

**A PHENOMENOLOGICAL
APPROACH TO UNDERSTANDING
THE EARLY EXPERIENCE OF
BECOMING A FATHER FOR THE
FIRST TIME**

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List of Contents

Copyright Statement	i
Abstract	ii
Acknowledgements	iv
1.0 Introduction	1
2.0 Literature Review	4
2.1 Introduction	4
2.2 Changing Fatherhood	5
2.3 Fatherhood as a Time of Transition	9
2.4 The Expectant Father's Experiences	14
2.5 The Father and the Birth	24
2.6 The Father's Post Natal Experience	27
2.7 The Significance of Studying Fatherhood	35
2.8 Supporting Fathers	37
2.9 Conclusion	42
3.0 A Qualitative Approach to the Study of Fatherhood	44
3.1 The Methodological Decision	44
3.2 The Philosophical Phenomenological Approach	48
3.3 The Descriptive Phenomenological Approach as a Scientific Practice	56
3.4 The Relevance of the Chosen Methodology to the Study of Fatherhood	62
4.0 The Study	64
4.1 The Sample	64
4.2 Recruitment	67
4.3 The Information Packs	68
4.4 Contacting the Fathers	70
4.5 Ethical Considerations	71
4.6 The Phenomenological Interview	75
4.7 Approach to Analysis	79

5.0 Findings	84
5.1 Introduction	84
5.2 The General Structure of Becoming a Father for the First Time	85
5.2.1 The Importance of the General Structure	87
5.3 The Constituents of the General Structure	88
5.3.1 Travelling into the Great Unknown	88
5.3.1.1 The Birth	88
5.3.1.2 Re-routing the roadmap	89
5.3.1.3 The Known	91
5.3.1.4 The Unknown Role	92
5.3.1.5 Preparation for their travels	93
5.3.2 Building The Tower of Strength	96
5.3.2.1 Pressures placed upon the tower	97
5.3.2.2 Supporting the Fathers	99
5.3.3. An Oscillating Reality	102
5.3.3.1 Before the birth	103
5.3.3.2 The baby's arrival from the womb	104
5.3.3.3 Bring home the baby	106
5.3.3.4 Feet placed firmly in reality	107
5.3.4 The Intimate Relationship with the Baby	108
5.3.4.1 The Developing Relationship	108
5.3.4.2 Obstacles to intimacy	111
5.3.4.3 A relationship of reciprocity	112
5.3.5 The New Me	113
5.3.5.1 The new "practical" me	114
5.3.5.2 The new attitudes	115
5.3.5.3 The new "emotional" me	117
5.3.5.4 The new relationships	118
5.3.5.5 The new identity	119
6.0 Discussion of Research Findings	121
6.1 Introduction	121
6.2 An Introduction to the "New Father"	121
6.3 An Individual Sense of the "New"	124
6.3.1 The Newness of Fatherhood	124
6.3.2 The Transition of the New Father	127
6.3.3 A New Functional Status?	129

6.3.3.1 Conflicting functions?	136
6.3.4 The Newness of the Antenatal Experience	138
6.3.4.1 The role of the antenatal class	144
6.3.4.2 Seeking information from literature	146
6.3.5 The Father and the Birth	149
6.3.6 Father and Child – A New Relationship	165
6.3.6.1 A relationship of reciprocity?	170
6.4 The Identity of the New Father	172
6.4.1 A conflict of identity?	178
6.5 Conclusion	179

7.0 The Conclusion 181

7.1 Introduction	181
7.1.1 A Personal Reflection	181
7.1.2 The early experience of becoming a father	181
7.2 Limitations of Study	183
7.3 Suggestions for Further Research	185
7.4 Implications for Practice	187

Appendices

Appendix 1	Contents of Information Pack
Appendix 2	Information Sheet for Midwives
Appendix 3	Correspondence from Ethics Committee
Appendix 4	Health and Safety Procedures
Appendix 5	Useful Contacts for New Dads
Appendix 6	Analysis of Transcript
Appendix 7	Stage Five of Analysis
Appendix 8	Summary of findings for fathers
Appendix 9	Audit Trail

References

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A Phenomenological Approach to Understanding the Experience of Becoming a Father for the First Time

Abstract

Background and aim of research: It has been suggested that expectant and new fatherhood can be a time of confusion and stress and there is an increasing awareness of the importance of supporting men through this complex transition. The aim of this research was to create a depth of understanding regarding how men experience becoming a father for the first time, and to examine the breadth of the entire experience from the antenatal period through the first few weeks of life as ‘father’.

Method : A descriptive phenomenological approach was chosen for this research, due to its emphasis placed on examining phenomena as they are experienced by the individual in everyday life. Phenomenology allowed for the fathers’ individual accounts of their transition and enabled them to discuss the aspects of their experience that they felt to be significant.

Results: Eight first time fathers were interviewed, between ten and twelve weeks after the birth of their child. Analysis led to the development of a general structure of early fatherhood, detailing the essential aspects of the experience of becoming a father for the first time that were present for all fathers interviewed. Five constituents of the experience were identified, these were; ‘travelling into the great unknown’, ‘tower of strength’, ‘oscillating reality’, ‘the intimate relationship with the baby’, ‘the new me’.

Conclusions: The early experience of becoming a father for the first time is similar to undertaking a complex journey, involving preparation and attempts to create an understanding of the route they will take. A sense of newness exists within every aspect of the experience. Throughout the experience there are moments when the father has difficulty engaging with the reality of his

impending or new fatherhood, yet he maintains a need to provide support for his partner. The birth brings with it the creation of the relationship between father and child, a relationship which affirms his new role. The findings of this research highlight the importance of assisting fathers with this journey, offering them the help and support they need to be able to feel prepared and to have a clearer understanding of how to negotiate the various paths their new role may take them down.

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1.0 Introduction

Fatherhood, and the experience of both becoming, and living life as, a father is a subject that has drawn an increasing amount of interest in the past thirty years, from a large variety of sources. Before beginning this research project I was aware of this growing interest and of the struggles men faced, in the media around me. The message that this was an important time for men, that it was complex and difficult and yet potentially very emotionally rewarding came from the titles of self-help books, written by fathers for fathers, and from television dramas highlighting the problems faced by young black fathers in the United Kingdom, for example the 2001 transmission of “*Babyfather*” by the BBC. As a childless female I did not, at first, actively engage in this growing interest, did not seek out the information or take great purpose in watching films or television programs concerning men becoming dads. However, when I first started examining the theme of fatherhood, with a hope of perhaps being given the chance of conducting research on that subject it was as if it had been a lifelong passion. I began seeking out information, trying to ascertain exactly what support was available to men both approaching this significant transition and men in the early stages of coping with this new role. This initial search for a glimpse into the life of the expectant and new father in the fields of research, information and support leaflets and many other forms of media led to my belief that a greater understanding was needed of how men experienced becoming a father for the first time and how they could be effectively supported through this time. This

has remained my aim throughout the research project and, as I explain this in more detail through the chapters of this thesis, I hope that a deeper understanding will be presented, an insight into the experiences of the most important contributor to the research, the father.

Since the 1970s there appears to have been an increase in the amount of research published concerning fatherhood. This continued through the 1980s and developed further in the 1990s with a diversification of the aspects of fatherhood that were concentrated upon (Marsiglio et al, 2000, Draper 2002). This interest in fatherhood and concerns regarding how to support fathers has continued into the twenty-first century. My research was conducted through interviewing eight first time fathers between the years of 2003 and 2006 and it is the experiences of these eight fathers of the new millennium that I will be exploring within this thesis. My reading of the research that had already been conducted on the subject of fathers, and in particular first time fathers leading up to and directly after the birth of their child, led me to the conclusion that more depth of understanding was needed. I will be discussing this research in more detail in the following chapter and although much of the research is important and informative I still felt that it only provided a snapshot picture of what it was like to become a father. This snapshot generally related to one part of the experience only, be that the antenatal experience, the birth itself or the postnatal period. I hoped to achieve a wider view of fatherhood, viewing the experience of becoming a father as one journey, as opposed to isolated moments. In order to achieve this I adopted a

phenomenological approach to conducting and analysing the interviews, the theory behind which will be discussed in detail within this thesis, as will the methodological steps used. Through conducting interviews with the fathers I aimed to discover, from the descriptions provided by these men, what it was really like for them as they undertook this journey into fatherhood. Through the analysis I worked towards identifying aspects of their experiences that were similar, and the variations and nuances that occurred. The synthesised description and significant constituents of these fathers' experiences will be outlined and discussed. However, first it is important to provide a review of the literature and to gain an understanding of what level of insight this provided into the early experience of becoming a father for the first time.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

In a paper examining the relationship between fatherhood and social change LaRossa (1988) identified two different and yet equally important elements of what he refers to as the '*institution of fatherhood*' (pg. 451). The first is the culture of fatherhood which involves the shared societal beliefs regarding the father's role. It is this culture that I will discuss first within this chapter.

Fathers live in a society of change which can both directly and indirectly affect them (Cabrera et al 2000). The significance of the changing role of fathers and the societal expectations and demands that are placed upon fathers will be considered. Although the focus of my research is on the individual father, an understanding of how these larger societal changes can impact upon each man's experience of fatherhood needs to be discussed, and I will do so within this chapter. The second element of fatherhood identified by LaRossa is that of the conduct of fatherhood. The conduct involves the practicalities of what fathers actually do, the tasks they perform within their role, be this with regards to childcare, housework or financial support for their families. I will be discussing this, and also will be examining the insight existing research can provide into how men experience these tasks. As mentioned in my introductory chapter, the research concerning these experiences of fatherhood has usually been conducted from the perspectives

of antenatal, birth and postnatal, and I will be using these time periods to inform the organisation of this chapter. Finally, I will be discussing the issues surrounding why it is so important to deepen further our understanding of the experiences of first time fathers and give a brief introduction to how this understanding can be used to support men through this transition, an issue which will be discussed in more detail in the final chapter.

2.2 Changing Fatherhood

In a paper examining the significant factors affecting fathers in the United States of America, Cabrera et al (2000) identified the four social trends that they believed had most had an impact on fatherhood. These trends were described as being an increase in female employment, increased cultural diversity, increased absence of fathers and conversely, increased involvement by the fathers. Although focusing on American fathers these trends reflect those of many other developed countries, including the United Kingdom. These social changes are the focus of much of the research concerning fatherhood. Although they are not solely related to first time fatherhood the results of these changes on the structure of families and the roles and responsibilities of family members can be argued to have had an effect on all fathers.

The social trend of an increase in absent fathers is an important one, and is often discussed with relation to the effects this has on the child or children involved (Barber; 1994; Thompson and Laible, 1999). However this will not

be discussed within this chapter in detail, as the fathers interviewed within this particular research study were living with the mother and baby and were both present and active within their lives (although it is important to note that this was not a selection criteria when fathers were recruited). However, perhaps by increasing our understanding of how men experience the transition into fatherhood we may gain a better understanding of why problems occur and what support can be offered to fathers to prevent emotional difficulties leading to potential difficulties within their familial relationships at a later stage.

Perhaps the most significant social change with regards to the role and identity of fathers in Western Society is the increased number of mothers returning to work as highlighted by Cabrera et al (2000). It has been suggested that this change greatly affected men because it challenged their role as breadwinner, they were no longer the sole financial provider (Gillis, 2000). The clearly defined roles of male breadwinner and female carer and nurturer do appear to have been removed (Pleck, 1997), and a more blurred system of co-parenting created. I refer to this system as being blurred as there is no longer a clear definition of what a parent's role should be according to their gender. This blurring may have a significant effect on new fathers as they cope not only with the changes to their daily lives that the newborn brings, but also with a sense of confusion regarding what their role should actually be, and insecurity regarding how successful they are in their new role. Goodnough et al (1996) explain this blurring further by describing it as

a continuum, with the role of fatherhood now ranging from the traditional role of breadwinner to the more involved role of caregiver.

Providing fathers and their families with the support they need in order to identify where their position lies along this potentially ever-changing continuum can be seen to be an important, and yet complex task. Before doing this a much deeper understanding of fatherhood is needed, an understanding which can be achieved through listening to the men experiencing this important role and through their words gaining an understanding of how they personally embody these social and cultural changes. Kaila-Behm and Vehviläinen-Julkonen (1999) considered this with regards to how both first time fathers and public health nurses label the role of men as fathers. The study involved conducting interviews with 24 first time fathers in Finland. These interviews were conducted two or three times during the pregnancy and then once after the birth (between two and eight weeks post-natally). The public health nurses worked within the maternity services and were asked to write essays regarding their experiences of working with first time fathers. Using grounded theory analysis it was found that the fathers and public health nurses described four different ways of being a father. These were; bystander, supporter of the spouse, partner and head of the family. Interestingly these categories were created with regards to the fathers' involvement in the every day activities of family life, suggesting this was what the fathers talked about during their interviews in response to the question "What is it like to become a father or what is it like to be a

father of a child who is ... weeks old?”. The categories suggest that answers were not given in relation to their position within society or societal pressures. However, Kaila-Behm and Vehviläinen-Julkonen do note the important link between how men perceived the role of fathers and how they saw themselves as men, highlighting the importance of gender identity. For ‘the bystander’ the main responsibility for childcare was with the mother, for ‘the supporter’ there was a sense of wanting to be involved and help with childcare and housework, but also a dependency on their spouse for making all of the decisions within the family. The role of ‘partner’ was also one of actively taking part, but was one of more shared responsibility and equal decision making responsibility. The last category, that of ‘head of the family’ took responsibility for the family’s income, but not for childcare. It is difficult to know from this study whether each father fell into one category only, or if there was a continuum, similar to that mentioned earlier, along which fathers held a variety of beliefs. It is important to consider that a father’s actions and his ideals or beliefs may be different. A father appearing to take the ‘head of family’ role may be doing so because he believes it is expected of him even if he would ideally wish to spend more time with his child. The combination of the views of both fathers and health workers could also be criticised as the perspectives from which each group sees fatherhood are different and should arguably not be placed together in the formation of categories. However, this study does provide an interesting insight into the variety of roles assumed by men and the potential link between these and

views of masculinity, which are likely to have been partially created through the attitudes and beliefs of the society in which they live.

The subject of the social construction of fatherhood is a vast one which often traces the man's role through centuries of change. It is important in understanding some of the confusion and pressure placed upon men entering and progressing through this life-long change of identity. However, I feel that it is through examining how this social change is actually experienced by men, if at all, and which aspects of their role are significant or important to them, that we can gain a better insight into what it is like to be a father in the twenty first century.

2.3 Fatherhood as a time of transition

When moving from examining the changes surrounding fatherhood on a societal level to that of the individual father it is first interesting to examine the role of the anthropological writings regarding transition and rites of passage. The experience of the female as she enters motherhood has been described as an intricate and involved transformation which; "takes linear time but involves change that is deep, complex and dramatic" (Bergum 1989, pg 36). The question which needs to be considered is whether the man experiences his own deep transformation, or transition. Perhaps the theories regarding transition can give an understanding of just how significant fatherhood can be for those experiencing it.

It was Arnold van Gennep's book *Les Rites de Passage* first published in 1908 that drew attention to the importance of every human's passage from one position in society to another, or 'status' passage (Glaser and Strauss, 1971). Hockey (2002) summarises the writings of Van Gennep as being an 'exposition of the structural similarity of a whole variety of rituals and transitions' (pg 212), including birth, initiation, engagement, marriage, healing and death. Hockey suggests that a rite of passage is a schema, designed to make sense of the complex transitions of mankind. Draper (2003) describes three phases of this schema; separation, transition (also described as limen), and incorporation. Separation involves the removal of the individual from his/ her 'normal' social life. The transition phase is a period in which the person no longer belongs to their old status, but has yet to reach the new status. Finally, there is incorporation, during which the new status is finally adopted. Each of these phases involve certain identifying rituals which aid the person through their passage. I will be discussing these important concepts with regards to the fathers I interviewed in the Discussion of Research Findings chapter within this thesis.

Within their book *Status Passage* Glaser and Strauss (1971) provide some useful descriptions that contribute towards an understanding of whether fatherhood can indeed be seen to be a rite of passage. The authors suggest that the traditional view of status passages define them as being scheduled;

passages have pre-defined rules regarding who will make the status change and when. Another important aspect to consider is that there is a 'prescribed sequence of events' (pg. 3) that the person must take in order to successfully move through this passage. This sense of the importance of scheduling, regularisation and prescription could be somewhat difficult to equate with the complex experience of becoming a father. However, Glaser and Strauss emphasise the importance of broadening the understanding of these passages, through considering factors such as the varying degree of control a person may have over a status passage, or that a person may go through a passage alone or with other people.

This brief overview of a vast and significant theoretical approach to the changes humans undergo does provide a basis for a consideration of fatherhood as a status passage. Van Gennep himself identified birth as being a rite of passage, and that birthing rituals serve to mark this important life change. In the previous section I discussed the effects of societal changes upon fathers, but it may also be that the status passage of the father also has an important role within society, as Turner explains people or societies in the transition period are a "kind of institutional capsule or pocket which contains the germ of future social developments, of societal change" (Turner 1982, pg 45). This link between the individual and society is an important one, suggesting that the two are linked and that perhaps the father is not a passive player in social change, but also has an active role, for example with the

introduction of increased lengths of paternal leave (an important change which is to be discussed further within this chapter).

However, the question remains of how useful these theories can be to fathers within our society now. Although the role of the father may vary within different cultures (Harkness et al 1992) perhaps we can identify commonalities within the experiences of fathers within each culture that help to identify their rituals, and their status passage, even within the complex world of the twenty first century father.

Reed (2005) is an anthropologist who has examined the transformation of men into fathers according to the book subtitle of '*American Rites of Birth*', arguing that rather than being simple observers of the birthing experience they are 'deeply transformed in the process, and exit as new (or renewed) fathers' (pg 29). The suggestion here is that the father's attendance and assistance at the birth is an important part of his rite of passage into fatherhood. However, Reed also emphasises the significance of external influences placed upon the pregnant couple as they attempt to carry out their pregnancy and birthing rituals, for example the influence of medical practitioners. It is important to note that Reed does not perceive the rite of passage into fatherhood as being solely involved in the actual childbirth. Rather, he believes that it begins with conception, if not before, and continues after the birth. These thoughts emphasise the complexity of status passages, as described by Glaser and Strauss (1971). The birth itself can

indeed be seen to be an important part of the transition from man to father but it also raises questions regarding how fathers not present at the birth experience their transition, and what aspects of their experience form the crucial parts of this passage. Also, what are the external factors that influence this passage? These important questions will be examined in more detail with relation to the fathers I have interviewed in the 'Discussion of Findings' chapter.

Draper (2003) sought to examine the relevance of transition theory for fathers by conducting interviews with eighteen expectant fathers (both novice and experienced) and using an ethnographic approach. The findings from this research suggest that fathers do still experience a rite of passage, with the public announcement of the pregnancy marking the process of separation from their previous status and a move towards their new status as expectant father. The transitional, or liminal phase was particularly important with regards to the lack of physical markers experienced by the fathers, unlike those of their pregnant partner. This sense of not having a connection with the pregnancy is an important one and will be discussed further. The incorporation phase was also evident in the fathers interviewed by Draper, with their new role as fathers being marked with such rituals as 'wetting the baby's head' (pg 75). These findings lead Draper to conclude that the theory of transition is still important and relevant to fathers in contemporary society. Marsiglio et al (2000) believe that it is important for researchers to gain an understanding of how fathering roles are defined in diverse contexts and

transitional periods and it could be argued that examining the rites of passage of men into fatherhood could make a significant contribution towards this.

It would seem therefore, that rites of passage, or status passage could still be relevant to fathers in Western society today, and its direct relevance to the fathers I interviewed will be discussed further within this thesis. However, it is first important to look at how fathers experience their transitions during the antenatal, birthing and post natal periods. By examining research surrounding these areas perhaps we can gain a clearer picture of how these status passages are actually lived and the factors influencing them.

2.4 The Expectant Father's Experiences

It may seem an obvious statement to make that the transition of a woman into motherhood has a physical element that a man approaching fatherhood lacks. However, it may not only be the actual physical changes that the father does not have the opportunity to engage with. In a study published in 2002 Draper conducted semi-structured interviews with eighteen fathers (both first time and those who already had children), interviewing at three stages, twice during the pregnancy and once afterwards in order to establish how fathers were dealing with this complex transition. The fathers were interviewed alone, without their partners being present. The men interviewed indicated that they had a strong desire to be involved in the pregnancy but did not

know how to engage with their partner and the reality of the approaching birth and subsequent creation of a family unit. Draper identified certain activities, for example the pregnancy test, which allowed the fathers to feel involved. These “*body-mediated moments*” (Draper , 2002 pg. 566) helped with making the pregnancy a reality and allowed the fathers to feel more involved in the pregnancy. An interesting variation to this study would have been to separate first time fathers and those with more experience to determine whether the same level of importance is placed upon these moments by both groups, and if those with more experience, who had already internalised their role of father found it easier to engage in the pregnancy.

Another important pregnancy confirming moment was the, now almost routine, ultrasound examination (Ekeline et al, 2004, Draper 2002). The visual nature of this experience for the fathers may lead to the connection with the unborn child that he is not able to experience in the same physical way as his partner. During interviews with a group of parents (33 women, six couples and two male partners alone) on the subject of antenatal screening Locock and Alexander (2006) found that the role of the father during the screening emerged as an important theme. A modified grounded theory approach to analysis elicited a number of roles that were adopted by the fathers, and the authors found that “*Sometimes these were roles they chose for themselves, and sometimes roles assigned intentionally or unintentionally by others*” (pg. 1352). This finding that the role of the father

is sometimes assigned by those around him is similar to that of Kaila-Behm and Vehviläinen-Julkonen (1999), who also concluded that others may be defining the role for the father, and it is important to consider that this definition may not be a role he would have chosen to adopt for himself. The roles identified by Locock and Alexander were ‘parents’, ‘bystanders’, ‘protectors/ supporters’, ‘gatherers and guardians of fact’ and finally ‘deciders or enforcers’. The definitions of these roles provide a valuable understanding of the different experiences of men involved in this important antenatal experience, and also of how women perceive their partners’ role. For some fathers work commitments meant that they were not able to attend the screening, suggesting work may be a barrier that some fathers can not overcome. For other couples it was considered “*not necessary*” (pg. 1352) for the fathers to take time off work, and in two fathers’ cases, searching for a hospital parking space meant that some fathers missed this important moment of pregnancy confirmation, highlighting that even though the men desired to fulfil their role as ‘parent’ it was not considered essential for them to be present. It is also interesting to note that the role of ‘bystander’ was also identified by Kaila-Behm and Vehviläinen-Julkonen (1999) with relation to the father’s role in general. This idea of the man merely standing on the outskirts of the experience, looking in is an important one and needs to be considered in more depth regarding whether it is the father’s choice to be a bystander. For some of the parents interviewed by Locock and Alexander (2006) the pregnancy resulted in termination due to various health complications and this, in particular, highlighted that in some cases the role

of bystander is allocated to fathers, and is not their choice, as one father whose partner had a termination explained; "...there ought to be sort of some, some way-I don't know how-but some sort of way of getting the father to be more involved perhaps in that side [*the consent procedure*] of the process" (pg. 1353). This father's desire to have been more involved was due to a wish to be able to support his partner more, and relieve some of the guilt she had felt. If the father is treated as a bystander throughout the pregnancy and the pregnancy related activities it may be more difficult for him to switch to being an involved parent after the birth. The study reported by Locock and Alexander, for practical reasons, primarily used the accounts of mothers to determine the roles, and as suggested by the researchers, it would be valuable to conduct further research in this area using the accounts of fathers to deepen our understanding of the experience of men during this complex time.

Gage and Kirk (2002) highlighted the importance of providing fathers with as much relevant information as possible in order to help facilitate their preparation for their new role. Through a phenomenological analysis of focus groups with nineteen first-time fathers (both prospective and recent) in New Zealand they determined that the fathers felt it was important to prepare for their child physically, financially and emotionally. The fathers actively sought information that would help them do this. With regards to the emotional preparation the fathers acknowledged that there was an expectation that they would be able to provide emotional support and this would be measured by their ability to show emotion towards their child, and

this expectation was something they hoped they would be able to live up to. The fathers also felt a need to interact with their child in an emotional way that was different to the relationship they had with their fathers, with one father expressing that he could not remember his father telling him that he loved him. However although the fathers had their own expectations regarding how they should interact with their child based on their own relationship with their father, no description was given in the paper regarding the origin of the societal expectations that they experienced. Although providing an initial insight into the areas of preparation an expectant father considers, the use of phenomenological analysis with data obtained from focus groups seems inappropriate due to the nature of phenomenological research which centres on examining the individual's lived experience. Also, within the context of a focus group fathers may feel reluctant to share their experience in depth, or unwittingly alter their account to fit with that of other fathers present. An in-depth interview with fathers would arguably have provided a richer source of description for analysis.

Another aspect of the antenatal experience linked to the concept of preparation for the impending transition to fatherhood are the antenatal or parentcraft classes (Nolan 1994, Galloway et al 1997, Smith 1999). There has been some indication that fathers did not feel the classes were relevant to their needs (Lewis 1986, Beardshaw, 2001). In a study examining the attitudes of one hundred British fathers Lewis (1986) discovered that many of the fathers he interviewed did not attend as they felt that they would be

unwelcome, or that the classes could not teach them anything of any importance. However, in a more recent interview based study of eighteen first time fathers who did attend antenatal classes Smith (1999) discovered that it was accepted by both parents that the father should attend the classes (although it should be mentioned that this result is likely to have been influenced by the recruitment of fathers already in attendance at classes). For one father the class proved to be a pregnancy confirming moment and was important to him with regards to his acceptance of his impending fatherhood. This may suggest that it is not just the body mediated moments mentioned by Draper (2002) that help the father engage in the reality of the pregnancy but also other activities in which he is acting within his role as potential father. However, these fathers did not expect the classes to contain any information on the role of “father”, but rather the role of “supporter” (pg. 463) leading Smith (1999) to the conclusion that these classes should contain more for the father than simply information on biological processes and hospital procedures. The need for providing expectant fathers with as much relevant information as possible was also highlighted by Singh and Newburn (2000) who received over four hundred completed questionnaires from expectant and new fathers, which focused on their information and support needs throughout the pregnancy. The results of the questionnaires highlighted that, as well as requesting more information on the more practical aspects of parenthood, men were also concerned about what life with a new baby would be like. However, it should be noted that this sample of fathers was recruited through the National Childbirth Trust and may have been predominantly

middle-class parents and therefore not representative of all social groups, affecting the generalisability of the findings to fathers of all social classes. This study will be discussed in more detail in the discussion of research findings chapter.

Perhaps the most neglected area in research concerning fatherhood is the emotional experiences of expectant fathers. In a Scandinavian study of seven first-time fathers using narrative interviews Finnbogadottir et al (2003) concluded that for the fathers they interviewed expectant fatherhood had been a time of transition - the fathers had undergone psychological, social and physical change and these changes brought with them both positive and negative emotions. In her book “Fatherhood Reclaimed: The Making of the Modern Father” Burgess (1997) describes the emotional swings of the expectant father with fathers of unplanned babies suffering “*extreme emotional distress*” and those of planned pregnancies feeling “*exalted and delighted, responsible and frightened*” (pg. 111). It is possible that through deepening our understanding of these emotions and changes we will be able to provide expectant fathers with the information and support that they desire.

A series of four self-report questionnaires returned by two hundred and four men both antenatally and postnatally highlighted the fact that the period of the pregnancy was actually the most stressful time for these fathers, more so than the stress experienced postnatally (Condon et al 2004). The experience

of the expectant father can therefore be seen to be confusing and emotional, with no clearly defined role. The fathers appeared to have a sense of what was expected of them, and a desire to meet these expectations, but lacked the knowledge or confidence in themselves to fully achieve this.

The final aspect of the expectant father's experience that I would like to mention in this chapter is that of the syndrome known as 'couvade'. The origins of this word provide an interesting insight into its meaning. The term couvade originates from the French word *couver* which is a verb meaning "*to cover a nest of eggs in order to help them to hatch into chicks*" (Mander 2004 pg. 11). The term couvade is now used in two different ways. The first, 'ritual couvade' can be described as a variety of customs and behaviour adhered to by fathers during the pregnancy and labour of their partner (Broude 1988). These rituals are often referenced in anthropological writings, with reference to post-industrial society and non-westernised cultures. Hines (1971) explains that over time, as the father's home and work life became more and more separated, his pregnancy rituals became less and less defined. Summergill (1993) also links this to the location of the birth moving from the home to the hospital where health-care professionals take on the role of providing the mother with everything she needs. However, the opinion that men no longer have a pregnancy ritual has been criticised, and it can be argued that becoming a father does still involve certain rituals. Reed (2005) believes that when examining the modern American father's pregnancy activities it is possible to identify ritual behaviour in the form of

creating a safe baby's room, tuning the car and organising family finances.

This suggests that the modern father may indeed still undertake ritual couvade, the possibility of which will be discussed within the discussion chapter of this thesis.

The second use of the term couvade is linked to what psychiatrists refer to as the 'couvade syndrome'. Couvade syndrome, also known as 'sympathetic pregnancy' is used to describe a variety of physical symptoms experienced by men during their partner's pregnancy. These symptoms can vary from backache to nausea and even weight gain. Thomas and Upton (2000) examined the couvade syndrome further in their study of one hundred and forty one fathers, using quantitative analysis on the responses given on a structured questionnaire. Of these men sixty three (44.7 per cent) reported no symptoms of couvade. The results obtained from the men who did indicate having symptoms of couvade (n=78) showed that the number of symptoms experienced varied greatly, for example 20 men (14.2 per cent) exhibited one symptom and six men (4.3 per cent) had six symptoms. Thomas and Upton state that in order to be considered as having couvade syndrome the fathers should have two or more symptoms, meaning that forty nine (34.6 per cent) experienced couvade. However, the three most commonly reported symptoms reported by the men were increased tiredness, increased stress and anxiety which, as the researchers stated, are also the symptoms of stress. This may suggest that the couvade syndrome as it is defined today is actually the manifestation of the feelings of stress and anxiety experienced by the

expectant father. The quantitative results of this study make it difficult to gain a glimpse into the world of these fathers in order to better understand what it was about their experiences that led to these symptoms. However, regardless of the cause of these symptoms their presence indicates the difficulties that some fathers can experience during this time and highlights the need to provide support to those who need it.

An interesting view on the cause of couvade related activities and symptoms in fathers is provided by Summersgill (1993) who believes that modern day couvade may be the fathers' way to gain some recognition from others regarding their new role as father. These couvade rituals may provide the fathers with a more clearly defined structure or role, referring back to the common theme within this chapter that new fathers often struggle to identify their role. Referring to fathers who had been excluded from pregnancy as being 'marginalised' (pg 93), Summersgill describes how during the 1970's these fathers fought back against this marginalisation, using their own ritual activities to define themselves as being a father. It was these activities that led to the creation of the new, progressive father who takes an active part in the pregnancy, birth and post natal period. However, Summersgill also describes a 'darker' type of father that may emerge due to the rituals of couvade (pg. 104). This type of father is described as being primarily concerned with establishing and serving his own needs above those of his partner. This is a contentious issue however, and without further research into the activities undertaken by fathers, and the physical symptoms they

display, it is impossible to truly understand the motivations behind their actions.

2.5 The father and the birth

The time of the birth can also bring with it feelings of confusion, especially with regards to the father's role during this time and the level and kind of support he should be providing to his partner (Sullivan-Lyons 1998). In a study aiming to examine the thoughts and feelings of a group of expectant first-time fathers Lavender (1997) highlighted the complex issues encountered by men during this time. Semi-structured interviews concerning the expectations surrounding the birthing experience and what their role would be were conducted antenatally with six fathers, selected by the researcher according to their answers given on a questionnaire regarding their expectations and beliefs about the birth, including expressing feelings of not wishing to be present at the birth, expressing concerns or having a desire for active involvement in the birth. Lavender analysed the data to identify major themes. The three main themes identified were 'support', 'information' and 'role conflict'. Lavender explained that the fathers' sense of wanting to be able to support their partner was strong, although they did not articulate what this support would involve. The theme of 'role conflict' highlighted the pressure that could be placed upon the fathers to attend the birth even though they might not wish to do so. However, due to the selection criteria used in recruiting participants it could be argued that these

fathers had been selected for having certain opinions, which could then have had an effect on the results. A deeper questioning of what the fathers meant by 'support' would also be valuable as support is a general term that can mean a variety of activities. For example, the different types of support the father might expect to give could include emotional support involving "being there" for his partner (Lavender 1997 pg. 94), support with decision making (Moran-Ellis 1989) and physical support (Shannon-Babitz 1979). For those fathers planning on attending the birth the creation of a role identity during this difficult and emotional time was important. Potential roles were those of 'coach', 'team-mate' and 'witness' (Chapman 1991). Each potential role can involve a different level of engagement with the experience, ranging from the coach who was in control and heavily involved, to the witness who was a bystander, only there to provide emotional support with no sense of needing to be in control. The theme of bystander is therefore raised again, suggesting that even during the time of birth the man can be an outsider, looking in. The conflicting image of these potential roles may increase the anxiety or confusion felt by the father who is unsure of what is expected from him.

The National Service Framework for children, young people and maternity services, published by the Department of Health on 15th September 2004 demonstrates the growing emphasis that is being placed on providing care and support for the father as well as the mother and baby. The statement that maternity care providers and Primary Care Trusts should ensure that birth environments are welcoming to fathers, as well as other birthing partners,

(standard 11, p29) is an important one. Encouraging fathers to be present during the labour and birth has led to an increased need to understand the effect this experience has on these individuals and the support they themselves may need, rather than simply their role as supporter of their partner. Research suggests that fathers feel that the birth is a time when all attention should be focused on their partner and they may therefore feel uncomfortable discussing their fears with those around them (Shapiro 1987, Somers-Smith 1999). However, through a study involving eight couples who gave semi-structured interviews (with the mothers and fathers being interviewed separately) both before and after the birth of their first child, Somers-Smith (1999) was able to identify some of the fears the fathers had before the birth. These included their partner dying, the possibility they would panic or faint, or that they would fail in their role as supporter. When interviewed postnatally the fathers felt that they had provided support successfully but had still found it to be a stressful experience. This stress may be caused by seeing their partner in great pain or through a sense of isolation.

In a quantitative study analysing the results of surveys completed by 107 Finnish fathers Vehvilainen-Julkunen and Liukkonen (1998) provide a more detailed analysis of the feelings and emotions experienced by the father during this time. They found that feelings of discomfort, fear, anxiety and helplessness were experienced, with the source of these emotions being concern for their partner, their baby and for themselves, indicating the confusing mixture of thoughts the father has during the labour.

The research conducted examining the fathers' experience of birth does highlight the difficulties encountered by men, including the role conflict or uncertainty they may experience and the emotional difficulties associated with attending the birth and the anxiety this can cause. However, I felt that more qualitative research was needed to improve the depth of understanding regarding the father's emotions during the labour and to inform the support the father might require but appeared reluctant to ask for.

2.6 The Father's Post Natal Experience

The research examining men's experiences after the birth focused mostly on a specific change that this new role has caused in the father's life; for example one area of change which has been researched is the effect the baby has on the relationship between the parents. Ahlborg and Strandmark (2001) conducted phenomenological interviews with five couples, interviewing each partner individually. The researchers identified the essence of the parents' experiences to be that the baby was the focus of attention. However, the ways in which this affected the parents varied, with some finding that the child was a focus of mutual concern for both mother and father, and others finding that the baby was focused on at the expense of the father. The latter group suffered from negative emotions as the fathers felt that their partners no longer had feelings or time for them. The researchers concluded that it would be valuable to include a discussion on fatherhood and the changes the

new baby might bring to their intimate relationship with their partner, as a part of parenthood education. It seemed that the fathers in general had unrealistic expectations of how quickly their intimate relationship with their partner would return. The importance of ascertaining the kind of expectations the fathers have and also of providing them with information to help reduce the level of expectations which are not met can be seen in the work of Belsky (1985) who also examined the role of expectations and the effect this could have on the parents' relationship. Belsky conducted a questionnaire based survey of sixty one new parents and discovered that in some cases the fathers did have expectations that were not met, and that these could have a negative impact on the parent's relationship. The term used by Belsky to describe these unfulfilled expectations was 'violated expectations'. However, it is important to note that in this study the mothers exhibited a higher level of violated expectations than the fathers. Due to the quantitative nature of this research little is known about what led to these violated expectations for both the mothers and the fathers, and how they had affected the transition to parenthood.

These unrealistic expectations are also linked to the man's conflicting role after the birth. In a longitudinal study involving discourse analysis of semi-structured interviews, conducted both before and after the birth, with fifteen men who had become first-time fathers in Australia, Barclay and Lupton (1999) found that the men had unrealistic expectations regarding the level of housework and childcare they would need to undertake, seeing their main

role in childcare as being that of breadwinner - the provider not the carer. The men also had expectations that could not practically be met in the first few weeks of birth, for example one father who felt let down that he could not be directly involved in breast feeding. Other fathers expressed a desire to “be there” for their new family, but were not sure what this would actually entail. Barclay and Lupton concluded that the fathers found fatherhood to be much more difficult and distressing than they had expected before the birth of their child. This discrepancy between the expectations of fathers and the realities of their role is an important one as it can have a negative impact not only on the father but also on his partner and the new baby. A greater understanding of what leads to fathers developing these unrealistic expectations regarding both their role and their relationship with their partner was needed in order to ascertain how to help fathers through this transition.

This sense of discrepancy between expectations and reality may also be linked to the fathers’ reality of their role within paid employment, in contrast to that of their position as father and carer. As mentioned in the section of this chapter titled ‘Changing Fatherhood’, social trends with regards to female employment may have impacted on the role of fathers. However, the important relationship between employment and fatherhood is far more complex than this, with the fathers’ own employment playing a significant role in how they define themselves as fathers and what their role as father actually entails. The image of the male breadwinner earning money for the family whilst the mother remains at home and cares for the child is still in

existence, with some research suggesting that this is still very much the fathering role adopted by men (Ranson 2001).

However, the relationship between employment and fatherhood may be far more complex than this image would suggest. Russel and Hwang (2004) explained that “the workplace has traditionally been defined as a barrier to father involvement” (pg. 479). However, these authors also outline a number of very important factors that can influence how easily a father can manage his work and family time. Issues such as workplace policies and the culture of the business may impact upon whether the father feels able to spend more time with his family. There is a suggestion that if employers openly encourage men to be active fathers and provide them with the time and support to do this the fathers may not follow the path of breadwinner who expects their partners to take full responsibility for childcare.

A 1998 white paper entitled ‘Fairness at Work’ highlighted the UK government’s recognition that both mothers and fathers should have the opportunity to spend time with their children: “Parents, both men and women, need time with their children and time to create a supportive home in which their children can thrive” (pg. 31). The question of whether, almost ten years later, this has been achieved is an important one. An important policy to consider here is that of paternity leave. The issue of paternity leave is an international one, with many countries implementing policies to govern how much time new fathers are able to spend with their infant. An example of this

can be seen in Japan, where in 1999 the Ministry of Health and Welfare conducted a public relations campaign to promote paternal involvement, with the campaign poster reading; “A man who does not participate in child rearing is not a father” (see Shwalb et al 2004, pg 168). The Japanese policies regarding paternity leave can be seen to promote this message of involvement, with the provision of leave being eight weeks if the mother is at home full time and up to one year if the mother is working for at least three days a week.

O’Brien (2004) provides an outline of how policy changes in Europe have shaped the availability of paternity leave there, with the changes beginning in Sweden during the early 1970s. By 1974 Sweden had in place its first scheme, providing fathers with the right to take time away from work after the birth of their infant. Both the number of fathers in Sweden utilising this period of leave, and the number of days taken has increased over the years (Björnberg, 1994), suggesting that perhaps it may take time for attitudes and beliefs to change even after policy changes. In the United Kingdom the government introduced paid paternity leave for the first time in 2003, entitling fathers to up to two weeks of leave after the birth of their child. This important change in policy is still recent and the long term effects on fathers living in the UK are unknown. However, Smeaton (2006) brings together the findings from two surveys commissioned by the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC), which aimed to investigate the use of leave by fathers in the United Kingdom. In total 920 families were surveyed by telephone, with

all the fathers being employees, and fathers of children aged three to fifteen months. The findings suggested that 70% of fathers surveyed used some of their paternity leave entitlement, with half of the fathers taking the full two weeks. The results indicate the importance of considering factors such as ethnic background and income level when examining statistics regarding the use of paternity leave, with Asian families and those who were considered to be low-skilled taking less leave. The report concluded that the most significant barrier to the taking of paternity leave were financial constraints. Interestingly, when looking at levels of satisfaction it was found that mothers were far less content with regards to the length of paternity leave than their partners, with 62% of mothers feeling that there should be a minimum of one month of paternity leave available (in comparison to the 48% of fathers who felt this way). This brief overview of a very important report begins to highlight the complexities of the issue of paternity leave. It may not only be attitudes towards work and family life that lead to new fathers spending long hours at work and the mothers taking responsibility for childcare. Financial factors are an important consideration and may lead to dissatisfaction in not only the fathers, but also the mothers.

A report titled “Twenty-First Century Dad” was also produced by the Equal Opportunities Commission in 2006 and contained within it certain recommendations regarding paternity leave provisions within the UK. The report suggests that there is a need for additional paternity leave being made available to fathers, allowing parents greater choice in who returns to work

and who remains at home caring for the infant. With regards to the financial constraints mentioned earlier it is also recommended that the rate of paternity pay should be higher, making all fathers, even those in low-paid unskilled employment, be able to afford to take paternity leave. There is also a sense that it is largely the responsibility of the employer to be flexible and understanding when dealing with employees who are new parents, allowing them the support they need to be able to balance work and family life.

The issue of how fathers perceive their role postnatally and how both societal attitudes and policy changes affect this is complex and will be discussed further in the discussion of findings chapter within this thesis. The beliefs surrounding the father's role in childcare vary greatly, and an examination of attitudes towards both paternity and parental leave help to illustrate this.

Dermott (2001) conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews with twenty five fathers of young children. Unfortunately no more information is given regarding the characteristics of the fathers, including how many children they had, but the views expressed by the men provide an interesting insight into the differing opinions of fathers regarding what their level of involvement in childcare should be, and what leave they should be entitled to. Dermott examined fathers' views towards both paternity leave and parental leave.

Parental leave is different to paternity leave and first became a legal right in the UK in 1999, in accordance with the Employment Relations Act, 1999.

Under this legislation parents are entitled to up to thirteen weeks of unpaid leave until the child is five years of age. Dermott discovered that it was

possible to categorise the fathers interviewed into three groups, determined according to their views regarding childcare related periods of leave. These groups were labelled; 'no leavers', 'parental leavers' and 'paternity leavers'. The first group, the 'no leavers' were identifiable by the short amount of time they opted to take away from work, with a couple of days paternity leave being a popular option amongst these fathers. An important opinion shared by these fathers was that they had not missed out, with one father stating that after the birth of his first child he took one week of paternity leave and felt "pretty desperate to get back to work" (pg 154). These fathers are also described as having little or no interest in taking parental leave. The attitudes of the second group, the 'parental leavers', contrasted greatly with the first group of fathers. These fathers believed that the length of paternity leave should be long enough to allow some meaningful time with their new family and all viewed the availability of parental leave to be positive. The benefits of both types of leave were considered by the fathers with regards to the emotional relationship they were forming with their baby. The final group, the 'paternity leavers' fell between these groups, with the men taking paternity leave, the most common amount being between one and two weeks. These fathers believed that the time that they had with their newborn was important but that the length had been sufficient. Their attitude towards parental leave was neither positive nor negative. Important differences existed between the three groups of fathers, with those falling into the final category of 'paternity leavers' differing from the 'no leavers' in that they did not share the belief that the mother should take primary responsibility for

childcare, but did not feel the need to receive equal parental leave rights.

Instead of having planned periods of time at home devoted solely to spending time with their children these fathers felt it was important that they should be able to attend certain important events in the child's life and to care for them during sickness.

It is to be expected that there is no uniform set of attitudes regarding the post natal role of fathers. However, it is still important to examine the origins of the varying attitudes, be they cultural, religious or financial. Policy changes are significant in helping fathers to be able to spend more time with their young family. However, without an understanding of the opinions, beliefs and experiences of individual men it may be difficult to fully understand the impact these policy changes may have.

2.7 The Significance of Studying Fatherhood

In general it would seem that a greater depth of knowledge was needed when examining the man's experience of the time leading up to, and following, the birth of his child. As has been mentioned previously, very little was known about the emotional effect their changing role and relationship would have on them as individuals.

The potential benefits associated with examining the experience of becoming a father in detail can be seen in relation to the father, mother and child. A study conducted by Dudley et al (2001) suggested that post-natal depression could occur in men as well as women, although the roots of the depression may differ. An understanding of the factors that can lead to post-natal depression in fathers is needed before the necessary support can be given. Through gaining this understanding we may be able to improve the support given to fathers, thus potentially having a positive effect on their psychological health. Although post-natal depression was not the main focus of this research it was hoped that through listening to the fathers it would be possible to understand the aspects of the experience that had been difficult for them. The effects of such research might also influence the well-being of the mother and child. Fathers have been found to provide invaluable support and care to their partners during the pregnancy, birth and post-natal period (Levitt et al 1993). Lamb and Tamis-LeMonda (2004) state that researchers, theorists and practitioners no longer hold the belief that the main role of the father is breadwinner and are, instead, acknowledging the varied roles the father can adopt. These include “companions, care providers, spouses, protectors, models, moral guides, teachers, breadwinners” (p. 3). In Western society we often see the nurturing and care of infants as being the role of the mother. However, some evidence suggests that if fathers are given support, and those around them treat their fathering skills in a positive way, they can become successful and affectionate carers of young children (Yogman et al 1988). Lamb (1995) highlights the positive effect the father’s care can have

on the child's physical development, cognitive and language skills, playfulness, emotional balance and social integration. Therefore, by helping fathers through the transition to fatherhood we may also perhaps be able to have a positive effect on the well being of the partner and child.

2.8 Supporting Fathers

In the section of this chapter examining the father's antenatal experiences the importance of antenatal classes was discussed. The study by Smith (1999) highlighted the feeling amongst fathers that their antenatal education provided them with information regarding their role as supporter, but not father. This issue of how to provide information and support to fathers on not only their role as supporter for their partner, but also on the complex range of changes that becoming a father will bring into their lives is an important one.

Bradley et al (2004) conducted a study aiming to explore how men experienced the post natal period and the support they had received during their transition to fatherhood. They conducted interviews with ten first-time fathers and used the methodological approach of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. Through the use of direct quotation from the interview transcripts Bradley et al provide a small but significant insight into what the experience had been like for the fathers. Support between the parenting couple was only considered by the fathers in regards to the support that they had been able to provide to their partner, and not vice versa. This perhaps suggests just how important the role of 'protector/ supporter' as

identified by Locock and Alexander (2006) (discussed earlier in this chapter), actually is for fathers. An interesting point identified by the authors which seems to reinforce this is, that any questions the researchers asked the fathers that concerned issues of support were generally interpreted by the men to be regarding help received by the mother, not the father. With regards to the antenatal period the fathers were particularly dissatisfied with the antenatal classes, believing them to be patronising, perhaps suggesting that, almost twenty years later, the findings of Lewis (1986) concerning the opinions of men towards these classes may still have been relevant for this particular group of ten fathers, with the fathers finding them inappropriate for their needs.

With regards to the postnatal period there was a sense that the fathers in the study by Bradley et al would have liked more information regarding the extent to which having a baby was going to affect their lives. As one father explained; “They just don’t really kind of say, look, your life is really going to change...you’re going to have no time for each other, your sex life will disappear” (pg 46). The structure of their lives was important for these men, with some fathers seeing the baby as an additional component within their existing structure, and others considering their new baby as bringing into their lives a new and alien structure of living. The authors believe that the key to helping men deal with the changes fatherhood brings is to provide advice in the antenatal period and immediately following the birth. The healthcare professional’s role in doing this is described as being to

understand the common patterns of change experienced by fathers and to be able to prepare fathers for these. The question of exactly how this level of preparation and support can be provided to those fathers who need it is one that is drawing an increasing amount of interest and consideration.

Schott (2002) wrote a paper examining how parent education can meet the needs of fathers, believing that not all fathers are able to gain support from their peers and should therefore be able to seek advice and support from the health professionals involved in the pregnancy. From her experience of working with fathers, Schott recalls one example of the importance of acknowledging fathers and making them feel as involved as possible as after asking one father 'How are you?' the response was for the father to burst into tears and reply 'Nobody else has asked me that. Not even my own mother' (pg 36). This emotional reaction to such a question hints at the isolation this particular father appears to have felt. Schott strongly advocates the approach of listening to fathers at every possible opportunity, giving them a chance to express their thoughts and providing the healthcare professional with the opportunity to learn from the father's experience. Within the context of the antenatal class it is suggested that this approach can be beneficial as it allows the class leader to become a mediator between new and expectant fathers, allowing the passing on of information that has been learnt from fathers who attended the class in the past to new attendees. As well as this idea of listening and the passing on of experiences, Schott believes that it is important for the classes to discuss issues that may affect only the father,

giving several examples, including the father being left abruptly outside the theatre during a Caesarean birth and juggling the demands of a job, visiting hospital, keeping the home in order and fielding calls from relatives. There is a general feeling within Schott's article that the importance lies in making the father feel as involved as possible at every possible stage. It is perhaps through this approach that some fathers will receive the support they may need.

In a paper examining the experience and needs of men throughout their partners' pregnancy Beardshaw (2001) further examined the ways in which fathers should receive support and the importance of doing so, emphasising the benefits not only for the men themselves but also for the partner and infant. The difficulties in applying new interventions in a maternity service that is already 'stretched to the limit' (pg 478) are considered, with the solution presented being to use techniques that would be easy to apply and would not be costly. Some of the interventions suggested by Beardshaw are to distribute free information resources to fathers, ensuring the fathers are involved in any discussions regarding the pregnancy and birth, have one antenatal class dedicated to fathers and developing a nationwide strategy for delivering information and skills to new fathers during their paternity leave. As with the suggestions made by Schott (2002) the emphasis is placed upon involving fathers whenever and wherever possible.

However, Beardshaw also raises the interesting question of whether the maternity services should be involved in the development of targets regarding the shaping of the roles and expectations men have for fatherhood, or whether a more 'laissez-faire' (pg. 478) attitude, allowing the fathers to develop their own expectations and shape their experience accordingly, should be taken. As has been discussed within this chapter, different men have different beliefs regarding what the role of a father should be, and it would therefore be inappropriate to advocate a particular approach to fathering. However, Beardshaw believes it necessary to respect these differences while still providing a general level of support, assisting the men with their transition into fatherhood. The complexity of the situation with regards to different ways of parenting is also raised by Sunderland (2000) in an examination of parentcraft texts. In an analysis of texts the researcher was given during her pregnancy and after the birth of her daughter, Sunderland carefully examined their use of language using Discourse Analysis. The dominant discourse found in the parenting literature was that of 'part-time father/ mother as main parent' (pg. 257), with the majority of parentcraft publications being aimed at mothers. Two other discourses were that fathers were seen to be only involved in childcare as the entertainer for the baby and that the father was the mother's 'bumbling' assistant (pg. 262). Although many fathers would not be as acutely aware of the use of language as the researcher it could still be argued that the texts are not providing the support needed by fathers who cannot relate to the image of fatherhood portrayed within them. Sunderland concludes by stating that she would like to see more

reference in texts to fathers as being central. However, the dilemmas of doing this in texts that may be given to mothers who do not have a male partner is acknowledged, posing another dilemma with regards to how to provide support that is suitable for all when the characteristics of parents and of the family unit can be so diverse.

Other suggestions have been made regarding how best to support fathers through their experience, including the establishment of men-only support groups and workplace based antenatal classes held for fathers in evenings and weekends (Lester and Moorsom 1997). It seems that there is a general sense that men should have access to support during the experience of becoming a father. However, the suggested ways in which to do this vary, possibly because every father's experience is very different and is shaped by his personal beliefs and those of the people around him. Any new interventions will need evaluating through research examining their usefulness and effectiveness and this will be discussed further in the 'implications for practice' section of this thesis.

2.9 Conclusion

It was my initial reading of the background literature that increased my belief that more research was needed on the subject of fatherhood. The increasing amount of qualitative research is helping to provide a broad understanding of

what it is like to become a father but seems to be scratching the surface of what is possibly one of the most significant transitions a man can experience. The snapshot images that each study examining the antenatal, birthing or postnatal experience provided could not be put together to form a whole as each group of fathers was different. They came from different cultures and backgrounds, have been sampled using a variety of methods and their words had been analysed using a variety of methodologies. It was my hope that by conducting in-depth interviews with a small group of first-time fathers, and through allowing them the freedom to talk about any aspects of the experience they wished I might gain a greater understanding of the experience as a whole. It is the method used to obtain this description of the experiences of first time fathers that I will now describe.

3.0 A Qualitative Approach to the study of Fatherhood

When examining the research that already existed concerning the subject of fatherhood it became apparent that the research did not provide a deep understanding of what this experience was really like for the men involved. Words such as ‘life-changing’ and ‘stressful’ were used without an examination of exactly how it had changed their life, or the effect this change had had. Little was known regarding why this experience was stressful for fathers and whether they employed any coping mechanisms to help themselves adapt to the changes. A review of the research highlighted that many of the studies opened up more questions than they answered. After conducting this review I felt that a qualitative approach was needed in order to gain a deeper understanding of the experience. Giorgi (1985) believed that qualitative analyses of descriptions could provide a psychological insight which is of at least the same value as that provided by quantitative approaches. It was with this consideration that I then began to consider the most suitable qualitative approach.

3.1 The Methodological Decision

As a research student I entered into this project with no predetermined orientation regarding which qualitative approach I would use, and undertook extensive reading on the various approaches. When deciding on a

methodology for the research it was important to choose an approach that would help to meet the aim of developing an understanding of how men experienced becoming a father for the first time and to determine what the essential aspects of this experience were. In order to accomplish this it was vital that the fathers felt free to talk about any aspect of the experience without any bias from the researcher affecting the areas discussed.

One methodological approach I considered in detail was that of grounded theory, first articulated by Glaser and Strauss in 1967 (Creswell 1998). The aim of this approach is to develop a theory relating to a certain phenomenon, which for this research would have been the early experience of becoming a father for the first time. Data collection can be undertaken in a number of ways including interviews, observations and written documentation, for example diaries. Data is collected until 'saturation' has been reached, meaning that no new information is being added. An important feature of this approach is that data collection and analysis are a simultaneous process (Bluff 2005), with the ongoing analysis potentially affecting further collection, for example by leading to the addition of new interview questions or further informing the sampling strategy.

My understanding of grounded theory led to my belief that it was a very useful approach to creating theories regarding social interactions. However, it was not until I took a mental step backwards and examined what I really hoped to achieve from the research that I realised that it was not appropriate

for this particular research project for several methodological reasons. The first, and perhaps most important was the process of hypothesis creation that exists within the grounded theory approach. As explained by Holloway and Wheeler (2002) researchers who undertake grounded theory do not start with a definite and clearly defined hypothesis. However, the process of simultaneously collecting data and conducting analysis can lead to relationships being established and thus the creation of hypotheses which are tested in the subsequent data analysis. I believed from the outset of my research that each of the fathers should be interviewed without influence either from my own experiences or from those of other men. I felt that conducting the data analysis at the same time as interviewing new fathers might influence how I interviewed the men, perhaps leaving them feeling less able to talk about an aspect of the experience that was significant for them, or leading them to talk more about one particular aspect mentioned by another father in an earlier interview. Instead, I wanted to ensure that the men I interviewed had the opportunity to talk completely and freely about any aspect of their own experience, at any stage of the pregnancy or beyond and I sought a methodology that would allow me to do this. Theoretical sampling was hence inappropriate for my study as it follows emerging concepts rather than focus on each individual interview separately. I also felt that reaching the point of saturation would be a particularly difficult step of analysis due to the incredible breadth of experiences involved in becoming a father for the first time. I felt unsure that a point of saturation would be reached within the experiences of men as I was not only interviewing them

about the twelve weeks after the birth but also the nine months of the pregnancy, meaning the breadth of experiences discussed was vast. After having conducted the interviews with the eight fathers this belief remains and I believe that although grounded theory research would provide a valuable insight into fatherhood it may be more appropriate to use it to examine certain aspects of the experience and not with the breadth I hope I achieved within this research. Finally, it is important to note that I did not have the aim to create a theory regarding the early experience of becoming a father for the first time. I felt that what was needed was an understanding of what the experience had been like for the fathers, by examining their own descriptions and not a theory of why they had experienced it in the way that they did.

Through my reading I encountered several other qualitative approaches that I felt it important to consider when determining the methodological path that the research should take. There was a sense of going backwards and forwards between methodological theories and my research aims. Throughout this process I found myself returning to the Phenomenological writings, believing that it was this methodological approach that would best allow an insight into how new fatherhood was experienced, and what aspects had been important for the men themselves.

A phenomenological approach was adopted in order to successfully achieve this aim, due to its emphasis on examining phenomena as they are experienced by the individual in the life-world, or everyday life. The aim of

phenomenology is described by Giorgi and Giorgi (2003a) as being to capture the way in which the phenomenon is experienced, within the context in which the experience takes place. This aim ties in closely with the aim of this research, an analysis of how the men interviewed experienced becoming a father for the first time within their life-worlds, their everyday life. Although the descriptive scientific phenomenological approach of Giorgi and Giorgi (2003a and 2003b) was used for this research it is important to examine its relationship with the original work of the founding father of phenomenology, Edmund Husserl (1859 – 1938).

3.2 The Philosophical Phenomenological Approach

When examining the history of the phenomenological approach to research, it becomes clear that over time different phenomenological schools have developed, bringing with them different styles and emphases (Spiegelberg, 1982). Holloway and Wheeler (2002) identify three major streams of phenomenology: the transcendental phenomenology of Edmund Husserl (1859-1938); the hermeneutic phenomenology of Martin Heidegger (1889-1976); and the existentialist phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961) and Jean-Paul Satre (1905-1980). The origins of phenomenological philosophy can be traced back to Edmund Husserl, often credited as the founding father of phenomenology (Vale and Halling, 1989). Husserl's *Logische Untersuchungen* (1900-1901) formed the basis of his criticisms of the current approaches to understanding knowledge, approaches which he

believed were of a meta-physical nature, determining how knowledge was actually possible, and his suggestions for a way of better understanding the condition of possibility for knowledge (Zahavi, 2003). Husserl believed that phenomenology should involve going 'back to the things themselves'. Giorgi (1985) interpreted this phrase from a psychological phenomenological standpoint and believed that it was guiding researchers to go to the everyday world, the world that is always around us, and to look at the phenomena people are living through within that world, and examining the experiences of people as they are lived. Dahlberg et al (2001) explain that for researchers this concept of "going to the things" means that their role is to stand in a way that allows things to show themselves, with the 'thing' in question being understood as a phenomenon. The idea of consciousness was an important one for Husserl, as he believed that nothing could exist if it did not come through a person's consciousness. A person's consciousness is therefore always present, even if they do not openly acknowledge it. It was through a desire to develop an understanding of how the objects and events of everyday life appeared to people's consciousness that Husserl developed the philosophical phenomenological approach.

Husserl believed in the power of the "natural attitude" in creating an understanding of the experiential happenings of people's lives. For Husserl the natural attitude is the immersion of ourselves in our everyday lives, in which we assume that the world is as we perceive it, and that others experience it in the same way (Dahlberg et al, 2001). It is important to note

that we are not implicitly aware of our natural attitude, we do not think of each experience or interaction, we simply do them or are them. This is our lifeworld, the experiential happenings or occurrences that we live before we even know (Todres and Holloway 2004). Todres and Holloway describe this interaction as being “seamless”. This sense of a seamless flow is linked to another important concept within Husserl’s writings, that of intentionality, a term originally used by Franz Brentano (1838 – 1917).

Giorgi (1997) described intentionality as being the essential feature of consciousness. It refers to the idea that consciousness is always directed towards an object that is not in itself conscious. Therefore, in order to hate, something must be hated, or to feel resentful, an object must be resented. In this way, every act of consciousness can be seen to be linked to an object that transcends it, and this object can be a specific object or a general concept. One of the primary aims of phenomenology is to describe the object of any act of consciousness, exactly as it appears within that act.

It is important to examine the main methodological stages of Husserl’s approach, before comparing them to those of the descriptive phenomenological approach. Giorgi and Giorgi (2003b) describe Husserl’s phenomenological approach as consisting of three steps;

1. Assume the attitude of the phenomenological reduction. Giorgi maintains that although Husserl discussed many different types of

phenomenological reduction within his writings, it is the transcendental reduction that he would have advocated using for the philosophical phenomenological analysis. In order to enter the transcendental reduction one must assume the attitude that all objects and acts of consciousness are considered to belong to any consciousness. The analysis of these objects or acts could therefore be applied to any consciousness of any living being, providing a universality of understanding. It is the essence of “consciousness as such” that Husserl was striving for (Giorgi and Giorgi, 2003b, pg. 246).

2. Determine the essence of the given object. For Husserl the researcher would then turn to the object or act that is being analysed and the determination of the essence would be made through a process known as free imaginative variation. This process involves taking various dimensions of the object, and then varying them, or taking them away and determining whether the object would still remain without them, or with the altered version. If the identity of the object does collapse without that specific dimension then it can be seen to be essential, or an essence. Todres and Holloway (2004) describe the essence as being the “whatness”; what is it and what makes it what it is.
3. Describe the invariant aspects of the object. This stage involves the recording of the essential aspects of the item as discovered by the free imaginative variation.

Through these three stages Husserl believed it would be possible to determine the essential aspects of any given object, or act of consciousness. In order to be able to fully appreciate any new dimensions of the object, or the phenomena, Husserl stressed the importance of bracketing. This mental process involves the researcher ensuring that they do not engage any of their previous knowledge during the free imaginative variation. As well as the transcendental reduction mentioned above Giorgi (1997) also describes Husserl's 'phenomenological reduction' which breaks from the natural attitude, the 'phenomenological psychological reduction' which brackets the world but not the empirical subject and the eidetic reduction which reduces the objects to their essences. Giorgi describes these latter two levels of reduction as being 'refinements' of Husserl's basic phenomenological reduction.

Before discussing the phenomenological approach used within my research study it is first useful to examine further the theoretical history of phenomenology beyond that of Husserl, in order to provide a deeper history to the methodology used. As mentioned earlier, another important philosopher in the history of phenomenology is Heidegger, who was an assistant to Husserl before leaving to develop his own beliefs further.

Heidegger was interested in the concept of temporality, linked to the idea of time being important not only in terms of the here and now but also what had happened in the past and what would happen in the future. The philosophy of hermeneutic phenomenology evolved through a perceived need to not only

describe experiences but to interpret them, believing that rather than bracketing out any presuppositions (as suggested by Husserl) it was instead important to be aware of them and to make them explicit. The theoretical discussions surrounding bracketing are therefore an important consideration when determining which approach to use. The ability of any researcher to fully bracket out previous knowledge and experiences is still debated within the field of phenomenological research, and will be discussed further during the explanation as to why the descriptive phenomenological approach, as opposed to the hermeneutic, has been chosen for this research project. Rather than aiming to find 'essential structures', Gadamer, a hermeneutic phenomenologist concentrated on attempting to achieve inter-subjective understandings of phenomena through what he called a 'fusion of horizons', the important distinction being that personal and shared insight is used to help determine meaning. The lifeworld also holds great importance within hermeneutic phenomenology which Gadamer describes as being "the whole in which we live as historical creatures" (pg. 247). Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900 – 2002) was a hermeneutic philosopher perhaps best known for his work titled *Truth and Method* (1960). Gadamer studied with Heidegger and went on to develop his own criticisms of the adherence of science to a single method. Gadamer believed that this was not possible when studying the world, and instead it is our experience of the world that allows us to have an understanding of it, not a pre-defined method or set of steps. For Gadamer the hermeneutic circle is an important concept, the sense of going backwards and forwards between the parts and the whole in order to develop an

understanding. This also led to Gadamer's criticism of any methodologies which aimed to understand experience and human interpretation through a scientific method.

Moving away from the hermeneutic phenomenological philosophy and towards the existential phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty distinctions between these approaches can be seen. The aim of Merleau-Ponty was to use phenomenology to give a direct description rather than a causal explanation of experience, examining the science of human beings rather than the abstract nature of being (Cohen 1987, Thomas 2005). In an exploration of the work of Merleau-Ponty, Thomas (2005) describes the importance placed upon the concept of perception, which is seen as being the key to all life events and the gaining of knowledge and meaning regarding life experiences. However, for Merleau-Ponty an important emphasis is placed upon the experience of the individual, or figure, in relation to the background, or form, upon which a particular phenomenon is perceived, as well as the external world the phenomenon is grounded within. This is the lifeworld "that world which precedes knowledge, of which knowledge always speaks" (Merleau-Ponty 1995, ix). The importance here lies in examining factors such as culture, the external factors that may influence how something is perceived. Thomas uses the example of anger to illustrate this, explaining that anger cannot be understood without learning of its relational and cultural contexts. Another useful example given is that of pain, which can at times be figural, when the pain consumes a person's body, but can then become grounded in

the outside world when the pain lessens and the individual is able to interact with the external world once more. The body is a very important aspect within this phenomenological philosophy, as everything we experience is experienced through the body in some way; “the human being does not have a body, but is a body” (Dahlberg et al, pg 51). As with the work of Husserl, intentionality is an important concept dealing with the individuals’ relatedness to the world. Where Merleau-Ponty does differ is his view on bracketing, believing that it is impossible to completely bracket out one’s own assumptions and presuppositions. However, his emphasis on the human body and its relation with the external influences around it have meant that his philosophy is particularly useful in nursing research, with the suggestion that perhaps all nurses, regardless of whether they are also researchers could use his theory to become “alert to what is figural in the perceptions of their patients yet ever mindful of their embeddedness in a particular sociocultural context” (Thomas 2005, pg. 74).

This brief consideration of the three complex approaches to phenomenological philosophy highlight that although they are linked through the common goal of examining phenomena in the lifeworld, the approaches and theories driving this are varied. Issues such as intentionality and bracketing are important and any researcher choosing phenomenology should consider these differences when deciding on a methodological approach. Through my initial reading I felt that it was the work of Giorgi that would be

most appropriate for my research, and it is to this approach that I will now turn.

3.3 The Descriptive Phenomenological Approach as a Scientific Practice

Within the study of human psychology there exists a tension between the science used by psychologists and the actual characteristics of humans as they live in their every day world (Giorgi 1992). Within the naturalist paradigm humans and their characteristic interactions are measurable, with anything that falls outside of the realms of scientific measurement being dismissed or ignored. Giorgi was aware of the difficulties facing qualitative methodologies in research and emphasised the importance that language has always held within scientific research, thus maintaining that the use of descriptions are important and valid within research (Giorgi 1986). Giorgi (1984) refers to the work of Merleau-Ponty titled 'Structure of Behavior (1945/1963) which suggests that the behaviours that psychology seeks to understand are neither ideas nor things (Giorgi 1984 pg 20). Therefore, the knowledge that is based upon these two areas will not provide us with a full understanding of the essence of any behaviour. For Merleau-Ponty behaviour is seen more as a structure, a network of relations between the human and the world. Following on from this concept, when developing his phenomenological approach, Giorgi wanted a method that would do justice to the lived aspects of human phenomena. He believed that in order to do this

it was first necessary to examine how someone has actually experienced what has been lived, through an analysis of their descriptions. Giorgi believed that the phenomenological approach would be the most appropriate in order to achieve this. However, Giorgi saw the work of Husserl as being philosophical and thus providing a philosophical analysis, in contrast to the scientific method he was hoping to create; “Phenomenological philosophy is a foundation for scientific work; it is not the model for scientific practice. The insights of the philosophy have to be mediated so that scientific practices can be performed” (Giorgi 2000 pg. 4). Giorgi utilised many of the main concepts of Husserl’s work and created a method that could be articulated and would generate data that could be replicated by others, as is expected within the field of scientific quantitative research. The first noticeable difference within Giorgi’s approach is that the order of the steps to be followed is not the same. Within the philosophical method the work is all being done by the philosopher, analysing their own experiences. Therefore, the phenomenological reduction can be entered straight away. However, the first component of the scientific approach involves obtaining descriptions of experiences from other people. The important aspect of this is that the descriptions obtained are considered to be adequate, that they give a true account of the phenomena being researched. Giorgi and Giorgi (2003b) describe these adequate descriptions as being “those that are capable of yielding distinctive structures of the phenomenon from a psychological perspective” (pg. 248). It could be argued that because this first stage involves the descriptions of others, not of the researcher, that it does not

follow the phenomenological tradition. However, Giorgi and Giorgi (2003a) clearly argue that as the outcome of the analysis is based upon the psychological meanings determined by the researcher, and that these findings are not made explicit by the interviewee, it can still be considered to be phenomenological in nature, as these psychological meanings are present to the consciousness of the researcher. For a description of the exact steps of analysis used please see Methods chapter.

The second feature within Giorgi's approach is to enter into the phenomenological reduction. However, it is important to note that this is different to the transcendental reduction as outlined previously; instead it is the phenomenological psychological reduction. This level of reduction is the existential reduction and it means that the phenomenon is reduced, but not the act of consciousness with which the phenomenon is related. In order to illustrate this more clearly I will discuss the way in which this has been applied to this particular study. When reading the transcripts of the experiences of the fathers interviewed I accepted that the descriptions they gave were true and valid in relation to how they perceived their experiences. However, I did not make the assumption that these experiences were exactly how they perceived them to be, nor that they could be universally applied. This aspect of the reduction is designed to help overcome the natural bias of stating that things actually are the way we experience them to be, without applying any kind of critical evaluation. There is an acknowledgement that phenomena may present themselves in one way to one particular person and

in a completely different way to another, with both being equally valid.

Giorgi (1994) explains that it is this perceived reality, and the claims made by the individual with regards to their reality that phenomenologists are particularly interested in. The other level of reduction involved in Giorgi's approach involves the suspension of theoretical beliefs. For this I ensured that I withheld any past knowledge I had on the subject of fatherhood, so that I was able to listen to and analyse the description given by each father without any bias from previous attitudes, expectations or knowledge that I might have formed. At first this seemed to be a daunting prospect. It was difficult to understand how I would be able to forget any of the knowledge I had surrounding fatherhood. However, this was easier than it may have been for a father in a similar position as I have never and will never experience the transition to fatherhood, meaning that I was able to give myself that level of distance from the phenomenon. To bracket out the knowledge I had gained from reading or interacting with fathers in my daily life I kept a tight mental control, focusing solely on the experiences of the fathers I had interviewed. Giorgi (1994) describes the reduction as being a way of "rendering oneself as noninfluential as possible during the process of research...in order to come up with valuable (value) findings" (pg. 205).

The third step of this procedure is to seek the essence of the phenomenon by means of free imaginative variation, leading to a general structure of the phenomenon of becoming a father for the first time. However, unlike in the philosophical method, the essence being sought is not the essence of

consciousness, or a universal essence, but rather is a psychological essence, or structure of the phenomenon. The scientific approach recognises the importance of context, and so the claims made are never universal in nature. Rather, the claims made regarding essences are ones of typicality within this context. There is therefore a sense of transferability, that the essences may lead to insights about the phenomenon that can be transferred to other peoples' experiences (Todres and Holloway 2004). However, although it is likely that the essences will exist for other people in other situations, they should not be considered to be universal. The task of presenting these essences or typicalities raises two concerns, as identified by Todres (2005). The first concern is scientific, in that it is necessary to achieve descriptive adequacy (Ashworth, 2000). Descriptive adequacy can be described as being the equivalent of achieving validity within the realms of qualitative research. For Ashworth this is achieved through the "hermeneutic circle", providing a framework for understanding how to achieve adequacy in qualitative results. This can be linked back to the hermeneutic beliefs of Gadamer mentioned earlier. Within my research I have followed a process as explained by Todres (2005), involving going back and forth between the emerging formulation of the general essences and the individual accounts from the fathers, in order to determine how the essences relate to and explain the accounts of the fathers, and also to determine whether the essences should be altered in some way to better account for the individual descriptions. The second concern highlighted by Todres (2005) is the communicative concern, which involves the researcher finding a way of communicating the findings of this long and

complex analytical process in a way accessible way to people who have no connection with the research and perhaps even no knowledge of the processes involved. Within this research I have attempted to achieve this through detailed descriptions of the essences uncovered through analysis, with the use of quotations from the interview transcripts to illustrate the essences further, as can be seen in the results chapter of this thesis.

In this section I have attempted to outline the important similarities and differences between the philosophical phenomenological writings of Husserl and the scientific or descriptive phenomenology as described by Giorgi.

When reading the theory and methodology suggested by Giorgi it becomes clear just how important Husserl's philosophy has been in its creation, and it has provided an important basis for the research. The emphasis Husserl places on examining the phenomena as it exists within our life world is vital. However, Giorgi's more scientific approach expands this concept and allows the researcher to present findings in a way that can be regarded as being as faithful as possible to the phenomenon and to the context in which it appears in the world, and yet in a way that may be more accepted by the scientific research community due to the emphasis on examining other people's experiences through a clearly defined mode of analysis. Before examining the analytical phenomenological method I used in more detail, I will first return to the discussion regarding the different approaches to phenomenological research, and my decision to choose the descriptive phenomenological path.

3.4 The relevance of the chosen methodology to the study of fatherhood

When writing about the possible ways to approach research into fatherhood, Somers-Smith (2001) explains that it is “important to choose a methodology that is sensitive to men’s accounts of their experiences and based on the principle that various equally valid ways of fathering exist” (pg. 684). As I have discussed previously, phenomenology allowed me to do this, although the decision making process regarding the phenomenological approach I chose was more complex. I believed that phenomenology would allow for the fathers’ individual accounts of their transition and provide a deeper understanding of the essence of becoming a father; what is it that makes becoming a father what it is, and without which it could not be what it is (van Manen, 1990).

However, many concepts within the various approaches overlap and it was therefore important for me to look at their differences in order to choose the appropriate one for this research. I felt that the interview process in descriptive phenomenology would allow the fathers to openly describe their experiences, without concern regarding whether their descriptions were meeting any preconceived expectations for the findings of the research. However, this would also be possible using any phenomenological approach. It is essential that the phenomenological researcher approaches the research without any other goal than wanting to obtain descriptions of experiences. It

was my belief in the importance of this that led me to choosing descriptive phenomenology due to its emphasis on bracketing out previous knowledge and experiences during the analysis. It was my belief that this was an important part of the analysis as I wanted to be free from any pre-judgements regarding the fathers' experiences. I felt that, as a female who would never be a father myself and had no first-hand experience of parenting, it would not be appropriate for me to draw on my own experience or knowledge when interviewing and analysing the data. The descriptive phenomenological approach allowed me to be able to examine the experiences exactly as they were presented by the fathers.

4.0 The Study

4.1 The Sample

Nine fathers were interviewed for this research. However, the first interview has not been included in the analysis as it was felt that it did not elicit a truly phenomenological description of the early experience of becoming a father for the first time. This was due partly to my interview technique as it was my first experience of conducting a phenomenological interview, but also partly due to the father's reluctance to talk in depth about his experiences.

However, this initial interview was very valuable in helping me to gain a better understanding of what is involved in the phenomenological interview.

When deciding upon the sample size the in-depth nature of the phenomenological interview and subsequent analysis was an important consideration. Although it was considered desirable to be able to gain an understanding of the experience from the perspective of different life worlds it was also essential that the sample size be kept small enough to be able to conduct the detailed analysis of the descriptions given. The eventual sample size of eight fathers was considered suitable to meet both criteria. Within phenomenological research the most important sample criterion is that the participants have experienced the phenomenon that is being studied (Creswell, 1998) For this reason it was important to be specific regarding the inclusion criteria I was using.

The minimum age of the fathers to be approached to be interviewed was eighteen years. This was due to the ethical concerns of interviewing fathers under this age, who might be particularly vulnerable. Although the experience of becoming a father under the age of eighteen is an important one, it was decided that this would not be considered within the scope of this particular piece of research. Other criteria were that the father should be experiencing the transition to fatherhood for the first time, as it was this particular experience that was being examined, and that he should have become the father of one infant, as opposed to twins or more. This last criterion was included as it was felt that becoming a father of more than one child might be a very different experience, and should be considered separately from the experience of having one child. The following table (table 1) illustrates the information gathered regarding the fathers;

Name*	Age	Occupation	Marital Status
Sam	25	Customer Support	Married
Robert	38	Counsellor	Married
Craig	32	Joinery	Married
Richard	31	Business Analyst	Married
Mark	30	Network Manager	Cohabiting
Jack	45	IT Consultant	Married
Carl	32	Call Centre	Cohabiting
		Operative	
Alan	28	Security Guard	Cohabiting

Table 1 – Father Information

The fathers were also asked for basic information regarding their baby, how the baby was being fed and the type of birth they had experienced. I felt that the question concerning how the baby was being fed was an important one as it may have influenced the fathers’ postnatal experiences. The answers to these questions can be seen below in table 2.

Name*	Baby’s Age (in weeks)	Baby’s Gender	Method of Infant Feeding	Type of birth
Sam	12	Female	Breastfeeding	Emergency Caesarean
Robert	12	Female	Breastfeeding	Water birth
Craig	12	Male	Breastfeeding	Epidural
Richard	12	Female	Breastfeeding	Normal
Mark	12	Female	Breastfeeding	Emergency Caesarean
Jack	11	Female	Breastfeeding	Emergency Caesarean
Carl	10	Female	Breastfeeding	Normal
Alan	12	Male	Breastfeeding	Normal

Table 2 – Information regarding infant and birth

*Please note that all names are pseudonyms

4.2 Recruitment

The question of how to inform fathers about the research and gain contact with fathers interested in taking part was one that led to several changes in approach. After discussion with the head of the local community midwives team it was realised that there were no antenatal classes or groups run specifically for fathers. It was decided that the first approach taken would be to speak about the research at a monthly meeting of the local community midwives' team. Those midwives who expressed an interest and thought they might be able to help were left with information packs (please see Appendix 1 for content) regarding the research to pass to any suitable fathers during the postnatal home visits they conducted. I wrote a brief information sheet for the midwives, regarding the research and left these with the information packs (please see Appendix 2). I also spoke to a local co-ordinator for the National Childbirth Trust (NCT) who also agreed to pass on packs to colleagues who would, in turn, pass them to any interested fathers attending the locally run NCT parent groups.

Contact was maintained with both the community midwives' team and the NCT, but it became apparent that not having direct contact with the fathers might be affecting the recruitment rate. I decided that attendance at local breast feeding support groups may be a useful way of contacting parents. After initial contact with the support group co-ordinators I decided that it would be appropriate to attend the groups and speak to the parents about the research. Although fathers do occasionally attend the groups it is

predominantly mothers. In this situation I briefly explained the research to the mothers and left information packs with them if they thought their partner may be interested in participating. In the few instances where a father was present at the group, I approached him directly and left an information pack with him if he felt he might be interested. Please refer to the ‘limitations of study’ section in the concluding chapter for a discussion of how this particular recruitment strategy affected the resulting sample of fathers I interviewed.

Throughout the recruitment process no record was made of who had been given information packs, so that there was no pressure on the fathers to feel that they must respond.

4.3 The Information Packs

The information packs that were passed to the fathers contained the following;

- An introductory letter, outlining who I was and what the research was about and explaining the contents of the pack
- An information sheet, providing detailed information about the research and answering any questions the fathers might have had about their involvement, as well as providing my contact details and those of my supervisor should they have any further questions

- A reply card for the interested fathers to complete their contact details and indicate a time and day on which they would like to be contacted myself
- A stamped, self-addressed envelope for the reply card

Please see Appendix 1 for an example of the introductory letter, reply card and information sheet. Each part of this pack contained a logo, which I designed for the research, and the acronym STaMP, which represents the Study of the Transition of Men into Parenthood. It was felt that using this logo would help create an easily recognisable identity for the research project.



**Study of the
Transition of
a
Men into
Parenthood**

A personal answer phone message mentioning the STaMP project was recorded ensuring fathers felt comfortable leaving a message, should they need to.

4.4 Contacting the fathers

I first telephoned the father at the time given on the reply card to ensure he still wanted to take part, or to answer any questions he might have had. I then explained that the precise date and time of day of the interview would be the father's decision. It was important that the fathers were interviewed at a time they felt comfortable with. However, although previous research involving fathers rarely gave a justification for the timeframe chosen for interviewing them (for example please see Somers-Smith 1999, Condon et al 2004, Ahlborg and Strandmark 2001) it was decided that for the purpose of this research the interview would preferably occur between eight and twelve weeks after the birth. No fathers were interviewed before the eight weeks as I felt that this time frame gave the fathers some time to experience their new role. The decision not to interview fathers beyond the time frame of twelve weeks was made as the purpose of the research was to capture the father's experiences relatively soon into their transition. The experience of becoming a father is an on-going one and it was felt that within the constraints of this particular research it was descriptions of the initial experiences of the fathers, up to twelve weeks after the birth, that were being sought. An approach used by Hartley (2005) in her phenomenological study exploring the transition to motherhood through interviews with new mothers, was adopted within this research, involving asking the fathers to dictate the exact time of the interview. I felt that allowing the fathers to make this decision ensured that the interviews were happening at a time in the transition when they felt

comfortable talking about their experiences, rather than dictating a time which may be unsuitable for them, both practically in terms of the constraints already placed on their time, or emotionally, with regards to them feeling they were not yet ready to talk about what this experience had really been like for them.

4.5 Ethical Considerations

A favourable opinion was obtained from the Local Research Ethics Committee in December 2003, subject to minor alterations. The Local Research Ethics Committee were also contacted in July 2004 regarding a change to protocol with regards to the number of interviews conducted (please see section 4.6 ‘The Phenomenological Interview’ for more information) and a favourable opinion was received in September 2004. For details of the correspondence received from the Local Research Ethics Committee confirming the favourable opinion please see Appendix 3. Within the research project every effort has been made to ensure that the ethical principles of beneficence, non-maleficence and autonomy have been adhered to. Frankena (1963) identified the principles of Beneficence as being the following;

1. One ought not to inflict evil or harm
2. One ought to prevent evil or harm
3. One ought to remove evil

4. One ought to do or promise good

It can therefore be seen to involve making every effort to do what is best for the participant. Non-maleficence involves doing no harm to the participant and autonomy can be described as giving the participants control over decisions. These principles were constant considerations when planning the research method and the steps I took to ensure they were adhered to will now be described.

I informed the fathers about the possible options for the location of the research interview to ensure that the interview was conducted in as suitable an environment as possible, which was both easily accessible for the father and yet also considered safe for the researcher. Safety was a very important consideration as I always interviewed the fathers on my own. In order to ensure my safety I followed certain procedures, including ensuring a work colleague or member of my family knew where the location of the interview was and the expected time of completion, when I would phone them to let them know I had left the interview, and so they could contact the relevant people if they did not hear from me within this time limit. Please see Appendix 4 for a health and safety document I wrote regarding the procedures I used, under university guidelines. Possible locations included the father's own home or an interview room at Royal London House, Bournemouth University. Although the options were presented, all interviews were conducted in the fathers' own homes for various reasons,

including feeling more relaxed at home, wanting to care for their child and suitability with regards to the timing of the interview, as several were conducted in the evening. Within the Information Sheet and when speaking to the fathers on the telephone it was suggested that if possible the interviews should be conducted without their partner present in the same room. This was to allow the fathers to feel able to openly express their feelings without concern for their partner's reaction. However, I understood that this would not always be possible if I was conducting the interviews within the home of the parents, and I felt it was important that the mother did not feel excluded. In all cases the majority of the interview was conducted with the mother being absent from the room, and during one interview the mother did enter the room for a brief period to feed their infant. I always explained to the fathers that they were welcome to care for their child during the interview, and four fathers decided that they would like to do so. This concept of facilitating the father to care for his child and thus ensuring that no obstacle was placed in the way of his role as father during that time can be seen to be linked to the feminist ideals of research, allowing fathers to feel empowered during the research process. When reading the research literature surrounding fatherhood very few researchers mention whether they also welcomed the fathers caring for their infants during the interview. It is difficult to know whether this important fact has been overlooked because the fathers were not given the opportunity, or if it was not considered to be significant.

Through allowing the fathers to decide upon both the timing and location of the interview it was hoped that they would feel as comfortable as possible and that any inconvenience would be kept to a minimum. The fathers were also assured that they could withdraw from the research at any time, without any detriment to themselves or their family.

Before the interview commenced I sought consent to record the interview, allowing transcription at a later date. The fathers were also assured that any information given during the interview would be treated confidentially and their identities protected. I ensured that I had information with regards to the NHS Trust complaints procedure and relevant contact details with me at each interview, should the father request this. If the father had shown any signs of distress during the interview I would have stopped the tape and provided immediate support. I also took with me a list of relevant support agencies and this included specific fatherhood/ family related services, general support contacts and information regarding who to contact with reference to child support/ child care issues, for example Parentline, Fathers Direct and Home-Start (please see Appendix 5).

After the interviews I transcribed the tapes and in accordance with the ethical guidelines of Bournemouth University, I will ensure they are destroyed five years after the interview date. The transcripts will also be destroyed after five years. The father's names and identification codes are kept in a locked drawer at my place of work, to which only I have access. The interview

transcripts and tapes are kept in a separate, similar locked drawer to protect the identities of the participants. When the interviews were transcribed and quoted in the research, pseudonyms were used to ensure that the participant could not be identified. Although all fathers interviewed were asked if there were particular pseudonyms they would like used to represent themselves and the members of their family only two fathers elected to do this, I allocated pseudonyms to the remaining fathers and their families, ensuring the names I selected were not ones I had any personal emotional attachment to, in order to ensure this had no effect on my perception of the fathers during analysis. Since the completion of the research I have posted a summary of the research findings to any fathers that requested it on their consent forms. Please see Appendix 8 for a copy of the letter and summary of findings sent to the fathers.

4.6 The Phenomenological Interview

The data has been gathered using the phenomenological interviewing technique. In accordance with the phenomenological approach the interview began with an open question. Becker (1992) explains that within phenomenology it is important that this opening question should evoke memories of the actual events that have been lived through, rather than the participants' thoughts about the phenomenon. It was therefore essential to obtain a description of the experiences of each father, and not their thoughts or opinions on the subject of fatherhood in general. Todres and Holloway

(2004) advocate taking a 'back to basics' approach in formulating the question, suggesting the researcher ask themselves what is the experience to which the topic (in this case fatherhood) may refer? It is therefore important to develop an open-ended 'experience-near' question. I wished to examine the early experience of becoming a father for the first time in its totality and so wanted to ensure that I did not give any suggestion in the opening question of what aspects of their experience should be discussed. By doing this I ensured that the question was as experience-near as possible as for each father it allowed a description of what aspects of the experience had been significant for them. The question chosen for this research was

“In as much detail as possible please could you tell me about your experience of becoming a father for the first time?”

This question did not alter at any point during the interviewing process as it was felt that it had always been successful in facilitating the fathers to talk about their experiences. Prompts such as “could you tell me more about that?” or “is there anything else you would like to say?” were also used to facilitate the continuation of the interview. These prompts were used to encourage the fathers to describe their experiences in more detail. For the majority of the fathers the opening question led to an uninterrupted description of the entire experience. It was important that I went back to this initial monologue and asked the fathers to discuss the experiences mentioned

in more detail. These prompts also acted as a tool to ensure that the fathers were directed back to talking about their personal experiences, as opposed to fatherhood in general, or the experiences of those around them. Before completing the interviews the fathers were always asked “*Is there anything else you would like to mention with regards to your experience of becoming a father for the first time*”? This closing question allowed the fathers a few moments to consider whether there were any aspects of their experience they had not yet mentioned. Using the open phenomenological style of interviewing and open beginning question allowed the fathers to express the aspects of their experience which were important to them, without interruptions from further questions and the presuppositions these involve (Kvale, 1996).

An important alteration that was made to the research protocol was the possibility for the inclusion of a second interview with the fathers which, when possible, occurred within two weeks of the initial interview. After conducting two interviews it became clear that the early experience of becoming a father for the first time was such a broad one that it might be difficult to obtain an in-depth description of the experience through only one interview. This approach was described by Todres and Galvin (2005) with regards to the issues of breadth and depth in qualitative research. In a phenomenological study of the lived experiences of a man caring for his wife who suffered from Alzheimer’s disease Todres and Galvin describe two phases of the study. The first is a ‘grand tour’ interview allowing for the

exploration of the phenomenon in a broad sense. The second phase was a descriptive phenomenological interview, designed to gain a deeper understanding of some of the more complex phenomena experienced and described in the initial interview. I felt this issue of narrative breadth and life-world depth was particularly relevant for the interviews I was conducting with the fathers. It was important to give the father the opportunity to talk about the breadth of his experiences and so I did not want to alter the opening question or structure of the initial interview. However, with the addition of the second interview I was able to obtain the depth of understanding that the initial interview could not always provide. A second interview was therefore requested, with the fathers being asked to describe aspects of their experience they had already mentioned but in more detail. In order to determine whether a second interview was required, the first interview was transcribed and read in order to gain a sense of the whole. If it was felt the interview provided a deep understanding of the early experience of becoming a father for the first time a second interview was not requested. However, if it was felt that a second interview would be beneficial in order to obtain the necessary depth of understanding of the experience. The information sheet was amended to inform fathers of the possibility for a second interview and it was also mentioned at the first interview. The fathers were contacted within two weeks of the first interview to determine whether they were happy to take part in a second interview. All fathers who were asked if they would take part in the second interview felt happy to do so, and

the interviews were conducted. Four second interviews were conducted in total.

4.7 Approach to Analysis

The analytical approach I chose to use for my research was the scientific phenomenological method as outlined by Giorgi and Giorgi (2003a), who describe their analytical approach as consisting of four basic steps (Giorgi and Giorgi 2003a pg 32). Each father's experience was analysed separately, and I will now explain the steps I used, which remained the same for each participant's description.

In order to begin analysis it was first important that I entered the scientific phenomenological reduction (please refer to previous chapter for a discussion of this) I then read the complete interview transcript, a step which is considered important due to the holistic nature of the phenomenological approach. This reading of the transcript would sometimes be repeated several times until I felt I had developed a true understanding of the father's experience, a sense of the whole.

After I felt I had developed this global understanding of the experience I progressed to the second stage of analysis, which concentrated on determining the parts of the description, referred to as meaning units. In

order to determine these units I re-read the transcript and drew a small line every time I experienced a shift, or transition, in the meaning of the description. It was important to ensure that these shifts in meaning were directly related to the experience of becoming a father, as opposed to any general change in meaning.

In order to illustrate the creation of the meaning units, the following is an example of a section of an interview with a father named Robert, with the determination of a change in meaning shown by / .

“/ I realised this a wee while later, but there was a bit of, I don’t know if it was sadness, but some kind of a sense of loss, my bachelor days were finally over and that was it you know, it was all gone and no more sort of nights down the pub with the lads and all that stuff. So yes, it was euphoric, but also a little bit sadness, so mixed in that sense. / But of course then the benefits are ten times greater than the, you know, anything else, what I lost. And so it’s been great, you know I think the biggest thing for me is like, I think I’m really privileged, really lucky, especially um, and it’s a grand thing to say, but it does feel like an honour, you know, it does feel lucky to have, to be a father / ”

As can be seen from the above example, the result of the second stage of analysis was a series of meaning units, each conveying some new insight into the early experience of becoming a father for the first time, requiring further analysis and clarification.

After completing these first two steps I found myself with an understanding of what the whole experience had been like for the father, and also of the transitions in meaning that existed, physically represented in the transcript by slashes. This led to the third stage of analysis, the transformation of the text into a more general language, as opposed to the language of the individual's everyday life, the goal of which and Giorgi describe as being to “transform what is implicit to the explicit” (2003a, pg 34). The step also helps to generalise the description, so that it is not so specific to the situation of the individual participant. In order to conduct this step it was important for me to adopt a psychological standpoint and to use this to inform the transformations I made.

The following is an example of a transformation I conducted on the first meaning unit given in the excerpt from Robert's interview above;

Interview text	Transformation
I realised this a wee while later, but there was a bit of, I don't know if it was sadness, but some kind of a sense of loss, my bachelor days were finally over and that was it you know, it was all gone and no more sort of nights down the pub with the lads and all that stuff. So yes, it was euphoric, but also a little bit sadness, so mixed in that sense.	For Robert there has been a sense of loss during the transition to becoming a father. This sense of loss is related to feeling that it signified the end of his days as a bachelor, and the activities he associated with this lifestyle. The sadness Robert felt about this loss contrasted with the euphoria he felt regarding other aspects of the experience.

In general I conducted either one or two transformations on the transcripts, with each transformation becoming more generalised and more grounded within the psychological perspective. However, it is important to note that within this phenomenological approach no limit is placed upon how many transformations should take place. An example of an interview transcript with the second and third stages of analysis can be found in Appendix 6.

The result of this third stage of analysis was a series of more general meanings, which, while remaining true to the experience of the individual, could be viewed in a more general light, allowing the movement into the fourth step of analysis, the creation of a general structure of the experience. In order to achieve this I read through the final transformations for each father's transcript and attempted to determine the constituents that existed within them. These essences constitute an explanation of the typical themes that have arisen throughout the analysis of the interviews from all participants. Giorgi (1997) explains that this stage will not necessarily lead to the creation of one structure, but rather that the researcher should write as many structures as required in order to accurately represent the experiences of the individuals. The relationship between the whole (the general structure) and the parts (the constituents) is a very important one and it is only through the creation of both; the plot and the details, that the deeper understanding of the experience can be achieved. Please refer to the findings chapter for the general structure defined within this research, and a discussion of the constituents that have been identified. Please see Appendix 9 for an audit

trail outlining the usage of the above steps in the creation of the constituent 'Oscillating Reality'.

When undertaking the initial analysis of the transcripts I considered including a fifth stage of analysis which involved writing an individual summary of each father's experiences. Although this step is not included in Giorgi and Giorgi's (2003a) four stages of descriptive phenomenological analysis I felt it was something that might contribute a deeper understanding of the men's experiences of becoming a father. I attempted to include this fifth stage with the analysis of Mark and Sam's interviews, and the resulting descriptions can be found in the appendix. This stage was conducted after the entire transcripts had been read, the meaning units identified and the transformations conducted. The resulting descriptions provided a detailed summary of each father's experience, almost an outline of their story (please see Appendix 7 for the description of Mark and Sam's experience).

However, when determining what contribution these descriptions made towards an understanding of the essence of the experience of becoming a father I decided not to include this stage of analysis. Although these descriptions consolidated the transformations that had been conducted, they provided nothing towards the ultimate aim of the analysis, the writing of the general structure of becoming a father for the first time, created through an analysis of the essential aspects, as experienced by each of the fathers, and the variations within them.

5.0 Findings

5.1 Introduction

The analysis of the interview transcripts provided a rich and layered description of the early experience of becoming a father for the first time.

The deep and detailed phenomenological analysis revealed five main constituents, the essences of the early experience of becoming a father for the first time for those fathers who were interviewed. The constituents identified have been titled;

- Travelling into the unknown
- Building a tower of Strength
- Oscillating Reality
- The Intimate Relationship With The Baby
- The New Me

Within these constituents exist many nuances which need to be described to allow a deeper understanding of how these constituents are experienced by different fathers. Before doing this it is important to consider the General Structure of the early experience of becoming a father for the first time.

5.2 The general structure of becoming a father for the first time

As the man becomes a father for the first time he takes many steps into unknown territory. The father carries out practical tasks such as changing nappies or bathing a baby, unlike any he has done before and experiences new thoughts and emotions. These steps form the basis of his journey into a new world, and this expedition is one for which he feels there is no road map. This brings with it feelings of excitement, insecurity and confusion. A sense of being prepared for the practical aspects of parenting is considered important by the new father, with this knowledge being obtained through the reading of parenting literature, attendance at antenatal classes and the creation of a birth plan. However, the father believes that this does not fully prepare him for the psychological and emotional changes this new role will bring. The father believes it is his role to form a tower of strength from which his partner can gain support. For some fathers there are sources of strength they can rely upon themselves, walls upon which they can lean. Others lack any source of support and instead lock any concerns they may have inside themselves. Irrespective of the level of support he receives the father always continues forward in his travels, unsure of what his future as a parent will entail. The next step into the unknown, the birth of their child, and the acquisition of the title of father does not always feel real, with an oscillating sense of the reality of the new role of “dad”. Throughout the pregnancy a sense of the baby being unreal prevails, although for some

fathers certain moments of confirmation exist, including the pregnancy test and the ultrasound scan. For the father the moment the child enters into his life is strongly linked to the very physical moment of the baby entering the world from its mother's womb. Once the baby inhabits the world outside of the mother's body the father is able to engage in a more definite and clearly defined way, initiating the beginning of the intimate relationship between father and child. Not having been able to experience the physical connection to the baby throughout the pregnancy the father places great importance on the moment of holding his baby for the first time, bringing a sense of the closeness he had previously missed. The removal or disruption of this moment has a negative effect. The new father places great importance upon any moments of interaction with the newborn, with each experience strengthening the formation of their relationship. Each father experiences certain defining moments in his relationship with his baby although these moments are different for each father, varying from the practical tasks of bathing the infant to seeing his baby smile. However, it is the general feeling that he is able to interact with his child, and that his child can reciprocate this, that forms the basis of the intimate relationship between the man and his child.

The cessation of the oscillating nature of the reality of his new role happens with the arrival of the baby into his home, bringing with it the final confirmation that he is now a father. With this realisation of his new role come new changes in both the everyday life of the father and in his views of

himself and the world around him. His new identity is formulated of both conscious changes in order to become the best father he can be, as well as subconscious changes influenced by the new interactions he now has with his family and peers, and most importantly, his newborn. A sense of newness now permeates every aspect of his life. The father now has membership of an elite club, the “fatherhood club”, of which only those men who have experienced the transition themselves can achieve membership.

5.2.1 The importance of the general structure

This general structure was the result of the analysis of the interviews I conducted with eight first time fathers and was the expression of their experiences regarding becoming a father for the first time. The creation of this structure was an invaluable stage in gaining that deeper understanding of the phenomena I aimed to explore within this research. It highlighted those aspects of becoming a father for the first time that were present for all fathers interviewed, the essence of their experience. The enormity of the expedition these men have undertaken and the changes this brought into their lives is clear in all of the accounts given. However, it is important to consider the nuances and variations that exist within this general structure, which will now be explained with regards to the identified constituents of the general structure.

5.3 The constituents of the general structure

As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, five constituents of the general structure have been identified and will now be discussed in detail. It is important to note that these constituents can be placed in any sequence as they do not form an ordered progression through the early experience of becoming a father for the first time. Rather, they can be seen to be intertwined, with no logical order regarding when they are experienced.

5.3.1 Travelling into the great unknown

For the fathers interviewed there was a sense of uncertainty regarding what their transition into fatherhood would entail. Although this sense of uncertainty was directed at differing aspects of fatherhood it was present in all accounts. The two main areas of the experience which contained within them the feeling of the unknown were the birth and the time following the birth when they brought their baby home.

5.3.1.1 The Birth

The birth and the time leading up to it was considered by most to be an area in which they did not know what to expect, or as described by Sam “the great unknown”. For Robert the time leading up to the birth was one of uncertainty

due to his perceived lack of knowledge of what would happen. This uncertainty led him to a sense of having no control over what was happening and a sense of being

“.. in freefall, right, and I didn’t know if the parachute was going to work or not...this could end up really messy or it could have a nice gentle landing”

Robert explained how he resolved this sense of uncertainty by gaining a sense of self-confidence by believing in his own intuition, and that he would know what to do when the time came.

For Carl the sense of not knowing what to expect and what was expected of him during the birth was strongly felt at the moment of finding out his partner had gone into labour, rather than being something he had felt or experienced beforehand;

“I shot out of bed and then realised I had no bloody idea what I should be doing next”

5.3.1.2 Re-routing the road map

I have used the term road map here to explain the preparation and planning that several of the fathers undertook in order to feel assured that they knew

what was going to happen. The creation of birth plans was one important way of laying down what they felt to be a definite map, providing guidance regarding which direction the fathers would be going in, and when. However, the sense that the birth represented something unknown was heightened for those fathers whose partners experienced complications during the birth, altering the birthing plan they had previously constructed together. Any previous feeling of being prepared for what was going to happen was lost as their experience deviated from the one they had already constructed in their mind. For Craig, whose partner encountered difficulties which led to her having an epidural, this led to him having a sense of entering “unknown territory” as he had not been able to plan for it and he found that during the birth he felt;

“hopeless, really hopeless”

This fear of the unknown due to birthing complications was particularly heightened for one father, Mark, for whom (like Carl), there had been no sense of uncertainty leading up to the birth;

“up until things went scary I was fine, because I knew exactly what was going on, every step that was coming up”

However, he believed that having this certainty removed led to a very negative experience and the sense of the unknown during the birth and the fear this led to had a significant effect on him and his new role as father.

5.3.1.3 The Known

Not all fathers interviewed expressed a sense of the unknown when approaching the birth. For these fathers preparation appeared to be important in achieving this, and there was a sense of being engaged with the pregnancy through attending antenatal classes.

Sam felt that the experience of the birth was one in which he did know what to expect, lessening his sense that this was unknown, believing that even though his partner had an emergency caesarean he was prepared due to a video he had watched at an antenatal class.

It would seem, therefore, that for some fathers the sense of the unknown was lessened by taking part in certain aspects of the pregnancy, with antenatal classes being specifically mentioned. However, for some fathers nothing that they did fully provided them with the road map they felt they needed in approaching the birth.

5.3.1.4 The Unknown Role

For Sam it was the time following the birth and the first few weeks of life as Dad that felt like he was entering “the unknown”. Although Sam had physically prepared his home for his new daughter he believed that

“you might have all the kit in the world but you’ll never be ready for those first few days when you bring her [the baby] back from the hospital”

For those fathers who expressed a feeling that this part of becoming a father was unknown, the contributory factor mentioned most within the interviews was a lack of any experience with children, as can be illustrated in the following quote from Richard;

“Normally when you’re going to do something this big you’d have a bit of practice, but no one gives you their child to have a practice with”

Having experience with caring for children within his wider family did help alleviate some of the sense of the unknown for Jack, although he still expressed a feeling that now it was his own child he was caring for it was very different. His concern was largely focused on the uncertainty of what would happen to his daughter as she grew up;

“I look at this gorgeous little thing and wonder what she’ll grow up like”

For both Mark and Richard this unknown area of childcare was represented by an uncertainty regarding how they should interact with their newborn.

Mark explained that he found caring for his daughter difficult at times as he was unable to reason with her when she cried, as he would an adult, and felt that was something he had to learn to adapt to. For Richard it was explained in relation to his wife's requests that he play with his daughter;

“Amy says why don't you go and play with her, and I haven't yet learnt exactly what I'm supposed to be doing”

Sam considered himself to have significantly less experience of childcare than his partner. Although Sam perceived his partner's level of experience to be positive in assisting them both to adjust to parenthood, Sam explained that he felt he would like to gain more experience himself. In order to achieve this Sam ensured that he gained practical experience with his daughter from the first possible moment. When bathing his daughter for the first time he described his arm as visibly shaking with nerves, but continued to bathe her for many weeks as a “confidence boost thing”.

5.3.1.5 Preparation for their travels

There were many ways in which the fathers described themselves preparing for their travels into this unknown place and the challenges it would hold. As

mentioned above, preparatory material such as videos and books were used.

However, Alan's view that;

*“I'd read the books, I knew what to do if he had a fever, that kind of thing,
but the rest of it was a mystery to me”*

was one that occurred in several of the accounts. The fathers explained that they felt they did everything they could to prepare but some still felt that they had no knowledge of what their role as father would entail, what effect it would have upon their lives, or what effect they could have upon their child's life. The explanations the fathers gave for this varied with Richard feeling that it was lack of information from accessible external sources involved in the care of his partner and infant, that led to his sense of the unknown;

“as a prospective father you don't get told a lot”

This desire to have been told more related directly to being able to speak to health care professionals, rather than having to read the information in books.

In contrast Sam felt that there was nothing more that could have been done prior to the birth to help him prepare, instead believing that new fatherhood was a “steep learning curve” and that the only way to understand it was to personally experience it;

“you won’t know what it is like to be a father until you are one”

Although the precise cause, timing and subject of the sense of the unknown varied for the fathers it was expressed by all that the journey into this new role had brought with it new experiences, requiring them to find ways to adapt and get to know the land into which they had now travelled.

5.3.2 Building the Tower of Strength

For several fathers a defining aspect of their role in the approach to the birth was to display a sense of strength, and to not burden their partners with any of the fears or worries they might be having. The fathers expressed how inwardly they were feeling deeply insecure about the health of their partner, their child, and the impending future for them as a father but how externally they tried hard to remain cool and composed. The reason given for this reluctance to discuss these issues with their partner was that they already felt as though their partners had so many concerns and that by discussing any of their problems with her she might become further distressed. Even though the fathers were happy for their partners to talk to them about any fears, as described by Robert;

“..I also felt, strangely, I felt that I couldn’t share my fears...I felt selfish...if I sort of talk about my worries, it might effect her worries and things”

The fathers appeared to build a tower of strength for their partners to lean against and to seek support from, with their own fears and concerns locked away inside.

The reasons for the formation of the tower and the role this source of strength was to fulfil varied for the fathers, depending on their situation and the

support they felt their partners needed. Alan felt that he was unsuccessful in providing the strength his partner needed during the birth;

“I wanted to do something to, you know, to take the pain away and well, I couldn’t”

The tower formed by Jack was one of necessity due to the illness his partner suffered following the birth of their daughter. However, Jack considered the strength he gave his wife and daughter a positive part of his experience, as he enjoyed providing it.

5.3.2.1 Pressures placed upon the tower

Although the fathers attempted to build this tower of strength for their partners they also described the pressures that they felt were placed upon them at various points throughout their experience. The birth in particular seemed to apply considerable stress. For Carl this was a particularly fearful time but he felt he could not express this fear as;

“I knew that me starting to panic wasn’t going to help anyone and nor would me asking loads of questions”

A belief that his partner should be receiving all attention during the birth led to the feeling that he must remain quiet, and keep any fears or questions locked inside.

For Alan there was a conflict between his need to support his partner and his fear of attending the birth. However, his desire to support his partner helped him to overcome his fear and he did attend.

Robert describes the “confident front” he created during the birth in order to reassure his wife and that despite the feelings of anxiety he had he could not share these feelings with her;

“I was really anxious, I kept reassuring her each time, but I couldn’t, I couldn’t even share”.

The pressures placed upon the fathers’ tower also extended into their new roles as fathers, including a pressure to be successful in their employment, as discussed specifically by Alan, Richard and Mark, and to be, or to become, a high wage earner. For Alan there was also a perceived pressure to be a good father and to ensure that his relationship with his partner remained content;

“there’s also the sort of pressure to make sure that everything is going well with me and Vicky”

Alan was one of the three fathers to mention his relationship with his partner and this was an area I asked him about further in his second interview. Alan explained that his previously relaxed attitude to relationships had changed now that he had a baby with his partner. He expressed a fear regarding something “*going wrong*” between himself and his partner and this then affecting his relationship with his child. Alan believed it was important that he maintain a happy relationship and took the responsibility for doing so.

5.3.2.2 Supporting The Fathers Themselves

Throughout the father’s experiences there were mention of certain areas of support that they received, and the importance that these providers of support held for them. The importance of this support can be seen in Jack’s words;

“I don’t think we’d all still be here in one piece if it wasn’t for the support we’ve had from everyone”

The “everyone” in Jack’s account consisted of health-care workers, family, friends and neighbours, with the first three being frequently mentioned as sources of support throughout the other fathers’ descriptions.

During the stressful experience of the birth Carl drew comfort from believing that his partner was “*in good hands*”, referring to the care his partner

received from the midwives. The knowledge that the partner was being cared for by professionals relieved some of the stress Carl experienced.

The role of being able to discuss parenting issues in a light hearted way with friends who have children of their own was also mentioned. Alan explained this important kind of interaction in providing support by stating;

“that’s always good, to know you’re not the only ones it’s happening to”

As well as discussing the support they received some fathers also discussed the support they wished they had received, the help they felt should have been provided to them. For Richard this perceived lack of support existed during the pregnancy when he had hoped to become involved in certain aspects, including appointments with the midwife and antenatal classes, but found that he was not able to. This perceived lack of support came partly from his employers who;

“weren’t keen about giving me time off to go to a midwife appointment, so you just don’t go”.

But also from the midwives he encountered when he was able to go to the ultrasound scan and felt that he was merely an “*appendage*” or that

“I might as well have been a bag”

As a father with a vested interest in what was happening to his wife and baby, Richard felt that he should have been acknowledged and although he felt that the main focus of attention should rightly be his wife, small gestures such as greeting him by name would have added significantly to his feeling of being included in the experience.

For Mark, a perceived lack of support which led to him briefly believing his wife had died giving birth to his daughter had led to ongoing feelings of anger towards those involved in his care. Mark's partner was taken to the operating theatre during the birth for an emergency caesarean and from Mark's perspective he was left standing in the corridor on his own, unsure of what was happening, and fearing the worst. He felt that the most basic level of support he needed was for someone to talk to him and explain what was happening, and this did not happen;

“yeah, that was pretty horrific, I needed someone to explain to me what was happening...simple”

Robert felt that throughout the entire experience of becoming a father for the first time he would have benefited from structured support, with the suggestion of

“a get together, for the men only”

Robert explained that he needed opportunities to discuss his fears and concerns and to ask questions as he felt unable to do this in front of his wife due to a need to appear “*strong*”.

5.3.3 - An Oscillating Reality

Several of the fathers interviewed used the word “*surreal*” to describe their experiences. When asked to discuss this sense of the surreal further it emerged that the fathers were describing a sense of their transition into fatherhood not being real, or that they were having difficulty engaging with the realities of their new role as a father.

However, this feeling of unreality did not pervade all the experiences of those fathers who described it. Moments of reality existed and were described, with these moments being seen as particularly important and significant within their overall experiences. For those fathers who described this sense of the real and the unreal there was also a sense of them moving back and forth, oscillating from the world of the unreal to the very real sense of being a father. It is interesting to note that these moments of reality occurred at different times for different fathers, some antenatally although the majority experienced the final moment of reality during the postnatal period.

The stages of the transition which elicited these feelings of unreality and reality varied, but can be separated into the categories of before the birth, the arrival of the baby from the mother's womb and bringing home baby.

5.3.3.1 Before the birth

A sense of being disengaged from the pregnancy existed for several of the fathers interviewed, and this contributed to their feeling that the pregnancy was not real. Carl explained this by saying that although he could see physical changes in his partner, there was nothing actually happening to him and he felt no different. This view was echoed by Sam who described the first few months of the pregnancy as being a *"no-man's land"*.

A sense of detachment from the pregnancy was particularly prevalent for Jack who explained that due to work commitments

"I wasn't really around much to take part in the pregnancy"

Jack felt this lack of engagement in the pregnancy was one which he regretted, although it had led to a determination to be involved in all future experiences with his daughter.

To counteract his sense of disengagement Craig ensured that he took part in certain pregnancy related events. This included three pregnancy tests, the

final one of which was conducted by a doctor, which he felt helped him to feel “*comfortable*” with the pregnancy. However, it was the ultrasound scan which led to his final acceptance of his reality as a father;

*“when I saw the scan it was like, right, that’s it, you’re going to be a father.
That’s when everything came into place”.*

The scan was also Sam’s first moment of reality. This scan was particularly significant in confirming the pregnancy for him as it served as physical evidence of his baby’s existence, which he felt he previously lacked

5.3.3.2 The baby’s arrival from the womb

For Carl the first moment of reality came when he partner woke him to tell him she had started labour. Without even needing his partner to tell him why she had woken him he described “*a wave of realisation*”.

However, even with the knowledge that his partner had started labour, and that he was taking her to the birth centre, Carl still felt that this experience could not really be happening to him, a sensation he recalls as being “*weird*”
;

*“I was there, driving my partner to the place where she was going to give
birth to our baby and honestly, it didn’t feel real”*

It was specifically the moment of walking into the birth centre that had a profound effect on Carl's sense of reality;

"You can read all these books and have people congratulate you...but it doesn't seem like it's totally real until you walk through those bloody doors".

The period of time during labour was one with which Alan had difficulty in engaging, explaining that;

"it was surreal. It was almost like it was happening to someone else"

However, the moment of the baby entering the world from its mother's womb was the defining moment of reality for Alan, leading to a feeling that;

"It's real, I'm a dad"

However, even directly following the birth, after they had seen their newborn some fathers had difficulty with their new reality, as Carl explained;

"Now I think back to it I'm not sure it sunk in that I was a dad even then".

Leaving his partner and baby at the hospital and driving home was a particularly difficult moment of unreality for Sam;

“I remember trying to think about it and the magnitude of what had just happened and it just seemed surreal”.

Instead, some fathers felt that it was the bringing home of their baby that signified the final stabilization of their oscillating reality.

5.3.3.3 Bringing home the baby

For several fathers the transition to fully realising that they were now a parent did not take place until they were able to bring their new born into their home. Sam described this time of being alone with his family as being a “reality slap”. For Craig the time of bringing his son home was significant as it represented the moment he and his partner had to take control, away from the around the clock guidance of the midwives at the hospital;

“that’s when it all kicks in and you have to sort yourself out, reality”

Bringing the baby home into their own domain which they had previously only shared with their partner was particularly significant as it brought with it a feeling that there was no longer any possibility of denying the reality that they were fathers, as Alan explained;

“this is it, it’s real, he’s our son and now we have to look after him and bring him up right”

With this new sense of reality following the bringing home of their baby came the belief that not only was their baby very real, but also that the baby had been present in their lives for much longer than they actually had. As Sam described in the opening line of his interview;

“well it seems as though Jessica has been a part of my life for a long time now...I don’t remember my life without her”

5.3.3.4 Feet placed firmly in reality

It is important to note that for a couple of fathers; Mark and Jack, their new position did not have the sense of moving back and forth between reality and unreality, but in contrast there was a sense of acceptance and being engaged in the reality of the pregnancy throughout. I did not directly ask the fathers whether the pregnancy had been planned, although this was something that several of them mentioned. This was particularly significant for Mark, as he discussed the experience of planning to become a father. The experience of becoming a father is one which he described as;

“two, two and a half years of me getting my head around it”

For Mark the experience of becoming a father was one that he had invested a large amount of time considering before undertaking, in order to be sure that having a baby was the right choice for him. This lead to him feeling prepared and accepting when the pregnancy became real.

5.3.4 - The Intimate Relationship With The Baby

The relationship which was talked about in detail within the interviews was that of the father and their newborn. Within the previously discussed “Oscillating Reality” essence it is apparent that for several of the fathers the moment of the child entering the world from their mother’s womb, and the bringing home of the baby were significant moments for the father. It was following a description of these that the development of the father/ child relationship was discussed within the interviews, with little or no mention being made about their relationship with their baby during the pregnancy. Once the baby was in the outside world the fathers were able to engage in a more definite and clearly defined way and this was the beginning of their intimate relationship with their child.

5.3.4.1 The Developing Relationship

For three of the fathers it was the moment of discovering the gender of their child for the first time at the moment of birth that they felt was their first

significant contact with their newborn. It is important to note that this was not because they had a desire for their child to be of a specific gender but rather that they felt that knowing the gender gave them a definite bond with the child, knowing whether they had a son or daughter.

However, the most frequently described moment in the fathers' accounts was the first time that they held their baby, or held their partner as she held the baby. The significance of this first moment of intimate contact was clear from the emotive ways in which it was described. For Jack holding his daughter was described as "*very special*" and for Carl;

"But yeah, that's got to go down as one of the best moments of my life ever, the first few moments of us sat there".

Robert recalled the first time he held his child as being significant with regards to their ongoing relationship as he explained how close he felt to her straight away and that this immediate closeness led to a sense of him always being with her and being close, even when he could not actually be with her;

"it's like always being with her right from the start, that was really special...you know, it felt really good, because she relaxed in my arms...even to this day you know, when she's crying, if I take her she relaxes a bit"

The development of this intimate relationship seemed to continue throughout the weeks after the birth, and was essential to the father's descriptions of themselves as fathers. Moments of contact with the baby were considered as being particularly special. For those fathers whose partners expressed breast milk, giving this by bottle was described as being a time of forming and strengthening a bond between father and child. This is in contrast to the sense of helplessness expressed by some fathers when they realised they could not tend to their babies' feeding needs if they were being breastfed. For others bath time, and simply being able to hold their child were important

“to be honest I did love every moment I spent with her. Bath time had to be my favourite”

[Jack]

Jack went on to explain how these moments he spent with his daughter are ones he would look back on fondly when his daughter was older. Richard described how, for several weeks after the birth, he would find himself just standing and staring at his daughter, unaware of anything else around him;

“it's lovely to just look at her”

Several fathers described how they felt that their relationship with their newborn was becoming closer as the baby grew older and was able to smile at them, or focus their eyes on their faces. Craig explains that interactions

such as smiles helped to reassure him that he was doing a good job as a father, that his son was happy and content.

5.3.4.2 Obstacles to Intimacy

Although the forming of the intimate relationship with the baby was spoken about in a positive way by most fathers, Richard and Mark did feel that certain factors were affecting, or had previously affected the forming of their relationship with their children. For Richard it was the sense that his commitment to his job were preventing him from being able to spend as much time with his daughter as he would have liked. This was a particular problem for Richard as he felt that he did not know how to play with her and was not able to learn how to interact with his child as quickly as he wanted. This was in strong contrast to the amount of time his partner had with their daughter;

“I’m obviously never going to have the same experience as Amy because I just don’t have the time”

For one father, Mark, medical complications that arose during his partner’s labour had led to him feeling that his first moments of his relationship with his daughter had been taken away. The hospital staff had to perform an emergency caesarean and this led to his partner being taken into an operating theatre and him being left alone outside. Unfortunately, without knowing

how his partner Sarah was, Mark found that he was not able to engage with his baby when they first brought her out to see him

“it sounds a horrible thing to say but I just wasn’t interested...I was like I’m not at all interested, how’s Sarah”

Mark expressed that he was unsure of whether this initial experience has affected his ability to form a close relationship with his daughter but did explain that it was about three or four weeks before he managed to bond with her properly, in contrast with the immediate sense of closeness described by those fathers who were given their newborns to hold shortly after a labour without such trauma. It is particularly important to consider Mark’s experience in contrast with that of Sam, whose partner also had an emergency caesarean section, and yet still felt included in the process and was able to be with his partner and hold his baby soon after.

5.3.4.3 A Relationship of Reciprocity

Although much of the description of the intimate relationship involved the fathers’ descriptions of their interactions with the baby, it is important to note that there was also a sense of the baby having a positive influence in return. Sam described the feelings of stress he used to suffer from when returning from work, but explained that now when he came home and saw his daughter smile there was no longer any feeling of stress. Richard also felt that

returning home from work had been a different experience since his daughter came into his life;

“I go to work, and I come back and now she’s smiling and everything. It is really rewarding”

Richard also described the positive effect he felt his daughter had on his motivation, providing him with a reason to do things, for example certain types of physical exercise in order to keep fit, which he otherwise might not have done.

For Robert the change his daughter had created in him was that she had given him a legitimate reason to express his “*free child*”, meaning that he felt more able to sing and laugh, and that his sense of humour had increased. Robert considered these changes to be positive and had enjoyed the effect his daughter had on him.

5.3.5 - The New Me

The experience of becoming a father for the first time brought with it many changes and a sense of newness for all of the fathers interviewed. This concept of the ‘new’ was threaded throughout all of the accounts and is present within all of the constituents. The changes experienced by each father varied, as did the ways in which these changes manifested themselves in

their lives. However, there was a definite sense that regardless of what these changes might be these men had now adopted new roles, a new title and the sense of a new identity, that of the father.

5.3.5.1 The New “Practical” Me

The new role as a father brought with it changes in the daily routine of the fathers, with factors such as helping with childcare and getting less sleep being mentioned as examples.

For Craig it was the practical changes in his life which were discussed. Craig felt that his role as father was to ensure that the facilities were there for the baby before the birth, and that they had all the equipment that they would need. He believed that making these practical changes helped “*put us in the right frame of mind*”.

Time management was an important practical change for Robert and due to a belief that he was previously “*spreading myself a little thin*” he consciously altered his social network to allow more time with his family. Robert explained how he did this by reducing the amount of time he spends with friends and no longer seeing all of the friends that he used to socialise with.

Parenthood brought with it changes in the finances of the fathers, leading to changes in lifestyle, with Mark naming a big change in his daily life as being;

“I’ve got less money.. so yeah, it’s all practical stuff”

For Mark, this change in finances has led to him feeling he needs to make sacrifices he otherwise wouldn’t, including the selling of his *“beloved car”*.

5.3.5.2 The New Attitudes

Becoming a father led to a wide range of new attitudes, directed at both themselves and their family, and the world around them, as Carl explained;

“having Anna has kind of changed how I look at pretty much everything in my life”

For three of the fathers interviewed fatherhood had brought with it a change in how they perceived themselves, with Robert explaining that he felt he now had more respect for himself and a desire to become healthy and physically fit. In relation to this increased self-respect, Richard explained that his new fitness regime was due to the fact that;

“I don’t want to be the lazy dad, I want to be cool and fun”

Changes in the fathers' attitudes towards work, or their employment outside of the home, occurred in several of the accounts. For Alan a previous employment history of "*floating*" between jobs was no longer considered possible as work became seen as essential in providing for his family. For Richard the change in his working life was that he now worked harder during the day to ensure he was able to leave his office at five o'clock, meaning he had more time with his daughter in the evening. After he became a father, Carl realised that he was unsatisfied by his employment, and took steps to change this by seeking additional training so that he would be able to advance further at work.

There were changes in how the fathers viewed life in general, and what aspects of life were important. When discussing the areas of his life that used to be considered important, for example drinking alcohol with friends and buying designer label merchandise Alan explained;

"all the things that used to seem important...none of that means much now"

For Robert the changing perceptions had not only been regarding his own life and the people in it, but also related to a wider context. As well as a changed attitude towards women, with an increased respect for them, fatherhood had brought with it important changes to his perception of both sex and contraception as seeing his baby had led to a feeling that;

“before sex was more recreational, now it’s something else”

5.3.5.3 The New “Emotional” Me

Several of the fathers discussed the feelings of happiness their new role brought them. The feelings of joy at returning home from work to see their babies was frequently described, and Robert felt that emotionally, becoming a father had been *“a grounding experience”*, helping him to understand what was important in his life.

Although in general the perceived changes in emotions and mood were positive, Mark felt the effect new fatherhood had on him had been, in part, negative;

“it has affected my mood a lot, I’m, not as cheery as you might expect a new father to be”.

However, this was something Mark had become aware of, partly due to his partner expressing her feelings that his mood had changed, and he was working towards changing. For Mark the identification of elements of his character which he did not feel were appropriate for a father to have had been an important aspect of his experience, and was something he was very aware of.

5.3.5.4 The New Relationships

Although the fathers generally seemed to be reluctant to discuss their relationship with their partner a few did mention the changes parenthood had brought to it in a positive way. Respect was a theme which commonly emerged, with Mark explaining that after seeing his partner go through a difficult labour he had a “*huge, huge amount of respect for her*”. For Mark the experience he had seen his partner endure had led to him feeling closer to her;

“I love her more, especially with everything she went through with the baby”.

Robert also mentioned feelings of respect towards his wife, but also he felt there had been a change in the dynamics of their relationship now that they were no longer only a couple, although this was something he perceived to be very positive. This was also reflected by Jack, who at forty-five was the oldest father interviewed ,who explained that

“after twenty years together the dynamics of our lives just changed so dramatically. We weren’t a couple any more, we were a family”

The changing relationships were not solely that between the new parents. For Carl one relationship that had also changed was that between himself and his friends who already have children;

“I honestly used to like, blank out, when my mates started talking about their kids... Now I take part and want to listen”

For Richard the changing relationship that was mentioned was that between himself and his parents, with new fatherhood bringing with it a deeper understanding of their relationship;

“I said to my parents I understand how much you love me now”

5.3.5.5 The New Identity

For some fathers the new identity fatherhood brought was embraced, and for Alan was one which he felt he had always had;

“it feels like I’ve been a dad since forever”

This was a view shared by Sam who explains he can’t remember life without his daughter and by Robert, who explained that he has now forgotten *“what it is like not to be a dad”*. This was in contrast to his initial feelings of loss at

saying goodbye to his “*bachelor days*” when discovering he was going to be a father, also mentioned within the interview.

This new identity brought with it membership of a new and exclusive club, one of which only fathers could be members due to the nature of understanding required, as Richard explained;

“It’s like you’ve joined this club where you can talk about these things”

The “*things*” mentioned here were the daily experiences of fathers and issues surrounding childcare.

For the fathers interviewed the “new me” was a new identity which was present in, or had an effect upon almost every aspect of their lives. The new understandings, attitudes, emotions and concerns this identity brought with it provided a membership card to the fatherhood club and the fathers believed the only way to truly access this club was to experience this transition.

6.0 Discussion of research findings

6.1 Introduction

The analysis of the interviews elicited some rich and evocative descriptions of what it was like to become a father for the first time. The general structure provides a unique insight into the journey the fathers had undertaken and how they coped with their transition into their new role. The emphasis of this research was to provide an in-depth phenomenological insight into the experiences of fathers, and thus necessarily a small number of them.

However, it is through examining the findings of my analysis and comparing them with those of other research concerning the subject of fatherhood that some interesting similarities and differences can be found, suggesting the wider implications this research may have.

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6.2 An introduction to the “new father”

In the Background Literature chapter I gave an overview of the concepts surrounding the relationship between social change and the role of fatherhood. A term often applied to fatherhood in the late twentieth and early twenty first century is that of the “new father” (Gillis, 2000; Brandth & Kvande, 1998). This newness is not a reference to the individual man’s experience of moving into the experiential world of parenthood for the first

time, but rather is linked to the concept of the 'new man', a new type of father who exhibits different characteristics and undertakes tasks different than those identified with fathers of past eras. Research examining the subject of fatherhood has tended to concentrate on defining the role of the father. However, the definitions provided are often contradictory. In a detailed historical overview of how the perceptions of fatherhood have changed, referring as far back as the fourteenth century, Gillis (2000) refers to the 1950s and 1960s as being the dawn of 'New Fatherhood' (p231), with the definition being of a man who is expected to marry and embrace domesticity. However, he also describes how during this time there was still a very gendered division of labour, with the home being the domain of the mother. There appears to be no consensus regarding when the 'new father' emerged with any decade between 1950 and 1990 being cited (Gillis 2000, Cabrera et al 2000, Marsiglio et al 2000). Another view is that there is no new father if the definition used is that they take a more active role in housework. Lewis (2002) argues that research suggests there has been very little change in the amount of housework undertaken by fathers in the past thirty years. The confusion surrounding the role of the father may have led to the use of the label of the 'new father' with no deep understanding of who this man actually is. There are important exceptions, with some research opening the door into the life of the father and this will be discussed at a later stage within this chapter.

In his important text examining many different facets of fatherhood, Lewis (1986) explains two conflicting approaches to understanding 'new fatherhood'. The first, the *emergent perspective*, suggests that fathers are now becoming more involved in family life and the care of their child. This model of fatherhood raises questions regarding the level of involvement of fathers from a historical perspective, as it contains the underlying assumption that men were not particularly involved in childcare before the development of the 'new man'. Although there has been an increasing research in the field of fatherhood since the 1950's, the nature and focus of the research does not provide a clear representation of the level of involvement of fathers in their children's lives, it is therefore difficult to confidently state that fathers are now more involved. The second and contrasting model of fatherhood outlined by Lewis (1986) is that of the *differentiation perspective*, which contains within it a belief that the roles of mothers and fathers are increasingly divided, with clearly defined gender roles controlling the way in which fathers fulfil their parenting role. However, as Lewis (1986) explains, "the emergent and differentiation perspectives obscure our understanding of fatherhood, since neither provides us with a detailed account of the man's role in the family" (pg 9). I will discuss the role of the father further, with particular emphasis on the roles described by the fathers I interviewed. However, before doing this I feel it is important to suggest the adoption of a different perspective regarding the new father.

6.3 An individual sense of the ‘new’

Within the scope of the research I have undertaken I would like to suggest a different approach to understanding the ‘new father’. Rather than examining the new role of the father with regards to his role within society, a far greater understanding of how this role is experienced can be gained through discussing the newness fatherhood brings to each individual man. The interviews conducted with the fathers gave a rich and evocative insight into the areas of their lives in which they had experienced something new, including new emotions, relationships, daily tasks and attitudes. Within my General Structure I described the early experience of becoming a father for the first time as being an expedition, and it is the undertaking of this that leads the fathers to new and unknown places. The sense of the “new” underlies all of the constituents I identified and it is this newness, in relation to the experiences of the fathers I interviewed and those of fathers in other relevant research that I hope to examine further throughout this chapter.

6.3.1 The newness of fatherhood

The research of Finnbogadottir et al (2003) was mentioned briefly in the Background Literature chapter with regards to the belief that fatherhood is a time of transition. However, it is through examining the different areas of this transition that a clearer picture of the importance of newness in this

transition becomes clear. Through conducting the narrative interviews with the fathers Finnbogadottir et al (2003) identified important changes in the men's lives, with some noticeable similarities between the accounts of the fathers they interviewed and those interviewed within my research. Within both groups of fathers there were clear social and physical changes. In the study conducted by Finnbogadottir et al one father, who they named Freddy, explained that his social life had changed as he noticed that "my friends and I have drifted so incredibly apart from one another". This provides a striking similarity with an account given by Robert who I interviewed, who expressed a sense that he felt it necessary to make alterations within his social group after the birth of his baby;

"I mean I've dropped a lot of friends actually, you know I had to, I had to do a bit of culling" (Robert)

The importance of forming new social networks, with people in similar social situations is evident within my research, and will be discussed more in relation to its importance in providing support to new fathers. However, the changing social relationships were evident in the work of Finnbogadottir et al, with some fathers believing the antenatal classes they were attending at the time were helpful in providing them with the new social network they desired. Interviewed from a postnatal perspective, several fathers in my research discussed the new social networks they had developed, but with only one, Robert, referring back to the antenatal classes as a useful source of

social support. Rather, the emphasis from a postnatal perspective was placed on the new level of friendship they now had with men who were also fathers, who they had been friends with before the pregnancy began, but felt a greater bond with now that they were also fathers. New fatherhood can therefore be seen to lead to a change in the social life of the fathers, creating both divides and bonds with friends old and new.

Another area of newness identified by Finnbogadottir et al (2003) was the physical change experienced by three of the fathers interviewed, and involved an embodied sense of being “pregnant” themselves (pg 101), with one symptom of this being weight gain. This can also be linked to the concept of the couvade syndrome, as mentioned in the background literature chapter and the physical changes it can lead to in men. No such physical change was described by the fathers within my study. As outlined in the constituent “the New Me”, the physical changes described were in relation to them seeking to become fitter after the birth of their child, and were linked to the psychological desire to be the best father they could be;

“I don’t want to be the lazy dad, I want to be cool and fun” (Richard)

This attitude was also exhibited in the Swedish men (Finnbogadottir et al, 2003), with the researchers believing this was linked to a sense of responsibility. The only father who described any physical symptom was

Richard who suffered a migraine during the birth, although this is something he believes was caused by the stressful nature of the situation.

Not mentioned in the Swedish study was the sense of wanting to ensure that their physical world was changed in preparation for their baby. This desire of wanting to provide all the equipment needed by the newborn was most evident in Craig's experience, and was an area which he repeatedly returned to when discussing his experience.

6.3.2 The transition of the new father

In the 'Literature Review' chapter I discussed the theory regarding fatherhood as a time of transition. The concept of new fatherhood being a transition is one which Draper (2003) examined, with a belief that ritual transition theory could be applied to contemporary fatherhood to explain the experience. The question of whether anthropological theories from over a century ago can be relevant in explaining the experience of fathers today is an interesting one and it does appear that the theories discussed within Draper's work do resonate with the experiences described by the fathers in my study. The three stages of transition described in the 'Literature Review' section were separation, transition (limen) and incorporation (Draper 2003). Applying these stages to the fathers I interviewed the separation phase was "characterised by removal of the individual from his normal social life" (Draper, pg. 67). As discussed, a significant social change occurred in the

fathers interviewed, with the distancing of themselves from the social activities they once took part in and the adoption of new activities. For example Alan described how his previous social activity of drinking alcohol with friends was no longer important to him as “none of that means much now”. The transition, or liminal phase was also evident, being characterised as being a stage where the person feels that they are in-between social statuses. This can be seen in the “no-man’s land” described by several of the fathers in the research as relating to their time during the pregnancy when they knew their partner was pregnant but could not fully absorb the reality that they were going to be fathers;

“I’m not sure it really sunk in, you know? Not until the day David was born”

(Alan)

The incorporation stage can be seen to be the point at which the fathers began fulfilling their new role, taking on the new tasks of childcare or the new responsibilities they felt, for example, increased participation in the workplace in order to provide for their families financially. The transitional aspects of the experience of becoming a father for the first time brought with them difficulties for several of the fathers I interviewed. The potential importance of providing support to fathers during this transition will be discussed further with regards to the implications for practice, but first it is important to consider the areas of newness this transition can bring with it.

6.3.3 A new functional status?

When reading the literature surrounding fatherhood another important area of change which is often addressed is the practical changes fatherhood had brought into the fathers' lives in relation to the new tasks they were undertaking, especially within the areas of housework and childcare.

However, difficulty exists in determining the level of work fathers are carrying out in the home, and a specific measure has been developed in order to assist in deepening our understanding. The Inventory of Functional Status – Fathers (IFS-F) was developed in order to measure the extent to which fathers change their involvement in a wide range of activities, both within the home and in the areas of social interaction and community activities (Tulman et al, 1993). The definition of this functional status as described by (Tulman et al 1993) is that it is a multidimensional process that requires from the fathers an integration of their new fatherhood role with their previous life activities. This concept of the fathers potentially having a redefined functional status has been considered in the research conducted by McVeigh et al (2002), using the IFS-F as a measure with over one hundred new fathers in Australia. It is important to note that this was including both men who were and who were not first time fathers. The IFS-F was completed by the fathers at six weeks postpartum. The conclusions drawn by McVeigh et al were that the fathers generally seemed to maintain the level of activity within the household and childcare (if they had previous children) that they had before the birth, with very few showing any significant increase in the level

of household tasks they undertook. However, the researchers acknowledged the limitations within their study with regards to the possible bias due to the recruitment strategy of only surveying fathers attending postnatal support services (including postnatal wards, early discharge programs and early childhood centres) in one geographic area. It is also important to note that within the results no differentiation was made between first time fathers and those who already had at least one infant. Interestingly, an inverse relationship was identified with relation to number of children and level of participation in childcare ($r = -.29$); the more children the fathers had, the less childcare they were involved in. Unfortunately, due to the nature of the quantitative research, it is impossible to understand why these differences existed.

Although the measures used vary, the predominantly quantitative nature of the research conducted within this area of fatherhood is very apparent.

However, the results of the research conducted within this area over the past twenty years are contradictory and inconclusive so that no firm conclusion can be drawn regarding the extent of the functional change within these men's lives. Although my research cannot provide the answers regarding the level of housework and childcare undertaken by fathers, the interviews conducted can afford an insight into how these eight fathers changed with regards to their functional status.

Childcare was a very dominant feature within the accounts of several of the fathers interviewed, with a sense of them feeling that in the early stages of

the postnatal period they were not able to be involved in childcare, as opposed to feeling that they were doing too much;

“I couldn’t do anything and I had to give her to my wife and it felt...I felt really, not useless, but you know, I felt as though I couldn’t console her [his daughter], which was awful really” (Sam)

For Sam in particular, his childcare duties were considered to be important and the first few weeks of the baby being breast fed were difficult due to a sense of not being able to contribute fully to the care of his child. Sam overcame this by finding other ways of interacting with his infant, and discussed his experience of both changing nappies and bathing his baby, believing that the more he was involved with childcare the more confident he became;

“The first time I changed a nappy it was a case of nappy to dummy, you know, please don’t cry...and after a week or two weeks it was tunnel vision, change the nappy, once you’ve done that she’ll stop crying.”

It is interesting to note that Sam was the only father who described asking the midwife to show him how to care for his baby, and in his case it was bathing her following the birth, and he was also the father who seemed to describe the childcare he undertook most explicitly within his interview. For the other fathers there were mentions of childcare activities, for example Richard

feeding his baby expressed milk, but there was a general sense that the fathers were doing more to prepare for their future role as a father and the activities that would entail, as opposed to being very involved with the care of their infant at the present.

For Mark a lack of involvement in childcare was due to a sense of being bemused, and when describing his interaction with his baby and partner following their return home he explained that:

“I just organised everything, and just left Sarah (wife) and Nicole (baby daughter) to do their thing”

The difference in the degree to which Sam and Mark were involved in childcare was very apparent when reading their descriptions. For Sam a desire to be involved existed from the first time he asked to be shown how to bathe his baby, contrasting with Mark’s experience of feeling unsure of what he should be doing, and therefore leaving the care of his baby to his partner. For Mark his functional change was more apparent with regards to his work, his function was principally now that of breadwinner. In order to better achieve this function Mark described how he would sleep downstairs, away from his wife and baby so that he was not tired due to interruptions during the night.

Research conducted by Henwood and Procter (2003) aimed to examine the beliefs of fathers regarding their roles, and did so by interviewing thirty first time fathers within the United Kingdom at three stages during their experience; once before the birth of their child and twice after (when their baby was between 2 and 4 months old and then between four and nine months old). The interviews were semi-structured and the analysis involved the “*development of sets of labels or codes*” (p. 342) designed to represent the answers given. The precise methodology is not detailed within the paper, making it difficult to understand exactly how the researchers identified their final schema. The fathers interviewed by Henwood and Procter (2003) appeared to embrace the opportunity for the involvement in their children’s lives that the role of the new father provided them with. This is very similar to the fathers that I interviewed, with none expressing any dislike for the idea that they should be involved in the life of their child in a caring and nurturing way.

The functional status of the fathers with regards to childcare did seem to vary greatly between each father interviewed, with each father’s experiences, attitudes and confidence affecting how much time they spent caring for their baby. It is important to report that only one father specifically mentioned housework. It is difficult to know whether this lack of discussion regarding how much housework they carried out was because they had not made any changes to the amount they were doing, or whether the changes they had

made were just not significant to them within the realms of their experience of becoming a father for the first time.

As mentioned, the important exception to this was Jack, whose partner was ill following the birth of their baby due to an emergency caesarean. Jack had previously been involved in a job he described as being high pressure, and it was this that his life had revolved around. However, following the birth of his baby his functional status completely changed and he believed that;

“I’m finding that I’m doing a lot of jobs that perhaps other new fathers aren’t having to do so much”

The changes in his life related to the amount of childcare he did, the time he spent doing housework and other related tasks, for example driving his wife and baby to all of their appointments. Although this adoption of a new role was “hard” for Jack he saw this in a positive way and believed that the situation had allowed him to be more “hands on” in the care of his daughter than he would have been otherwise, something he had enjoyed. Although little is known about the effect on fathers when their partners need extra time to recover physically following the birth, the stress experienced by fathers whose partners need to take antenatal bed rest due to health concerns has been examined within a study conducted by Maloni and Ponder (1997).

Although the situation surrounding the fathers in this research was very different to Jack’s experience, there are some important similarities regarding

the concerns the fathers exhibited. Fifty nine fathers (it is important to note that there is no indication as to how many of these were first time fathers) whose partners were taking bed rest antenatally completed questionnaires examining their concerns and the stresses placed upon them. The findings suggested that as well as concerns regarding the health of their unborn child and partner, the fathers also experienced concern regarding the adoption of multiple roles, including housework. Although for Jack his partner's period of incapacity came after the birth of their baby, the stresses this placed on him were similar to those of the fathers in the study by Maloni and Ponder. This change in functional status was one created through his feeling of having to be there to care for his partner, infant and home. It is also important to note that similar to the fathers in the research conducted by Maloni and Ponder (1997), Jack also sought out help and support from family and friends during this time and felt that it was this that helped him to be able to cope with the adoption of this new role.

Within the constituent "The New Me" many of the changes that occurred within these eight fathers' lives were discussed. However, it is with regards to the concept of this "functional status of fathers" that I believe the descriptions can best provide a rich insight into why conflicting evidence exists regarding the extent to which fathers contribute towards housework and childcare (Lewis, 2002). For every father his experience was very different, with some finding that they had the opportunity to spend more time caring for their child, with others lacking the confidence to ask what it was

they should be doing, or feeling that their new function was not that of child carer, but rather was that of breadwinner.

6.3.3.1 Conflicting functions?

The question of where the balance should lie between the role of carer and breadwinner was a particularly important for one father, Richard. The conflict that his adopted role of breadwinner caused was particularly noticeable, and was something he became increasingly aware of as he was talking during the interview I conducted. The financial circumstances within Richard's household had changed considerably as his wife had previously been the higher earner. Richard now felt the full weight of the financial responsibility, especially as his partner was considering not returning to work, although she had originally thought she would. The word responsibility was used by Richard many times throughout his interview, each time in relation to the financial responsibility he now felt to provide for his family. This sense of responsibility conflicted heavily with his desire to spend time with his daughter, and the differences between his experience and the experience of his partner, Amy, were mentioned;

"I'm obviously just never going to have the same experience as Amy because

I just don't have the time and it's going to take a lot longer"

The belief that it would take him a lot longer referred to the sense of being able to grow to understand and know his daughter. Richard gave the example of not knowing how to play with his daughter, and also not being able to recognise the meaning of her cries yet, believing both were because he did not have the time he needed with her to grow to understand these things;

“I really want to get to know her. I don’t have the time, you know...I leave the house at seven thirty and I get in at six if I’m lucky”

Importantly, Richard explains that this caused him tension not only because he wished to spend more time with his daughter, but also because he felt that this was expected of him, although he wasn’t sure what the source of this expectation was. He described how he felt a “*pressure*” from somewhere that told him that spending time getting to know his daughter was what he should be doing as a new father, as well as feeling a pressure to be the provider. This conflict of roles that Richard encountered highlights the difficult position fathers now face. Alan also explained that he was trying to find a “*balance*” between his family and work, but for fathers who are not able to do this, as in the experience of Richard, it is a particularly difficult conflict to solve. Henwood and Procter (2003) also identified this tension between paid employment and childcare within their interviews, highlighting the complexity of achieving a balance between work and home life, and the conflict this could lead to. As discussed in my review of the literature surrounding paternity and parental leave this issue is one that has received an

increasing amount of interest with regards to national policy. Improvements have been made with regards to the amount of support fathers receive in order to enable them to spend more time with their families. However, as suggested in the Equal Opportunities Report “Twenty-First Century Dad” (2006) further change may still be needed. The suggestion that fathers should be given greater freedom to spend more time with their infant, without fear of financial difficulties or discrimination by their employer may help fathers like Richard to resolve some of the conflict caused when balancing their home and work life.

The effects that this new functional status can have on the role identity of the men involved will be discussed in more detail in this chapter. However, before doing this it is important to examine the other areas of newness that have an impact on the identity of the new father.

6.3.4 The newness of the antenatal experience

The fathers’ sense of their new identity and role was particularly complicated during the pregnancy due to confusion surrounding the reality of the situation. Within the constituent of “Oscillating Reality” it was discussed that for several of the fathers there was a sense that the pregnancy was not real to them, or that they were not able to engage with it. This is similar to the sense of unreality experienced by three mothers in a study conducted by Kirkman (1997). As one mother, Anna, described; *“At the moment I just feel*

disbelief” (pg. 234). It could therefore be suggested that both parents struggle to accept the reality of the pregnancy.

It is important to examine why this lack of reality may exist and what barriers may exist, preventing fathers from feeling that they are able to become involved and engaged participants throughout the pregnancy.

An important insight into fathers’ experiences of the antenatal period with regards to engagement in pregnancy related activities such as antenatal appointments and antenatal classes was provided by Singh and Newburn (2000) in a study published by the National Childbirth Trust. As briefly discussed in the ‘Literature Review’ chapter of this thesis, one of the main aims of this research was to provide an understanding as to what extent men were able to gain access to information about the experience of becoming a father, and what support they were provided with during this time. To achieve this questionnaires containing both open and closed-ended questions relating to fathers’ access to information and support were posted to pregnant women, with the hope that they would be passed to fathers interested in participating in the research. The results presented in the research have been obtained from analysis of questionnaires returned by eight hundred and seventeen fathers (sixty one per cent of whom were first time fathers). As mentioned in the ‘Literature Review’ chapter it is important to consider the sample of fathers used within this research as they were recruited through the National Childbirth Trust, possibly effecting the results.

The presentation of the results is predominantly quantitative, with the use of qualitative data given by the fathers to illustrate their views and opinions.

Unfortunately the research offers no deep insights into the experiences of the fathers. However, important similarities and differences can be found between the findings of this research and the accounts of the fathers within my research. It is through detailing some of these that I hope to provide a more embodied sense of the fathers' antenatal experience. For the fathers surveyed by Singh and Newburn it was the first time fathers who reported the greatest sense of being involved completely or 'quite a lot' in their partners' pregnancy and pregnancy care, however one third of all the participating fathers believed that they would have liked to have been more involved. Unfortunately it is not possible to determine the differences between new and experienced fathers with regards to their desire to be involved as the data from both groups was combined. For the fathers I interviewed the level of involvement varied considerably, for example Carl expressed that he had always held a desire to be as involved as possible;

“I knew this was kind of a once in a life time thing I guess. I wasn't going to be a dad for the first time again... so I sort of embraced every experience I could I think?”

In contrast to this Jack felt that due to work commitments he was detached from the pregnancy, something which he regretted;

“I wasn’t really around much to take part in the pregnancy. I missed the scans and the classes and that kind of thing which I suppose I do regret now looking back on it”

Jack’s regret that he was not more involved with the pregnancy was something he believed he would always “carry with him”. It is also important to note that although Carl stated he tried to be involved this did not lessen the sense of the pregnancy and birth being unreal to him. No other fathers I interviewed expressed such a strong a sense of needing to be involved as Carl and Jack. However, it is important to note that no fathers expressed any sense of wishing they had not been involved with the pregnancy, or that they were not involved because they did not want to be, although for Craig, Alan, Richard and Mark very little mention was made of the pregnancy at all. It is important to consider why, when the interviews were conducted at a maximum of only twelve weeks after the birth, some men disregarded pregnancy, or only mentioned it briefly with regards to significant events such as the ultrasound scan. The opening question of the interviews could have been an important factor with regard to this. It seemed that when asked to describe their experience of becoming a father for the first time the fathers would often mention the antenatal experience briefly in their introductory description of their experience. However, when asked if they could say any more about this aspect of their experience the fathers would often return to

the sense of unreality they felt during the time. An important decision when determining the timeframe I should use when interviewing fathers was whether it would be valuable to conduct interviews from both an antenatal and postnatal perspective. It was decided this would not be possible due to practical constraints and that it was important to interview fathers during the postnatal period in order to achieve the aim of gaining an understanding of the early experience of fatherhood. However, an important consideration for future research would be whether interviews conducted during the antenatal period would illicit a more detailed description of this period than interviews conducted postnatally, or whether this sense of detachment would still be prevalent within the fathers' accounts.

Work commitments were an obvious factor affecting the fathers' involvement with their partner's pregnancy, and within my research were particularly significant to Jack who felt he had not been able to be involved due to work commitments. However, other factors did affect how involved the fathers felt or the level of involvement they felt able to seek. One such factor was how the fathers felt they were treated by the health care professionals involved in the pregnancy. For the fathers surveyed by Singh and Newburn (2000) there were contrasting opinions with regards to the level of care they received personally from healthcare practitioners. The comments varied from one father believing the midwife had been "*amazing*" and that "*we both feel totally at ease with her*" to one father who believed that the midwife had "*completely closed me out*" (pg. 10). For Richard the latter feeling of being excluded from certain pregnancy related activities was

prevalent, with a sense that as he had “*done my bit*” with regards to the conception of the baby there had been nothing else for him to do until the actual birth, despite wanting to be involved. As indicated earlier, he felt that his exclusion was partly the result of work commitments preventing him from attending appointments. However, there was also a sense of exclusion by the health care professionals he encountered when he was able to attend appointments. Richard explained that of all the midwives he met with during the pregnancy only one referred to him by name, or spoke to him directly. The treatment by the other midwives he had met at antenatal scans had left him feeling like he was;

“..just an appendage, I might as well have been a bag, as opposed to a person who’s got something vested in what’s going on”

However, when asked to describe his experience further Richard was clear in stating that although he felt excluded he did accept this to a degree as he felt that his role was now simply one of supporting his partner, and that full attention should be given to her. No other fathers I interviewed discussed their antenatal experiences with midwives, although for a couple of fathers the feeling that this was their partner’s time, not theirs and that their partner should be the one receiving all the attention was prevalent. This may suggest that perhaps the fathers were inclined to take a step back from the pregnancy, not feeling that it was appropriate for them to be involved at this stage. The concept of the fathers’ antenatal role being that of supporter resonates with

the findings of Locock and Alexander (2006) who found that during the process of fetal screening the fathers' "impulse to support and protect featured strongly in their own accounts and indirect accounts by women" (p. 1354). Smith (1999) also identifies the antenatal role of supporter for fathers attendance at antenatal classes. Smith suggests that the fathers who attend do so to support their partner rather than expecting to gain anything themselves.

6.3.4.1 The role of the antenatal class

The importance of antenatal classes in fatherhood education and preparation is becoming increasingly recognised, and this is reflected in the growing amount of research in this area. However, within the study by Singh and Newburn fifty seven per cent of the fathers were not intending to attend any, and within my research only two brief (and yet important) mentions were made by two of the fathers. Sam felt that the antenatal classes he attended had helped him to understand the practical aspects of the pregnancy and birth, but he still felt that he was not prepared for his impending new role;

"mentally we knew exactly what was going to happen but physically and mentally together...well that's something completely different"

However, the antenatal classes did play an important role for Sam as they provided him with the understanding of the procedures involved in his partners' emergency caesarean. Another father who mentioned attending an

antenatal class was Robert, who described the one father's group that was organised as part of an antenatal classes (run by the National Health Service), in which the mothers and fathers were separated into two groups as being;

“great, that was very supportive because I met other dads for the first time”.

Robert expressed a wish that there had been more groups for men only at both the antenatal and postnatal stages as it was an opportunity for him to express his thoughts about becoming a father, providing him with a way of openly engaging in his new role. The positive influence that antenatal classes can have in helping fathers adjust was highlighted in a study of eighteen fathers attending classes who were interviewed about their experiences (Smith 1999). The value placed upon the classes was one of sharing, it was a “chance to set aside formal time in the midst of a busy life to think about the baby together” (p. 463). Smith explained how the classes were a way of helping reduce the feelings of detachment from the pregnancy, similar feelings to those which several of the fathers I interviewed described. Those fathers I interviewed who clearly expressed this detachment made no mention regarding having attended antenatal classes. Unfortunately, it is not possible to know if this was because they had not attended, or if they had attended and had not found the class to be particularly helpful in reducing the feeling of detachment.

6.3.4.2 Seeking Information from Literature

The final way that the fathers discussed becoming involved during the pregnancy was through reading. They read a variety of texts, both produced by health organisations and also lay literature or self-help guides. For Mark the process of reading ensured that he had initially felt prepared for the birth (although subsequent complications during the birth resulted in him feeling very unprepared). Postnatally Mark described just feeling “*bemused*” all the time, suggesting that perhaps the literature had not prepared him for the post-natal period. However, irrespective of how ill prepared they found themselves to be postnatally, for several fathers, including Mark, reading was still considered to be very important as a way to become involved and knowledgeable about the pregnancy and beyond. In the research discussed previously, conducted by Lewis (1986), the fathers interviewed had felt themselves to be alienated by the parenting literature, and had felt that it had not been written for them, but instead had been written for the mothers. The research of Sunderland (2000), as mentioned in the ‘Literature Review’ chapter, also criticised fatherhood literature, suggesting that it contains negative discourses regarding the role and ability of fathers. These criticisms were not expressed by the fathers I interviewed, who appeared to have carefully researched the literature available and found material that they felt was suitable to them as individuals. One father in particular had been so impressed by the book he had read during his partner’s pregnancy that at the conclusion of the interview he left the room to find the book so he could

show it to me to illustrate the aspects he had found particularly helpful due to their style and content.

Although the fathers considered reading to be a useful tool for engaging with the pregnancy there was still a sense of it not helping them to fully prepare for their impending role;

“I’d read the books, I knew what to do if he had a fever, that kind of thing, but the rest of it was a mystery to me” (Alan)

The reading of books therefore appeared to provide the fathers with the knowledge they sought regarding the practical aspects of birth and beyond. However, it did not provide them with the deeper understanding of the emotional aspects of fatherhood, a comprehension of which might help them to better engage with the pregnancy and their impending role.

When beginning the preparation for this research study one of the first steps into the world of fathers I took was to visit several of the websites that had been designed to provide information for fathers. I found websites such as www.fathersdirect.com to be a valuable resource in gaining a better understanding of the issues fathers are currently facing. I also found several websites that had been created by fathers and were used as a journal of their fathering experiences. I wondered at the time how many fathers knew about this resource and used it. In a conversation with Robert after the completion

of his interview, he indicated that he would have appreciated having access to a website that would provide him with information on fatherhood and I passed on the details of some of the sites I had found. This suggests that websites could be a valuable resource for fathers, but that at present they may not be aware that this resource is there. This is an issue I will address further in the concluding chapter of the thesis.

The antenatal period therefore appeared to be one of strange detachment from reality for the fathers I interviewed. The new challenges it presented, such as antenatal classes or attending ultrasound scans, appeared to be managed successfully with no emotional distress. However, the sense of being detached from the reality of the pregnancy was perhaps the most significant factor here. It was this oscillating reality which could lead to the sense of shock at a later stage in the experience of the fathers. When examining the literature surrounding supporting fathers in the 'Literature Review' chapter the clear emphasis was placed upon involving the fathers in any way possible (Beardshaw 2001, Schott 2002) and producing parenting literature which focuses upon the father's experiences as well as the mothers (Sunderland 2000). These concepts of involvement and a central focus may help some fathers to manage these feelings of detachment. Facilitating the fathers to be able to become more involved with the pregnancy and to engage with the reality of their impending fatherhood at an earlier stage might help to alleviate some of the shock surrounding perhaps one of the most important and potentially emotionally stressful aspects of the experience, the birth.

6.3.5 The father and the birth

The birth played a significant role in the experience of the fathers I interviewed. The importance of the birth can be seen clearly within four of the five constituents identified through my analysis. Within the constituent of “Travelling into the great unknown” the birth signified a great chasm of previously unexplored territory for the men and was described by the fathers themselves as being “*the great unknown*” and “*unknown territory*”. “The tower of strength” that the fathers formed for their partner in the constituent of the same name was put under particular pressure during the birth of their child, the fathers feeling that they needed to be able to support their partners, and in some cases feeling that they themselves were not provided with equal levels of support during this confusing and sometimes frightening experience. This was similar to the findings of Somers-Smith (1999) who also discovered that the fathers would often successfully support their partner through labour but would find the experience to be particularly stressful. Within the “Oscillating Reality” the birth acted as a moment of reality. The arrival of the baby into the physical world of the fathers was a significant moment and although for some it did not provide the final moment of acceptance of the reality of their new role, it did allow the fathers to have the first contact with their baby through touch. This moment was a particularly important and memorable moment for all fathers in the forming of their “intimate relationship” with their newborn. The birth represented an important moment in the journey of the fathers into their new role. The

experience itself was one of total and complete newness. Regardless of the preparation they felt they had undertaken antenatally, the fathers described how the birth had provided them with experiences, emotions and fears that they had no previous experience of.

The significance of the birth for the fathers was threaded throughout their stories. Its importance was not linked solely to their role of supporter but rather the birth represented a moment of change in the lives of the men. The emotional and physical impact the birth had on the fathers raises questions regarding what the role of the father should be during the birth, and perhaps more importantly, how he can best be supported through this.

A literature review conducted by Draper (1997) highlighted the changing attitudes towards fathers' attendance at the birth of their child. The belief that birth was "women's business" (pg. 133) has now been largely dismissed within Western culture, and instead paternal attendance at the birth has taken on a more normative status. However Draper also highlights an important alternative view to this when she mentions the work of Michel Odent (1984), who has suggested that "*Men may actually interfere with the labouring process and inhibit the labouring woman*" (Draper 1997 pg.135).

Although this discussion of the benefits of father attendance is ongoing, it is not only permitted but is also often expected that the father will attend, especially by the pregnant partner. The impact of this attendance on the

fathers is an important consideration, particularly with relation to the emotional impact the experience may have. Vehvilainen-Julkunen and Liukkonen (1998) administered questionnaires to 107 Finnish fathers who had been present at the birth of their baby in order to understand how these fathers had experienced it. It is important to note that almost half of these fathers were first time fathers ($n=47$), and almost all had said that it was their own decision to be present at the birth ($n=103$), as opposed to feeling forced into attendance by an external influence (for example partners or health care professionals). The quantitative analysis identified that feelings of discomfort were significantly more likely to occur in first time fathers under the age of thirty two ($p=0.033$) first time fathers were also more likely to feel uncomfortable than men who had already had children ($p=0.003$). Feelings of fear, anxiety and helplessness were identified, although approximately half of the fathers, ($n=54$), claimed they felt no anxiety. A sense of pleasure and pride was also identified by the fathers, thus highlighting the conflicting emotions encountered by the men.

The quantitative nature of this research does not help develop an understanding of why these conflicting emotions existed, or why it may have been that some fathers reported high levels of anxiety and some none at all. However, when discussing some of the answers to the open-ended questions within the questionnaire the researchers did highlight some important issues. When asked what the hardest aspect of the birth had been for them many fathers identified seeing their partner in pain. Other common concerns were

the welfare of their baby and feeling helpless and fearful. When explaining the answers given to the question as to what the fathers thought the best thing they had experienced was, the researchers simply state that the majority of the answers “had to do with the baby” (pg17). However, no detail is given as to what these things were and it is here perhaps that the findings of my research can provide an insight.

For all of the fathers I interviewed the birthing experience was very different and was described in very different ways. In relation to Vehvilainen-Julkunen and Liukkonen’s finding (1998) that the fathers experienced both positive and negative feelings towards the birth, Carl described these feelings in more detail. When initially describing the birth he explained that it was;

“the most amazing experience of my life. It sounds corny, but wow it was”

In contrast to this positive description, when asked to talk about the birth more, Carl recalled feeling “*helpless*” and that he should have been “*doing more*”. This sense of helplessness may be linked to the discomfort described by the Finnish fathers. However, for Carl it was his partner’s reassurance since the birth that he had been as supportive as he could have been that had lessened the concerns and provided him with a “*boost*”, suggesting this had improved his feelings of self-confidence with regards to how he performed his role during the birth. It is difficult to know whether positive perceptions of birth were linked to the fathers’ sense of achievement regarding how

supportive they had been, but this was an issue identified by two more fathers. For Craig the birth was a time of feeling “*hopeless*”, but in contrast to Carl this feeling had not been alleviated with time, as he recalled;

“I just felt hopeless. Er, just trying to comfort Emily in a way. I know sometimes she got a bit annoyed with me and pushed me away and then I came back and apologised, you know”

As this quote illustrates, for Craig the experience of the labour was not a positive one, and instead was full of concerns for his partner, how much pain she was in, and how he could best help her with this - something he believed he had failed to do. However, there was one important similarity with Carl’s experience as Craig also describes the actual birth as being “*amazing*”. For these fathers the anxiety during the labour was put to one side, with the overwhelming sense of amazement once their child had been born being the more important emotion. This is likely to be linked to the sense of “pleasure and pride” reported by the fathers in Vehvilainen-Julkunen and Liukkonen’s research.

However, it would seem that for Craig the positive feelings he felt did not help lessen his memory of the initial feeling of hopelessness.

This sense of happiness at the birth was present for six of the eight fathers I interviewed, and for those fathers who did experience this elation at the birth it was still the most emotionally evocative part of their descriptions. The

impact the birth had on them was clear, with the moment of first seeing their child being considered as perhaps the most significant aspect of their experience leading up to the date of interview. In contrast to this Jack had not been present at the birth due to unforeseen circumstances as he was working several hours away from home at the time of his partner's labour. Although this was something he did "*feel bad about*" as he had intended to be there, he had tried to "*make up for that since*". This statement highlights the sense that it is now the fathers' duty to be present at birth, leading to feelings of guilt and a sense of needing to compensate for the absence should they not be there. However, for Jack the impact of not being present had not been entirely negative, and his account of seeing his baby for the first time was very similar to the other fathers;

"I'm pretty sure I welled up at that point, when they gave her to me to hold.

It was a very special moment"

It is Mark's account of his experience of the birth which can perhaps provide the greatest insight into the levels of stress and anxiety that can be experienced by fathers during this time. As has been described previously, complications during his partner's labour led to her being taken into theatre for an emergency caesarean and the effect that this had on Mark was very evident in his descriptions of becoming a father. Mark described his experience as follows;

“I was left outside with...nobody came and saw me, no staff, no nothing. So I thought Sarah was...” (made clicking sound and hand motion on throat to imply death)

Although Mark’s daughter was brought out for him to see he *“wasn’t interested”* as his concern was focused on whether his partner had survived. For Mark the emotionally positive moment of seeing his child for the first time was taken away. This raises important questions regarding the role of health professionals in supporting the father during the birth. Lavendar (1997) conducted research in which she examined the birthing experiences of a group of fathers through the use of questionnaires (n= 42) and interviews (n=6). Through examining how midwives can provide support to fathers Lavendar concluded that the emphasis should be placed on creating a “three-way team” (pg 95) in the time leading up to the birth, with all members of this team being involved in the decision making process. This three way team consisted of the mother, father and midwife. However, Mark’s experience highlighted that it was not only in the preparation for the birth that the father should be involved, and I would suggest that perhaps this three way team should be encouraged throughout the birth and in the time afterwards. Through having a staff member available to communicate to Mark what was happening with his partner and child the experience may have been very different, and his first meeting with his child the positive experience of other fathers. Mark felt that his experience had had a negative impact on his emotional experience of becoming a father and was something

that seemed almost to be an open wound that he had not been able to heal, although he had sought counselling. The emotional pain of that experience could have possibly been avoided through communication and this is something I will discuss further when considering the implications for practice raised by my research.

Lavendar (1997) identified a sense of “role conflict” amongst the fathers she interviewed. This conflict existed between the perception that the fathers should attend the birth and reluctance to do so, as one father explained; “There are so many people expecting you to be at the birth yet nobody really asks you if you want to be” (p.94). This conflict was particularly present for one father I interviewed;

“I mean for a long time I said I didn’t even want to be in the room, I didn’t want to be there at the birth”

(Richard)

However, for both fathers who expressed this view there was a sense that although they had initially been reluctant, this was due to a sense of fear about what to expect and with hindsight they were very glad that they had attended. Lavendar concluded that midwives should emphasise that fathers should only attend the birth if it is what both they and their partner wished. However, I would also suggest that it is important to ensure that the reluctance to attend is not due simply to the fear of the “unknown” and is

something that could be alleviated with information and support. Thus it might be possible to avoid a decision they might later regret.

For those fathers who do attend the birth an important consideration for all involved is what his role should be during this experience, and how he can best be supported in adopting this role. The fathers I interviewed did express feelings of insecurity regarding how successfully they had performed their role during the birth. However, the role they felt they should have performed remains unclear, with the fathers feeling that no set definition or explanation had been given to them regarding what this role should be. Irrespective of this uncertainty it was still made obvious through the interviews that for several of the fathers this role formed a significant structural part of the tower of strength they were attempting to build for their partner. Research focusing on the paternal role during childbirth has also examined what the definition of that role is, and how the men, their partners and the healthcare professionals defined this role. In a grounded theory study of twenty couples interviewed at four weeks after the birth of their child, Chapman (1991) identified the differing roles adopted by the fathers and gave these roles the labels of 'coach, teammate and witness'. It is important to note that of the twenty fathers who were interviewed thirteen had previously attended a birth, suggesting that perhaps they were not first time fathers, or at least that they had previous experience to draw on, unlike the fathers I interviewed.

However, within the role categories Chapman identified there were similarities with the experiences of the fathers within my research. No fathers

I interviewed said anything that indicated that they could be described as having fulfilled the role of 'coach' as defined by Chapman. The 'coach' was described as being a father who took the lead in directing their partner through the labour and birth. Chapman uses the terms 'managers' and 'directors' to explain how these men viewed themselves. None of the fathers I interviewed expressed any sense of taking control during the birth, with the emphasis of control being placed upon their partners and the midwife. It is with Chapman's descriptions of the two remaining groups that the role described by the fathers I interviewed seem to resonate most. For the fathers interviewed by Chapman the largest role group was that of 'witness'. The fathers within this group were the providers of emotional and moral support, their participation being observation with little physical involvement. During my interview with Robert he expressed how he had desired to adopt this role of 'witness';

"I didn't want to be there at the birth. But actually I did really, I guess I was just a bit wary of it all, I didn't want to be down the business end, you know"

For the fathers interviewed by Chapman who were a 'witness' it appeared to be their physical presence, rather than any actual tasks they might perform that they felt provided the support. The final group identified by Chapman (1991) was that of 'teammate', with the fathers responding to their partners' physical and emotional needs when asked to do so by their partners and healthcare professionals. For Robert there was a definite sense that he felt

happy that he had been able to have tangible tasks to perform, including providing his partner with “gas and air” when she needed it. The sense of the mother, father and midwife forming a team, supporting each other through the birth was also described by Robert as being a positive aspect of his birthing experience;

“...we were all comfortable together, because we were a team, you know”

It is important to note that for Robert a staffing change towards the end of the labour led to what he perceived to be a negative change in the “*dynamic*” of the birthing team. For Robert the change in midwife led to him feeling that they were no longer a team, as the bond he had built with the first midwife was no longer present, something he clearly felt angry about. This refers to the idea of having the “three-way team” as mentioned by Lavendar (1997). Robert spoke very positively about the team he had created with his wife and midwife and it is important to consider the effect that changing a very important member of the team, the midwife, can have on both parents.

However, in general I do not feel that it is appropriate to classify the fathers I interviewed as being ‘witnesses’ or ‘teammates’. A blurring of roles existed, with many factors influencing how involved they were within the labour and some fathers appearing to be a ‘witness’ at some stages and a ‘teammate’ at others. For those fathers whose partners experienced complications during the labour and had a caesarean birth the decision as to the type of role they

would take was not theirs, even if they had previously planned to be very involved. As previously discussed, for Mark this led to him having no birthing role as the seriousness of the situation meant that he could not be present. His role was, instead, one of waiting outside the operating theatre. For Sam there was a shift in roles, but one which still allowed him to be involved. Sam transferred from Chapman's 'teammate' to being a 'witness' as he obviously could not participate in the caesarean in any way, and instead;

"I got put in a place and told not to move, next to Natalie's head, and you know, we talked to each other the best we could"

For those fathers who did need to change role there was an acceptance that it was understandable and in the best interest of everyone concerned. This acceptance seemed to be strongly linked to the sense of control the fathers felt over their role in the birth process in comparison to the control they perceived their partner and the midwife to have. They felt as if their labouring partner and midwife were the only active participants, and that they should therefore have control over any decisions. The fathers explained feeling that they were present as supporters, not active participants, and did not feel it was appropriate to be as involved in any decisions. For Craig this lack of control was very different to the approach he adopted in every day life, and was therefore particularly difficult for him;

“normally, you know, I like to play a role, I like to get involved...and I was in a situation where you’ve just got to wait and be patient”

For Carl the perceived lack of control over his partner’s well being was also difficult, although he found that accepting that she was being cared for by professionals helped lessen his anxiety at this situation.

Within all of the interviews I conducted, and clearly within all of the roles adopted by the fathers in Chapman’s (1991) research, it would seem that the overall theme of any role the fathers develop is that of support. They felt a need to support their partners, to be that tower of strength, and it is the need to fulfil this, that influences the role they adopt, and can also be the cause of negative emotions for some fathers if they feel they have failed in it. The importance of this role was highlighted by Somers-Smith (1999) in her research using semi-structured interviews with eight couples before and after the birth of their child. The parents interviewed all expressed a desire to have the fathers present at the birth to provide support. Somers-Smith found that the fathers expressed a sense of confusion regarding their role, with one of the fathers explaining how he felt that during the birth he would be “completely shooting in the dark” (pg104). Other stresses affecting the support role included concerns regarding the well-being of their partner and any complications that might arise during the birth. All of these stresses were expressed by the fathers I interviewed, and perhaps were more evident due to the complicated nature of several of the births in contrast to the fathers

interviewed by Somers-Smith, whose partners had all had a vaginal delivery and had not had a prolonged labour. It should be noted that this was coincidental as the parents were recruited antenatally. As discussed previously, for Craig there was a definite sense that he was unsure of his role during the birth, leading to feelings of being “*hopeless*”. Carl frequently mentioned a sense of panic when describing the labour and birth and when asked to talk about this more he explained that the panic had been due to a fear that;

“I’m not going to know what the hell to do during the birth, or that I’m going to do something seriously wrong”

Carl’s fear that he would do something wrong suggested that he was unsure of how to perform the support role he felt he needed to perform during the birth. Fear of ‘doing something wrong’ was present in several of the interviews I conducted and was generally a cause of much stress for the fathers. A quote from Richard highlights this. However he had not been fearful of being unable to do enough for his partner like some fathers, but instead was almost concerned he might do too much;

“sometimes you can do the wrong thing, rub when they don’t want to be rubbed, or talk when they don’t want to be talked to”

These concerns highlight a conflict that occurs for fathers when attempting to be a tower of strength for their partner during the birth. The fathers feel a need to support their partner in any way they can and yet do not know exactly how to do this, leading to feelings of stress, confusion or panic. The partner they would usually turn to for support themselves is no longer able to perform that function, leaving the men feeling that they have no support themselves. The stress of this experience led to one father I interviewed, Richard, getting a migraine during the birth, something which he exhibited some embarrassment about, especially when he recollected the physical pain his partner was experiencing at the time.

When examining how to best provide fathers with the support they need during this time it is also important to take into account the different factors that can significantly effect their performance of this role. Chapman (1991) emphasises the importance of understanding the relationship between the mother and father as this will heavily influence what role the father can perform to best support the mother and to cause the least amount of stress possible for him. Both Chapman (1991) and Somers-Smith (1999) interviewed the mothers as well as the fathers, providing an understanding of their experience of their partner's support. Due to the decision to focus my research on the experience of the fathers, and to listen to their words only I did not interview any of the mothers, and therefore cannot comment on how the support provided by the fathers affected them. However, the fathers I interviewed did describe how they believed that it was important that they

received a sense of approval from their partners regarding how well they provided support. Craig, Alan and Richard described how they had spoken to their partners about the experience and were relieved to be told that they had been successful in their role of supporter. Chapman's conclusion with regards to how to support fathers in their birthing roles was that men should to be encouraged to adopt a labour role that fits naturally with couple. I believe that this is a very important consideration for the fathers and that by doing this the stress experienced by Carl and Craig could have been lessened as they were required to perform roles that they felt were not comfortable for them, or were very different from the roles they usually adopted.

As found by Chapman (1991) and Somers-Smith (1999) the birth is an emotional time for fathers, and this can be seen to be the case for the fathers I interviewed. However, it does seem that certain steps can be taken to reduce the difficult emotions and subsequent stress experienced. Concerns for the safety of their partner and child are perhaps inevitable. However, good communication can help alleviate some of the stress this causes, as can be seen in the experience of Mark. A father should not be without information regarding the health of his partner and child while in a professional healthcare setting. The ongoing negative impact of this experience for Mark highlights this. In general I would suggest that encouraging fathers to think about their role during the birth during the antenatal period would be beneficial in reducing the levels of uncertainty regarding what is expected of them. The difficulty with this lies in whether the fathers are able to do this

successfully or whether their difficulties in engaging with the reality of the situation will prevent them from being able to successfully plan their role.

6.3.6 Father and Child – A New Relationship

For those fathers present at the birth, the moment of the child arriving into the world brought with it the first moment of connection with their child, with this initial contact being not through touch, but by simply being able to see their baby for the first time. For Sam this was a particularly emotional time, as he recounted discovering the gender of his child for the first time;

“I thought about this after, but I can still cry...I went oh wow it’s a girl and burst out crying and Natalie was crying, it was wonderful”.

It is important to note that discovering the gender of their child was highlighted as an important moment for several of the fathers I interviewed. However, the gender itself was not important with regards to having a desire for one gender over another, but rather discovering whether they had a son or daughter provided them with a link to their child. The gender gave the child an identity, the first moment in the formation of their relationship as they now knew whether they could identify themselves as being father to a son or daughter;

“God that was great, seeing he was a boy, you know? It was like, wow, he’s a proper little person, you know? And, well, he’s my little person” (Alan)

The process of the birth bringing the child into the real, lived world of the father can be seen to be an important aspect of the experience of becoming a father. Much research has been prompted into whether being present at the birth can have a significant effect on the father’s sense of “bonding” (Palkowitz, 1985, pg 392) with their infant. In a review of the literature surrounding this area Palkowitz (1985) discussed conflicting results, with studies suggesting that attendance at the birth had a positive effect on the father’s relationship with his child but also that it could have no effect. Perhaps more research is needed examining how fathers in the twenty first century, for whom there is an expectancy that they will attend the birth, respond to their babies. However, Palkowitz’s assertion that there are many different variables affecting the father’s involvement in his child’s life, including the attitudes of the father himself, does seem to agree with the experiences of the fathers I interviewed. For Jack not having been present at his daughter’s birth seemed to have deepened his commitment to caring for her;

“It has made me more determined to be around for everything else from now on”

Although the importance of the birthing experience for the fathers I interviewed was clear, it was the significance that this held with regards to their new lives as fathers that formed the essence of this experience for them. For almost all of the fathers I interviewed the stresses explained with regards to their birthing experiences were put aside, although not forgotten, as soon as they described seeing or holding their babies for the first time, emphasising the importance of facilitating fathers to be able to experience these moments after the birth if they have the desire to do so. The types of interaction they described were very different, with some describing simply seeing their baby, and others describing the first moment of holding their partner as she held their baby, or for Robert, holding his baby himself;

“I just rocked her and that and er that was great, that was a really good moment...it’s like always being with her right from the start”

Through all of these variations remained a sense of pride and happiness, and for some a sense of wonder that their baby had actually arrived, physically, into their lives. It is important to note that one important exception to this was Mark, as has already been discussed above, whose concerns for his partner’s health meant he was suffering from too much stress to acknowledge his baby when she was brought out to see him by a midwife. The difficulty this showed for his forming a relationship with his child suggests important implications for practice, which will be discussed. For all fathers, their experiences during the first few hours of birth and beyond were the

beginning of perhaps one of the most important aspects of their entire early experience of becoming a father, that of their relationship with their child. It is this I will now examine in more detail.

Within the general structure of becoming a father for the first time I identified the importance that the fathers I interviewed placed upon the interactions they had with their newborn. After bringing the baby home these moments were not only ones of holding their child, but were also practical tasks such as feeding and bathing. For Richard it was the feeding of his daughter that was a particularly important aspect of their growing relationship. Time was allocated in his evening to sit quietly with his daughter, feeding her the breast milk his partner had expressed. He was concerned that nothing should interrupt this time and this was something his partner supported him in. For Richard, and all of the fathers who helped with the practical infant care, there was no indication that they were doing it because they felt it was their duty, but rather that this was their way of beginning to form a relationship with their baby. Within both research and the media image of fathers it is often suggested that a father's role in childcare is that of "play". For the fathers I interviewed play featured equally with practical duties as their developing relationship with their child, and represented another important way that they could interact with their infants. When discussing the changes that his daughter had brought into his life Robert explained;

*“I want to play with her, give her a chance to develop, um, make sure she’s
ok, take her out”*

The individual acts of caring that were described in detail appeared to be representative of a general attitude of wanting to be able to care for their baby in every way possible. Anderson (1996) examined the father-infant relationship using an open and theory-suspended qualitative approach, interviewing fourteen fathers of two-month old infants in Canada. Anderson described the relationship several of these men aimed for as being “The Nurturing Father”, a father whose relationship with his infant was categorised by a sense of needing to love and protect and be “emotionally present” (pg 310). When these men discussed the qualities associated with fathering they discussed love, good communication skills and the provision of support to their partners. Interestingly, these qualities were not openly discussed by the men I interviewed. Love was only mentioned by a couple of fathers, although its presence was implicit in the way the fathers spoke about their babies. However, the fathers in Anderson’s research were asked very specific questions, which may have led to them giving the answers they felt expected to give, in contrast to the fathers I interviewed who discussed their experiences in an open way, without being given direction or asked specific questions. There was a feeling amongst the fathers I interviewed that they fully embraced the more nurturing aspects of their relationship, and would in some instances specifically seek out opportunities to provide this kind of care. However, their ways of expressing why they did this were to place

importance on the interactions they had with their baby, and to explain the happiness they felt now their child was in their lives;

“it’s just a great feeling. Like no matter what else I do I’ll always be David’s dad, so it’s ok....I am just so stupidly proud of him, you know?”

Alan

Another description given by Anderson (1996) was that of the “Protective Father”, involving a sense of wanting to protect their infants. Again, this was alluded to in the interviews I conducted, but never specifically discussed. Protection was acknowledged with regard to the long-term role of fathering, for example Richard’s discussion of how he would feel when his daughter was older and brought home her boyfriend. However, in general it seemed as though it was taken for granted that protection and nurturing were important parts of their role as father. They knew these responsibilities were a part of their lives, but it was the intricacies involved in undertaking them and forming the relationship that were discussed in detail, providing a greater insight into how the men actually strove to achieve their role in the relationship.

6.3.6.1 A relationship of reciprocity?

Although I have concentrated on the significant acts of caring and interaction that the fathers undertook in the development of their relationship with their newborn, it is important to note that several of the fathers also felt a sense of

being given something by their baby, that the benefits of the relationship were reciprocal. Within the general structure of fatherhood it was this sense of interaction that was so important, and formed the essence of several of the fathers' relationships with their infants. This was particularly evident for Robert who believed that seeing the way his daughter led her life had changed his attitudes towards life, and had a positive effect on him;

“She lives it, she screams, when she’s hungry she screams her head off and that’s it, and in a way what a way to live, you know, in the moment, that’s all we have”

Several other fathers described a sense that interacting with their babies had helped them to see life in a new and positive way, including aspects such as their attitude towards work and physical exercise. For Carl an important interaction was simply seeing his daughter smile;

“I tell you what, when that little face smiles at me it’s like everything in my life is suddenly OK. Um, it’s like the best thing I have ever seen”

These interactions were emphasised in the descriptions given by the fathers and highlight the importance of ensuring that fathers are given the opportunity to experience this level of interaction. The fathers I interviewed did not measure their experience by how many minutes, hours or days they spent with their babies. It was clear during the interviews that due to a

variety of factors they all spent varying amounts of time with them.

However, the interactions they had with them, the forming of their intimate relationship and the ways in which they believed that their babies responded were very important for the fathers. This committed attitude towards forming a relationship, or emotional attachment, was present in all of the fathers I interviewed but it may have been this that led them to putting themselves forward for interviewing. It may be that for some fathers this desire to have a relationship with their baby is not present, and it is not my intention to suggest that it should be expected that every man would feel the same way. However, the commitment to an intimate relationship was there for all the fathers I interviewed, even the one father, Mark, who had such difficulties in his transition to parenthood. Perhaps from their experiences we can gain important insights into the ways in which the relationship is formed, and use this insight to help facilitate this in those fathers who find they have difficulties knowing how to develop a relationship with their baby.

6.4 The Identity of the New Father

This chapter has been a discussion of the newness brought to the life of each of the fathers I interviewed. The newness takes many different forms and nuances exist within every area of newness for each father. However, as outlined in the constituent “The New Me”, one aspect of the experience that was present for all fathers was a sense of having a new identity. The

accumulation of all of the newness in their lives was that they felt that their identity was now that of dad; an important identity which could only be fully internalised once they stilled the pendulum of their oscillating reality, and their new position as a father become a reality;

“it’s almost like I have a new identity now, um, which is odd I suppose, but it’s like I’m not just Alan, the fun loving guy who’s always up for a laugh, now I’m a dad” (Alan)

By some fathers this new identity was discussed more openly than by others but it is important to note that all of the fathers I interviewed viewed their new identity in a positive way, there was no sense of a reluctance to accept their title of dad and the newness it brought with it. This might have been due to the nature of the method of recruitment I used, with only fathers who felt comfortable in their new role volunteering for interviews. Fathers who were struggling to accept their identity may have been unlikely to want to openly discuss the problems they were having with a researcher. However, this possible limitation will be discussed further at a later stage in this chapter.

Although this new identity was adopted in a positive way by the fathers I interviewed they still expressed certain difficulties in both the creation of their identity and the adoption of their new title. These difficulties were addressed in an Australian study conducted by Barclay and Lupton (1999), who used semi-structured interviews with fifteen first time fathers, and their

partners, in order to understand the changes in self-identity new fatherhood brought to the fathers. A series of interviews were conducted with each couple from a few days after the birth of the child to five or six months after the birth, with the mother and father being interviewed separately. Discourse analysis was used, with a focus being placed upon “the structure of the participants’ explanations and the words, phrases, concepts and belief systems they used to describe phenomena and beliefs and represent their experiences” (page 1014). The analysis led to Barclay and Lupton identifying several themes that they believed were inter-related and that shaped the experiences and self-identity of both the men and their partners. The first theme described was that of renegotiating paid employment and household work. As discussed previously in this chapter, for several of the fathers I interviewed there was a sense that their attitudes towards paid employment had changed, especially with regards to the new responsibility of providing for their family. Unlike the fathers I interviewed however household work was discussed, possibly because this was something they were asked about directly. However, one similarity that did arise with the experiences of the fathers I interviewed was the conflict that occurred in Richard’s experience, between his desire to provide for his family through paid employment and his perceived need to spend more time with his daughter in order to provide care and form a close relationship. This conflict highlights an important area of concern for fathers of infants and perhaps also older children. However I cannot comment on this as it is outside the limitations of my research. The need to work in full time employment to

provide the financial security their family needs is not easy to combine with a desire to take an active part in childcare and to form the close relationship with their child that they hope for.

The second theme contains perhaps the most interesting area of conflict and ambiguity within the new identity of the men. For the fathers interviewed by Barclay and Lupton, and similarly for the fathers I interviewed, there was an acceptance that as well as their role being that of provider, it should also be that of nurturer and carer. For the Australian fathers there was a belief that the latter role could be achieved through “being there” (pg 1016). The fathers I interviewed did not mention this ambiguous term “being there”, but as has been discussed, they did describe the importance of forming a relationship with their child, through a range of activities including practical childcare such as bathing and activities such as jogging on the seafront with the baby in a specially designed pram. For the fathers I interviewed it seemed that for them “being there” meant interacting with their infant, having a presence in their lives and in return their infants having an important presence in the lives of the fathers. This is in noticeable contrast to the fathers interviewed by Barclay and Lupton (1999) who found that the interaction they had hoped for, that of being able to play, was not available to them at this early stage in their child’s life. Therefore for these Australian men the sense of “being there” was postponed to a later date, when the child was older and could participate in more easily defined activities, such as bike-riding. Although for several fathers I interviewed there was a sense of not knowing how to

interact with their infants at first, there was an indication that in very differing ways they each adapted fairly quickly and learnt the activities that would provide them with the interaction they sought. There was no sense of “postponing” the development of their relationship as it was such an important part of their identity already. It is difficult to know why such differences exist between the two groups of fathers. It may be cultural or societal differences between the lives of the Australian fathers and those of the British fathers. However, perhaps more importantly, it can be noted that there is no indication in Barclay and Lupton’s paper as to at what stage of interviewing the Australian fathers identified this confusion with regards to their ability to interact with their child. It may be that this was identified during the interviews conducted a few days after the birth, but that it was resolved fairly soon after that. The fathers I interviewed may have described similar experiences a few days after the birth, but by the time I interviewed them they had all found ways to interact with their infant that allowed them to feel they were successfully developing a relationship, and this relationship in turn led to the internalisation of their new identity. Without any detail as to when the various elements of the themes outlined by Barclay and Lupton (1999) were discussed by the fathers it is very difficult to gain a comprehensive understanding of how the experience changed over time for the men. Although the interviews I conducted provided a retrospective account of the fathers’ experiences it allowed them to both describe their experiences immediately following the birth, and also to describe how things

had now changed for them, and how they achieved these changes, providing a more complete view of their experiences as a whole.

Another important factor may be the relationship between the mother and father, and the level to which the mother facilitates the fathers' new relationship with his child. Barclay and Lupton identified a sense of tension between several of the couples they interviewed, something not discussed by the fathers I interviewed. I will be discussing this omission in more detail in the concluding chapter.

I feel that an important distinction also needs to be drawn between the fathers' "role" and their "identity". From the interviews I conducted it seemed that the roles the fathers adopted varied but it was the accumulation of these new roles and the experiences that they brought with them that led to the sense of "the new me". However, this new identity was formed not only of current experiences but also the memories of what they had already experienced during the pregnancy, the birth and the first few weeks as a parent. Although the formation of the identity was different for each father there was still a sense of the universal nature of fatherhood. Regardless of background or life experience it is possible for a man to be a member of the father club, with the identity of "dad" and the experiences this has brought with it providing the membership card;

“it’s like you’ve joined this...well it’s not a particularly small club is it? But it’s like you’ve joined this club where you can talk about these things that no other adult really...well I wouldn’t want to talk about them before”

(Richard)

This perhaps suggests that a significant part of the identity formation is the ability to share this identity with others, to discuss experiences, worries and ideas that the fathers perceive can only be truly appreciated by those with a similar identity. I would therefore argue that the identity of the new father is not created solely through the roles he performs (although these roles are important and should not be dismissed) but also through the lived experiences of becoming a father and interacting with both his infant and those around him, such as partner, family, friends and other people he encounters in his day to day life.

6.4.1 A Conflict of Identity?

Barclay and Lupton (1999) identified the fathers’ ideas and experiences of fatherhood as being linked to the “new age man” discourse. I have already discussed how I do not feel it is appropriate to use the labels of “new man” or “new father” in the traditional sense but the concepts behind these labels do provide an important insight into the conflicts that may occur while the new father creates his identity. No one definition exists regarding the identity of the “new father” as discussed in research, lay literature and often the media.

The term is often used with no explanation of the meaning the author places upon it. However, prevalent within society does appear to be an unspoken belief that this is the time of the “new man”. Through simply observing the media portrayal of men this change is perceivable. Men are now shown as taking part in housework, displaying emotions and even taking an active part in childcare. The concept of the “new father” therefore conjures an image of a man who is caring and affectionate towards his child, who spends time bonding and has a close and loving relationship. Unfortunately, as explained by Lewis (1999) this expectation that fathers will now be active in childcare does lead to the fathers being drawn in two different directions. As discussed in the section examining the fathers’ functional status, the expectation that they should care for their child is often in conflict with the belief that they should fulfil the role of breadwinner and provide for their family in a financial and material way as. Lewis explains that “*the redefinition of roles places particular demands on fathers and leaves them struggling to find the most appropriate solutions when society’s expectations are so much less clearly defined*” (pg 14).

6.5 Conclusion

Within my general structure I stated that the fathers felt that there was no road map for the expedition into fatherhood that they were taking. Helping fathers identify the different routes beforehand could be very important, and could help reduce the stress and tension that can be caused at a later stage. I

will discuss the implications of this for practice and research later. However, I would like to propose that it is also vital to consider the external influences and conflicts steering the direction the fathers took. These men who previously had no dependents found themselves suddenly responsible for the financial well-being of mother and child. However, concurrently they also both wanted to, and felt that they should, spend time with their infant. It seems almost as though society is providing two conflicting road maps, one is slightly old and creased and suggests that the fathers should work as hard as they possibly can to provide for their family. The other, newer and shiny, tells them that they are fathers of the twenty first century and that means they must spend time developing a relationship with their newborn, and that this relationship must be based on care and nurture, not only play. To overcome this I believe we need to help each father in creating his own route, with an increased awareness of the bumps that he might find on the road.

7.0 Conclusion

7.1 Introduction

7.1.1 A Personal Reflection

Throughout this research I have kept a research diary, a record of my thoughts and feelings and the decision making processes I used along the way. As I recently revisited my early entries in this diary I began to understand that this research project represented a journey for myself, very different to the journey experienced by the fathers I interviewed, but with many of the same themes. Throughout life we all embark upon expeditions into unknown territory and it was clear from the analysis of the interviews I conducted that this transition into first time fatherhood had been very significant for the men I interviewed and had brought with it many new experiences, thoughts and feelings.

7.1.2 The early experience of becoming a father

The initial aim of my study had been to gain a deeper understanding of what it is like to become a father for the first time. I feel that the general structure and constituents identified through my analysis have allowed that to happen. It was not just the identification of the constituents that led to this understanding, but the examination of the nuances, the variations between the fathers. Their accounts of their experiences are all different, as each

father faced his own challenges. However as the general structure highlights, they are joined on a common path. Each father was working towards forming his new identity. Many important factors contributed to this including his previous attitudes and beliefs, his relationship with his partner and the varying experiences he has had since discovering that he was going to be a father. The father's identity is more than a calculation of how many hours he spends working or helping with childcare. It is his embodied sense of himself as a father.

I hope the results of my analysis have highlighted how important it is to consider the new and expectant father as having a great deal of investment into their new title of 'dad'. It affected them in many different ways, from the practical to the emotional. Underlying all of the constituents identified is the concept of newness. Several of the fathers I interviewed found that they could not articulate the overwhelming sense that everything in their lives was now new, stating instead that the only way to understand it is to experience it. This phenomenon is one that appears to have brought with it an incredible sense of change, in each aspect of the lives of the fathers I interviewed.

It is for this reason that I suggest that when discussing the 'new father' consideration is given to each man who is experiencing this enormous transition. Although examining the social construct of fatherhood is important, I believe that it is by concentrating more on the individual father

that the depth of understanding that is needed to be able to offer support to new families can be achieved.

Some important implications for practice are raised through the experiences of the fathers I interviewed. However, before discussing these in more detail I will first consider the limitations of my research and make suggestions for further research.

7.2 Limitations of study

Perhaps one of the most significant limitations of my study was the recruitment strategy I employed. The 2000 Infant Feeding Survey conducted by the Department of Health in the United Kingdom indicated that mothers from higher social groups, and also mothers over the age of thirty are more likely to initiate breast feeding. Education was also an important factor, with those mothers who left full-time education at age 16 or below being less likely to breastfeed than those who were educated for longer. Because the majority of the fathers I interviewed were recruited through the breast feeding support groups, this is an important factor to consider. However, the parents attending these support groups are from a wide range of socio-economic backgrounds but they may still represent a particular group of parents; those who actively seek the help, support and advice that these groups can provide. However, as I was using a phenomenological approach it was not necessary to develop a sample which represented all social/ race/ economic groups.

The fathers I interviewed were all positive with regards to their new role, and seemed to be embracing the changes it had caused. This may, again, be linked to the recruitment strategies I used. It is difficult to know why those fathers who returned the reply card, and indicated that they would like to take part in the research, did so. However, there was a general impression that these fathers looked forward to having an opportunity to discuss their experiences. It may be that fathers who are struggling and finding their new role difficult to cope would be less likely to return a reply card and actively engage in talking about their experiences. The fathers I interviewed were also only representative of fathers who live at home with their partner and baby. I cannot determine why it was only fathers who were living with their partner and were positively enjoying their new role who engaged with the research project, but this may be an important consideration for recruitment in the future. Although fathers who are experiencing difficulties with their transition may be difficult to engage in a research study it is still important to consider how they could be contacted, for example through the Surestart service in the United Kingdom.

The analysis of my data highlighted that the fathers rarely mentioned their relationship with their partner. Only one father mentioned feeling any kind of pressure within his relationship and for the other fathers the only mention made was to indicate how proud they felt of their partner with regards to the strength they displayed during the birth. Studies such as that by Ahlborg and Strandmark (2001) have highlighted the difficulties faced by some couples

after the birth of an infant, and the sense of displacement men sometimes feel. It is interesting to consider why none of the fathers I interviewed chose to discuss their relationship with their partner, and instead focused upon their relationship with their infant. This may be due to a reluctance to discuss anything of a negative nature in case their partner would read it. As discussed in the “Building a tower of strength” constituent, the fathers felt reluctant to share their concerns with their partner as they did not want to cause her any additional worry. They may still be keeping any concerns locked away inside that tower and therefore have not shared them with their partner, and so are reluctant to discuss them with a researcher.

This leads to another important consideration, and that is my gender. It is impossible for me to know how different the content of the interviews may have been if the fathers had been interviewed by a male researcher but it is possible to hypothesise that the fathers may have spoken about different aspects. This could be particularly relevant with regards to their expression of their feelings with regards to their relationship with their partner.

7.3 Suggestions for further research

Through conducting my research my belief that a phenomenological approach can provide great insight into the experience of fatherhood has only

strengthened. Within the constituents 'Oscillating Reality' and 'The Intimate Relationship with the Baby' I identified the importance for the fathers of the event of bringing the baby home. This not only assisted with the fathers' acceptance of the reality of their new role, but also facilitated the formation of the father-child relationship as the father was given more opportunity to interact with their child. This raises important questions regarding how fathers who do not live with the mother and baby experience their transition into fatherhood. Phenomenological research with this group of fathers may help to develop a greater understanding of how their absence from the home of the mother and baby affects them, and the ways in which they can be supported through their transition.

The issue of support was an important one for the fathers I interviewed and further research into the effectiveness of the types of support that could be made available to new and expectant fathers would be very valuable. Several of the fathers in my study mentioned a desire to have a source of information that they could turn to at any time, with one father in particular mentioning the internet (it is important to note that these conversations took place after the research interview had finished so were not transcribed or included in analysis). However, it does raise an important question regarding how valuable an internet based support site for fathers would be. With the increasing tendency for people to seek information and advice through their computers, and the difficulties fathers face in organising antenatal classes and other parent related activities around their work schedule, the internet

may be a useful tool for reaching fathers who otherwise may not feel able to seek advice.

7.4 Implications for practice

The recent Postnatal Care Guidelines issued by the National Collaborating Centre for Primary Care (NCCPC) in 2006 mention the importance of providing information and support to fathers to assist them with the adjustment to their new role (p. 258). The need to support fathers is becoming widely acknowledged within the health service and I feel that the findings of this study provide a useful insight into the areas in which first time fathers may value this support and guidance. Preparation was clearly important for the fathers I interviewed, and gave them reassurance, particularly with regards to what would happen during the birth. However, if there is any deviation from the birth plan the fathers have helped to create, this can cause them anxiety. It is also important to note that relatively few parents complete birth plans, and indeed, not all fathers that I interviewed had done so. However, if an official birth plan was not constructed the fathers still appeared to build their own mental map of what would happen. For Sam, who had watched a film in an antenatal class on the subject of Caesarean births the anxiety was reduced, as when his partner was required to have an emergency caesarean due to complications he knew what the procedure involved. This may suggest that it would be useful to provide

fathers with information on subjects such as emergency caesarean births. Schott (2002) specifically mentions the importance of providing men with information on areas such as the possibility of being left abruptly outside the theatre during a Caesarean birth. Within the context of my research it would seem that this may have been particularly helpful in helping Mark to understand what to expect during his partner's emergency Caesarean. This would not completely alleviate the stress experienced during this time but may help some fathers to create the alternative road maps that would help guide them through the experience.

It is interesting to note that two of the fathers I interviewed felt that there was nothing more they could have done to prepare for the transition to fatherhood, and yet still found it to be a shock. These fathers stated that they believed there was nothing that could fully prepare a man for becoming a father for the first time. This raises the complex question of how to help men prepare when those who have experienced it do not believe they could have personally done any more. Schott (2002) believes that "the key to discovering men's needs is to listen to them when their partners are not there" (p. 36). My experience of talking to these fathers has convinced me that this is indeed the case and that perhaps one of the best sources of support for expectant fathers could be men who have already experienced the transition. Not all men have fathers in their friendship group, and for the father I interviewed who knew no other young parents this was a particularly

isolating experience. This raises the importance of helping to facilitate the creation of social networks for expectant and new fathers.

As mentioned in the suggestions for further research section the possibility of the internet as a source of support is also an important factor in the care of fathers. Having antenatal classes for fathers would appear to be the perfect way for fathers to gain information and meet other men experiencing the same concerns and emotions. However, many fathers were not able to attend these classes, even if held in the evenings, due to their paid employment. Perhaps the way to resolve this would be to have a central website, providing online antenatal classes to fathers and an online forum for fathers to meet and anonymously discuss the concerns and fears which they might have difficulty doing in person.

There are also implications with regards to the treatment of fathers within the healthcare services. One father felt he might as well have been a bag at an antenatal screening, which suggests that some fathers still feel excluded. Through the acknowledgement of the father by name and speaking to both the mother and father this exclusion could be avoided. The fathers I interviewed did not want to be the main focus of all the health care professionals' attention, but simply felt a desire to be acknowledged as being a parent in their own right. This may have implications for training, as it would seem that an emphasis should be placed on including the father, not

only in a physical sense of inviting him to appointments and screenings but also in the sense of welcoming him and acknowledging his role in the process.

One father in particular raised important implications for practice from his emotive description of his experience, and that was Mark. Throughout the interview Mark expressed his distress at being left in a hospital corridor with no one communicating to him as his partner underwent an emergency caesarean. Although the health of mother and baby must of course take priority, ensuring that there is a member of staff available to update the father on progress is a very important consideration. The distress of seeing his daughter without knowing if his partner was safe was a particularly distressing memory for Mark and one that could have possibly been avoided. Other possible practice implications include the issue raised by Robert's experience of the midwife changing during his partner's labour. This was particularly significant for Robert as he felt that with the change of staff came a change in his sense of being part of a team. It is important to acknowledge the pressures placed upon maternity wards and that it would not always be possible to have the same midwife throughout the birth. However, due to the negative effect this change had on the birthing experience it may be suggested that where possible the ideal organisation would be to facilitate the sense of team work by keeping the same members of staff present.

Sam's experience of requesting that the midwife show him how to bathe his baby highlights the importance of involving fathers in the postnatal wards to assist them in developing the practical skills needed to care for their infant. Sam found that the more he was involved in the practical tasks the more confident he became. It is possible that not all fathers would feel confident enough to ask directly for advice. By having the facilities available to be able to support fathers through their early childcare experiences it would ensure that those fathers who do feel that they lack experience can gain confidence in a neutral environment, before bringing their baby home.

The general structure provides a unique insight into the world of the new father. One difficulty expressed by the fathers I interviewed was that they felt there was no way that they could have prepared for the experience of becoming a father as they had no understanding of what it would be like for them. I hope that my general structure would allow them to gain more of an insight into the experience, particularly the postnatal experience. The general structure is not a universal structure for what it is like to become a father for the first time. However, the constituents contained within it were essential to the experiences of the fathers I interviewed and may provide a more in-depth and lived insight into the world of the new father.

Within the Background Literature chapter I mentioned paternal post natal depression. No fathers I interviewed mentioned feeling depressed, or any symptoms of depression. As mentioned previously this could be due to the

recruitment process as fathers who are suffering from depression may be less likely to put themselves forward for a research interview. However, I believe that the interviews I have conducted do provide a useful insight into the aspects of the experience which may contribute to paternal post natal depression. Factors such as trying to be supportive for their partner whilst feeling that they have no one to turn to for support could lead to feelings of depression in some fathers. Other factors such as increased responsibility, feelings of unreality and confusion or fear can also be seen to be important. I feel that the results of this research can be beneficial to new and expectant fathers, and help reduce the feelings of anxiety, stress and even depression through both informing the care fathers receive throughout the pregnancy, birth and post natal period, and also by providing expectant fathers with a window they can look through and gain a better understanding of what the voyage ahead may hold for them.

Appendix 1 – Contents of Information Pack

The following are the contents of the information packs that were passed to each father.

Contents

- Introductory Letter
- Information Sheet
- Reply Card



Study of the Transition of a Men into Parenthood

Dear “New Dad”

Thank you for taking the time to read this information pack. My name is Katherine Graham, I’m a research assistant working for Bournemouth University and I am a full time MPhil/ PhD student. As part of this I am conducting research aimed at understanding what it is like to become a father for the first time. This is the STaMP project – the study of the transition of men into parenthood.

The only way we can really understand what it is like to become a dad is to talk to the men who have already experienced it. There will be no formal list of questions during the interview as it is hoped that this will be a chance for you to discuss any aspects of the experience that have been significant for you.

In this pack you will find an information sheet which gives a more detailed explanation of the research and what it involves. If you would like any more information my contact details are also listed and please don’t hesitate to contact me. Also included is a reply card. If you feel you would like to take part in the STaMP project please complete your details on the back of the card and return it in the enclosed self addressed, stamped envelope.

Thank you again you your time.

Yours sincerely,

Katherine Graham
Research Assistant
Bournemouth University



Study of the Transition of a Men into Parenthood

The Experience of Becoming a Father – Information Sheet

Information Sheet Version 3 June 2004

My name is Katherine Graham. I am a research assistant from Bournemouth University and I have a background in psychology. I am currently working on a research project that will form the basis of my MPhil/ PhD and I would like to invite you to take part in the research project. Here is some information to help you decide whether or not to take part. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with friends, relatives and your GP if you wish. If having read this sheet you have any further questions please ask me. Please take as much time as you need to decide whether or not you wish to take part. Thank you for reading this.

What is the study about?

The experience of becoming a father for the first time.

What is the purpose of the study?

To gain a much clearer understanding of what it is like to become a father for the first time. The research will aim to discover what aspects are significant or important for you.

Why have I been chosen?

These information sheets are being left with fathers randomly. I am hoping to interview between eight and ten men who have recently become a father for the first time. I would like to interview fathers who are over the age of eighteen and who have recently become the father of a single child (as opposed to twins or more). Although I would ideally like to meet with you between eight and twelve weeks after the birth of your baby, the final date and time of the interview will be your decision. If you decide you do not wish to take part this won't affect the care your partner and baby are receiving in any way.

Who is organising the study?

The study is being funded and carried out by Bournemouth University. No one is being paid for including you in the study. The entire duration of the study is likely to be around two and a half years.

What will happen to me if I take part?

You will be asked to take part in an interview, lasting approximately an hour, and with your permission this will be tape-recorded. The researcher may ask to interview you a second time to talk about your experience more. This second interview would ideally occur within two weeks of the first. You would be under no obligation to agree to this second interview. The location of the interviews will be agreed between you and I from a selection of suitable locations. This may include your own home. You will be

compensated for any travel costs you may incur. It is important that you feel able to talk freely during the interview and in order to do this it would be preferable if there are

no other people present. However, you are welcome to bring your baby if you would like to do so. If you do decide to take part, you are free to withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason.

Are there any disadvantages to taking part in this study?

In the unlikely event that you find revisiting your experience distressing the interview will be stopped. I will provide you with the details for any relevant support you may need.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

You will not receive any direct benefit from taking part in the study. However, you may find it helpful to talk about your experience.

What if something goes wrong?

It is highly unlikely that you will come to any harm through giving this interview. However, I am advised to tell you that if you are harmed by taking part in this research project there are no special compensation arrangements. If you are harmed due to someone's negligence, then you may have grounds for a legal action but you may have to pay for it. Regardless of this, if you wish to complain, or have any concerns about any aspect of the way you have been approached or treated during the course of this study, the normal National Health Service complaints mechanisms are available to you.

Confidentiality – who will know I am taking part in the study?

I will be the only person to know that you are taking part in this study. All of the information collected about you during this research will be kept strictly confidential. Your name will not be used on the recorded or written version of the interview and you will be given a false name for the purpose of the report. Your details will be kept safely locked away at all times and the tape recording of the interview will be destroyed after 5 years. When writing up the research I may use direct quotes from the interview but the false name will be used.

Local Research Ethics Committee (LREC) Approval

The study has been approved by the Dorset LREC.

What will happen to the results of the study?

Once completed, the research will be available in the form of my doctoral thesis and possibly journal papers. I will send you a summary of the research if you indicate you would like one.

Contact for further information or to offer to take part:

If you have no further questions and feel you would like to take part in this research please return the reply-slip in the stamped, addressed envelope you should have been given with this sheet. I will then make initial contact with you within 2 weeks of receiving your reply. If you would like to talk about this study further please feel free to contact me;

Katherine Graham (Research Assistant)
IHCS
1st Floor

Telephone 01202 962181

Royal London House
Christchurch Road
Bournemouth
BH1 3LT

E-mail; kgraham@bournemouth.ac.uk

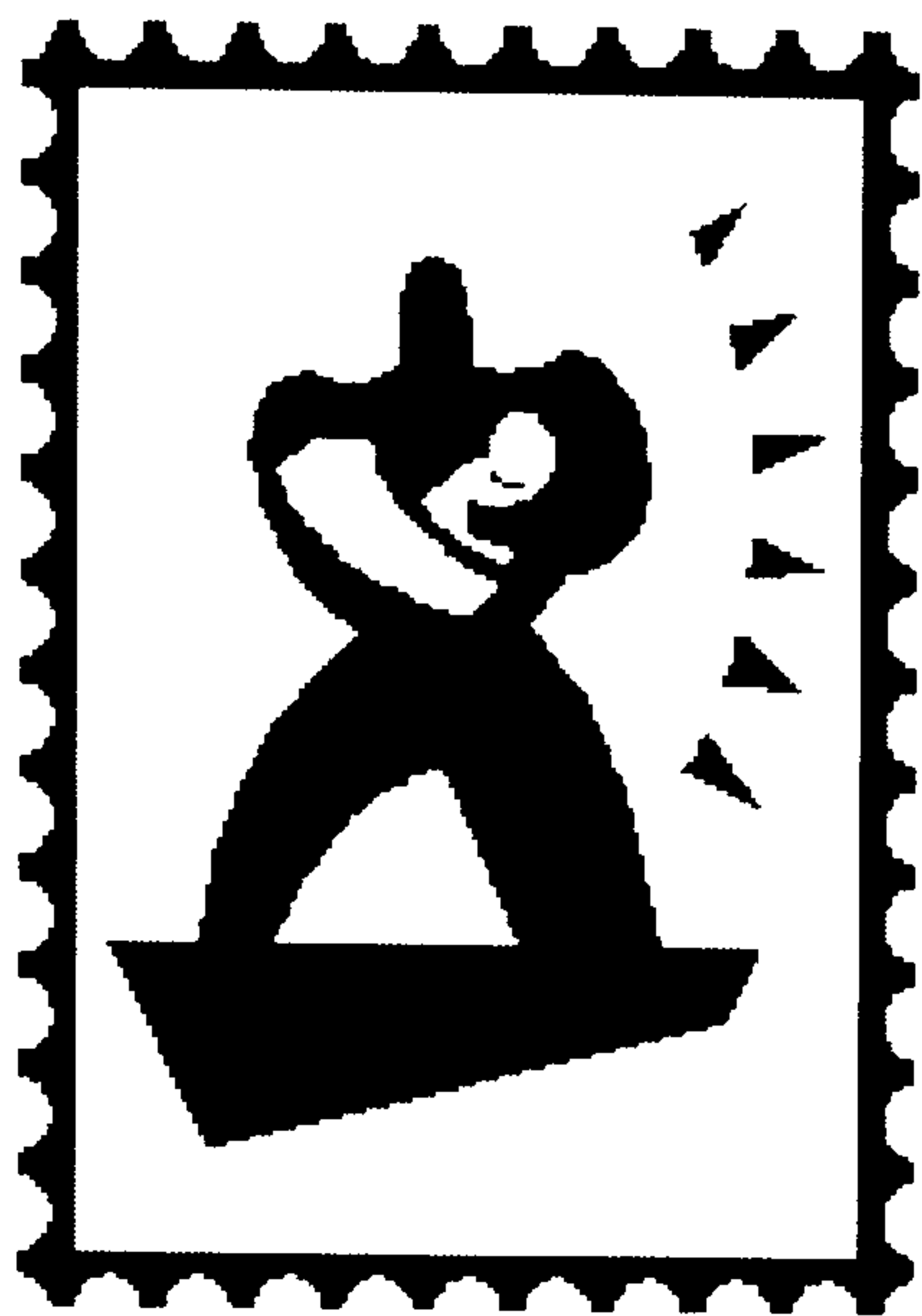
Alternatively, you may contact my first supervisor, Jo Alexander (Professor of Midwifery Research and Development at Bournemouth University) on 01202 504360.

If you do not wish to take part in the research you need not take any further action.

Thank you for considering taking part in this study.

Reply card given as part of information pack (originally printed onto the front and back of a plain postcard).

Front of reply card with logo;



STaMP Project

Study of the Transition of Men into Parenthood

Back view of reply card;

Thank you for your interest in taking part in the STaMP Project.
Please complete your details below and I will phone you
within the next week.

Name

Address

.....

.....

Tel. no.

Please indicate a date/ time when it would be convenient for me to phone
you.

.....

Please return this card in the enclosed stamped addressed envelope.

Appendix 2 – Information Sheet for Midwives

The following is a copy of the information sheet that was passed to midwives with the information packs.



Study of the Transition of (a) Men into Parenthood

Research Information for Midwives

Research Title: Becoming a Father for the First Time: A phenomenological approach to understanding the experience of becoming a father.

Aims of the Research

1. To gain insight into the way men experience becoming a father. Through using a phenomenological approach this study aims to gain an understanding through the words of the fathers.
2. To use the men's accounts to identify the areas within which expectant and new fathers may value support, guidance or advice from health care professionals.

How will the information be gathered?

- Through unstructured interviews lasting approximately one hour. I am hoping the interview will be a chance for the fathers to talk about any aspects of the experience they consider to be significant or important to them.
- I would like to interview between eight and ten fathers.
- The fathers should all be over the age of 18 and have recently become a father for the first time, of a single child as opposed to twins or above. I would ideally like to interview the fathers between 8 and 12 weeks after the birth. However, the final date and time of the interview will be the decision of the father.

How am I hoping to contact the fathers?

- I am hoping to forward information packs to any new dads in the area. It would be an enormous help if any community midwives felt they would

be able to offer the packs to any new dads or any new mums to pass to the dads, during home visits.

- The information pack includes an introductory letter, an information sheet, a reply card and a stamped, addressed envelope.

My Contact Details – if you have any queries please don't hesitate to contact me.

Katherine Graham
Research Assistant
IHCS, Bournemouth University
1st Floor, Royal London House
Christchurch Road
Bournemouth
BH1 3NL

Tel. no 01202 504181

Email: kgraham@bournemouth.ac.uk

Appendix 3 – Correspondence from Ethics Committee

The following letters were received from the Dorset Local Research Ethics Committee;

- Letter dated 15 December 2003 confirming that a favourable opinion was offered subject to minor amendments
- Letter dated 10 February 2004 confirming that the minor amendments were considered and no objection was made to the study
- Letter dated 20 September 2004 confirming that the amendment to the protocol was approved

Appendix 4 – Health and Safety Procedures

The following document is the health and safety protocol that I wrote following Bournemouth University Guidelines.

Health and Safety Procedures

As a part of my research I am required to conduct interviews with new fathers and where possible these interviews are conducted with no other people present. A number of procedures have been put into place to ensure my safety during these interviews.

With regards to my personal safety when conducting interviews outside of Bournemouth University during office hours, I will always make sure I notify a colleague of my location and the time of the interview, and will give an estimate for the time the interview will be completed. I will then contact the colleague when I arrive at the interview location and as soon as I have left after completing the interview. I keep my mobile phone with me at all times. The colleague will know to contact the relevant people, including the police, if they don't hear from me at all within two hours of the expected finish of the interview.

It is sometimes necessary to conduct interviews outside of office hours. When this situation arises I make sure I notify a family member who has access to a car of my location and follow the same procedure of phone calls as I would during office hours.

When conducting interviews on NHS premises I will follow the safety guidelines for that particular location (for example carrying a panic alarm) and will ensure that I understand the procedure beforehand.

In order to ensure I understand the dangers and safety issues involved in conducting interviews I have watched a video produced by the University of Southampton. This video clearly outlined the possible dangers and gave advice regarding what steps to take and what to do in certain situations. If I find myself in a situation where I feel uncomfortable I will follow all the procedures outlined in the video.

Apart from these issues surrounding personal safety during the interview there are a few other areas of health and safety I have considered. When interviewing someone in a different location, for example an NHS owned building, I will ensure that I understand the fire safety procedure and the location of the nearest fire exit for the safety of myself and the interviewee.

I use very little equipment in my research but any electrical equipment used will be subject to health and safety checks by university staff.

Appendix 5 – Useful Contacts for New Dads

The following is the information sheet I designed as a useful resource for fathers. It was passed to fathers after the completion of their interview if they indicated that they were interested.



Study of the
Transition of
a
Men into
Parenthood

Useful Contacts for New Dads

Fatherhood

- Fathers Direct – A registered charity and the UK's national information centre for fatherhood.

✉ Fathers Direct

Herald House

Lambs Passage
Bunhill Row
London
EC1Y 8TQ

☎ 020 7920 9491

💻 www.fathersdirect.com

- Homedad – Website with parenting information and opportunities for stay-at-home dads to meet other fathers.

☎ 07752 549085

✉ info@homedad.org.uk

💻 www.homedad.org.uk

Parenting

- Parentline – National helpline providing support, information and guidance to parents and carers. Website contains online publications to download containing parenting advice.

☎ 0808 800 2222

💻 www.parentlineplus.org.uk

- Home-Start – Provides support to parents of under-fives and recruits parents as volunteers offering friendship and support to other parents.

✉ Home-Start

2 Salisbury Road

Leicester
LE1 7QR

☎ 08000 68 63 68 (freephone information line)

✉ info@home-start.org.uk

💻 www.home-start.org.uk

Local Branch of Home-Start:

✉ Home-Start Bournemouth

1462 Wimborne Road

Kinson
Bournemouth
BH10 7AS

☎ 01202 574877

✉ homestart@bmth-poole.fsnet.co.uk

- The Maternity Alliance – national charity which works to improve support for pregnant women, new parents and babies under one.


✉ The Maternity Alliance
3rd Floor west
2-6 Northburgh Street

London
EC1V 0AY

 020 7490 7638

 www.maternityalliance.org.uk

- Working Families – A Charity that helps parents balance work and family life and support parents' employment rights.


 Working Families
1-3 Berry Street
London
EC1V 0AA

 020 7253 7243

 office@workingfamilies.org.uk

 www.workingfamilies.org.uk

- National Family and Parenting Institute (NFPI) – Independent charity working to support parents in bringing up their children, to promote the well-being of families and to make society more family friendly.

 NFPI
430 Highgate Studios
53-79 Highgate Road
London
NX5 1TL

 020 7424 3460

 info@nfpi.org

 www.nfpi.org

The NFPI also run e-parents – a website designed to provide parenting advice and links to useful organisations.

 www.e-parents.org


Childcare

- National Childminding Association (NCMA) – Promotes quality registered childminding.

 020 8464 6164

 www.ncma.org.uk

- Dorset Children's Information Service – provides free, impartial and confidential childcare information. This includes a list of registered childcare.

 0845 355 2099

Poole Children's Information Service

 01202 261999

Bournemouth Children's Information Service

 01202 456222

All of the details for the local Children's Information Service can be accessed using the map at www.childcarelink.gov.uk/index.asp

Appendix 6

The following is taken from the beginning of the first interview conducted with Richard. The left column represent the interview text, divided into meaning units and the right hand column represents the first transformations into a more general language.

Bold text = Interviewed

Richard = the father
Amy = the mother
Elizabeth = the daughter

Meaning Unit	Transformation
In as much detail as possible please could you tell me about your experience of becoming a father for the first time?	
Yeah, well it's interesting, I'm trying to pick a point where to start, and I think going back to the point where we were talking about perhaps we should have a baby. Basically Amy and I have applied to emigrate to Australia, and we were thinking well maybe we'll wait until we get a decision and I mean that's a years process, but then someone said well don't you think it might be easier to have the first child here where you've got the support network around you.	Explains that they planned to have a baby. Richard and his partner were planning to emigrate but decided it was suggested that they had their first child whilst still in the UK due to the social support network they would have.
And er, yeah, it happened really quickly, really quickly, honestly much quicker than I'd rather it had (<i>laughs</i>). Um, but yeah, it was great. I'd like to say I remember everything that..you know, the moment Amy said oh, I'm pregnant, and I'm sure Amy could reel it off, exactly what she said, exactly what she was wearing but my memory's not the best.	The pregnancy happened much faster than Richard had expected. He remembers the experience as being great but doesn't remember the details of everything that happened in the early stages of the pregnancy, although he thinks his partner would remember.
But I do remember feeling, well amazed that it had happened so quickly.	Reemphasises the sense of shock at how quickly his partner became pregnant.

I just thought this is fantastic and I couldn't wait to tell everyone, but couldn't tell anyone. Mainly because Amy wanted to wait, she was very paranoid about losing the baby, which I can understand. She was paranoid about telling people and then if she did lose it having to go through that other conversation so we didn't tell many people until twelve weeks.

Um, it was good, we went and saw my mum and dad in Wiltshire and that was brilliant telling them, my mum's been desperate for a grandchild for a long time. That was really good, really interesting to see their reaction. It's their first grandchild, whereas with Amy's parents it's their fourth, but the reaction was almost exactly the same, I'm not saying it was less special for them but err they are used to be told.

And then it was just all the worrying of is everything normal.

Certainly as a prospective father you don't get told a lot. You don't...you don't often go to the midwife, I think I went once. I did go to a scan and the midwife was actually quite good about, you know, come and have a feel here. But really, you've done your bit really, which is fair enough, I suppose I have, and then it's down to Amy. So I felt, I remember feeling a bit left out but not..well, I thought that was the way it should be. It's not my body that is doing all sorts of amazing things. I was just there to support Amy, you know. But I still felt, you know it would have been nice to have been...well it didn't worry me, I just used to think you know, well there are two of us in this.

But then, you know, my work wouldn't...weren't keen about giving me

Felt positive about the pregnancy and wanted to share the news but knew he couldn't as his partner was concerned about telling people too soon.

Greatly enjoyed telling his parents that they were going to be grandparents as it was the first time for them, as opposed to his wife's parents who were already grandparents.

Richard recalls the worry he initially felt regarding the pregnancy and whether there would be any complications.

Richard felt that he was excluded from the pregnancy as he did not attend appointments with the midwife very often. Feels that as the father his role in the pregnancy has been fulfilled and it is understandable that he is not as involved as his partner whose body is supporting the infant. Does recall a positive experience of one midwife involving him in a scan but felt that he would have liked his involvement to have been acknowledged throughout.

Richard's employment prevented him from attending the appointments as he

<p>loads of time off to go to a midwife appointment every other week, so you just don't go</p> <p>I distinctly remember the day she was born, much better than I do Amy telling me she was pregnant. She was late by exactly a week and I remember thinking around the due date oh it could be any time now, and then get to the due date and it's not there. Every day I was going off to work thinking I was going to get the phone call and every time my phone on my desk rings differently from an outside call than an internal call and I'd be like that...on tenterhooks.</p> <p>And then I was actually at home, it was a bank holiday weekend, um, and it was about eleven thirty at night and Amy said oh, I think it might be starting, but I don't know, go away again, you can go to sleep. Which I thought was very kind of her (<i>laughs</i>) and so off I went erm but then she came in at about three o'clock in the morning and said it's definitely starting.</p> <p>It was just er, I was really excited but really nervous because I've got no experience with kids not even though my sister in law has got three girls under six or something but I've never had hardly anything to do with them. I've never changed a nappy. Normally when you're going to do something this big you'd have a bit of practice, but no one gives you their child to have a practice with, there isn't any, you know, and there's loads of books but they don't tell you how you know, it's not real until you have one. Even though I could tell you that it was coming any time soon.</p> <p>So yeah, then it got to about eight or nine o'clock in the morning, we phoned the hospital and they said oh you sound</p>	<p>was not able to take the time off work.</p> <p>Recalls the anxiety he experienced in the time leading up to the birth, waiting for it to happen.</p> <p>Recalls the details of when his wife went into labour</p> <p>Felt both excited and nervous once he realised the labour had started. Felt nervous due to a lack of experience with children. Felt that there was no way he could practice for caring for a child and the books that he read didn't help with the reality of being a father.</p> <p>Began to get anxious about his wife as the hospital did not think she needed to attend the hospital straight away. Felt</p>
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alright, go another couple of hours. That was alright but then we phoned again and they said oh you seem alright, go another hour, and I was thinking well at what point do they actually ask you to come in? And they said oh we'll the midwife round, the midwife was going to come round.

Amy was really, well you see it on the TV and all the rest of it, but until someone you care about is in pain and you see it, even though they're coping with it you think there must be something.

And so I said alright, if this lady's not here in the next ten minutes we're going anyway. It was about midday and I phoned them up and they said oh she's around the corner. She came round, walked in and saw Amy and said I don't even need to do an exam get her to hospital straight away and we were like yay, well I was really excited. Amy was quite organised, everything was ready to go, so we just picked up the bag and the pillow, whatever we were taking with us.

It was really hard not to drive like a lunatic to get there. Because, well, what you want is for someone to say that this is all normal because I haven't got a clue. I'm sure it all was.

Um, I was outwardly quite relaxed but I wasn't really. It was quite an odd feeling. Funnily enough Amy got through the whole thing without any painkillers at all, nothing no gas or air, nothing. And yet I had a headache and had to have two paracetamol.

uncertainty regarding when they would allow him to take his wife to the hospital.

Seeing her in pain was difficult for him, and it was very different to things he had seen on television as it was really happening to someone he cared about.

Recalls details about his partner being admitted to hospital.

Felt excited about what was about to happen.

Did not know what to expect from the experience and so felt uncertainty regarding what was happening and whether it was normal.

Richard recalls feeling odd as externally he appeared to be calm but internally he wasn't and recalls the headache he got whilst at the hospital, which he needed to take painkillers for.

Appendix 7 – Stage 5 of Analysis

The following descriptions represent a fifth stage of analysis which I attempted but decided not to use as I felt they did not contribute towards the overall analysis (please see Methods chapter for discussion).

A description of Mark's experience

Preparation was an important part of the experience for Mark and he felt that he had done everything he could to prepare for the birth. However, Mark found the birth experience to be particularly traumatic as there were complications, leading to his wife being taken into emergency surgery. This was a confusing time for Mark as he felt there were people rushing in from every direction and taking his wife away, leaving Mark by himself, unsure of what was happening. This sense of being alone and not knowing led to feelings of fear and frustration for Mark, with the sense of frustration still remaining twelve weeks after the birth. Mark feels that the first moments of him seeing his new born daughter were ruined as she was brought out to see him without him first being told what had happened to his partner, so his overwhelming concern at that time was for her safety. As well as this first contact between father and daughter being ruined Mark also feels anger that the first intimate moment as a family, after the birth, was taken away from them, and this is something they can not get back. This negative experience has had a significant effect on his overall experience of becoming a father, with Mark still looking for answers about why he was left alone without explanation of what was happening. It is clear that this experience has had a strong effect on Mark and he finds it difficult to talk about. He feels that it is not something that he could ever go through again and at the time of interview was unsure he would ever want a second child. Mark's feelings about fatherhood since the birth have been ones of bemusement about what his role should be, leading to him taking the role of organiser, and concern

about the kind of father he will be, and whether he will repeat the mistakes of his parents. After initial difficulty in bonding with his daughter Mark feels that he is now able to interact with her more, although he still feels he is not as cheerful as a new father is expected to be. Mark has found himself worrying about job security and finances, which is something he has never thought about in the past. However, his change in mood is something he is aware of, and is taking positive steps to change. Although Mark has experienced some difficulties in his transition to fatherhood, due to how he perceived he was treated during the birth, he does feel the whole experience has brought him closer to his partner, and he has a huge amount of respect for her after everything she went through. He doesn't feel his experience has had an adverse effect, as the thought that he might be about to lose something he loved, has changed how he sees things in a positive way, although he is unsure of whether the difficult birth had a negative effect on how quickly he bonded with his daughter.

A description of Sam's story

For Sam there has been a sense of surrealism regarding his journey into fatherhood. Throughout the pregnancy Sam had a sense of knowing something was going to happen, but not really knowing what. Although certain landmarks in his experience, for example the ultrasound scan, helped to make the experience seem more real it wasn't until a couple of days after the birth that it felt real to Sam that he was now a father. The moment of bringing the baby home for the first time was a moment of realisation for Sam, as there was no longer the support of the midwives around at all times, and he understood that it was now the full job of himself and his partner to

care for their baby. Sam felt that compared to his partner, who had cared for nieces and nephews, he was inexperienced in how to care for his baby. However, Sam embraced any opportunity to help care for his daughter and felt this helped to build his confidence over time. This desire to help with the care did lead to some feelings of frustration as during the first few weeks of his daughter's life there were some situations where he simply couldn't help as his daughter was being breast fed and was crying for food. Sam found this situation particularly hard as he felt he wanted to be the one to alleviate his daughter's unhappiness if she was crying, and he wasn't able to do this. However, as his daughter grew older, and his partner began to express milk, he was able to help with her care, and he found this to be particularly rewarding, and he now feels more capable to provide care. The first few weeks of fatherhood were a steep learning curve for Sam, although he feels there is little he could have done to better prepare for the situation. The support he has received from both his partner and outside sources has been invaluable in helping him through the transition, and has lessened the overall stress of new parenthood. The different speed at which time seemed to have passed during his journey into fatherhood is something Sam is very aware of, with the last couple of weeks before the birth seeming to take a very long time, and the time since the birth going very quickly. However, regardless of the speed in which time passes Sam feels that his daughter has always been a part of his life, and can't imagine anything without her again.

Appendix 8 – Summary of findings for fathers

When completing the consent forms fathers were asked if they would like to receive a summary of the research findings at the completion of the research. Those fathers who indicated that they would be interested received the following;

Contents

- **Introductory Letter**
- **Summary of Findings**



Study of the
Transition of
A
Men into
Parenting

Dear “Dad”

The enclosed is a summary of the findings of the STaMP project which you kindly contributed towards through allowing me to interview you about your experiences. These are the findings that you indicated you would be interested in reading on your signed consent forms.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you again for taking the time to provide me with this incredibly important insight into your experiences. Without this the research would not have been possible.

The summary highlights the main findings of the research, which have formed the basis of my PhD thesis.

I hope you find them interesting to read and thank you again.

Best wishes,

Kat Graham



Study of the
Transition of
A
Men into
Parenting

The STaMP Project – A Summary of Findings

Introduction

A method of analysis called Descriptive Phenomenological analysis was used on the transcripts of interviews conducted with the eight first time fathers, all interviewed between 8 and 12 weeks after the birth of their child. Although I will not go into detail regarding the processes involved, the result of this analysis was a description of what the experience of becoming a father for the first time had been like for the men interviewed. Within this general description there were five themes that were found to be essential in all of the fathers' descriptions. These themes were present in all of the accounts given, although there were some important differences in the way they were experienced by each father.

The following is a summary of these findings.

What is it like to become a father for the first time?

The findings gave an idea of what it was like to become a father for the men interviewed. This was a very important insight and led to a writing of a general description of the experience. The description is too long to be included in its entirety but the following are some excerpts from it;

As the man becomes a father for the first time he takes many steps into unknown territory. The father carries out practical tasks such as changing nappies or bathing a baby, unlike any he has done before and experiences new thoughts and emotions.

The father believes it is his role to form a tower of strength from which his partner can gain support. For some fathers there are sources of strength they can rely upon

themselves...Others lack any source of support and instead lock any concerns they may have inside themselves.

Throughout the pregnancy a sense of the baby being unreal prevails, although for some fathers certain moments of confirmation exist, including the pregnancy test and the ultrasound scan.

Once the baby inhabits the world outside of the mother’s body the father is able to engage in a more definite and clearly defined way, initiating the beginning of the intimate relationship between father and child.

...the father places great importance on the moment of holding his baby for the first time...The removal or disruption of this moment has a negative effect.

Each father experiences certain defining moments in his relationship with his baby...However, it is the general feeling that he is able to interact with his child, and that his child can reciprocate this, that forms the basis of the intimate relationship between the man and his child.

Within the general description of becoming a father for the first time existed five important themes which were present for all fathers interviewed, although the way in which they were experienced varied. These were;

Travelling into the great unknown

- Involved a sense of uncertainty regarding what their transition would involve
- The birth and the time immediately following bringing the baby home were considered to be particularly “unknown”
- The fathers undertook preparation in order to help with this sense of the unknown, particularly with regards to reading
- However, there was still a sense that there was nothing they could do to fully prepare, particularly with regards to their new role of “dad”.

Building the Tower of Strength

- There was a sense of need to be strong and provide support for their partners
- For some there was reluctance regarding discussing their own fears and concerns with their partner, believing this would add to their partners’ stress.
- There was a sense of pressure being placed upon the fathers, for example to be a successful birthing partner, or to provide financially for the family
- Support was important for those fathers that received it and this support came from a variety of sources

An Oscillating Reality

- The experience of becoming a father often felt “surreal”, involving a sense of it not being real, or not really happening
- This sense of it being unreal was particularly strong during the pregnancy
- The birth also felt unreal to some fathers, with it not really sinking in that it was happening to them
- There were important moments where the experience did feel more real, including the ultrasound.
- Bringing the baby home was the most important moment of reality

The Intimate Relationship with the Baby

- The fathers relationship with his baby seemed to form once the baby had left the womb
- Seeing the baby for the first time, and particularly discovering the gender of their baby were particularly significant moments, as was the first moment of touch
- This relationship continued to grow as the infant grew older and the father discovered new ways of interacting
- Constraints such as spending a lot of time at work did prevent some fathers spending as much time with their new baby as they would have liked.

The New Me

- This theme involved all of the changes the fathers experienced in their lives and in themselves.
- This important sense of “newness” was described in a number of ways;
New practical tasks
New attitudes towards themselves, their family and the world around them
New emotions and feelings
New relationships
New identity – that of “dad”

Some Concluding Thoughts

Being able to talk to the fathers themselves has provided an invaluable insight into what the experience was like. Important aspects of the experience were highlighted, as was the possible negative effects of not being able to experience these aspects.

The complete sense of “newness” that seemed to exist within every part of the experience for all the men interviewed has been an important theme, highlighting the changes that this experience brings and the sometimes overwhelming sense that everything is new, and not always knowing how to cope with this change.

The importance of support was clear for the fathers interviewed. For those that felt they had received support, the influence of this was positive. Those that did not feel that they had a support network, or had not received support in a particular situation expressed how difficult this had been.

This has highlighted the importance of supporting fathers throughout the experience, not only during the birth, but also during the pregnancy and after bringing the baby home. Some of the suggestions that could be made from the findings of this research are that all possible sources of support and information should be made available to all fathers, so that they can use the help if they wish to do so. During the pregnancy help understanding what their role will be during the birth and beyond may be helpful. It is important to consider that the fathers are not only concerned with practical roles, but also emotional and social. A sense of feeling included is important and the findings suggest that it would be valuable to support this throughout every aspect of the experience.

Thank you for taking the time to read this.

Appendix 9 – Audit Trail

The following document is an illustration of how the process of descriptive phenomenological analysis I adopted led to the creation of the constituents and general structure. I have chosen to explain how I arrived at the constituent of “Oscillating Reality”.

After reading through the interview text as a complete whole several times and dividing the text into meaning units (please refer to the ‘Approach to Analysis’ section for an explanation of this. I then transformed the meaning units into a more transferable language. This stage aimed to make some of the implicit meanings in the descriptions given by the fathers more explicit. The following outlines all of the meaning units and subsequent transformations that are related to the constituent of Oscillating Reality.

It is very important to note that at the time of analysis these transformations were made without the concept of the constituent having already been determined, and were made within the context of the complete transcript of the interview. However, in order to illustrate how a constituent was created I have isolated the meaning units and transformations which, with hindsight, were those that led to the determination of the constituent.

The fathers’ original words, as divided into natural meaning units within the interview transcript can be found in the left hand column, with the transformations in the right. After the presentation of these columns I will

explain how I arrived at the essential constituent and its place within the general structure as a whole.

<u>Sam</u>	
<p>then my wife had quite a long labour which resulted in an emergency caesarean so she stayed in hospital for a while after that, er, and that was fine because, you know, I thought the midwives were there, and they took very good care of us and although you knew you had a child they still took a lot of the responsibility off you and it wasn't until the first day that we brought her home, at the night time, it was, you know, a big reality slap, you know, when she cried.</p>	<p>Sam explains that his partner had a long labour. Complications meant that she had to have an emergency caesarean and a subsequent stay in hospital. The period of time in the hospital after the birth brought Sam reassurance due to the care provided by the midwives and the removal of some responsibility with regards to care of the new infant. However, this reassurance was removed when Sam arrived home with his partner and baby for the first time. His daughter crying on their first night alone with was a moment of reality as the responsibility he now had to care for his infant became a reality.</p>
<p>er it was definitely, it was definitely excitement really. It never seemed as though it was, I don't want to say a big deal, but it never seemed quite real, it always...it's really strange actually, I'm probably going to waffle on a bit here, it felt as though, I knew we were going to have a baby on May 27th, even though she was overdue, but we worked towards that and I knew it was going to happen, and I knew and I knew...but I think looking back now, because I didn't know what it entailed, I couldn't really prepare myself for it and it just felt surreal, really surreal as though I knew something was going to happen but wasn't quite sure what that was going to be</p>	<p>Sam's baby was overdue and the time leading up to the birth was one of excitement. However, even though Sam was aware of the due date of May 27th and was working towards being a parent at that time it still did not seem as though his situation was real. Sam believes that this sense of unreality, or surrealism was due to a lack of understanding regarding what fatherhood would entail, meaning that he could not engage with its reality. For Sam there was a sense of knowing that an event was about to happen to him, but without knowing what this event was.</p>
<p>the midwife then said, you know,</p>	<p>Sam recalls the midwife explaining</p>

<p>we've got to take you for a caesarean section now, you're not going to progress for what ever reason, your cervix has actually gone backwards. It had scored a certain number and it had gone backwards [er] and that's when it finally hit us because she said, you know, we're going to take you to the theatre in twenty minutes or whatever and then all of a sudden it was the unknown to well, this is going to happen in twenty minutes</p>	<p>to himself and his partner that she needed to be taken for a caesarean due to complications she was having. This was a significant moment of reality for Sam as it identified a more definite time for the arrival of his child.</p>
<p>I was just sat in this waiting room on the top floor of Salisbury Hospital, not crying, but I just had tears running down my face you know and I don't know what that was, whether that was [er] nervousness, fear of the great unknown kind of thing. I knew it was going to happen, I knew that in an hour I was going to be holding my son or daughter, because we didn't know what sex it was, and there was all sorts of emotions going through there.</p>	<p>As Sam waited while his partner was prepared for the caesarean Sam describes the emotional experience of sitting in the hospital waiting room in tears. Unsure of what the cause of these tears was Sam considers that they may have been due to feelings of nervousness about what was about to happen and the reality that within an hour he would be holding his newborn for the first time.</p>
<p>You know, have your daughter kind of thing and I walked around with her for about ten minutes, just blank really, big smile on my face, couldn't believe it, it was so surreal,</p>	<p>Sam explains that even after being given his daughter for the first time he was not locked in any complex thought and instead was simply walking, holding her and smiling. However, there was still a sense of it being surreal with Sam unable to believe that he was actually holding his daughter.</p>
<p>And driving home that night it was just, there was nothing on the road, it was quiet, and I'd had to leave Natalie, it was just strange. I remember trying to think about it and what had gone on and the magnitude of what had just happened and it just seemed surreal.</p>	<p>As Sam drove home, after leaving his partner and daughter at the hospital he attempted to mentally process the significance of the experience he had just had but was unable to do so due to it's magnitude.</p>
<p>So I came back and went straight to bed and woke up the next morning at</p>	<p>Waking up for the first time as a father did not feel real for Sam. He</p>

<p>seven o clock when my alarm went off to go visit her and it just didn't seem real. You know, I went in the hospital and seen Jessica and it was, it was wonderful. But there was a great deal of surrealism it took a long time to.., even though I knew she was my daughter and I'd care for her and things like that, it just didn't seem real for the first couple of days.</p>	<p>visited his daughter that day but explains that for a couple of days there was still a conflict between his knowledge that she was his daughter who he needed to care for and the sense that the situation was not real, that it was not actually happening to him.</p>
<p>It was really, you know, if you think two days previously we were sat in the hospital having a cup of tea and thinking oh its going to happen, and two days later you're on your own, you're in your house, there's no midwife, you've only got what you've got in your house before you went to the hospital and it's, you know, the balls in your court kind of thing.</p>	<p>Sam recalls the short time frame between the time just before the birth of his daughter and the time bringing her home for the first time. The responsibility now placed upon him in his own home, without the immediate support of professionals, is described.</p>
<p>I remember the feelings of, every night we'd sit in the bathroom and say only three days to go and have a laugh and a joke and again it was surreal, it was, we knew we were working towards something but didn't quite know how much of an effect it was going to have.</p>	<p>Sam describes himself and his partner light-heartedly counting the days until the baby was due but explains that he doesn't feel that they really knew what they were counting towards, or how much the experience would effect their lives.</p>
<p>and it was just a no-mans-land for the first three months, you know, can't tell anybody, are you ok, don't do this, what do you do, what pills do you start taking, do you have to do this, you know , we booked in with a midwife and things and she came round the house and took her weight and details and whatever. And it wasn't until the twelve weeks was up and we'd had a scan or whatever that we really felt like oh we're having a baby, best tell everybody, you know, we're having a baby</p>	<p>A sense of being in a no-mans-land existed during the first three months of the pregnancy as they did not want to tell anyone about the pregnancy until after twelve weeks and were concerned about what health precautions his partner should be taking during this time. However, the end of this twelve period, and the ultrasound scan, marked the beginning of the reality of the pregnancy.</p>
<p>We were really excited about going</p>	<p>Sam describes the excitement both</p>

<p>to the scan at the hospital [er] because like I said, it doesn't seem real, it sort of went off the boil a bit, Natalie wasn't showing anything, and I remember we were driving to Salisbury hospital and thinking you know, is this real, is she, cause the midwife only does like a blood test or whatever and she never told us that she was definitely pregnant. We did this test ourselves , yeah it was positive, the midwife came round and did some checks, took her blood pressure and things but never actually said you are right, you are pregnant, well done, you know. So there was always that element of are you really pregnant, you know, even when we were driving to the hospital, this are you pregnant, you know, did we get it wrong. We went in for the scan and although you couldn't really see much on the twelve week scan because the detail isn't that great, it was so emotional , you know, because it went from that nobody has actually told us you're pregnant yet, Natalie went and seen the army doctors to let them know and they never told her either, they just went, oh, congratulations, there was no lets confirm that first kind of thing [er] and when they put the ultrasound scan on it was great</p>	<p>himself and his partner felt with regards to the ultrasound scan. Up until this point Sam felt that no one had really confirmed the pregnancy for him. Even though they had positive pregnancy tests the fact that no one had actually said the important confirming words of you are pregnant was important for Sam. This lead to a sense of uncertainty regarding the existence of the infant. However, Sam found the ultrasound scan to be an emotional experience and was positive in confirming for Sam that both himself and his partner were correct, she was pregnant and the baby did exist.</p>
<p><u>Robert</u></p>	
<p>Um it's strange because now it's been 12 weeks and I can ..it almost feels like I've been a dad all my life if you know what I mean. I've forgotten what it's like not to be a dad, in a funny way.</p>	<p>The identity of being a father has become so real for Robert that he feels like he has always been a father, with this identity permeating his life</p>
<p>basically I felt um..I remember thinking this is it, it's too late now, all I can do is go along with it and it was like err..I was glad we'd finally got to</p>	<p>The actual labour was important in helping Robert accept the reality that this was the moment from which he could not turn back, he was going to</p>

<p>that point you know, we'd finally got to that point where the contractions were there and I remember thinking, and this might sound bizarre but it was almost like it wow it's alive</p>	<p>become a father. The contractions provided Robert with confirmation that his baby was alive, that she did exist</p>
<p>Anyway then the baby..suddenly..out the bloody thing came, you know, the baby came out, I saw the head and then out it popped and the next thing there's this green baby..because it was obviously in the water. And I was thinking oh right, you know, because in the space of about five or ten minutes from the head..the head just sort of started coming and then suddenly it plopped out and I didn't realise it was going to happen that quick, you know once it came,</p>	<p>Robert recalls seeing his baby for the first time, through the water of the birthing pool. Seeing his baby so suddenly came as a surprise for Robert who thought that it happened very quickly, with only a few minutes separating his first glimpse of her head and her complete arrival into the world.</p>
<p>I was just relieved. I felt very, very light. It was at that moment I realised just how bloody stressed out I'd been, right up to that, so it was like the stress was conspicuous in it's absence, if you know what I mean. I was so ..I felt very very...yeah..really light, really floaty, sort of almost like. I didn't have any particular, it wasn't really what I thought, it was what I wasn't thinking, if you know what I mean. It was that absence of worry, that absence of thought, that absence of heaviness. That's what I experienced, it was just nice to not have that anxiety, to know that everything was ok, everything was alright, I could ..could actually enjoy the moment, without those sort of niggling anxieties digging into the present. It was funny you know, but er..yeah it was a very light moment you know, felt very connected.</p>	<p>Robert describes a sense of relief following the birth of his daughter. The stress that he had been experiencing in the lead up to, and during, the birth, was absent and this was something Robert was very aware of. Robert describes a feeling of mental lightness, free from complex thoughts and worries. The reality of the birth, and the knowledge that the stressful aspects of the birth were completed and his wife and baby were safe was an enjoyable period of time for Robert.</p>
<p>Yeah, there were moments during the pregnancy where I was a bit sort of bemused about the whole experience. Here I was preparing myself and</p>	<p>Robert describes a feeling of bemusement during the pregnancy caused by an inability to comprehend the reality of his</p>

well, physically preparing our home but at the same time I don't think I really grasped the full magnitude of the reality of the experience. Erm, it was just a wee bit mad really, the thought that I was actually going to be a dad. I think the preparation did help ground me in the experience though, gave me something to think about.	experience and impending role as a father. The physical preparation of the home did not completely remove any feelings of unreality. However, Robert does explain that the preparation he undertook did play an important role in helping him to engage with his experience.
<u>Craig</u>	
We kind of read up a little but about it all, but it was still unknown to us, and um, I think Emily was quite comfortable with it, and um after that, you know, the baby was there. And it just felt, I don't know, overwhelming you know.	Craig feels that the reading he undertook with his partner did not fully prepare them for the experience of the birth and although he felt that his partner was comfortable with the birth he still felt a sense of being overwhelmed when his son was born
And erm, taking him away for the first night, that's a different feeling because it's like you're in control now. And that's when it all kicks in and you have to sort yourself out, reality, you have to, you know, make sure you follow things properly	Bringing his son home for the first time, and in particular their first night together, was an important moment of reality for Craig as the responsibility for the correct care of their infant now fell with himself and his partner.
Well I just thought 'is it true', is it true, is it true. Emily did two pregnancy tests and I wasn't happy with that. They were quite expensive ones as well, so she went to the doctor and I was there with her and the doctor said congratulations Emily, you know, and I thought is that it? <i>(laughs)</i> I really thought is that it and then I feel yes, you know, I'm quite comfortable now. Well, quite comfortable to a certain extent but I think the next level was I need to see a scan. Yeah, and when I saw the scan it was like right, that's it, you're going to be a father. That's when everything came into place.	Craig was not content with receiving pregnancy confirmation from home pregnancy tests and gained a further confirmation of the reality of the pregnancy from a test conducted by a medical practitioner. However, Craig acknowledges that this still did not give him complete confidence in the existence of his baby and it was the ultrasound scan that was the important reality confirming moment. It was seeing this scan that allowed Craig to tell himself that it was real, that he was going to be a father.
Thinking back now I think maybe it	Craig explains that he was still

<p>didn't fully sink in even after the scan you know. It kind of faded away again for a while. I guess it was the birth, or even maybe the time we brought him home that eh, that kind of made it sink in. Oh alright, you know, we're parents. Um, but I think the preparation I did do helped, that was my thing really.</p>	<p>unable to accept the reality of the pregnancy, even after the ultrasound scan, as the reality provided by the scan wore away over time. Craig is unsure of when his identity as a father became real to him, and suggests that it may have been the birth, or even bringing his son home for the first time, that finally provided him with the confirmation he needed</p>
<p><u>Carl</u></p>	
<p>It wasn't like Helen was panicking or anything, you know, she just woke me up calmly, and the first thing I did was look at the clock, and then it was like this sudden wave of realisation came over me and I just knew that this was it, she was in labour.</p>	<p>Carl recalls his partner's calm appearance when she woke him up and explains that he didn't need for her to say anything as he was encompassed by the realisation that she has entered labour.</p>
<p>God, I haven't really thought about that part of it since, I'd forgotten what a weird feeling it was. It was just so weird. I was there, driving my partner to the place where she was going to give birth to our baby and honestly it didn't feel real.</p>	<p>Carl experienced a strange feeling as he drove his partner to the birthing centre as at the time he had found it difficult to accept the reality that he was actually undertaking this task.</p>
<p>Um yeah, it was mad really. I guess it all started to feel that little bit more real when we actually got to the centre, I parked the car and then all of a sudden it was another oh my god moment.</p>	<p>Arriving at the centre was a moment of reality for Carl and was a significant moment for him as he realised the significance of what was happening.</p>
<p>But yeah, that's got to go down as one of the best moments of my life ever, the first few minutes of us sat there, you know. I actually still get a bit choked up when I think about it. So, um, yeah, I suppose that was my first moment of actually being a father really.</p>	<p>Seeing and holding his baby for the first time are emotional memories for Carl, and were particularly important in affirming his new role as a father.</p>
<p>Now I think back to it I'm not sure it sunk in that I was a dad even then.</p>	<p>With hindsight Carl feels that he was not able to fully accept the reality of</p>

<p>It's been since she's been at home, you know, that's when it's become so much more real. It's the sort of, daily things, the waking up and thinking about her, going to work and thinking about her, driving home and thinking I can't wait to see her and Helen. That's been pretty bloody special really.</p>	<p>his experience, even following the birth. Instead it has been the sense of daily living, with his daughter and partner in their home, that has helped him to believe that his new role is real. Carl feels very positively about the effect his daughter has had on his daily life.</p>
<p>Oh yeah <i>*laughs*</i>. That was just another ... oh my god what the hell am I doing here moment. It suddenly hit me that I was about to be a dad I think.</p>	<p>The moment of arriving at the birthing centre brought with it a realisation that he was actually at the physical place where he was going to become a father</p>
<p>You can read all these books and have people congratulate you on the pregnancy and stuff but it doesn't seem like it's totally real until you walk through those bloody doors.</p>	<p>Recalling the moment of entering the birthing centre Carl explains that experiences such as being congratulated on the pregnancy and reading pregnancy literature did not help with the acceptance of his role as father. It was not until he entered the birthing centre that it began to feel real</p>
<p>Yeah, that's a weird one to be honest. It's hard to explain. I think it's something to do with the fact that we found out that Helen was pregnant, and then nothing much really happened for a while, you know? I mean, I could see her changing physically, but still there was nothing really happening to me.</p>	<p>Carl believes that his inability to fully accept the pregnancy as being real may have been due to his inability to experience the pregnancy physically. For a period of time following the pregnancy being confirmed there were no to Carl's life, unlike the physical changes he could observe in his partner</p>
<p>So, you know, I read all the books, kind of read about other dads, their experiences and stuff but then when it was happening to me it was like it wasn't really happening, like, I wasn't really just about to become a dad in a few hours. I mean, obviously when Anna was born there was this sudden reality of having her, my baby, there in my arms.</p>	<p>Carl explains again just how difficult he found it to accept that this experience was happening to him, that he would soon become a father, irrespective of the amount of pregnancy related literature he read. It is the physical confirmation of being able to hold his daughter in his arms that is important in acceptance of the realness of the situation for Carl.</p>
<p>I then went home and everything was</p>	<p>Returning home from the birthing</p>

just the same. It wasn't until she was home, in our home, you know, that it finally felt truly real that she was in our lives	centre on the first night on his own did not help Carl to emotionally adjust to his new role as a father. Instead, this happened when he was able to bring his daughter home, placing her physically into their lives.
<u>Alan</u>	
I don't think..well..I'm not sure it really sunk in, you know? Not until the day David was born. Then it was like holy crap, it's real, I'm a dad	Alan did not fully comprehend his new role of father until his son was actually born. It was the birth that brought with it the realisation that he was a father.
But yeah, Vicky came downstairs and said she thought it was time to go to the hospital so I got her stuff, we'd packed her some stuff up beforehand, and then I drove down there. It was all a bit surreal still really I think.	Alan recalls the drive to the hospital feeling surreal, suggesting that it did not feel completely real to him at the time.
Um, I think once we were there it all became a bit more real like, because suddenly we were there, this was it, this was where David was going to be born.	It was arriving at the hospital that helped with the acceptance of the reality as Alan realised that he had arrived at the location where his son would be brought into the world and into Alan's life
I suppose it hasn't really been until we brought David home that the reality of the whole thing has well and truly sunk in	It was the experience of bringing his son home for the first time that helped to give his transition into father a more concrete sense of reality
It's like...gone so quickly but at the same time it feels like I've been a dad since forever, you know? Ah, god, it's hard to explain, maybe one of those things you have to have gone through to understand it, but yeah, it's like life was building up to this point, this was what it was all about, and now I'm waffling	Now Alan has been able to accept his role as a father it has become so important to his sense of identity that he can not imagine a time without it.
It's like I said though, it's odd, because it didn't seem real, not when the doc confirmed it, or Vicky had	Alan considers it to be strange that throughout the pregnancy it did not seem real to him. However, he

<p>her scans, nothing. I suppose it was because nothing really changed. I still got up, went to work, went to Tesco, blah blah, you know. I guess things changed for Vicky much more, what with all the physical changes. So yeah, I did what I thought needed to be done, got the room ready, read some books with Vicky about the birth and parenthood and stuff. I suppose you'd think all that would help it sink in, but no <i>*laughs*</i>. So yeah, it's actually hard for me now, sitting here, to remember what all that was like, because now he's very real, you know? There's no escaping the reality of him now. He's a baby, he's there, in front of me, no denying the fact I'm a dad.</p>	<p>believes that this may be because the pregnancy has a minimal effect on his daily life at first. He then describes how he did engage in the pregnancy by preparing a room for the baby and reading parenting literature. His engagement in these activities did not assist in making his transition to fatherhood seem any more real. However, with hindsight Alan finds it difficult to imagine that he ever had any doubt about the reality of his path into fatherhood, as it has now become so integrated into his life and his son is a physical reality in his life.</p>
<p>Um, but going home that night was the weirdest part of the whole thing. I guess it was about nine in the evening and I left to go home and get some sleep. I walked in the front door and everything looked the same, but really, I knew it wasn't the same, now I was a dad...although I'm not sure it sunk in even then</p>	<p>Coming home on his own for the first time was a strange experience for Alan as physically everything looked the same as it was when he had left the house. However, emotionally Alan knew that it was not the same.</p>
<p>Yeah, it was weird really, it was surreal. It was almost like it was happening to somebody else. God that sounds mad. But um, yeah, I think maybe it was 'cause we'd been planning for that moment for ages and ages you know? The whole time it was like right, she'll go into labour, I'll get her to the hospital, she'll have the baby and then I'll be a dad. But when it's actually happening around you it's a whole different thing. It's like , um, well I think it's just like a sense of this is all happening to some fella I'm watching on the tv, not me. Maybe that's the way my brain copes with stress, you know? Shuts off and goes la la la this isn't happening.</p>	<p>For Alan the feeling of unreality he has surrounding the labour has manifest itself into a sense of being completely external from the experience and watching it happen to someone else. Alan feels that he did try to prepare for the labour and had constructed a mental path regarding what would happen but that on the day the enormity of the situation led to him struggling to engage in what was happening. This is likened to being similar to watching someone on television have the experience, again suggesting a feeling of being outside looking in. Alan acknowledges that this particular aspect of his</p>

	experience may be due to him coping with the stress of the situation, allowing him to imagine that the situation is not happening to him
up until the day we brought him home it was like either I couldn't see him because he was still inside Vicky or in the hospital there was normally other people around and you know, we were always kind of aware of the fact that help was pretty much just around the corner. But, erm, bringing him home into the house we'd already lived in for a couple of years was kind of like, um, confirming he was real, and he was ours I guess. You know? It was like this is it, it's real, he's our son and now we have to look after him and bring him up right.	For Alan there had been a sense of distance from his son through the pregnancy due to the lack of physical connection and at the hospital due to the number of people near by offering support. However, bringing his son home acted as an important confirmation of reality and lead to Alan's commitment to care for his son.
<u>Richard</u>	
After nine or ten months of this journey we'd been on it was finally here	For Richard the moment of holding his baby for the first time was an important symbol of being the end of this part of the journey for him
<u>Jack</u>	
The pregnancy itself was something I felt a little bit detached from to be honest	Jack recalls a feeling of being detached from the pregnancy
Well it was mostly because I was at work from about seven in the morning until six in the evening five days a week. I wasn't really around much to take part in the pregnancy. I missed the scans and the classes and that kind of thing which I suppose I do regret now looking back on it.	Jack explains that his feeling of detachment from the pregnancy was largely due to his work commitments preventing him from being present on a daily basis and also taking part in certain pregnancy related activities, such as the ultrasound scan. This is something that Jack regrets as he looks back with hindsight.
I suppose there is the obvious fact that I wasn't experiencing the	The lack of physical connection to the pregnancy was also important for

physical side of things as well, which meant that although I could sort of see the changes happening in Sue, I couldn't actually experience them, and didn't really associate them with being to do with the imminent birth of our daughter really	Jack as he felt that although he could see the changes his partner was experiencing it was difficult to associate these changes with the birth of their daughter, and his journey into fatherhood.
<u>Mark</u>	
I'd spent so long thinking about it and getting myself ready for it that she was probably one of the most planned babies coming. Especially on my part because it was literally two, two and a half years of me getting my head around it	Mark expresses the level of preparation that went into the decision to become a father. For Mark the preparation did not only take place during the pregnancy but also for a period before the baby was conceived, with Mark preparing himself emotionally to become a father for at least two years before the actual pregnancy.

It was through reading the transformations I had made within all of the transcripts that I realised the concept of the reality of the pregnancy, and this sense of unreality, was important for some of the fathers. This was particularly important for Sam, Carl and Alan, and was also mentioned by Robert and Craig. For these fathers it seemed that the experience for the first time was, at times, characterised by this sense of the experience not being real. Initially I believed that the sense of unreality was the essential constituent of the experience. However, further analysis led to my understanding that just as essential were the moments of reality experienced and described by the fathers. Moments such as the ultrasound scan, the birth and bringing the baby home were described as being important moments of reality. Further analysis of the relationship between reality and unreality for the fathers highlighted the complex nature of this constituent. Within one

fathers description there could be several moments of reality confirmation, with further moments of unreality in between. This can be illustrated through transformations of Carl's transcript as the meaning units seem to almost swing between the experience being real (for example, the arrival at the birthing centre) and then back to unreal (it still felt unreal, even after the birth of his child) and finally back to the real again (bringing his child home for the first time). It was this sense of swinging backwards and forwards between reality and unreality that was apparent in several of the transformations that led to the determination of this essential constituent as being an 'Oscillating Reality'. For the five fathers who articulated this oscillating reality there appeared to be essential moments of reality and unreality through the experience that could be labelled as being during the pregnancy, the birth and bringing home the baby, and it was these important moments which helped to develop the structure of the experience.

As essential as these moments appeared to be for the fathers concerned, it was also important for me to consider those fathers who did not discuss any sense of unreality or reality, and these were Richard, Mark and Jack. The reasons for this were discussed in the constituent as they provided a valuable insight into the nuances and variations that exist within the fathers' experiences, for example Mark's description of the long mental preparation he undertook regarding becoming a father for the first time which he believed led to his full acceptance of what was happening during the pregnancy.

To see the final result of this analysis please see section 5.3.3 'An Oscillating Reality' within this thesis, as this shows the constituent in its entirety. The following is an excerpt from the general structure which highlights the importance of this sense of oscillating reality within the early experience of becoming a father for the first time;

“The next step into the unknown, the birth of their child, and the acquisition of the title of father does not always feel real, with an oscillating sense of the reality of the new role of “dad”. Throughout the pregnancy a sense of the baby being unreal prevails, although for some fathers certain moments of confirmation exist, including the pregnancy test and the ultrasound scan. For the father the moment the child enters into his life is strongly linked to the very physical moment of the baby entering the world from its mother’s womb”.

The process of reading and re-reading the transformations and using imaginative variation to determine how essential they were to the experience, and what their essential characteristics were was used for the creation of all of the constituents, and the formulation of the general structure of the early experience of becoming a father for the first time.

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