants. One father, who had said he was looking forward to "teaching" values to his child and participating in sports activities, responded as such when asked if he had thought about how he will be involved with his infant:

Yeah, uh, somewhat. I'm not, uh, I guess it remains to be seen as far as what my role is as far as taking care of the baby. My wife has looked forward to all her life having kids, and she is just great with kids. (#26)

### Feeling Unprepared for Fathering and Fatherhood

In imagining themselves as fathers, 21 of the expectant fathers in this study expressed some doubts and anxieties about their readiness for fatherhood. In some cases, this was expressed as a fear that they might not be able to protect their children from harm as they grow and develop:

Its scary going into fatherhood. At least, the first few years won't be bad. Its when they go to school, that's going to be the biggest fear: not being able to communicate with my child on drugs. It worries me. (#16)

Other expectant fathers expressed their doubts about their readiness for fatherhood in terms of whether or not they were responsible enough to be a father:

I guess a lot of it, I've wondered if I'm really responsible enough to handle this. . . . I see a lot of stuff that they [friends] do that bothers me and I think if I will be dedicated enough and responsible enough to raise ours like I feel like they ought to be raising theirs. (#27)

For some fathers, the concerns about readiness for fatherhood centered on issues that were more concrete and immediate. For instance, nine of the fathers had some difficulty imagining themselves changing diapers and performing basic caretaking tasks even though they anticipated carrying out these tasks:

Its going to take awhile to get used to it. . . . There are some things I probably can't do, but I don't know what they are. Its hard for me to see myself changing a diaper now, but I know I will. (#11)

Another expectant father, who also anticipated being involved in caretaking activities, had difficulty imagining himself taking care of an infant because he had no models for such behavior:

I would have a little conflict. I would see myself as the person needing to do that, but I didn't have a role model to bring me up that way. I just didn't see that. (#30)

In spite of their fears and trepidation, most of the fathers in this study concluded that they were ready as they were going to be for fatherhood and were looking forward to the experience. The following quote, is representative of this prevailing attitude:

I'm as ready as I will ever be. . . . Well this is as good as a time as any.

I pictured myself as jumping in with both feet and enjoying it. (#11)

### Perceptions and Feelings about

#### Fatherhood: Postpartum

After the birth of their child, these first-time fathers were faced with the reality of fatherhood. No longer did they have to "imagine" the kind of father they would be or what fatherhood would be like for them. Although the reality of fatherhood often coincided with fathers' expectations, it just as frequently conflicted with or went beyond what was expected. Their perception of themselves as fathers was both challenged and/or reinforced by their experiences of fatherhood. The following themes relevant to men's postpartum images of themselves as fathers and their feelings and perceptions about fatherhood will be described in this section: (a) the impact of the father-child relationship on men, (b) guilt and/or disappointment at lack of

patience and involvement with their children, and (c) "feeling like a father" and fathering-images.

### Impact of Father-Child Relationship and Bonding

Most of the men in this study felt a bond with their children which began from the earliest moments of contact with their infants in the birthing room. Frequently this bond was described as an immediate identification and connection with their children. The following quote illustrates this theme:

Right as she was coming out she looked like me and I thought, "Is that what I look like?" I felt that bonding. . . . All of a sudden everybody is coming together as one. (#30)

Another father, who was somewhat surprised at the strength of the relationship he had with his daughter, described the immediate bond he felt with his child at the time of birth:

There's very definitely and quickly a new and significant relationship in your life. . . . I've never had that kind of sudden relationship that has that kind of depth. (#26)

Some fathers described the impact of the relationship they had with their children in terms of how they would feel if they lost their child for some reason:

It didn't take long, but I sat there and talked myself into bawling my eyes out . . . when I think about losing my child, its almost like that feeling of devastation wouldn't go away if something like that happened. (#21)

Another father, who took great pride in being a new father, described the strength of the relationship with his child in similar terms:

If something were to happen to him, I don't know what I'd do. I think I would go crazy. (#16)

Fourteen of the new fathers described the bond and the relationship they had with their infants as growing stronger over time. This ever-strengthening bond seemed to coincide with the infant's increasing ability to respond to the father's interactions. One father described how this relationship changed over time for him:

The fact that now I can interact with her. I can sit there and talk to her, and I can stimulate her, and she will respond to my stimulation. (#11)

Another respondent father reported that during the first 4 to 6 weeks, he felt as if he was just there to "stick a bottle" in the baby's mouth (#23).

However, by the time the baby was 3 1/2 months old, he enjoyed the fact that his child recognized him and that they had developed a mutual relationship:

I think the best thing about it now is he can look at you and know who you are. I get a kick out of that. It makes you feel good inside. The

smiling the laughing, there are some things they will do for you that they won't do for anybody else. (#23)

Five first-time fathers reported that they were surprised at how involved they were with their children and/or how much "fun" they were having with their infants. One father reported how he was much more involved with his child than he had anticipated, based on his previous experience with babies:

I never imagined or realized that I could or would spend that much time playing with her and holding her and talking to her. Always before whenever it was someone else's baby I could do that for a few minutes, but I was ready to put them down. I couldn't imagine doing it for long. But with my baby I can do it by the hour. (#26)

Several fathers were impacted by the relationship with their children in that they felt more "loving" and more capable of an unconditional kind of love after becoming a father. One respondent described how he had become more outwardly loving not only with his child, but with his wife as well, as the result of the relationship he had with his infant:

Yeah, I think in a way I've become more loving. I think the baby makes me, maybe not more loving but more outwardly. You sit there with a baby and ooh and aah and just hold the baby and tell her how much you love her. Stuff like that tends to rub off on you, like the way you treat your wife. (#14)

Another father reported how he had discovered for the first time his capacity to love in a selfless, unconditional manner with his own child:

I don't know that a baby is capable of loving someone. This is the first time that I've been able to love something that didn't love me back. That is really what love is. . . . I think that is why it changes you. You work really hard and maybe only get a smile out of it. (#13)

### Guilt and Disappointment

Ten of the new fathers in this sample expressed some guilt and disappointment in themselves over their self-perceived lack of patience and/or lack of involvement with their children. For these men, their actual behavior with their infants did not coincide with the image they had of themselves as fathers.

One subject, who had stated in the prepartum interview that he wanted to be a "good father," described how his behavior contradicted his image of himself as a father:

I don't think I've been as good a dad as I would like to be. I get upset with him sometimes when he cries and I can't figure out why he is crying, and I get mad at him. I don't like it when I do that . . . I hoped I would have had more patience. (#19)

Another new father described how disappointed he was in himself when he lost his temper for the first time with his child:

It made me mad that I let him get to me, and I yelled at him. He was crying for a reason. I was kind of depressed that entire night. (#10)

Other fathers also expressed feelings of guilt and disappointment over the lack of time and involvement they had with their infants. One respondent described the conflict between the time he wanted with his infant and time for himself:

If I could change anything about it, I would like to spend more time with him. . . . Its a double-edged sword because I would like to spend more time with the baby, but I also want to have more time to spend with myself. . . . It makes me sound like a hypocrite. (#24)

Some fathers who had expected to be just as involved in child care as their wives, expressed guilt and disappointment over not being involved as anticipated:

I'm probably a little lazy and its probably 70/30. I'll admit it that I'll be laying on the couch and he'll start crying and I'll expect her to go get him. . . . I want it to be 50/50 but God its so easy just to say "its the woman's job, go for it." (#10)

### Feeling Like a Father

In an effort to further examine the meaning and impact of fatherhood, the men in this study were asked during prepartum and postpartum interviews, "Do you feel like a father yet?" The probes that followed this question were

designed to explore when and how they came to feel like fathers. The majority of the men reported during the prepartum interviews that they did not feel like a father as yet. Most of them felt that they would not feel like a father until they could actually see and touch the baby.

During postpartum interviews, most of the men responded that they did feel like a father, at least some of the time. However, there was a wide variety of responses as to when and how they came to identify themselves as fathers.

Several men reported feeling more like a father the more they got involved in one-to-one interaction and caretaking with their infants. For example, one new father describes how he felt immersed in fatherhood when he took over child care responsibilities when his wife got sick:

She came down with the flu, and I wouldn't let her touch him at all. It was daddy and baby for the whole 3 days. That's an experience. That's probably when I really felt like a father and felt like I had really gotten into fatherhood--doing every feeding and all the changing. I took total responsibility for those 3 days. (#23)

Other fathers have their "special" time or activities with their children which they enjoy and which help them to feel more like a father. For example:

I give him his bath every night except when I'm in school; and whenever I'm down on the floor playing with him or I'm taking care of him, then I feel like a dad. (#18)

In contrast to the fathers quoted above, some of the men indicated that they would not feel that they had really become fathers until their children were older and could communicate. In many of these cases, fathers saw their role as that of "teacher" of values and skills and did not identify infant caretaking as part of the fathering role. As such, they tended to discount the value of what they were doing with their infants. One father, who was the primary caretaker of his child while his wife worked, described his feelings as such:

Now all I can do is feed him or change him. If I could go to the park and spend a few hours throwing a ball to him during the day, I could handle that. I don't feel like I'm teaching him anything. There's nothing to teach him. Just doing by instinct. There's nothing I can do but just help. (#8)

Another new father, who identified the father role with that of disciplinarian, described how he felt more like a mother than a father at that stage of his infant's development:

Actually I'm a mother right now too. I'm just helping out. I always thought of the dad as the one who does the disciplining but there isn't much of that to do right now. (#31)

### The Meaning of Becoming a Father

During the postpartum interviews, the new fathers were asked what the experience of becoming a father meant to them. This question was asked in

order to explore in more depth how they were affected by the transition to fatherhood. Some of the fathers described the meaning of this experience in terms of how they had become more responsible and/or had matured as a result of fatherhood. Such responses are described in a previous section. Other subjects, however, responded with broader, more philosophical answers as to the meaning of this experience for them. Fourteen subjects described fatherhood as giving them more of a sense of fulfillment and/or purpose in their lives.

One father, who at first denied any significant meaning to becoming a father, described the sense of fulfillment that he felt in his life:

It adds a new aspect. . . . To get abstract or something its like filling out our lives, what I think should be a completion of our lives. There is another level or something that's in our lives. (#3)

Some fathers depicted this sense of fulfillment in terms of achieving their dreams and long-term goals:

When I first got married I had daydreams of having a family, a little boy or little girl running around. This is one of my dreams come true. It's part of the over-all picture again, that I had pictured in going through different stages of life. (#7)

Another father, who had achieved his plans of buying a home and being in a stable job before having a child, described the feeling as follows:

I finally feel like things are coming together. I feel like I'm where I want to be and doing what I want to be doing. (#20)

Other new fathers described a newfound sense of purpose in their lives as the result of having a child. For these fathers, fatherhood gave them a reason for doing what they do:

Here is a pretty good way to sum it up. I was telling you before that I work a lot of hours. Well before when I was 17 or 18 I put in long hours, but I never knew why. I came home at night and I go, "Why am I killing myself?" But now there's a reason: we've got the baby. . . . It kind of puts a reason to everything. (#24)

### Summary

Chapter IV described the impact on men of the transition to fatherhood. Based on a qualitative analysis of interview data, it was discovered that the transition to fatherhood affects men in several major areas of their lives. First, during pregnancy, men think about the way they were fathered and observe other fathers as they develop their own image as fathers. Second, men perceive themselves as taking on more responsibility during the transition to fatherhood and growing and maturing in this process. Third, as men come to perceive themselves as fathers, they also begin to take their work and careers more seriously. However, many fathers see themselves as more than providers as they consider how to balance their work and family roles. Fourth, men are

affected by their relationship with their infants as they experience a bond with their children which grows over time. Finally, the transition to fatherhood is a meaningful experience for men as they gain a sense of fulfillment and increased purpose in life in the process of becoming fathers.

## CHAPTER V

### DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### Overview of the Study

A qualitative study was conducted to examine the impact on men of the transition to fatherhood. The study focused on how men perceived themselves as being affected by the process of becoming fathers. Thirty first-time fathers were interviewed once during the last trimester of pregnancy and again from 12 to 16 weeks after childbirth. Data were analyzed qualitatively by looking for recurring themes and commonalities.

#### Discussion of Findings

The highlights of the findings of this study, as well as the relationship of these findings to previous research on fatherhood, are discussed in this section. This section is divided into the following areas as they relate to the impact on men of the transition to fatherhood: (1) impact on self, (b) impact on work and career, (c) perceptions and feelings about fatherhood, (d) the meaning of becoming a father, and (e) relevance of current study to previous research.

#### Impact on Self

Based on the data, it appears that the transition to fatherhood impacts men's perception of themselves or their self-image. In particular, during the

transition to fatherhood the men in this study saw themselves as taking on more responsibility, and as a result, growing and maturing in the process. Fatherhood meant for some men that they were finally becoming an adult and could no longer indulge themselves like a child. Some men perceived themselves as beginning to change during pregnancy, while others perceived more of a change in themselves after the birth of their child when fatherhood became a concrete reality for them.

A number of men, some who did not necessarily describe themselves as maturing, did see themselves as becoming more conservative and taking fewer risks as a result of becoming fathers. Such changes would seem to indicate that these men are also undergoing a maturational process as they take on the responsibilities of fatherhood in considering the needs of their children and families before their own needs. However, it may be that these fathers are either unwilling or unable to perceive themselves as growing and developing in this manner.

A number of fathers saw themselves impacted by the transition to fatherhood in that they had a major shift in priorities. In particular, their children became their number one priority, and their own needs became secondary. For some, this change meant for the first time that they loved someone in an unconditional, selfless manner. Such changes indicate that

these men have become more "generative" in that they are putting aside their own needs to foster the growth of another generation (Erikson, 1963).

These findings offer support for the theory that fatherhood can lead to growth and development in men (Benedek, 1970; Erikson & Erikson, 1981; Fein, 1978; Grossman et al., 1980; Osofsky & Osofsky, 1984). Likewise, the findings offer support for Erikson's theory that parenthood can set the stage for the development of "generativity" (Erikson, 1963). For these men, the maturational development seemed directly related to the fact that they were taking on more responsibility in considering their children's needs before their own.

Based on the subjects' expressed anxieties about their readiness for fatherhood, there was evidence that some were experiencing a certain amount of stress and strain during the transition to fatherhood. However, none of the fathers appeared to be overwhelmed by this experience. Whatever anxieties they had during the prepartum interviews appeared to have subsided by the time the postpartum interviews took place.

### Impact on Work and Career

Relevant to the changes they saw within themselves during the transition to fatherhood, many men also noted a change in how they perceived their work and careers. Again, for some of the fathers the changes began during

pregnancy while for others the changes were most apparent after they had become fathers.

In the process of taking on more responsibility, many men saw themselves taking their work and careers more seriously than they had before the transition to fatherhood. However, many new fathers were also considering how to balance their work responsibilities with the time they wanted with their children and families. Some fathers in this study were making the choice to cut back on work hours to be at home. Others had changed jobs in order to spend more time with their infants and families.

These findings offer support for the argument that the role of fathers is being redefined in our society as men perceive themselves not only as providers but also want a more involved role with their children (Fein, 1978; Grossman et al., 1980; Phillips & Anzalone, 1982; Rotundo, 1985).

Likewise, the fact that some of the men in this study were actively restructuring their work roles and careers to achieve a balance between work and family, indicates that their commitment to their family role goes beyond rhetoric. This finding runs contrary to the argument that the changing role of fathers is more ideology than reality (LaRossa, 1988).

The potential for conflict for fathers who are trying to balance their work and family roles is obvious. However, most of these men did not appear to be experiencing any major conflicts. Perhaps this is due in part to the fact that

they had the balance they wanted by the time the postpartum interview took place. However, it is also possible that conflicts between work and family will occur later when some men see their involvement as fathers becoming more important as their children get older.

### Perceptions and Feelings about Fatherhood:

#### Pre- and Postpartum

The data indicates that expectant fathers think about how they were fathered and observe other fathers during pregnancy as they consider the kind of father they want to be with their children. In this manner, they come to develop their own image of themselves as fathers during the transition to fatherhood. This finding concurs with the results of other research which has found that men go through an "image-making" stage (Galinsky, 1981) as they come to redefine themselves as fathers (May, 1982).

It was discovered that the majority of first-time fathers had some doubts and anxieties about their readiness for fatherhood and their ability to adequately take care of their children. These findings reinforce the suggestion that men in our society are ill-prepared for fatherhood and fathering (Parke, 1981; Wente & Crockenburg, 1976).

Furthermore, the majority of men wanted to be more involved with their children than their fathers were with them, and they wanted to be involved with their children from their earliest stages of development. Again, this

finding supports the argument that the fathering role is being redefined in our society as men seek a more involved role with their children (Fein, 1978; Grossman et al., 1980; Phillips & Anzalone, 1982; Rotundo, 1985).

Many fathers, however, had difficulty imagining themselves actually performing caretaking duties and/or were unclear about what they would actually be doing with their infants. This finding may be a reflection of men's lack of role models and lack of experience with infants. For example, most of the fathers in this study had little or no previous experience with infant caretaking. Furthermore, as one father pointed out, most had no role models for the type of involvement they wanted with their children (#30).

After the birth of their child, the reality of fatherhood both challenged and confirmed first-time fathers' expectations for themselves. Most of the fathers were quite impacted by their relationship with their child and reported feeling a strong bond with their children. Some fathers saw themselves as being more "loving" as a result of the unconditional kind of love they experienced in their relationship with their infants.

Many fathers described the bond with their children as growing over time relative to their infant's ability to respond to their interactions. This finding indicates that men have difficulty relating to their infants until they can interact in a physical or verbal manner that fathers find meaningful and pleasurable.

Again, this may reflect the fact that most of the men in this study had minimal experience with infants prior to becoming fathers.

Several men reported that the more involved they got with their children on a one-to-one basis, the more they felt like a father. These fathers appeared to define fathering as including both caretaking activities as well as that of providing. As such, they seemed comfortable in their role as involved, caretaking fathers.

However, some fathers felt that they would feel more like a father when the child was older and could interact on a more sophisticated level. These fathers were more likely to have a "traditional" (Rotundo, 1985) concept of fathering as teaching, disciplining, or other activities that are more appropriate with older children. For these fathers, infant caretaking was perceived as just "helping out" and was discounted as a legitimate fathering activity. As such, they appeared to be experiencing some discomfort and confusion in their caretaking role with their infants.

A third of the men in this study experienced some guilt and disappointment over their perceived lack of patience and/or lack of involvement with their child. For these men, their perception of themselves as involved, caretaking fathers did not hold up to the reality of interacting with an infant.

The difficulty and discomfort in assuming the involved, caretaking father role can be attributed to a number of reasons. Many of the men in this study still identified with the traditional image of father as provider/breadwinner since this is what they learned about fathering from their own fathers. However, they had few role models for the involved, caretaking role they were trying to develop. Furthermore, most of the men in this study had minimal experience with infants prior to becoming fathers. As such, they were ill-prepared for the kind of infant caretaking that they, and perhaps their wives and society in general, now expect of them.

It is likely that these men had unrealistic expectations for themselves based on their lack of experience with infants and the lack of role models for the type of involvement that they wanted with their children. This points out that simply because men want to be more involved with their infants than their fathers were with them, does not mean that they can easily carry out this task or take on a caretaking role without some negative consequences.

### The Meaning of Becoming a Father

The transition to fatherhood was interpreted by first-time fathers with several meanings. Many described this experience in terms of having to grow up and take on more responsibility. For these men, becoming a father meant that they had to become adults and could no longer indulge themselves as they had in the past.

Fourteen men perceived the meaning of becoming a father in more abstract terms, describing fatherhood as giving them a sense of fulfillment and purpose in life. The sense of fulfillment seemed based in part on the fact that they had achieved their dreams and goals as they entered another developmental stage in their lives. Furthermore, a sense of fulfillment also appeared to come from the bond and relationship they had developed with their children which was rewarding in and of itself.

The increased sense of purpose in life was based on the fact these fathers had more of a reason for being and for working. The experience of fatherhood itself provided some fathers with an intrinsic sense of meaning and purpose in life. For others, being a father and having responsibility for a child gave them more of a reason for working and taking their work seriously.

#### Relevance of Current Study to Previous Research

Overall, the results of the current study are relevant to a number of previous studies conducted on the impact of fatherhood on men. In particular, the findings of this study provide further support for the following, previous research findings: (a) Men undergo an image-making process during pregnancy (Galinsky, 1981; May, 1982); (b) men are impacted by childbirth and their relationship with their infants (Greenburg & Morris, 1974); (c) men adapt to their role by 6 to 8 weeks after the birth of their child (Entwisle &

Doering, 1981; Fein, 1976); and (d) men see themselves as providers, but also want a nurturing role with their children (Einzig, 1980; Obrzut, 1976).

### Conclusions

Based on the findings, it can be concluded that men are profoundly impacted by the transition to fatherhood. First, they perceive themselves as taking on more responsibility and growing up and maturing in the process of becoming fathers. Likewise, they become more "generative" (Erikson, 1963) as their own needs become secondary to that of raising their offspring.

A second major conclusion is that the transition to fatherhood impacts how men perceive their work and careers. Many men not only took their role as provider more seriously but also wanted to maintain some balance between work and family. The potential for conflict between the demands of work and family are evident. However, at the time of the postpartum interviews most of the fathers seemed to have the balance they wanted between work and family. This sense of balance is both subjective and dynamic in that it is continuously subject to change in men's lives.

A third major conclusion is that men are impacted by the transition to fatherhood in that they undergo a process of developing an image of themselves as fathers. This process begins during pregnancy, or earlier for some men, as they recall how they were fathered and observe other fathers in considering the kind of father they want to be with their children. Most of the

fathers in this study wanted to be more involved with their children than their fathers were with them. However, many men were unclear or unsure as to how they would carry out this involvement. Likewise, a number of men were disappointed in themselves when they were not involved in the way they anticipated they would be with their children.

A fourth conclusion is that men are impacted by their relationship with their children. Many of the men felt an immediate bond with their children, a bond which grew over time. Some fathers saw themselves as being more "loving" as a result of the unconditional kind of love they experienced in their relationship with their infants.

A fifth conclusion is that the transition to fatherhood impacts men by giving them more of a sense of fulfillment and purpose in life. Therefore, the process of becoming a father means more than the adjustment to the demands of a new role but also represents a profoundly meaningful experience for men.

Overall, it can be concluded that during the transition to fatherhood men undergo a transformation of identity. For most men, this is the first time in their lives that they have someone who is totally dependent on them for every need. Thus, the transformation of identity comes about as men assume responsibility for the care and raising of their children. This sense of responsibility alters their perception of themselves and their world as it impacts every aspect of their lives. Through the process of nurturing,

protecting, and providing for their children, men come to define themselves as fathers and come to redefine their world in terms of fatherhood.

### Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

The current study provides some insight and information on the impact on men of the transition to fatherhood. However, the fact that the study focuses on 30 white, predominantly middle-class men, limits its generalizability to the larger population. Therefore, it is recommended that future research include working-class men and minorities in order to better represent the general population. Likewise, the study of larger samples is also recommended to enhance generalizability.

The fact that the current study uses a self-selected sample also limits generalizability and may have biased the research findings. For example, since the men in this study were volunteers, it may be that they were more involved in the process of becoming fathers and thus affected differently by the transition to fatherhood than men who did not volunteer. As such, it is recommended that future research should be conducted with a more random selection of subjects to reduce possible bias and increase generalizability.

Another limitation of the current study is that it focuses on a relatively brief span of the transition to fatherhood. The process of fathering and fatherhood does not end at 3 months postpartum, but is an on-going process

that changes over time. A longitudinal study could more accurately assess how men are affected by fatherhood over time. For example, what is the impact of fatherhood on men when the child is 1-year-old as opposed to when the child is 3 or 4 months old?

The current study focused on fathers who were experiencing their first pregnancy and childbirth. However, this study did not explore the factor of whether or not it was the first pregnancy and childbirth for the wives of these first-time fathers. Therefore, it is recommended that future research consider this factor as to how it may or may not affect men's experience of the transition to fatherhood.

#### Implications for Research and Practice

The results of the current study provide a number of important implications for researchers, family life educators, and those in the helping professions. First, and foremost, childbirth educators, physicians, or anyone who works with expectant or new fathers should assume that men are affected by the transition to fatherhood and are not simply passive bystanders. As such, men should be included as much as they want to be included in all aspects of pregnancy, childbirth, and infant caretaking. Secondly, it is clear that men do not feel prepared for fathering and fatherhood and continue to suffer from a lack of biological and social guidelines for their experience (Rossi, 1968). Furthermore, many men want to be more involved with their

children than their fathers were with them but are unsure or unclear about their ability to actually carry out this task. Therefore, there is a need for classes and support groups for expectant fathers, new fathers, as well as fathers in general. These classes could explore men's feelings and concerns about fatherhood and offer some support and guidance for the type of involvement they want with their children. However, family life and childbirth educators must take into account that all men are not ready for a highly involved caretaking role with their infants and must be allowed to get involved in a way that is comfortable for themselves and their families.

#### Theoretical and Social Implications

The results of this study have major implications for theories of adult male development. For example, in spite of the fact that most of the men in this study were in their late 20s, many saw themselves as maturing and becoming more like adults as the result of fatherhood. This finding suggests that maturation and growth is not simply an age-related phenomenon for men, as suggested by Levinson (1978) and Erikson (1959) but may also relate to specific life events such as marriage and parenthood. The fact that so many men interpreted fatherhood as meaning that they have to "grow up" may indicate that parenthood is socially defined as synonymous with adulthood. Again, if this is the case, then previous theoretical definitions do not coincide with the cultural definitions of maturation and adulthood in our society.

Furthermore, the fact that many young men displayed evidence of becoming more generative in the process of becoming fathers contradicts Erikson's (1963) earlier theory that generativity occurs primarily during middle age for men. This indicates a possible cultural change since Erikson's theory is based on observations of men during a different historical era. It may also indicate that the development of young adult men during the life cycle is becoming more like that of women (Gilligan, 1979) in that they are placing more emphasis on relationships and nurturance than in the past.

The results of this study also have major social implications. It appears that the image of the "involved father" has become the "ideal" image of fathering and fatherhood for many men. This ideal fathering image seems to encompass both the provider role as well as a nurturing, caretaking role. It has been argued that the ideal images in our culture tell us about who we are and where we are going as a society (Ryff, 1985). As such, the image of the "involved father" may not only indicate how men perceive fathering now but may also indicate the role of fathers in the future.

However, based on the current study it is also apparent that many men experience conflict and confusion in assuming an involved, caretaking role with their infants and have had minimal social support or training for such a role. Therefore, modern fathers appear to be caught between the traditional

fathering role they have learned and the more involved role they want with their children, unable to identify comfortably with either role.

Men will continue to experience confusion and conflict in trying to assume a caretaking role with their children until they, and society, can come to redefine fathering as including caretaking tasks and until more opportunities are provided for men to prepare for such a role. Until then, the "ideal" image of the involved, caretaking father may prove to be more of an enigma than an answer for the men that have this image of themselves as fathers.

### Summary

The current study utilized qualitative methods to explore the impact on men of the transition to fatherhood. It appears that the major impact on men is that they undergo a transformation of identity as they come to define themselves as fathers and redefine their world in terms of fatherhood. This transformation of identity is based on men's sense of responsibility for nurturing, protecting, and providing for their children.

In the process of taking on more responsibility, men also see themselves as maturing and becoming more generative. Some men perceive themselves as more loving and more capable of an unconditional kind of love as a result of the relationship they have with their children. Men also take their work and careers more seriously as the result of fatherhood but are seeking a balance between work and family involvement as well.

Finally, fatherhood impacts men beyond changes in personality in that it gives them a sense of fulfillment and purpose in life. As such, the process of becoming a father represents more than just an adjustment to a new role in that it also provides a profoundly meaningful experience for men.

## REFERENCES

- Barnhill, L., Rubenstein, G., & Rocklin, N. (1979). From generation to generation: Fathers to be in transition. The Family Coordinator, 28, 229-235.
- Benedek, T. (1970). Fatherhood and providing. In E. Anthony & T. Benedek (Eds.), Parenthood: Its Psychology and Psychopathology. Boston: Little, Brown & CO, pp. 167-183.
- Bogdan, R., & Biklen, S. (1982). Qualitative research for education: An introduction to theory and methods. Boston: Allyn & Bacon Inc.
- Cronenwett, L., & Newmark, L. (1974). Fathers' response to childbirth. Nursing Research, 23, 210-217.
- Curtis, J. (1955). A psychiatric study of fifty expectant fathers. U.S. Armed Forces Medical Journal, 6, 937-950.
- Dubbert, J. (1979). A man's place: Masculinity in transition. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall.
- Dyer, E. D. (1963). Parenthood as crisis: A re-study. Marriage and Family Living, 25, 367-372.
- Einzig, J. (1980). The child within: A study of expectant fatherhood. Smith College Studies in Social Work, 50, 117-164.
- Entwisle, D., & Doering, S. (1981). The first birth: A family turning point. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University.
- Erikson, E. (1959). Identity and the life cycle. New York: W. W. Norton & Co.
- Erikson, E. (1963). Childhood and society. New York: W. W. Norton & Co.
- Erikson, E., & Erikson, J. (1981). Generativity and identity. Harvard Educational Review, 51, 241-269.

- Fein, R. (1976). Men's entrance to parenthood. The Family Coordinator, 25, 341-348.
- Fein, R. (1978). Research on fathering: Social policy and an emergent perspective. Journal of Social Issues, 34, 122-135.
- Freeman, T. (1951). Pregnancy as a precipitant of mental illness in men. British Journal of Medical Psychology, 24, 49-54.
- Galinsky, E. (1981). Between generations: The six stages of parenthood. New York: Times Books.
- Gilligan, C. (1979). Woman's place in man's life cycle. Harvard Educational Review, 49, 431-446.
- Giorgi, A. (1971). Phenomenology and experimental psychology. In A. Giorgi, W. Fischer, & R. Von Eckartsberg (Eds.), Duquesne studies in phenomenological psychology: Volume I (pp. 6-16). Duquesne University: Duquesne University Press.
- Greenberg, M., & Morris, N. (1974). Engrossment: The newborn's impact upon the father. The American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, 44, 520-531.
- Grossman, F. K., Eichler, L. S., & Winickoff, S. A. (1980). Pregnancy, birth & parenthood. San Francisco: Josey Bass Publishers.
- Hobbs, D. (1965). Parenthood as crisis: A third study. Journal of Marriage and the Family, 27, 367-372.
- Ihde, D. (1977). Experimental phenomenology: An introduction. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons.
- Jessner, L., Weigert, E., & Foy, J. (1970). The development of parental attitudes during pregnancy. In E. S. Anthony & T. Benedek (Eds.), Psychology and psychopathology of parenthood (pp. 209-244). Boston: Little, Brown & Co.
- Lamb, M. E. (1981). Father and child development: An integrative overview. In M. Lamb (Ed.), The role of the father in child development (pp. 1-70). New York: John Wiley & Sons.

- Lamb, M., Pleck, J., Charnov, E., & Levine, J. (1987). A biosocial perspective on paternal behavior and involvement. In J. Lancaster, J. Altman, A. Rossi, & L. Sherrod (Eds.), Parenting across the life-span: Biosocial dimensions (pp. 111-142). New York: Aldine De Gruyter.
- Lancaster, J. (1985). Evolutionary perspectives on sex differences in the higher primates. In A. Rossi (Ed.), Gender and the life course (pp. 3-27). New York: Aldine Publishing Co.
- LaRossa, R. (1988). Fatherhood and social change. Family Relations, 37, 451-457.
- LeMasters, E. (1957). Parenthood as crisis. Marriage and Family Living, 19, 352-355.
- Levinson, D. (1978). The seasons of a man's life. New York: Ballantine Books.
- Liebenberg, B. (1969). Expectant fathers. Child and Family, 8, 265-277.
- May, K. (1982). Three phases of father involvement in pregnancy. Nursing Research, 31, 337-342.
- McLain, R., & Weigert, A. (1979). Toward a phenomenological sociology of family: A programmatic essay. In W. Burr, R. Hill, I. Nye, & I. Reiss (Eds.), Contemporary theories about the family: Volume II (pp. 160-205). New York: The Free Press.
- Miller, B. C., & Sollie, D. L. (1980). Normal stresses during the transition to parenthood. Family Relations, 29, 459-465.
- Nash, J. (1965). The father in contemporary culture and current psychological literature. Child Development, 36, 261-297.
- Nicholson, J., Gist, N. Klein, R., & Standley, K. (1983). Outcomes of father involvement in pregnancy and birth. Birth, 10, 5-9.
- Obrzut, L. (1976). Expectant fathers perception of fathering. American Journal of Nursing, 6, 1440-1442.

- Osofsky, J. D., & Osofsky, H. J. (1984). Psychological and developmental perspectives on expectant and new parenthood. In R. D. Parke (Ed.), Review of Child Development Research (Vol. 7) (pp. 372-397). Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Parke, R. D. (1981). Fathers. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Phillips, C. R., & Anzalone, J. T. (1982). Fathering: Participation in labor and birth. St. Louis: The C. V. Mosby Co.
- Ross, J. (1975). The development of paternal identity: A critical review of the literature on nurturance and generativity in boys and men. Journal of the Psychoanalytic Association, 23, 783-813.
- Rossi, A. S. (1968). Transition to parenthood. Journal of Marriage and the Family, 30, 26-39.
- Rotundo, E. A. (1985). American Fatherhood. American Behavioral Scientist, 29, 7-25.
- Russell, C. S. (1974). Transition to parenthood: Problems and gratifications. Journal of Marriage and the Family, 36, 294-302.
- Ryff, C. D. (1985). The subjective experience of life-span transitions. In A. S. Rossi (Ed.), Gender and the Life Course (pp. 97-113). New York: Aldine Publishing Co.
- Soule, B., Standley, K., & Copans, S. (1979). Father identity. Psychiatry, 42, 255-263.
- Taylor, S., & Bogdan, R. (1984). Introduction to qualitative research methods: The search for meaning. New York: John Wiley & Sons.
- Trethowan, W., & Conlon, M. (1965). The couvade syndrome. British Journal of Psychiatry, 111, 57-66.
- Valentine, D. (1982). The Experience of pregnancy: A developmental process. Family Relations, 31, 243-248.

- Ventura, J. (1987). The stresses of parenthood re-examined. Family Relations, 36, 26-29.
- Wainwright, W. (1966). Fatherhood as a precipitant of mental illness. American Journal of Psychiatry, 123, 40-44.
- Wente, A., & Crockenberg, S. (1976). Transition to fatherhood: Lamaze preparation, adjustment difficulty and the husband-wife relationship. Family Coordinator, 25, 351-358.
- Wilkie, C., & Ames, E. (1986). The relationship of infant crying to parental stress in the transition to parenthood. Journal of Marriage and the Family, 48, 545-550.
- Zilboorg, G. (1931). Depressive reactions related to parenthood. American Journal of Psychiatry, 10, 927-962.

## APPENDICES

**APPENDIX A**  
**Interview Guide**

## Interview Guide

### Prepartum Interview:

1. What effect has expectant fatherhood had on you personally?

Probe: Has this experience changed you in any way? If so, how?

2. Have you thought about the kind of father you want to be?

Probe: What is your image of the kind of father you want to be after your child is born?

Probe: How does this image compare to the way your father interacted with you as a child?

3. What effect has expectant fatherhood had on your work and career?

Probe: Has being an expectant father changed the way you see your work and career? If so, how?

### Postpartum Interview:

1. What was the birth of your child like for you?

Probe: Can you describe what feelings you had?

2. How has the experience of becoming a father affected you?

Probe: Has it changed you? If so, how?

3. What has becoming a father meant to you personally?

4. How would you describe the relationship you have with your child?

Probe: How does the kind of involvement you have with your child compare to what you expected?

Probe: How is it the same and how is it different?

Probe: Is there anything you would change about the kind of relationship you have with your child? If so, what?

5. Have you felt like a father yet?

Probe: What does it feel like to be a father?

Probe: When did you start feeling like a father?

4. What affect has fatherhood had on your work and career?

**APPENDIX B**  
**Demographic Data Form**

## DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

1. Age: \_\_\_\_\_
2. Date of birth: \_\_\_\_\_
3. Occupation: \_\_\_\_\_
4. Education: \_\_\_\_\_
5. Wife's age: \_\_\_\_\_
6. Wife's date of birth: \_\_\_\_\_
7. Wife's occupation: \_\_\_\_\_
8. Wife's education: \_\_\_\_\_
9. Length of marriage: \_\_\_\_\_
10. Religious affiliation: \_\_\_\_\_
11. Anticipated date of birth of child: \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX C

### Consent Forms

## CONSENT FORM A

### Consent to act as a subject for research

1. I authorize Bruce Drobeck to:
  - a. Conduct two interviews which are designed to understand my experience of becoming a father. Each interview will last approximately 1 to 2 hours in length. The first interview will take place during the last trimester of my wife's pregnancy and the second interview will take place within 6 to 10 weeks after the birth of my first child.
  - b. Analyze the data from the interviews.
  - c. Publish findings in a dissertation and possibly in journals or books in the future with the knowledge that no names or identifying information will be used.
2. The investigation described in number 1 has been explained to me by Bruce Drobeck.
3. I understand that the investigation may involve the following risks or discomforts:
  - a. Questions may be asked which I do not wish to answer.
  - b. I may disclose information which causes me some discomfort or embarrassment.

4. The following measures will be taken to reduce above-mentioned risks:
  - a. Subjects may terminate participation in this study at any time.
  - b. No names or identifying information will be used in reporting the data.
  - c. Subjects may review the data gathered from this study after it has been analyzed.
5. The investigation described in number 1 has the following potential benefit:
  - a. Greater awareness of oneself as a person and a father.
  - b. Greater preparation for fatherhood.
6. No medical service or compensation is given to subjects by the university as a result of injury from participation in research.
7. An offer has been made to answer all my questions regarding this study. I understand that I may terminate my participation at any time.

---

Signature

---

Date

---

Witness

## CONSENT FORM B

I, the undersigned, do hereby consent to the recording of my voice by Bruce Drobeck, acting on this date under the authority of the Texas Woman's University. I understand that the material recorded today may be made available for educational, and/or research purposes, and I do hereby consent to such use.

I hereby release the Texas Woman's University and the undersigned party acting under the authority of Texas Woman's University from any and all claims arising out of such taking, recording, reproducing, publishing, transmitting, or exhibiting as is authorized by the Texas Woman's University.

---

Signature of participant

---

Date

The above consent form was read, discussed and signed in my presence. In my opinion, the person signing said consent form did so freely and with full knowledge and understanding of its contents.

---

Authorized representative

---

Date

of the Texas Woman's University

**Appendix D**  
**Parenting Resources and Information**

The following is a list of list of possible resources and support for parents and their families:

The Dallas Association for Parent Education  
13531 N. Central Expressway #29  
Dallas, TX 75243  
(214) 253-2826

The Parenting Connection  
Mental Health Association of Dallas County  
2500 Maple Ave.  
Dallas, TX 75201  
871-2420

Family Guidance Center  
1425 W. Pioneer Dr.  
Irving, TX 75061  
(214) 253-8879  
Main office: (214) 747-8331

Irving Youth and Family Counseling Services  
835 W. Irving Blvd.  
Irving, TX 75061.  
(214) 721-2448

Family Outreach of Irving  
612 E. Second  
Irving, TX 75061  
(214) 438-5446

Family Outreach of Greater Dallas  
(214) 361-5230

**APPENDIX E**

**Coding Categories and Subcategories**

## CODING CATEGORIES AND SUBCATEGORIES

- 100 Impact on Self
  - 101 Taking on more responsibility
  - 102 Growing up/maturing
  - 103 More conservative/less impulsive
  - 104 Change in priorities
- 200 Impact on Work and Career
  - 201 Taking work more seriously
  - 202 Balancing work and family
- 300 Perceptions and Feelings about Fatherhood: Prepartum
  - 301 More involved than their fathers
  - 302 Feeling unprepared
- 400 Perceptions and Feelings about Fatherhood: Postpartum
  - 403 Father-child relationship and bonding
  - 404 Guilt and disappointment
  - 405 Feeling like a father
- 500 The Meaning of Becoming a Father
  - 501 Fulfillment and purpose in life

## APPENDIX F

### Matrix Chart

# MATRIX CHART

Subject Code Number      3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10   11   12   13   14   15   16   17   18   19   20   21   22   23   24   25   26   27   28   29   30   31   32

## PREPARTUM DATA:

### Impact on Self

Taking on more responsibility	X			X				X		X		X				X	X			X		X		X				X
Growing up and maturing			X	X	X													X									X	
More conservative/less impulsive		X																		X								
Change in priorities						X															X	X						

### Impact on Work/Career

Taking work more seriously							X		X	X					X			X										
Balancing work and family													X		X			X			X					X		X

### Perceptions/Feelings about Fatherhood: Prepartum

More involved than their fathers		X		X		X	X		X	X			X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X		X			X	X	X	X
Feeling unprepared	X			X		X		X	X	X		X	X	X		X	X		X		X	X	X	X		X		X	X

(chart continues)

Subject Code Number      3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10   11   12   13   14   15   16   17   18   19   20   21   22   23   24   25   26   27   28   29   30   31   32

**POSTPARTUM DATA:**

Impact on Self

Taking on more responsibility	X	X	X			X			X	X	X				X	X		X					X						X
Growing up and maturing			X	X					X	X	X							X					X	X					X
More conservative/less impulsive						X												X				X	X	X				X	
Change in priorities						X		X				X	X							X		X		X			X	X	

Impact on Work/Career

Taking work more seriously				X	X				X							X	X												
Balancing work and family								X		X			X					X						X	X	X		X	

Perceptions/Feelings about Fatherhood: Postpartum

Impact on father-child relationship: bond grows over time						X	X		X	X	X			X	X		X		X	X	X	X						X
Guilt and Disappointment				X				X	X	X					X	X		X					X	X			X	
Feeling like a father: when child gets older						X									X								X				X	X

The Meaning of Becoming a Father

Fulfillment/purpose in life		X				X		X			X			X	X		X	X	X	X		X		X	X			X
-----------------------------	--	---	--	--	--	---	--	---	--	--	---	--	--	---	---	--	---	---	---	---	--	---	--	---	---	--	--	---