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THE EVOLVING FATHER: CONDUCT AND CULTURE IN CONTEMPORARY FATHERHOOD

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Thesis submitted to the University of Dublin, Trinity College for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

February 2011

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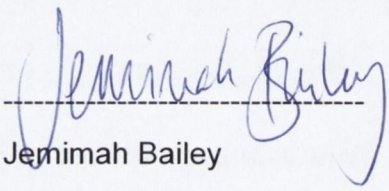

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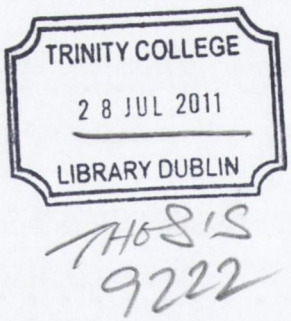

Summary

This study builds on previous academic interest into fathers, fatherhood and fathering and aims to describe and understand the nature of contemporary fatherhood for a group of first-time fathers. The research set out to examine the role that gender plays in the construction of fatherhood, to provide clear hypotheses about family relationships and to locate contemporary fathering within a wider social context.

The research had three main phases. The first phase involved the distribution and collection of a questionnaire, "Becoming A Parent", to expectant couples in a maternity hospital. The questionnaire was designed to provide empirical contextual data and act as a sifting device to recruit a sample of expectant fathers. The second and third phases of the study were qualitative longitudinal in-depth interviews. Expectant fathers were interviewed during the late stages of their partners' pregnancy, and re-interviewed when their babies were five months old.

The potential benefits of having more "involved" fathers, who provide for their offspring not only financially, but also through their engagement, accessibility and responsibility (Lewis and Lamb, 2003) have been acknowledged by the existing literature. Yet there remain significant gaps in knowledge about fatherhood, and the complexity of analysing the varied influences on paternal involvement provide a challenge to researchers (Lamb and Lewis, 2007). Meanwhile the extent of changes to fathers' conduct and the culture of fatherhood has been debated (LaRossa, 1998; Dermott, 2008) as has the meaning of employment and breadwinning for contemporary fathers (Warren, 2007; Dermott, 2008). In addition the relationship between gender, fatherhood and equality has been explored (Connell, 2005a; Doucet, 2006, Dermott, 2008; Featherstone, 2009) and the potential for involved fathering to challenge hegemonic masculinities and offer a route to "back door equality" has been suggested. Increasing attention to family practices and relationships (Morgan, 2002; Smart 2007) also provides a crucial backdrop to understanding fathers' connections to wider social structures.

After receiving ethical approval from both the School of Social Work and Social Policy ethics committee and the maternity hospital ethics committee, the questionnaire was administered to 84 couples and twenty men were recruited to take part in the in-depth interviews. The first interview took place just before the babies' birth and the second interview took place when the babies were five months old. The interviews were transcribed and analysed to identify themes and concepts.

Chapters Five to Nine explore the key themes and findings resulting from the research. Chapter Five: Setting the Scene maps the route the couples take to starting their families and explores the men's attitudes towards and expectations of fatherhood. Chapter Six: Experiences of Pregnancy and Childbirth examines the men's journey through pregnancy, their anticipation of birth and fatherhood, and the realities of labour and delivery. Chapter Seven: Doing Fatherhood explores their adjustment to the reality of parenting and their growing relationship with their baby, the context of their extended family and their reflections on their experiences of fathering. Chapter Eight: From Couple to Family Unit describes the impact of the baby on the couples' relationships. Chapter Nine: Employment and Fatherhood examines how the fathers attempt to balance work and family life and how their attitudes to work change and how these changed attitudes impact on behaviour and choices around work.

This study points to more changes in the *conduct* of fathering than changes in the *culture* of fatherhood. It demonstrates the way in which the caring roles of father and partner are inextricably linked together and sometimes difficult to differentiate. In addition it shows how the structural influences of employment and culturally dominant essentialist ideas about gender place men in an ambiguous position, and how the men in this study seek to reconcile the tensions between their roles as fathers, partners and workers. It argues that despite these structural barriers, which are tentatively labelled as a 'patriarchal deficit', this group of men invest time and emotion into building a complex and meaningful relationship with their infants. It provides an understanding of how, as nurturers, men are beginning to assess their own attempts to reconcile work and family life, and argues that this provides an opportunity to move towards gender equality and symmetry.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank all the first-time fathers who took part in the research, and who gave so generously of their time, thoughts, experiences and emotions.

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The interest and support of my post-graduate colleagues, Jessica Breen and Elena Moore, has been invaluable. The discussions (and the caffeine!) we have shared made a major contribution to the completion of this project.

Alex Jefferson not only designed the wonderful logo for the questionnaire, but has been a sympathetic ear at every stage of the doctoral process. Thanks also to Annie and Simon (my parents) for their enthusiastic backing and eagle-eyed proof reading skills and to Síne for finding time to correct my mistakes, and to all the friends and family members who have listened to me talking about the PhD without looking bored.

Dedication

None of this would have been possible without my inspirational family: Mark, Beth and Noah, and so this work is dedicated to them.

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Foreword

When it came to considering the origins of this study of contemporary fatherhood, I continually recalled moments in my own life that seemed to have a particularly strong resonance and played a part in the formation of my own research questions. In no particular order, I felt it might serve to clearly position the influence of my own biography on the research if I started by providing a few vignettes of these personal memories.

> Lying exhausted but exhilarated in the post-labour ward on the night after my first child was born, after a lengthy and somewhat traumatic labour, we are told by hospital staff that my partner is not permitted to stay with me and our newborn baby, but should leave us and go home. Despite the fact that he had provided me with practical care and emotional sustenance throughout the pregnancy and birth, including being my sole support for most of the previous night, on our daughter's first night in the world he was relegated to being a secondary parent. It sat uneasily with both of us.
>
> During my own undergraduate education, when I first studied feminist theory and explored the different views of feminism, liberal and radical, equality and difference, I continually came back to the same questions – what about men? How can the gender equality project move forward unless men change too? The reality is that men are part of women's lives, and often a valued and important part of their lives, as partners, sons, brothers, fathers and friends. If women want to be liberated from the constraints of their prescribed gender roles, to what extent do men want the same thing?
>
> "You're very lucky. He's very good, isn't he?" The numerous times other people have commented on my partner's commitment to parenting and to our children. The role that he plays appears to strike

> people as exceptional enough to comment on, and yet when I play the same role, it provokes very few comments and seems to be taken for granted.

As these personal experiences echoed around my head, I was led to question how much my own generation of men have changed, particularly in relation to fatherhood and parenting, and what kind of impact this change (or lack of change) has had on gender relations, and by implication on the gender equality project that is a fundamental part of my own personal ideology.

This study can make no claims to definitively answer this question, but I hope offers an insight into how these questions and issues impact on a particular group of men, along with their partners and families, as they start their journey into parenthood, and most importantly how these sometimes theoretical notions of gender equality, gender roles and gender relations play out in the day to day lives of "real" people.

Chapter One: Introduction

Introduction

Over the past few decades academic interest in families and parenthood has proliferated, particularly in the health and social sciences, including the areas of developmental psychology, family health and welfare, sociology and gender studies.

Investigations into fatherhood were a later addition to this interest in personal and family life, resulting from the fact that traditionally parenting was seen as synonymous with mothering. When one of the breakthrough publications in the literature of fatherhood, *The Role of the Father in Child Development* (Lamb, 2004), was first published in 1976 "most social scientists doubted that fathers significantly shaped the experiences and development of their children" (Lamb and Tamis-Lemonda, 2004, p1). The extent to which this assumption has shifted is evidenced by the fact that the third edition of the book in 1997 "reflected widespread acceptance of the notion that fathers are often affectively and formatively salient" (ibid).

Despite the increasing attention paid to fatherhood in the past twenty years, a clear understanding of men's family roles continues to be elusive. This is partly as a result of the varied and complex influences on family processes, and partly as a result of the varied theoretical lenses through which fatherhood can be examined: gender relations, masculinities, personal life, which can lead to researchers resorting to over-simplistic stereotypes, such as "loving fathers" or "deadbeat dads" (Freeman, 2003).

Since the turn of the century there have been frequent calls for researchers to attempt to locate their inquiries into fathers in relation to broader social structures, contexts and relations (Morgan, 2002, Dermott, 2008, Featherstone, 2009). Lewis and Lamb argue that the most fundamental need is for research that "draws the tangled strands [of biology, motivation, culture, economics, historical, legal, political and personal] into a tidier and more systematic bundle" (Lewis and Lamb, 2007, p23). Recent work has begun to respond to this call, (Marsiglio et al., 2005) by recognising that:

> Fathering is situated in contexts of time, culture, space, work, and ongoing events. Fathers are situated in neighbourhoods, careers, subcultures, policies, legal systems, and ethics. They are situated in cultural prescriptions of masculinity, provision, protection, nurturance, the best interests of the child, and paternity (Palkovitz, 2005).

This thesis seeks to make a contribution to this wider and ongoing intellectual project. It presents the findings of a four year project exploring the experiences of twenty first-time fathers. The aim of this research was to describe and understand the nature of fatherhood for this group of men, examining the role that gender plays in the construction of fatherhood, and to provide clear hypotheses about their family relationships, while locating their experiences in a wider social context. To this end, the research employed a qualitative longitudinal methodology. In-depth interviews were carried out with the twenty men shortly before the birth of their first child and five months into their lives as fathers.

This thesis draws on several intellectual traditions within sociology, primarily the sociology of gender and the sociology of personal life. By doing so, it attempts to provide theoretically nuanced and empirically rich account of the realities of contemporary fatherhood. It is particularly concerned with the practices of fatherhood, the day-to-day conduct of this group of contemporary fathers.

In this thesis I argue that contrary to previous theories of fatherhood, the evidence of this study points to more changes in the *conduct* of fathering than changes in the *culture* of fatherhood. I also demonstrate the way in which the caring roles of father and partner are inextricably linked together and sometimes difficult to differentiate. In addition I show how the structural influences of employment and culturally dominant essentialist ideas about gender place men in an ambiguous position, and how the men in this study seek to reconcile the tensions between their role as fathers, partners and workers. I argue that despite these structural barriers, which I tentatively label as a 'patriarchal deficit', this group of men invest time and emotion into building a complex and meaningful relationship with their infants.

Fathers under the spotlight

As a macro level, current interest in fathers as subjects of sociological concern stems from the broader interest in parenting and the family that exploded in the 1970s and 1980s, primarily in response to the issues and changes raised by second wave feminism and the mass movement of women, especially those with children, into the paid workforce.

Interest in the role of parents more generally can be traced back much further than just the past few decades and it is arguable that there has been debate on the appropriate role that parents should play for hundreds of years:

> When a father washes diapers and performs some other mean task for his child, and someone ridicules him as an effeminate fool... God with all his angels and creatures is smiling. (Martin Luther (1483 – 1546) quoted in (Gillis, 1997, p186).

Clearly, even five hundred years ago there were tensions between a 'hands on' version of fathering and the dominant conception of masculinity. Competing versions of masculinity are not a new issue. The quote from Martin Luther illustrates that the discussion about the role of fathers in families is an old one and a brief outline of some previous debates in previous centuries can act as a useful context for current contested issues.

Broadly speaking, before the industrial revolution fathers were seen as playing a central part in family life "actively engaged in nurturing and educating their children, overseeing wet-nursing, clothing, doctoring" (Featherstone, 2009, p42).

> In early modern Europe, fathers were generally considered as more important than mothers in the caring, raising and education of children... taking primary responsibility for older children's moral and religious instruction, preparing them for their adult duties" (Lupton and Barclay, 1997:37).

The emphasis on the father's role was underpinned by assumptions about the rationality of men, who represented reason rather than nature. Their ability to bestow

order, (along the lines of common debates during the Enlightenment) was valued, while "women were conceptualized as little more than the passive vessels in which the child grew" (Lupton and Barclay, 1997:37).

There has been a tendency among some commentators to portray this time as a 'golden age' for fathers' parenting role, concluding that since the industrial revolution "it has been all downhill for fathers. They have lost power, authority, control and status" (Popenoe, 1996, p90, quoted in Pleck, 2004, p33). The complexities and varieties of family life existed even in earlier eras. 'Absent fathers' are not a new phenomenon: some men have always been separated from their families as a result of the search for work, or via military and civil service, through incarceration or other institutionalisation. However, although paternal absence existed, the pattern of work for many families would have been based in the domestic sphere, rather than in the office or factory; before the Industrial Revolution, particularly in the middle classes of artisans, farmers, business and professional men, much work would have been conducted from their homes.

Step-families are also not a modern invention, but the cause of such re-partnering and re-parenting was generally after the death of one spouse, rather than as a result of separation or divorce, as it is in the present day. Higher mortality rates and lower life expectancy created single parents too.

The global patriarchal system was reinforced by the state and the church, where women and children were considered chattels. There are competing arguments among scholars today about the extent to which men felt emotionally attached to their children and wives, at a time when infant and child mortality was high, as was maternal death due to childbirth. Some have a fairly bleak view of men as "legalized petty tyrant" (Stone, 1979, p7) over their families, while others have argued that this is an over simplified view. For example Burgess provides evidence of men's involvement with their children, and indeed their love for them when she quotes Sir Thomas More (1478-1535): "It is not so strange that I love you with my whole heart, for being a father is not a tie which can be ignored" (Burgess, 1997, p37).

As the industrial revolution progressed, the office or the factory replaced the household as the primary economic focus, and resulted in a separation of the public

(i.e. male) and private (i.e. female) spheres. Such material changes resulted in a predominant view of the fathers' role as a breadwinner and economic supporter of the family.

> The assumption was that as the father came to concentrate almost exclusively on earning a living, he became increasingly removed from involvement with home and family, and relegated to roles of disciplinarian, financial decision maker, and occupational guide for older sons (Pleck, 2004, p37, Marsiglio and Pleck, 2005, p37).

The close supervision and rearing of young children increasingly became the responsibility and role of women and there was something of a Victorian idealisation of mothers as "angel of the house", as described in Coventry Patmore's 1854 eponymous poem, who selflessly and submissively put their husbands and children's needs before their own[1].

During the nineteenth century there was an increasing interest in social welfare and health issues, which coincided with this change in working practices. In particular the concern for child health and welfare acted as a spotlight on parenting practice. This gave rise to 'expert' input on how children should be raised, whether through health visitors, who acted as a formalised source of surveillance on, mostly, working class mothers (at the end of the nineteenth century), and the rise of child-rearing books and pamphlets, providing advice on how to "successfully" raise children (Lupton and Barclay, 1997, p39). This is something we can see echoes of in today's thriving market for "how to parent" books, such as Gina Ford's *Contented Little Baby* book, which has sold millions of copies and popular television programmes, such as *Supernanny* and *The Baby Whisperer.*

By the beginning of the twentieth century men were being encouraged to develop "companionate" marriages, which were understood as being '"more devoted and emotionally connected" (Featherstone, 2009, p47) to their families. This new conception of masculinity was also reflected in the expectation that men should have

[1] Clearly many working class mothers did engage in paid work outside the home, as well as taking work into the home, such as washing and sewing, so it is important to remember that this 'angel' notion was primarily a middle and upper class ideal.

a more nurturing and emotional connection with their children (Lupton and Barclay, 1997, p40).

Part of this push towards a more involved role for men in their children's lives was a growing concern about children being reared in exclusively female environments, particularly the impact on boys' development and fears that they were being "feminised" by mother-dominated households. There was a belief that in order for boys to grow into "proper" men, they needed the role model provided by fathers, and this translated into an expectation that fathers should play with children and take an active role in their moral supervision, *as well as* providing for them economically. "Fathers were needed to make decisions, punish their children, act with authority, and teach sons the facts of life. This kind of good dad could prevent his son from becoming a homosexual" (Pleck, 2004, p41).

The concerns surrounding fathers who were absent from their children's lives due to their long working hours outside the family home, were compounded by the enforced paternal absence resulting from the disruptions in family life caused by the Second World War.

"Children without fathers were portrayed as being 'at risk' of abnormal physical, sex-role, intellectual and moral development, including lack of independence, passivity, eating and sleeping problems, decreased sociability" and a particular concern that boys with absent fathers would be more likely to have "abnormal sexual development, and liable to become homosexual or delinquent" (Griswold, 1993).

The post-war prosperity of the 1950s meant that for the first time "the masses were able to imitate the rich in passing on some of their wealth to their offspring... by paying them allowances and spending money" (Garland, 2001, p80). The freedoms provided by the new 'youth culture' also provided a challenge to parents, as concerns about juvenile delinquency and the increasing questioning of established institutions by teenagers and young people threatened the era's dominant ideology of conformity. "Parents' magazines wanted fathers to impose rules and advocate traditional morality when so many young adults were challenging all aspects of authority" (Pleck, 2004, p42).

Undoubtedly the advent of second wave feminism and the mass movement of women into employment in the 1960s and 1970s led to a "burst of interest in the sociology of parenting and the family" (Lupton and Barclay, 1997, p52). During the 1980s social scientists Michael Lamb and Joseph Pleck constructed the influential notion of fatherhood involvement, identifying that there are different types of involvement: engagement, accessibility and responsibility (Lamb, Pleck, Charnov and Levine, 1987).

Contemporary fatherhood

Since the 1970s and 1980s, fathers have come under more detailed scrutiny and writers tend to at least attempt to consider fathers in a broad social context. There is now recognition of the fact that fathers play a variety of roles in families, and that these roles vary "across time and sub-cultural context" (Russell, 2001, p53).

Barclay and Lupton's 1997 book *Constructing fatherhood: discourses and experiences* was part of a move in the academy towards "a recognition that fatherhood is a cultural construct that shifts and changes, that is multiple and contextual" (p51). The authors argue that "the emotional, and indeed the pleasurable, dimensions of fatherhood are rather underplayed in the 'expert' literature", and that if there is a focus on emotions, it tends to be on negative ones. This reflected a trend in much of the research done into fathers and their involvement with their children up until the middle of the 1990s, which tended to problematise the experience of fatherhood. This body of work tended to centre on the negative aspects of fatherhood; such as the stresses of coping with the competing demands of work and family. Alternatively the focus was on positioning fathers as "troubled fathers, subject to a range of social, psychological and physical difficulties" (Lupton and Barclay, 1997, p60).

It is generally taken for granted that shifts in family formation – more divorce, family formation changes, smaller families, step families, etc. – and subsequent shifts in gender roles, have led to a questioning of fathers' roles. This view would seem to

assume that men themselves remain fairly passive in this and some argue that men have much to gain from retaining their "gender privilege".

> Many feminists have been critical of men's participation in domestic life. They have argued that women's social and economic inequality and their general alienation and unhappiness are perpetuated by men's reluctance to engage in household work and take equal or greater responsibility for child care (Lupton and Barclay, 1997, p54).

Others have argued that men themselves want to change and can be a driving force behind shifts in expectations and perceptions of father involvement, and what prevents them is a dominant form of "metropolitan business masculinity" (Ferguson, 2001, p130) which continues to position men as outside the nurturant sphere. These issues of gender relations and masculinities are explored in more detail in the following chapter.

The asynchrony between culture and conduct

One of the key contemporary debates about fatherhood is around an apparent discrepancy between culture and conduct. In the late 1980s Ralph LaRossa (1988) was among the first to explore this concept, and he suggested that:

> There is the *culture of fatherhood* (specifically the shared norms, values and beliefs surrounding men's parenting), and there is the *conduct of fatherhood* (what fathers do, their paternal behaviour) (LaRossa, 1988, p451, italics in original).

LaRossa (1988) argues that there is an "asynchrony" between these two aspects of fatherhood, and that the "conduct of fatherhood has not kept pace with the culture" (p452). Esther Dermott provides a useful summary of this debate when she concludes that while cultural representations suggest a model of ever increasing involvement of fathers in their children's lives, and a move towards equal parenthood, research into the behaviour or conduct of fathers suggests much less change in

men's activities, and a continuing division of labour between mothers and fathers (Dermott, 2008).

When the "culture of fatherhood" is discussed, there is rarely any effort made to distinguish between different types of culture, whether, for example, authors are referring to "internal" cultures, such as the personal beliefs and attitudes of fathers, or "external" cultures, such as societal expectations, or policies built on implicit normative expectations about father's roles. The fact that "norms, values and beliefs" (LaRossa, 1998, p451) are assumed to be shared fails to account for the possibility that cultural contradictions may exist, and the impact of these cultural contradictions on the realities of fatherhood have often been overlooked.

So, linked in with the debate on culture and conduct is a focus on the practice of fatherhood – what fathers do and how they feel about fatherhood, or how they conduct themselves as fathers. These debates are often based on comparisons of time use between men and women, or comparisons between different cohorts of men (this issue will be explored further in Chapter Two and Chapter Three). While attempts have been made to measure what fathers do, in terms of how much time they spend with their children, and what kind of activities they are involved in, there are ongoing debates about how much fathers' behaviour has actually changed. Some have even argued that the assumption that cultural expectations have shifted is a false one, with recent scholarship beginning to challenge how much the culture of fatherhood, particularly in the popular media, has really changed (Singley and Hynes, 2005, Wall and Arnold, 2007).

Wall and Arnold (2007) point out that "when media portrayals and advice literature are subject to content and discourse analyses, superficial references to "new fathers" and "parents" are often undermined by images and text that position fathers as part-time, secondary, less competent parents with fewer parenting responsibilities and greater breadwinning responsibilities than mothers" (p511). Their own analysis of a series of parenting articles published by a national newspaper in Canada concludes that fathers are positioned as workers first and parents second.

> Their involvement in day-to-day caregiving tasks or emotional care, while admirable when it occurs, is not necessarily *expected*, nor is it considered

> essential to healthy development of their children (Wall and Arnold, 2007, p522, my italics).

Sunderland's (2000) analysis of parenting advice texts also finds that men are positioned as "baby entertainer, bumbling assistant and line manager". The evidence of these analyses suggests that fathers' involvement with their children is limited by social expectations and cultural assumptions perpetuated in popular media which continue to perceive fathers as secondary parents to mothers.

The debate about fathers' conduct and contribution to parenting is also intertwined with a debate about the role that breadwinning plays in fatherhood, and whether or not financial provision is how men "do" fatherhood. Although Dermott (2008) concludes that "the association of fatherhood with breadwinning is, in actuality, not so strong" (p41) and that financial provision for their children is not an important aspect of fathering for the men in her study[2], others argue for a more nuanced understanding of breadwinning.

> Research consensus is that breadwinning continues to be of consequence in fathering, to a greater or lesser degree, but other paternal desiderata have emerged alongside it, and the rise in mothers' employment has undermined the *sole* breadwinner ideal (Pleck, 2010, p616, italics in original).

The significance of financial provision to the role of fathering is explored in more detail in the following chapter.

Approaching the research thesis

Three key theoretical approaches have played an influential part in forming the lenses through which to view contemporary fatherhood. These are: fatherhood and the gender equality project; fatherhood and masculinities; and fatherhood within the

[2] Dermott argues that "tying men's orientation to work specifically with parenthood puts the emphasis in the wrong place" (p41) and that "the importance of earning money is a taken for granted necessity" (p37) and that emphasis should be on "the aspects of male parenting that fathers themselves view as most significant: emotions, the expression of affection, and the exclusivity of the reciprocal father-child dyad" (p143).

broader sociology of families and intimate relationships. It is within this international body of work that this thesis is positioned. In drawing on these multiple discourses the thesis attempts to integrate these overlapping ideas, and respond to the questions they raise about contemporary fatherhood.

The thesis is situated within the background of academic attention to, and public discourse around, contemporary fatherhood. As well as responding to the questions raised by previous literature around the experiences and issues of contemporary fatherhood, this study seeks to make a contribution to the sociology of fatherhood and also to provide detailed insight into the realities of fathering.

The aim of this project was to explore the transition to first time fatherhood for a group of men living in contemporary Ireland. I wanted to uncover what men themselves think and feel about fatherhood, how they view their roles as fathers and what day-to-day life is like for new fathers. In looking specifically at men at the point when they are becoming parents for the first time, I set out to explore how men adapt to fatherhood, and what becoming a parent means to them.

In terms of orienting research questions I wanted to explore: what are the beliefs and attitudes that men have about fatherhood? What do they see their role as? What influences these attitudes and beliefs? What kind of concerns do they have about becoming a father? Just as importantly, how do this group of men "do" fathering? What kind of meaning do they attach to their practices?

In attempting to address these questions I hoped to contribute to the wider intellectual project on fatherhood by answering the larger question about how much men's behaviour as fathers is changing or has already changed and to explore the meaning of fatherhood for this group of men. In addition I wanted to explore how these issues intersect with the gender relations and the wider social structures within which these men are parenting, and to position this research within the Irish context.

The next chapter, **Chapter Two: Fatherhood and Research**, outlines in further detail the international body of academic work that has contributed to this study, and identify the gaps in knowledge that this thesis seeks to address.

A detailed analysis of the approach to the research is given in **Chapter Three: Research Methods**, which explores the qualitative longitudinal approach, the challenges and limitations of the research and the methods used to analyse the data, and reflects on the research process from the researcher and participant's viewpoint.

In **Chapter Four: Families and Change in Ireland** I provide an overview of the context for the research in its Irish setting, exploring changing patterns of family formation in Ireland and using data collected during the participant recruitment process to locate the interviewee sample within the national context.

In the following five chapters, **Chapters Five, Six, Seven, Eight and Nine**, I present the main findings of the research, using previous empirical research to set each of the broad themes in context.

Chapter Five: Setting the Scene describes the interviewees and their partners and maps their first steps towards creating a family, and explores the men's attitudes towards fatherhood.

Chapter Six: Experiences of Pregnancy and Childbirth examines the men's journey through pregnancy, their anticipation of birth and the realities of labour and delivery.

Chapter Seven: Doing Fatherhood explores the men's adjustment to the reality of parenting, their burgeoning relationship with their child, the context of their extended family and their reflections on the first few months of fathering.

Chapter Eight: From Couple to Family Unit describes the men's feelings about their relationship with their partner and explores the impact of the baby on the couples' relationships.

Chapter Nine: Employment and Fatherhood addresses the extent to which the fathers' attitudes towards work shift and how these attitudes manifest themselves in behaviour and choices around work, and examines how the fathers attempt to balance work and family life, and their concerns and thoughts about the future.

In **Chapter Ten: Moving Towards Gender Symmetry?** I argue that the evidence of this study points to more changes in fathers' conduct than culture and that the

research demonstrates the ambiguous position the men hold as they seek to reconcile their roles as carers and workers. I conclude that men's increasing involvement as parents offers the potential of a route to more gender symmetry.

Chapter Two: Fatherhood and Research – Literature Review

Introduction

In this chapter I examine some of the key academic literature relating to fathers, fatherhood and fathering, and I outline the significant sociological theories that have contributed to the contemporary sociology of fatherhood and to the formulation of this thesis. I am particularly concerned with the role that gender plays in the construction of fatherhood, how contemporary conceptions of masculinity intersect with ideas about family and family relationships and the potential for family life to be examined in the light of recent contributions to the research community on personal life and intimate relationships.

Sociology has long explored gender and the family as sites of interest, as previously outlined in **Chapter One: Introduction**. However, the attention paid to fatherhood has increased in the past two or three decades, partly as a response to feminist concerns (Doucet, 2006) and the fatherhood rights movements (Collier and Sheldon, 2008, Featherstone, 2009), partly as interest in masculinities has increased (Connell, 2005a) and partly as sociology has turned its attention to exploring intimate relationships (Jamieson, 1998, Dermott, 2008, Gabb, 2008) and personal lives (Smart, 2007). Undoubtedly this increasing concern with "fathers, fathering and fatherhood" (Morgan, 2004, p382) has also been connected with the fundamental shifts in gender relationships and the way in which men and women and children live their lives.

There has also been a growing appreciation of the potential benefits to children of having more "involved" fathers, who provide for their offspring not only financially, but also through their engagement, accessibility and responsibility (Lewis and Lamb, 2003). Linked to this are the increased focus on fatherhood of policy makers at state and European levels, as attempts are made to reconcile work and family life (O'Brien, 2004), and the tensions between "cash and care" (Hobson, 2002), as well as

legislation on the rights and responsibilities of fathers (Collier and Sheldon, 2008). In addition men also benefit from fatherhood and involvement in domestic life:

> Men who have closer relationships with their children report greater marital satisfaction and better health. They feel less stress... and less pressure to be successful, powerful, and competitive (Kimmel, 2008a, p150).

Clearly it is possible that the relationship between marital satisfaction and a close relationship with children can flow in either direction and it is possible that a positive marital relationship encourages men to establish and maintain closer relationships with their children.

As recently as 2002 Hearn et al were able to write in their critical assessment of the state of academic research into men and masculinities in Europe: "relatively little research has been carried out on men as carers" (Hearn et al., 2002, p398). It is now debateable whether fathers, fathering and fatherhood can claim to be a neglected area of sociological inquiry, and in some ways the task of reviewing the current theoretical and empirical work on fatherhood in sociology has been made easier by the recent publication of several key works, including Andrea Doucet's *Do Men Mother?* (2006), Esther Dermott's *Intimate Fatherhood* (2008) and Brid Featherstone's *Contemporary Fathering* (2009). This work reflects the increasing attention paid to fatherhood in recent years, even though there remain significant gaps in our knowledge about contemporary fatherhood.

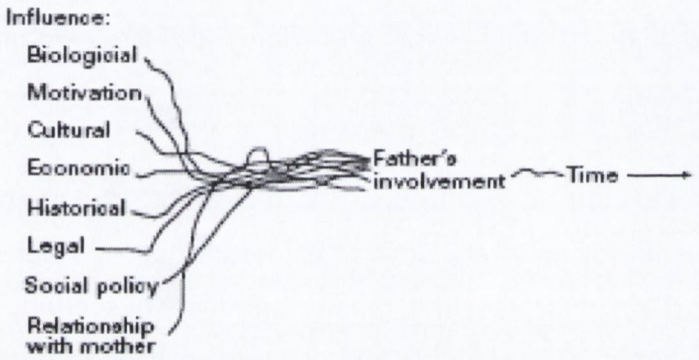
Yet Lewis and Lamb's recent review of the current state of research into fatherhood "Understanding Fatherhood" argued that:

> the complex influences on family processes have inhibited efforts to develop a clear understanding of, or policy statements about, men's family roles, in part because professionals and academics often fail to acknowledge these complexities and resort instead to stereotypes (Lewis and Lamb, 2007, p23).

Lewis and Lamb identify many factors that can influence fathers' involvement with their children, including biological, motivational, cultural, economic, historical, legal, social policy and the relationship with the child's mother. The complexity of analysing

these multiple dimensions of fathering and fatherhood are clear, as not only do these factors interact with one another but they also interact over time. Lewis and Lamb illustrate these "added strands of complexity" (see Figure 1: Factors Influencing Father Involvement) and claim "the most fundamental need at present is for research that draws the tangled strands into a tidier and more systematic bundle" (Lewis and Lamb, 2007, p23).

Figure 1: Factors Influencing Father Involvement



(from Lamb and Lewis, 2007)

Clearly there are additional factors that may also influence fathers' involvement, such as personality, age, health, the number of children, the family form, sexuality and ethnicity.

Another way of viewing Lamb and Lewis's (2007) construct of the factors influencing fathers' involvement is as an attempt to understand how these various aspects shape the conduct of fathers, and how their behaviour as fathers is affected by these interrelated influences. Although Lamb and Lewis identify how these factors can also change over time, as the power of their influence changes during the life course of fathers, time spent with their children can also be seen as playing a significant role in contributing to fathers' connection with their children.

In Ireland the attention paid to fathers, both by academics and by government policy, has been limited. Although there have been important contributions to the debate about the role of fathers and the role of policy makers in relation to fathers (Ferguson and Hogan, 2004, McKeown et al., 1998), there have been only a handful of

sociological empirical studies of the experience of fathers in Ireland. Consequently very little is known about the experience of fathers in contemporary Ireland as "there has been virtually no empirical research done on fathers in Ireland which explores their actual views" (Ferguson and Hogan, 2004). Research that has been carried out in Ireland tends to have focused on the 'problem' issues, such as non-resident fathers or socially marginalised fathers, teen fathers and so on (Corcoran, 2005). Hearn et al (2002) use Ireland as an example of the "huge gap in knowledge [that] exists with respect to the division of domestic labour and parenting in Ireland... Irish fathers' accounts of their partcipation in child care and domestic life remain to be documented" (p398).

What has received attention in Ireland are the social and demographic changes that have taken place in the past 50 or so years, which has meant that "the behaviour of Irish people in relation to birth, marriage and family formation has changed quite dramatically" (Tovey and Share, 2003). Much of this change has been attributed to the extent to which there have been significant changes in women's place in Irish society, with much larger numbers of women entering the paid work force and remaining in it after marriage, widespread use of contraception resulting in delayed childbearing and a reduction in family size, as well as childbirth outside marriage increasing and becoming more socially acceptable.

Clearly these changes have had an impact on men's roles, and Ireland has shifted from a strong male breadwinner model to one of a dual income model (Cook and McCashin, 1997) or arguably a one-and-a-half income model. However, government policy has done little to recognise the modern challenges of balancing work and family life, and Ireland remains one of the few European countries that does not provide men with statutory entitlement to paternity leave, despite having one of the more generous maternity benefit schemes in Europe (this issue will be explored further in Chapter Four).

Meanwhile, the gender equality agenda has received significant attention in Ireland through the reports produced by such bodies as the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) and the Central Statistics Office (CSO) which show that while the gap

between the genders in relation to domestic work is narrowing, women continue to spend more time on childcare and housework than their partners (McGinnity et al., 2008) and the phenomenon of the "second shift" (Hochschild, 2003) of women's dual role as earner and housekeeper remains a common one.

The current state of knowledge about the social and economic position of men and women in contemporary Ireland will be explored further below, and also in Chapter Four: Families and Change in Ireland, which provides a more detailed picture of how the fathers in this study 'fit' in with the wider national context.

Taken together, these findings raise the question of how the alleged "involved" father of contemporary society *actually* involves himself in his children's upbringing and care. This has led some commentators to question the extent to which fatherhood is in a state of transformation and whether in fact the "breadwinner" function remains the primary role of contemporary fathers (Brannen and Nilsen, 2006). In the wider research context internationally, as was explored in Chapter One: Introduction, recent scholarship has begun to challenge how much the culture of fatherhood has really changed (Wall and Arnold, 2007, Singley and Hynes, 2005). Some have suggested that fathers' involvement with their children remains limited by social expectations and cultural assumptions which continue to perceive fathers as secondary parents to mothers.

Gender equality

As Michael Kimmel points out:

> Gender has joined race and class in our understanding of the foundations of an individual's identity. Gender, we now know, is one of the axes around which social life is organised, and through which we understand our own experiences (Kimmel, 2008b, p1).

This awareness of the centrality of gender in shaping social life has its roots in the work of feminist scholars.

Feminism's interest in fatherhood has been inextricably linked with concerns about the gendered division of labour within the home, and much attention has been paid to the "stalled revolution" (Hochschild, 1989) of the gender equality project. Research has consistently revealed that "even when women spend as many hours in the paid labour force as their husbands do, they retain primary responsibility for homemaking and childrearing" (Risman, 1998, p93), resulting in a "second shift" (Hochschild, 1989, 2003) for women who work outside the home.

This concern with domestic responsibilities grew out of the changes in women's lives brought about by the influence of the second wave of feminism of the 1960s and 1970s, when "a key early demand was that women should be freed from their confinement to the domestic and enabled to work outside the home" (Featherstone, 2004, p42). The role that domestic responsibilities play in ongoing gender inequality has been debated by different forms of feminism, with radical feminists arguing that "men's continuing failure to accept their fair share of domestic responsibilities is linked to their refusal to give up a position of privilege" (Featherstone, 2004, p44).

> What emerged quite quickly and continues in the twenty-first century was a complex and tension-ridden set of imperatives towards developing more plural understandings of women's desires in relation to children, men and family life (Featherstone, 2004, p44).

This included feminist literature on mothering which exposed a key question: "is the goal to share childcare with men or to mother without men?" (Featherstone, 2004, p44). Featherstone (2004) suggests that the focus on this feminist thinking has been with "family practices", reflecting a multiplicity and fluidity of relationships and practices of those involved in family life. The concern with family practices, what is done, what behaviours or conduct can be found within family life, is a central component of this study.

Recent analysis of men and women's time use in Ireland found that among dual-earning couples, who now make up the majority of working age couples in Ireland

(55% in 2004), "there are still gender differences in the allocation of time to employment and unpaid tasks in dual earner couples, with women having on average a higher workload than men" (McGinnity and Russell, 2008, pxi). The same *Gender Inequalities in Time Use* study also found that even in couples where neither partner is involved in paid work, women still have a higher share of domestic work. This is "strongly suggestive of a role for gender ideology in the division of unpaid labour, with men and women conforming to sex roles" (McGinnity and Russell, 2008, p72). Overall McGinnity and Russell (2008) conclude that their findings suggest "a relatively traditional (and unequal) gender division of labour in Ireland, compared to other European countries, even if this is changing" (p72).

The *Gender Inequalities in Time Use* study was the first to examine the gendered distribution of paid and unpaid work in Ireland, and it is not clear from the reported results how much couples' behaviour differs by cohort and whether, for example, the older cohort of couples behave in more 'traditional' ways than younger couples. It also focused on dual earner couples where both partners work full-time, and acknowledges that future research should examine couples where one works full-time and one works part-time. This may give a more coherent picture of couples with young children, given that 76.2% of part-time jobs are held by women (2008, CSO Statistical Yearbook, own calculations), and that a third of women in employment are in part-time jobs.

For some commentators, the fact that "women changed rapidly but the jobs they went out to and the men they came home to have not changed" (Hochschild, 2003, xxi) is at the heart of what Dermott (2008) calls the paradox of culture and conduct: "while cultural representations of fatherhood suggest a new model of ever increasing involvement and a move towards equal parenthood, the conduct of fathers suggests much less change in men's activities and obvious continuing division of labour between mothers and fathers" (p7).

For feminists the liberating potential of moves towards equal parenthood is clear in that "men becoming more like women with regard to parenthood could provide the other half of the transformation in gender roles, to balance women's growing similarity to men in terms of participation in paid work" (Dermott, 2008, p77), and of the exciting

possibility of a route to "backdoor equality", "not through an explicit commitment to gender equality or even as a necessary response to women's expectations, but because of a desire to be involved with children in a way that was previously the preserve of women" (Dermott, 2008, p77).

Doucet's (2006) work on the experiences of primary care-giving fathers in Canada plays an important role in exploring the extent to which mothers and fathers are inter-changeable, and also contributes to the gap Dermott identifies in the literature of "how men (including fathers) think about motherhood" (p78). In attempting to answer the question posed by her book's title, *Do Men Mother?* Doucet draws attention to "both the similarities and differences between men's and women's ways of parenting" (p218). Doucet was surprised to find "a strong sense of the connectedness of mothering and fathering" and that "fathers rely profoundly on mothers to define their own fathering" (p216).

The issue of whether fathering is different from mothering is one of the key debates linking fathering with masculinities, and the question of whether fathers have something unique to offer their children is a politically contentious one, connected in part with a broader political concern with paternal "absence". Radically conflicting positions are advanced by different stakeholders – conservatives, feminists, fathers' rights groups, policy makers (Marsiglio and Pleck, 2005).

Dermott suggests that "in order to understand either mothering or fathering they must be looked at in relation to each other" (Dermott, 2008, p78), but Doucet cautions that studying fathers' care-giving through a "maternal lens" limits our views of fathers' ways of caring. Just as feminism has cautioned against understanding the "voices of one gender against a landscape designed by the other, so too these cautions must be brought to bear when we study men in female-dominated domains of social life" (Doucet, 2006, p28) She critiques her own question, 'do men mother?', as flawed, given that it implies that we are looking at fathering through a female perspective and "thus, other ways of nurturing are pushed into the shadows and obscured" (Doucet, 2006, p222).

In addition Doucet identifies other problems with the question of whether men mother. Firstly, the implicit assumption that there is an ideal type of mother, and that mothers

will be the primary care-givers. Secondly, the question construes mothering as work rather than identity, when in fact there is "often a blurred line between who people think they are and what they do" (p223). Finally, the question of how men mother is also in danger of rendering invisible those mothers who remain "in the picture" (p224).

As an alternative approach Doucet argues:

> Rather than comparing fathers to mothers, we require novel ways of listening to and theorizing about fathers' approaches to parenting. More effective questions to be grappled with are ones that explore how fathers enact their parental responsibilities and ultimately how they reinvent fathering (Doucet, 2006, p225).

Support for the idea that fathers are reinventing fathering is found in the consistent finding that men do not see their own fathers as providing role models (Pleck and Masciadrelli, 2004, Daly, 1995) and that they aspire to a different model of fathering, one which they see as "different" and "better" (Lupton and Barclay, 1997).

Maternal gatekeeping

The concept of maternal gatekeeping can be defined as the way in which mothers' beliefs and behaviours can act as a barrier to men's involvement in caring for children and the home. It can be "one important source of men's underinvolvement in domestic labor and may inhibit mutually satisfactory arrangements for sharing family work" (Allen and Hawkins, 1999, p200). It is connected with the "vital mediation role mothers play in facilitating men's parenting... [and the fact that] men's attempts to become more involved in childcare are contingent on maternal beliefs and mothers' assessment of its benefits" (Featherstone, 2009, p80-81). Allen and Hawkins (1999) provide a model of three dimensions of maternal gatekeeping: mothers setting rigid standards; external validation of mothering identity and gender differentiated conceptions of family roles.

Doucet's (2006) work explores the impact of maternal gatekeeping on the primary caregiving fathers in her study and she finds that mothers "play a key role in determining the ways that fathers take on the emotional and community responsibility for children" (p229). She describes the way in which fathers rely on mothers to set the style of parenting, and the way in which women's embodied experience of pregnancy, breastfeeding and maternity leave positions them as parenting experts. Doucet also identifies the strong belief that the fathers in her study hold that "fathers and mothers have a different connection to their children and that the one held by the mother is stronger, vaster, and more profound" (p220).

Although maternal gatekeeping is primarily seen as a barrier to father involvement, Doucet also offers a more optimistic conceptualisation of gatekeeping, which sees the potential for women to act as gate-openers, rather than as defenders of their domestic territory, when she introduces the idea of "women moving over and creating space for men" (p232):

> Metaphorically, the image of borders (borderwork) and gates (gatekeeping) can be joined here. It is women, however, who lead in taking down this gender border, or opening the gate, so that men can also participate fully in parenting. This idea of opening and closing borders or gates provides for a more dynamic concept of maternal gatekeeping and the recognition that while it may occur in particular spaces and times, it does shift and change and even disappear (p232).

Doucet concludes that the men in her study reconstruct masculinities by simultaneously distancing themselves from the feminine *and* by radically revising notions of masculine care practices. She finds that there are times when "gender is muted and fathers become parents in seemingly ungendered ways" (p45) and other times when "gender differences ignite" and offers the view that: "gender difference, unlike dominant approaches in feminist sociology, can co-exist with equality and, indeed, what should be emphasized is gender *symmetry* rather than gender equality" (p233).

Connected with the idea of maternal gatekeeping is Featherstone's important point that "positive paternal influences are more likely to occur not only when there is a

supportive father-child relationship but are also crucially linked to the father's relationship with the mother" (Featherstone, 2003, p244).

Masculinities

There is sparse literature specifically addressing the relationship between fatherhood and masculinities (Marsiglio and Pleck, 2005) but it is possible to engage with this topic by examining work which contributes to a "gendered understanding of fatherhood".

Like Doucet's work, this study is concerned with "whether engaged fathering confirms or challenges current theoretical understandings of masculinities" (p237). RW Connell's breakthrough work *Masculinities* (Connell, 1995, 2005) outlines the difficulty in defining masculinity, but argues that it "is simultaneously a place in gender relations, the practices through which men and women engage that place in gender, and the effects of these practices in bodily experience, personality and culture" (p71).

Connell claims that hegemonic masculinity continues to provide men with a patriarchal dividend, recognising that while:

> The number of men rigorously practising the hegemonic pattern in its entirety maybe quite small. Yet the majority of men gain from its hegemony, since they benefit from the patriarchal dividend, the advantage men in general gain from the overall subordination of women (Connell, 1995, 2005, p79).

However, Connell also argues that while men continue to dominate corporate, political and economic power, there has been a seismic shift in culture: "what has crumbled, in the industrial countries, is the *legitimation* of patriarchy... patriarchy has to be excused and defended against a cultural presumption of equality" (p226, original italics).

The notion that patriarchy is now culturally illegitimate lends support to the idea that masculinities are being actively reconstructed by men. Doucet argues that her research findings lend support to this: "Fathers' narratives... are filled with visible and

inchoate contradictions, which tell how fathers are both determined to distance themselves from the feminine but are also, in practice, radically revisioning masculine care and ultimately our understandings of masculinities" (Doucet, 2006, p237).

Other research supports the idea that the hegemonic structure is changing: "to qualify for hegemonic masculinity, it is no longer enough to be rational, goal-means oriented, career oriented and disciplined. Today, men must also show their readiness to engage in childcare" (Johansson and Klinth, 2008, p58). Whether this change is evidence of a more child oriented masculinity or the adoption of a more gender-equal ideology for men remains unclear, and probably varies from one man to another.

In his examination of masculinities and men's lives in Ireland Harry Ferguson (2001) argues that historically traditional masculinity in Ireland was "essentially rural, based heavily around the family, marriage and celibacy... the celibate priest was the role model for Irish masculinity" (Ferguson, 2001, p120). In addition, masculinity was strongly connected to providing financially: "Irish men, married or single, have traditionally gone to extraordinary lengths to find work and make a living for themselves and their families" (ibid, p121). The economic growth of the 1990s saw the consolidation of women's mass participation in the workforce, which had started two decades previously, and reduced the numbers of men who were sole breadwinners. Ferguson argues that contemporary hegemonic masculinity in Ireland is based on a "metropolitan business" (ibid, p130) model, one that continues to privilege the hard-working family man, and sideline his capacity to care.

As mentioned in the introductory chapter to this thesis, the extent to which breadwinning continues to be an important component of fathering continues to be contested. Commentators, such as Dermott (2008), see breadwinning as "unshackled" (p25) from fatherhood. Yet her argument is confusing, as her evidence is the fact that, contrary to previous research, men who are fathers do *not* work longer hours than non-fathers, which goes against the "expectation that men should increase their hours of work as a measure of work commitment when they become fathers, in order to provide financially for their partner and children" (Dermott, 2008, p33). In fact Dermott's analysis of the British Household Panel Study and National Child Development Survey found that fathers actually *reduce* their working time when a

baby is born. She seems to suggest that this means men are disengaged from work rather than committed to it and that, therefore, breadwinning is not a primary focus of their fathering.

What seems to be missing from Dermott's account is an exploration of the *meanings* the men in her study ascribed to their work *in relation to their fathering*. She seems to interpret fathers' attitudes towards earning money as a "taken for granted necessity" (p37) and the rarity of men mentioning "earning money as an aspect of fathering" (p36) as meaning that "the association of fatherhood with breadwinning is, in actuality, not so strong" (p41). Dermott goes on to argue that the reason breadwinning continues to be seen as core to fathering, when the statistics relating to men's working patterns and labour market engagement are analysed, is because "masculine and fathering identities will be interwoven" (p39) and because "the importance of employment in displaying socially appropriate masculinity is unquestioned" (p41). Her distinction fails to see the co-existence of both masculinity and fatherhood in her sample of fathers.

Perhaps some of the confusion about the salience of breadwinning to fatherhood comes from the fact that, as identified by Warren (2007): "the breadwinning concept is used extensively in academic debate but there is rarely any explicit attempt to pinpoint its meaning". Warren's review provides a useful analysis of the various ways in which breadwinning has been conceptualised; as main financial provider; as main labour market participant; as ideological and policy prescription; as masculine identity; and as female breadwinning. She concludes that "what is needed in the study of breadwinning is the recognition that breadwinning, like caring, is a complex rather than one dimensional concept" (Warren, 2007, p330) and calls for more work in qualitative studies on the meaning of breadwinning.

Individualization and connectedness theses

This study also draws on some of the ideas from Carol Smart's work on the sociology of family, particularly her critique of the theories of individualization propounded by

Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, who claim "men and women can and should, may and must, decide for themselves how to shape their lives" (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002, p ix), and that the "bonds and beliefs" that previously bound people to their families can be loosened or rejected. The view that "growing individualization brings with it not only a diminished capacity to love properly, but also a diminishing capacity to commit to others or to relationships" (Smart, 2007, p66) is seen as a challenge to committed relationships.

Smart points out that the portrait painted by individualization theorist Anthony Giddens of how a "pure relationship" is "entered into for its own sake... [and] continued only in so far as it is thought by both parties to deliver enough satisfactions for each individual to stay within it" (Giddens, 1992, p58) bears no relation to the "kinds of lives being represented in local and more closely specified studies of families" (Smart, 2007, p17).

In addition, the individualization theory has been criticised for its assumption that individuals are able to make free choices about their life course, and while it is certainly possible to argue that becoming a parent and the style of parenting practiced is now a matter of choice for many people, "the opportunities for individual men as fathers to shape their own life trajectories are highly variable and frequently shaped by circumstances outside their immediate control" (Morgan, 2002, p285).

Smart also draws on the work of Neil Gross (Gross, 2005) and argues that "the individual is not a free agent, but embedded in culture and history" (Smart, 2007, p26). Building on this notion of embeddedness, she points out that "to live a personal life is to have agency and to make choices, but the personhood implicit in the concept requires the presence of others to respond to and to contextualise those actions and choices" (Smart, 2007, p28).

In *Personal Life* (2007) Smart offers five core concepts through which to view family and personal relationships; memory, biography, embeddedness, relationality and the imaginary. In arguing for a new way of approaching the study of relationships and family life she calls for a counter-balance to the individualization thesis, by adopting "the connectedness thesis" (Smart, 2007, p189), which she defines as "an awareness of connection, relationship, reciprocal emotion, entwinement, memory, history and so

on" (Smart, 2007, p189). She grounds this argument in her "intellectual and ethical commitment to representing the everyday lives of ordinary people in the fullest and most nuanced ways possible" (Smart, 2007, p190).

Smart's "connectedness thesis" suggests that studies concerned with family relationships need to pay attention to the concepts she outlines and to "move out of the flat world of most sociological accounts of relationships and families to incorporate the kinds of emotional and relational dimensions that are meaningful in everyday life" (Smart, 2007, p3).

Dermott (2008) argues that "emotion now functions as the basis for good fatherhood in a way it did not in the past... it seems that the emotional connection has been transformed from an accepted but unremarkable fact to become the central component of good fathering" (p70). In fact, Dermott's main thesis (as suggested by the title of her book, *Intimate Fatherhood*) is that the most significant aspects of contemporary fathering are "emotions, the expressions of affection, and the exclusivity of the reciprocal father-child dyad" (p143). She finds that "it was not the routine, transferable work of childcare that mattered nor the total amount of time spent with children" (p62), and in addition that "the link between the emotional relationship of the father and child and the work of childcare is hazy" (p75).

Dermott also suggests that focusing on the emotional relationship the men have with their children rather than on the work of childcare (that they don't provide) resolves "the apparent gulf between 'culture' and 'conduct'" (p143), but in reality this seems more to be ignoring men's behaviour rather than explaining the apparent disjuncture. An alternative interpretation would be that the men in her study justify their lack of practical involvement by emphasising their emotional relationship with their children, having picked up on the value placed on intimacy and communication as the "central component of good fathering". Another argument is that the real gulf is not between culture and conduct, but between theory and reality, in other words perhaps that culture has not changed as much as we thought? Perhaps some of the confusion also stems from the fact that Dermott does not seem to define 'culture', whether it is an internalised ideal of a normative notion about how an individual man should father, or an externally produced script which men are expected to perform?

Dermott states that the father-child relationship plays a prominent role in the discourse around contemporary fatherhood, giving it a primary status, and she observes that: "Fathers are viewed as important for their children and vice versa. This construction sees fatherhood as a *standalone relationship*, which is therefore inherently equal to motherhood, and downplays other relationships that are integral to the negotiation of fatherhood, such as the role of mothers as both parents and partners... [and] it does run the risk of unthinkingly, leaving social contexts and influential structural forces unexplored" (Dermott, 2008, p137 emphasis added).

This also echoes Morgan's point that "the focus on a simple dyadic relationship between a father and child excludes the numerous and complex ways in which this dyad is linked to others and to wider social structures" (Morgan, 2002, p273) and Featherstone's argument that "it is absolutely crucial that individual practices by men as fathers, including the kinds of knowledge they draw on, are located within wider social relations" (Featherstone, 2009, p108).

Once again, the call made by Lewis and Lamb (2007) to pay close attention to the "tangled strands" of influences on fathers, fathering and fatherhood is reiterated. This emphasis on locating fathers' practices within wider social relations and structures has played an important role in forming this research thesis.

Key questions for this research

The literature has raised some of the key questions which this study seeks to address.

- Can this study offer any insights on the asynchrony of culture and conduct, the apparent gulf between attitudes and behaviour? (LaRossa, 1988; (Dermott, 2008)
- How are men involved in parenting and does their involvement provide a possible route to "back door equality"? (Dermott, 2008, Doucet, 2006,

Featherstone, 2009) Is there any evidence of more gender symmetry in parenting? (Doucet, 2006)

- What new insights on the ways in which fathering and mothering are related are offered by the study? (Doucet, 2006, Dermott, 2008, Featherstone, 2003) What does the study tell us about the gendered distribution of childcare and domestic work? (Featherstone, 2009, Doucet, 2006, Dermott, 2008, McGinnity et al., 2008)

- Are the fathers in this study "reinventing fathering"? Does their fathering challenge our understandings of contemporary masculinities? (Doucet, 2006, Ferguson, 2001, Morgan, 2002, Connell, 2005a, Featherstone, 2009) How are emotion and care connected? (Smart, 2007, Doucet, 2006)

- How do the men in this study relate to work, as men and as fathers? What meaning do they give to breadwinning? (Warren, 2007, Dermott, 2008)

- How can we study fathers in the context of their connections to wider social structures and their embeddedness in relationships with people and institutions? (Lewis and Lamb, 2007, Featherstone, 2009, Smart, 2007, Morgan, 2002)

This final question about how we can study fathers in context leads us into the next chapter, **Chapter Three: Research Methods**, where the research design and methods are described and the challenges of studying men and fathers are explored.

Chapter Three: Research Methods

Introduction

This thesis presents an exploration of the experience and meaning of fatherhood in contemporary Ireland based on an analysis of twenty first-time fathers' accounts of becoming a father. The research design is longitudinal and qualitative in nature, and aimed to tap into the process of becoming a father for the first time. The research is influenced by feminist theories of the meanings of pregnancy, childbirth and the early stages of fatherhood, and contributes to the growing body of masculinities literature and the sociology of fatherhood. This research is concerned with gaining a better understanding of men's position in their families and how this intersects with their other roles, as partner, worker, son, brother and friend, as well as how the cultural expectations and meanings of fatherhood impact on men's everyday lives and interpersonal relationships.

Recent theoretical work on family studies has explored the possible contribution of new theoretical and analytical approaches, such as Carol Smart's call "to move out of the flat world of most sociological accounts of relationships and families to incorporate the kinds of emotional and relational dimensions that are meaningful in everyday life" (Smart, 2007, p3) and Jacqui Gabb's argument that psycho-social research offers the opportunity to reconceptualise the researcher as "a constitutive factor in research" (Gabb, 2010, pxvi). These moves towards interrogating the researcher's own subjectivity built on longstanding feminist arguments about the significance of subjectivity in the research process. I have been influenced by these ideas in my own approach to this study, in that I have constantly been aware of how both my own experiences and others' perceptions of me have the potential to influence many aspects of the study, from who is likely to volunteer to take part, to what participants choose to reveal or conceal, to how they present their own experiences. I have included reflections on this issue throughout this chapter, and indeed throughout the thesis.

This chapter presents a detailed discussion of the research approach and includes a description of the research design, including methods of recruitment, interviewing and data analysis. It describes the methods employed and offers a reflection on the methodological issues encountered during the research process. The chapter starts by describing the research design, addresses the issues of accessing and recruiting fathers for the research, describes the interview participants, then moves on to discuss the interviews conducted with the men, and both the participants' and my own reflections on the research process. It concludes with a description and exploration of the analytical approach taken.

Research design

There were three main phases to the research. The first phase involved the drafting of a questionnaire, "Becoming a Parent", which was designed to elicit attitudes towards parenthood and also provide empirical contextual data. The second purpose of the questionnaire was to act as a sifting device to recruit a sample of expectant fathers. The questionnaire was distributed via antenatal classes in a major Dublin maternity hospital. The second phase was to interview those expectant fathers who volunteered, during the last few weeks of their partners' pregnancy. The final phase was to re-interview the fathers when their babies were five months old. The findings in this thesis draw extensively on the interviews and data from the questionnaire is used selectively to support the qualitative data.

Accessing fathers as research participants

Expectant fathers do not tend to be as visible as expectant mothers – they have no physical signs of their impending parenthood, they may not attend the antenatal appointments that their partners do. As McKee and O'Brien pointed out "there is no ready-made sampling frame of fathers and as a group they are less accessible and conspicuous than mothers who tend to be more 'captive' to researchers through their involvement in antenatal and child health clinics" (McKee and O'Brien, 1983, p147). In considering where to make contact with expectant fathers, I followed an approach

taken by previous studies (Lupton and Barclay, 1997, Draper, 2003) by recruiting men through their attendance at antenatal classes, which in Dublin are provided in and by the maternity hospitals. Given that I wished to recruit a purposive sample of first-time fathers who were living with their child's mother, couple antenatal classes provided a logical route to this group. First-time fathers were recruited as I felt that this transition from non-parent to parent would present a good opportunity to ask the men to reflect on their aspirations for fatherhood. I decided to exclude men who were not living with their partners, as I felt that non-residential fathers would have different experiences of the day-to-day care of child, which though a valid topic of study, was beyond the scope of this research. Clearly recruiting via ante-natal classes introduces some bias into the selection process. There were groups who were less likely to attend the classes, such as those with language barriers or who were unable to attend for work reasons. Some research suggests that those from lower socio-economic backgrounds are less likely to attend ante-natal clinics and classes (Rowe and Garcia, 2003), although research into this area is limited. In addition it seemed likely that those men who are committed to their involvement as fathers were most likely to attend ante-natal classes. However, given the time and resources available to complete the research recruiting via ante-natal classes offered access to a high number of men expecting their first child.

Ethical approval was sought and received from the School of Social Work and Social Policy ethics committee in May 2007. Ethical considerations permeated the research process and I was conscious of the injunction to researchers to 'do no harm' at every stage of the research. Ethical concerns included being sensitive to the possibility that I might be an intrusive presence at the antenatal classes, addressing issues of confidentiality and anonymity, awareness of the potential for psychological distress during the interviews, as well as concerns about accurately representing the men's experiences and following through with post-research feedback. I have attempted to address these issues throughout the thesis.

I made contact with one of the three major maternity hospitals in Dublin, with which I was familiar from the pregnancy and birth of my own first child, meeting with a number of senior managers within the hospital to explain my proposed research. In

order for me to use the hospital as a recruitment site, I needed to receive ethical approval from the hospital ethics committee (having already received approval from my own departmental ethics committee) to allow me access to the antenatal classes. This involved submitting to the ethics committee the research proposal and all documents (such as information sheets and the questionnaire) that I intended to use. I subsequently attended a hospital ethics committee meeting to explain and defend my proposal.

The primary concern raised by the hospital ethical committee was how I would handle any distressing situation that may arise for the participants, if, for example, their child was very sick or died during the period of the research. I was able to reassure the ethical committee that I would handle any such situation with sensitivity. My previous work experience (as a helpline counsellor for people who had experienced sexual violence) provided me with skills to ensure that I would deal with distress appropriately, which seemed to reassure the committee sufficiently. I explained how during the first interview I planned to agree with the research participants that they would contact me once their baby was born to let me know that all was well, and we agreed that if I heard nothing from them they were comfortable for me to contact them six weeks after the due date to reconnect and check whether they wanted to continue their involvement. By having this agreement in place I hoped to minimise any intrusion into the early days after the births, and also to give the men a clear choice about their on-going participation in the research. I felt that even if something distressing had happened, the men may still want to take part in the research and share their experiences, and it was important to give them the opportunity to do so.

Once the hospital ethical committee had given its approval to the project in November 2007, I was given permission to contact the antenatal education department. I had preliminary discussions with the midwives involved in teaching the antenatal classes (over 100 courses are run each year) and negotiated an appropriate time to attend some of the classes, which run over five weeks, emphasising my desire to be as unobtrusive as possible to the classes.

I was conscious of the fact that not all men with pregnant partners would attend the antenatal classes, even though recent legislation in Ireland meant that men were entitled to take time off work to attend two antenatal sessions. However, the fact that the majority of the classes run by the hospital were free to attend (only the 5.30pm evening sessions incurred a fee) meant that I hoped I would be able to recruit men from a diverse range of socio-economic backgrounds.

The "Becoming a Parent" questionnaire

I developed the "Becoming a Parent" questionnaire which I distributed at the antenatal classes to expectant fathers *and* their partners. The questionnaire's primary purpose was to act as a sifting and recruiting tool for the interview phase of the study and in addition to give context to the interview sample. I informed couples that their participation was voluntary and that the questionnaires were anonymous, unless a man identified himself as wishing to take part in the qualitative interview phase of the research. In this case he was asked to record his name and contact details on the final page of the questionnaire.

The questionnaire provided an opportunity to inform potential participants about the qualitative phase of the study, as well as to collect some demographic information to compare my interview group with the overall antenatal class group. This strategy allowed me to contextualise the study's findings, and it also provided some useful baseline information to inform the development of my interview schedule.

The questionnaire was piloted at an antenatal class in a major maternity hospital in January 2008. The pilot led to one additional question being added to the questionnaire, which was to ask what type of health care option patients had chosen (public, semi-private or private). As two respondents were attending the class without their partners[3], this issue was tackled subsequently by stamped addressed envelopes being given to respondents to take home questionnaires and for absent partners to complete them and send them back to the researcher.

[3] Single mothers were not included in the study and the hospital ran separate classes for women without a partner.

Each antenatal course runs over five weeks. I attended the second session of each course, where I briefly introduced myself, explained the study and handed out an information leaflet and provided a more detailed information sheet which people could choose to pick up on their way out[4]. I returned to each group's final session in the fifth week to distribute and collect the questionnaires. The midwives involved in teaching the antenatal classes had identified this as an appropriate time as it coincided with a natural break in the class when the midwife went to find an unoccupied delivery room to show the expectant parents. While the midwife left the room I distributed the questionnaires (and pens) and waited in the room while they were completed, and to answer any queries. When the midwife returned I collected the completed questionnaires. If people had not finished completing them I provided a stamped addressed envelope for them to take the questionnaire away and post it back.

Over seven weeks, the questionnaires were distributed at seven different antenatal classes during February and March 2008, on four different weekdays (Mon-Thurs) and at four different times of day (11am, 2pm, 3.15pm, 5.30pm). A total of 94 couples packs were distributed (each containing two questionnaires, one for each expectant parent), including the pilot group. Four couples did not complete the questionnaires. In four cases only the woman completed the questionnaire, and in one case only the man completed the questionnaire. In one case a woman did not have a partner, so was excluded from the study. This resulted in 84 couples (168) completing the questionnaires, representing a 79% response rate.

Two versions of the "Becoming a Parent" questionnaire was developed, one to be completed by expectant mothers and one by expectant fathers. The questionnaires were broadly similar, but with some specific differences, such as the difference in maternity/paternity leave entitlement, taken into account. Each couple was given an envelope containing a questionnaire for the man and one for the woman and returned the completed questionnaires to the researcher in the envelope.

[4] Copies of the leaflet and information sheet are available in Appendix 1.

There were three parts to the questionnaires: part one covered demographic details, part two asked questions about plans and expectations around becoming parents in eight sections (preparing, sleeping, feeding, baby care, information and support, working life, social life and household chores), and the third part was the Iowa Infant Feeding Attitude Scale (De la Mora and Russell, 1999), a scale used in previous studies in the US and UK to measure attitudes towards breastfeeding. The men's questionnaires also had a final page asking them if they would like to volunteer to take part in one-to-one interviews for the next phase of the study[5].

Some of the findings from the questionnaire are used in Chapter Four: Families in the Irish Context, and others are used in the chapters which report on the interview findings.

Although clearly the men were in the company of their partners, I felt that this was the most direct way of making contact with as many men as possible, making some attempt to "contest the everyday cultural assumption that men are always and only tied to their children through their wives" (McKee and O'Brien, 1983, p148). It also served as a way of introducing, and hopefully demystifying, the study for both the men and their partners, and as a way of introducing myself as a researcher. I did consider other possible recruitment routes, such as attending private antenatal classes, but felt this would have limited the study to those who could afford to pay for such classes. Similarly, I felt that using crèches or schools as an initial point of contact to pursue a 'snowballing' strategy to recruit would reduce the potential diversity of the participants; would fail to capture expectant fathers and was less likely to result in direct contact between myself and the men.

Taking a qualitative approach

Twenty expectant first-time fathers were recruited from the wider Dublin area through the antenatal classes in a maternity hospital to take part in the interview phase. These men were asked to take part in two in-depth semi-structured interviews,

[5] Copies of the male and female questionnaires are available in Appendices 2 and 3.

approximately four weeks before and five months after their babies' birth. The pre-birth interviews took place between late February and early May 2008. The post-birth interviews took place between August and November 2008. The interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed. The approach to data analysis was informed by a thematic analysis approach and involved the close reading and interpretation of the transcripts in order to identify themes and commonalities between the men, and also any differences between them.

Although a questionnaire was used as a tool to recruit the participants for this research, the primary approach was a qualitative one. In taking this approach I was influenced by the work of Jane Ritchie and Jane Lewis (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003) who define qualitative research as "a naturalistic, interpretative approach concerned with understanding the meanings which people attach to phenomena (actions, decisions, beliefs, values etc) within their social worlds" (p3). Given that the aim of this study was to explore and map the experiences and attitudes of first-time fathers in contemporary Ireland, and that it sought to obtain the "thick description" (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003, p21) these men could provide, in-depth individual interviews provided a valid way of generating this kind of data.

I considered other possible qualitative approaches. For example, I thought about interviewing couples, but decided against this option partly because I felt that women's experience of the transition to parenthood has been thoroughly researched previously, and partly because I felt that the male participants would be more likely to be open and honest with me if they did not have their partner as an audience. Another possibility would have been to organise focus groups for first-time fathers, but I decided against this as I was concerned that some men might feel more vulnerable in a group situation and less willing to reveal sensitive or emotional experiences, and I was more interested in individual experiences than in learning how the men's "ideas are shaped, generated or moderated through conversation with others" (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003, p37).

In using in-depth interviews this study set out to:

- Map how expectant and new fathers defined their role as a parent

- Describe the meaning of becoming a father and the contribution to parenting made by these men
- Explore the influences on fathers' beliefs about fatherhood
- Identify the motivations for the choices that fathers make in relation to fatherhood and how these intersect with other parts of their lives
- Examine the origins of their attitudes towards fatherhood
- Explore the context for how their relationship with their child develops

It was hoped that through the analysis of these interviews the study had the potential to generate:

- New understandings of the role that gender plays in the construction of fatherhood
- New understandings of contemporary conceptions of family and family relationships
- New hypotheses about the nature of fatherhood in the twenty-first century

The longitudinal element was also an important part of the research design. In taking a longitudinal approach I aimed to capture the transition from pre-parenthood to parenthood and the fathers' unfolding relationship with their baby. I was also hoping to capture the way in which men construct their fathering identity and explore their pre-baby aspirations and ideals and then look at the post-baby realities of parenthood, and see what the relationship between these two stages was. Through this approach I was able to capture a process, a change from one state of being to another for these men, and it also provided an important sense of continuity, which contributed to my confidence in my ability to accurately represent this group of men's experiences.

> Analysing interviews conducted over time can illuminate, confirm or unsettle initial and tentative interpretations, alert us to recurring motifs and tropes in participants' narratives as well as to shifts and change, suggest continuities or disruptions in emotional investments in desires and dispositions, and provide a strong sense of how particular identities are taking shape or developing (McLeod, 2000, p48).

Given that becoming a parent is one of the major changes that takes place in adult life, taking this approach did seem appropriate – qualitative longitudinal studies provide a useful way of exploring how people manage change in their lives and, to quote Corden and Millar, they provide "an opportunity to explore how and why people make the individual choices" that they do (Corden and Millar, 2007).

I also felt that by repeated contact with me (twice in the hospital, twice at interviews) I would establish a strong rapport with the participants, and maximise the opportunity for the interviewees to feel comfortable in revealing sometimes intimate and sensitive accounts of their lives.

Interviewing men becoming fathers

Having administered the questionnaire to 84 couples – 168 individuals – 29 men volunteered to take part in the interview phase of the study, a response rate of 34%, which was encouraging in terms of the willingness of men to volunteer to take part in such a study.

The demographic profile of those men who volunteered to take part in the study was not vastly different from the larger group of men who completed the questionnaires. The interview volunteers were slightly older, more had completed higher levels of education, and a majority came from the professional or managerial occupational classes. There were also a higher proportion of non-Irish respondents in the interviewee group, especially among the men, and, in line with this fact, a higher proportion of the couples had a mixed nationality or totally non-Irish make-up. There were also a slightly smaller proportion of public health care patients in the interviewee group. The marital status, home location, employment status, ethnicity and stage of pregnancy patterns were all broadly in line with the questionnaire group, and these demographic details are also explored further in the following chapter, **Chapter Four: Families and Change in Ireland**.

The interview participants

A basic description of the twenty interviewees and their partners is given in Table 1 below, and the number of interviews that they took part in is identified. All names are pseudonyms. In order to preserve their anonymity I have chosen not to give specific ages, job titles or nationalities, as these could make particular couples easy to identify. To give a hypothetical example, if a 35 year old Spanish university lecturer was married to a 39 year old Polish public relations consultant, this combination of facts may make the participant identifiable.

Table 1: Description of interviewee participants

Name	Age	Occupation	Nationality/ ethnicity	Partner	Partner age	Partner occupation	Partner nationality/ ethnicity	Marital status	Interviews
Jim	Mid 30s	Lawyer	EU white	Sarah	Mid 30s	Doctor	Irish white	Married	Both
Fergal	Early 30s	IT technician	Irish white	Katie	Early 20s	Works in home	Americas white	Married after birth	Both
Conor	Early 30s	Marketing (unemploy at first interview)	Irish white	Rachel	Early 30s	Admin	Irish white	Married	Both
John	Mid 20s	Electrician	Irish white	Aisling	Mid 20s	Social care	Irish white	Living together	Both
Peter	Early 30s	IT	EU white	Orla	Early 30s	Finance	Irish white	Married	Both
Michael	Mid 30s	Engineer	Irish white	Anne	Mid 30s	Civil service	Irish white	Married	Both
Tony	Mid 30s	Printer	Irish white	Bridget	Mid 30s	Marketing	Irish white	Married	Both
Alex	Mid 30s	Education admin	EU white	Liz	Late 30s	Higher education	EU white	Married	Both
Frank	Mid 30s	Librarian	Irish white	Laura	Mid 30s	Librarian	Irish white	Married	Both
Shane	Mid 30s	IT	Irish white	Judy	Mid 30s	Civil service	Irish white	Married	Both
Aidan	Mid 30s	Librarian	Irish white	Fay	Mid 30s	Studying	Americas mixed race	Married	Both

Donal	Mid 30s	Marketing	Irish white	Eimear	Mid 30s	Healthcare	Irish white	Married after birth	Both
Nick	Mid 30s	Finance	Non-EU white	Aoife	Mid 30s	Finance	Irish	Married	Both
Philip	Mid 30s	Architecture	EU white	Miriam	Mid 30s	Marketing	EU white	Living together	Second
Des	Mid 30s	Finance	Irish white	Clodagh	Early 30s	Pharmacy	Irish white	Married	Second
Bill	Early 40s	Company director	Americas white	Sylvia	Early 40s	Management consultant	EU white	Married	Second
Andrew	Late 30s	IT	Irish white		Late 30s	Human resources	Americas white	Married	First
Eoin	Late 30s	Civil servant	Irish white	Clare	Mid 30s	Pharmacy	Irish white	Married	Both
Robert	Early 30s	IT	Irish white	Ciara	Late 30s	Accountancy	Irish white	Married	Second
Tom	Mid 30s	Engineer	EU white	Sinead	Early 30s	Admin	Irish white	Married	Both

In considering the type of men who decided to volunteer to take part in the interviews, it is appropriate to explore what influence my own biography and presentation may have had on encouraging or discouraging men to volunteer. The initial contact with the fathers at the antenatal classes was their first exposure to me as a researcher, and acted as the first stage of the researcher-participant relationship and as the first opportunity to establish some rapport.

Previous studies have explored the ethical issues associated with "doing rapport" (Duncombe and Jessop, 2002) and the feminist concern with attempting to establish an "egalitarian research process characterised by authenticity, reciprocity and intersubjectivity between the researcher and the researched" (Holland, 2007, p203). Particular attention has been paid by feminist scholars to the potential exploitation of research participants in qualitative interviews since Ann Oakley's influential criticism of the traditional form of interviewing as hierarchical and non-reciprocal and her call for feminist interviewers to "invest their personal identity in the exchange, even becoming friends with the interviewee" (Holland, 2007, p202). However, more recent

critiques have interrogated the ethics of phony friendliness to "encourage or persuade interviewees to explore and disclose experiences and emotions which – on reflection – they may have preferred to keep to themselves" (Duncombe and Jessop, 2002, p120).

In addition to these dilemmas around establishing an appropriate level of rapport with interviewees, I was also conscious of the fact that the "individual biography of the qualitative researcher is recognised to have a major impact on a research project" (Broom et al., 2009, p51). I felt there were a number of factors in my own biography that were likely to influence my approach to interviewing. Professionally these factors included my previous work as a counsellor on a helpline, which influenced the development of my listening skills as well as my awareness of the boundaries between talker and listener, and a capacity to "limit the emotional depth of the interview" (Duncombe and Jessop, 2002, p110), so as not to encourage disclosures that may cause discomfort or harm to interviewees. My more recent training as a postgraduate student in applied social research had also made me aware of the dangers of asking leading questions in interviews and the importance of avoiding interviewer bias, where interviewees provide answers or information that they think the researcher wants to hear. There is the "potential for dialogue (or indeed, impression management) aimed at pleasing the interviewer" (Broom et al., 2009, p59).

On a personal level, there were a number of ways my presentation in the antenatal classes may have served to influence potential volunteers. My accent shows that I am not Irish, but English, and just by looking at me as I described the research, people would be able to see that I was female, white, in my mid-30s and presumably had a high level of education given that I was undertaking a doctoral study. Given these factors I had something of a debate with myself about how much more to reveal about myself, for example, whether or not to tell potential participants that I was a mother myself, and that my daughter had been born in the hospital we were in. In the end I decided that it was important for these potential participants to understand that part of my interest in the research stemmed from my own first-hand experience of becoming a parent myself and that being a parent myself probably added to the credibility of the study in the potential participant's eyes.

I can only speculate on what impact my presentation during the antenatal classes had, as there is no way of knowing what factors played a part in discouraging those men who did not volunteer. I have wondered whether the fact that I was not Irish encouraged a relatively high number of non-Irish men to volunteer, or whether living away from their own countries had either led them to think more about their impending role as parents, or given them less opportunity to discuss it with others, perhaps making them more curious about taking part in the research. It is also difficult to know what impact the relatively high number of non-Irish men (seven out of twenty), may have had on the findings of this thesis, although I did not observe any obvious differences between the Irish and non-Irish men. I did ask the interviewees about why they had decided to volunteer, but there did not seem to be any discernable pattern. The majority gave altruistic reasons, some thought it was an important topic and were pleased it was receiving attention while others had a personal interest in the research process itself.

Ultimately, of the twenty-nine original volunteers, nine were unable to take part in the interviews for various reasons, from work commitments to a change of mind about participating. Of the remaining twenty men, sixteen were interviewed during the late stages of their partners' pregnancies. Four other men, who were very keen to take part, had babies who arrived before we had a chance to meet, however we agreed that I would interview them during the post-birth phase of the study.

I re-contacted all twenty men 12-16 weeks after the birth of their babies. Nineteen of them took part in the post-birth interview, including all four men whose babies had arrived before we could complete the pre-birth interview. One man who had done a pre-birth interview did not complete a post-birth interview. I made several attempts to contact him after the birth and he responded once to say that he was in the process of changing jobs, but subsequent emails were not answered. I can only speculate that he had enough on his plate with a new job and a new baby!

I used a semi-structured interview guide for each of the interviews, which allowed me to ensure that similar topics were covered with each individual, although often I did not need to ask specific questions as the flow of the interview provided much of the

information spontaneously. For the men who were interviewed only after their babies' birth, the interview guide was expanded to include some of the background information that would have been covered in the pre-birth interview, but these interviews focused primarily on the men's experiences since the baby's birth, rather than asking them to describe their anticipation of the baby's arrival[6].

The men were asked where they would prefer to be interviewed, and some interviews took place in the men's homes or workplaces. This provided me with a small opportunity to observe the men with their babies. For example, in one case the man was in sole charge of the child during the interview, so we both took turns to hold the baby. Other interviews took place in a college office or a seminar room on college premises. One interview took place in a café. All the men read and signed consent forms, a copy of which they took with them[7]. They were assured of the anonymity and confidentiality of the data, told that they could choose not to answer questions, and asked if they would like to ask any questions themselves. At the end of the interviews they were asked how they had found the experience of taking part in the research and asked if they would like to be sent a summary of the results. All the participants said they would. At the end of the second (final) interview the fathers were given a thank-you card and a small selection of books to read or look at with their baby as a token of thanks for their participation. In the time since the interviews took place I have sent an annual email to the fathers to update them on the study's progress. All identifying features have been removed or made generic and all names used in the study are pseudonyms.

On average the interviews took approximately one hour, although the post-birth interviews tended to be slightly longer than the pre-birth interviews. The shortest interview was 35 minutes long and took place in a café. My sense was that it was a less than ideal environment and this could have contributed to its brevity, so I subsequently avoided this type of location. The longest interview was one hour and forty minutes long. In total the interviews generated 35.5 hours of digitally recorded data and over 400,000 words.

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[6] Interview guides are available in Appendix 4

[7] A copy of the consent form is available in Appendix 5

The resulting 35 interviews provided a huge amount of incredibly rich data about a wide range of topics. In the pre-birth interviews the men were asked about their relationship with their partner, how they came to plan, or not plan, having a baby, what the pregnancy experience had been like for them, how they felt in anticipation of the birth, how their own family background informed their views, and what kind of role they expected to play as fathers and how they expected fatherhood to impact on their working life. In the post-birth interviews the men gave accounts of their experience of the labour and birth of their child, how they and their partners coped with the new baby in the first few weeks, how their relationship to work had, or had not, changed, what role their extended family and social network played, how their relationship with their baby was developing, how their relationship with their partner may have changed and how they felt about taking part in the research.

Reflections on the researcher and the researched

I have been strongly influenced by the idea that "people are affected by the process of being studied and that the relationship between the researcher and social phenomena is interactive" (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003, p13) and indeed I believe I found evidence for this relationship in some of the comments made by the interviewees, which I will address below. However, I would also accept that "the social world does exist independently of individual subjective understanding, but that it is only accessible to us via the respondents' interpretations" (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003, p19). This would suggest that my stance is close to one of "subtle" or "critical" realism. "Critical realists agree with the positivists that there is a world of events out there that is observable and independent of human consciousness. They hold that knowledge about this world is socially constructed" (Denzin and Lincoln, 2008, p17).

At the same time I would also describe my epistemological approach as being influenced by the (sometimes seemingly contradictory) commitment to attempt to be as objective and neutral as possible. For example, I made choices in the data collection stage of the study to minimise my influence over the expressed views of the

interviewees. However, I also accept that my stance is an interpretive one which emphasises "the importance of understanding people's perspectives in the context of the conditions and circumstances of their lives" (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003, p21).

I felt that it was important that the interviewees held as few preconceived ideas about what they thought I was looking for in the research as was possible. I tried to walk a fine line between being genuine and empathic, but at the same time revealing little more about myself than I had at our first encounter at the hospital and attempting to keep a non-judgemental stance about what they said. I argue that there is some evidence that I was successful in this, in that there were comments made by interviewees that in another context I would have challenged, and yet they seemed to be comfortable expressing these views to me.

Gender dynamics in the interview process

Previous studies of men and fathers have described some of the potential difficulties facing a female researcher interviewing a male research participant (Gatrell, 2006, McKee and O'Brien, 1983, Lee, 1997, Williams and Heikes, 1993). Some have explored whether the "power brought by interviewee's 'maleness' usurps the power of the female researcher" or whether "pressures to enact cultural ideals of masculinity (whether in the context of female or male interviewers) may function to 'cover up' key issues faced by men" (Broom et al., 2009, p54). However, gender incongruence between researcher and interviewee may at times be an advantage, if there are "subject areas and contexts where men are equally or even more comfortable speaking with a woman than a man" (Broom et al., 2009, p54) and Broom et al suggest that this trend has been particularly common in contexts that are seen as traditionally "feminine", such as nursing or family life, which clearly applies in the case of this study.

Another potential problem I was conscious of was the commonly held belief that men are "unable or unwilling to disclose feelings" (Gatrell, 2006, p244). This perception of men as emotionally inarticulate was held by a number of people I discussed my study

with, both colleagues and key informants in the maternity hospital. Previous studies (Duncombe and Marsden, 1993, McKee and O'Brien, 1983) also uncovered "men's difficulties in expressing intimate emotions" (Duncombe and Marsden, 1993, p233). Outweighing this perception though, was my feeling that perhaps men's ability to discuss intimate issues had shifted in the twenty or more years since the studies cited, and this was supported by more recent studies which have found that "both men and women were willing and able to articulate their feelings" (Gatrell, 2006). In addition I felt that the questionnaire had flagged many of the issues likely to be discussed in the interviews, and it seemed likely that if men had volunteered having already filled in the questionnaire, they would be comfortable talking more in depth about those issues.

What became apparent during the course of the interviews was that the group of men who volunteered to take part in the study were, on the whole, very comfortable discussing their experiences and feelings in detail. However, it was interesting to note that a small number of them also revealed their own view that men don't talk about emotions. Many of them said that they may have discussed certain issues with their partners but not with anyone else, while others said taking part in the research had provoked them to think about new issues and initiate new discussions with their partners:

> *"I suppose a lot of men mightn't be as open to talk" Michael (post-birth interview)*

> *"I think women are more, are more in tune with, with love and emotion than men are… on a day to day basis the men would, I don't know, shut things out and get on with doing the work, hunter gatherer. Suppose if we moved away from that it'd really help some ways. But I think having a baby makes you more in touch, brings you more in touch, so you can be kind of wussy and that's ok, cos you've just got a baby. So you talk, men, funny enough, they open up and talk to you a bit more" Robert (post-birth interview)*

"I'm not very talkative. Like, she would have asked me and I would've just – I wouldn't have said 'oh we talked about this and we talked about that'. I would have ended the conversation very quickly" John (post-birth interview)

"I definitely did go home and talk about it. And yeah I probably did reflect on some of the things that were brought up" Eoin (post- birth interview)

"I haven't really taken time to maybe think myself, well, what do I actually truly think?" Frank (pre-birth interview)

"There's questions that maybe I haven't asked myself – stuff that's lying there, that's dormant. It's like [I'm] not looking under the covers, you've brought it up maybe" John (post-birth interview)

Other men disclosed how they felt that they had benefited from the opportunity to take part in the research, and that it had provided them with a space to think and discuss the experiences they were going through, a space that they might not otherwise have had.

"On a personal level it's actually good to talk about these things cos as I, I don't have my old friends, I'm not going to talk like this with my family-in-law, really, as openly and definitely not at work. So it's, I find it a bit therapeutic and it allows me to think through my thoughts and, and just to talk about it." Nick (post-birth interview)

"The first time we talked, I thought it was great, I dunno what, I just felt like I'd got a load off my chest and it felt, I talked with stuff, verbalised it, as I said, to someone who doesn't know me in a sense that, in a way, you could talk more frankly, you could talk more openly about everything and you put some ideas to me that I hadn't thought about… It's just kind of occurred to me now, when you asked me, would I have a figure who I would speak to about these things and I, I said not really … but in talking to you, that kind of helped … and it's not as if you have to talk about it all the time, once or twice like this is brilliant… it

makes me think then well, not everyone is gonna do this kind of thing and what would I've done if I didn't talk to you and it makes you think ok, you'd like to have someone." Frank (post-birth interview)

Frank's quote provides a striking example of the way in which the relationship between the researcher and the researched is an interactive one when he asks "what would I've done if I didn't talk to you?" and explores how he feels he has benefitted from taking part in the research.

Another salient issue is the fact that despite expressing some doubts about the ability of "men" to discuss emotional and intimate experiences, and the fact that many of the men who were interviewed seemed to see themselves as conforming to the stereotype of not being "talkative" or not having many people they would confide in, their own behaviour in the interview setting contradicts these assumptions and beliefs.

It is also clear from the quotes above that several of the interviewees found the process of taking part in the research "therapeutic". The potential for the qualitative interview to act as a "therapeutic encounter" (Birch and Miller, 2000, p190) has been explored by previous researchers engaged in qualitative research (Duncombe and Jessop, 2002, Kvale, 1992), and it has been noted that "both settings – the therapeutic practice and the qualitative interview – can involve acts of self-disclosure, the revealing of intimate personal meanings in the presence of a listener" (Birch and Miller, 2000, p190). However, there was no time during the interviews when I felt that my role as a researcher, and not as some sort of pseudo-therapist, was unclear to either myself or the interviewees. There were a few occasions when interviewees asked me what I thought, but mostly I was able to deflect this, or they even corrected themselves.

One additional issue raised by Lee (1997) is the possibility of "interviewer vulnerability" (p563) and "potential for trouble that any man may present" (p555). In making the decision to interview relatively unknown men in their own homes, usually without any other person present, I was conscious of my own potential vulnerability and took the precaution of both leaving the details of the time and location of the

interview with a trusted person, and calling them once the interview was over, and also of having my mobile phone on hand with an emergency number ready to dial. As it turned out, at no time during any of the interviews did I feel in any way threatened by or uncomfortable with the interviewees.

Analysing the data

In the remainder of this chapter I will discuss the process of interpretation in the data analysis and some of the decisions behind the selection and presentation of the material which follows in the next five chapters. The challenge of analyzing qualitative data is to attempt a process that means "what initially appears to be a muddy field or 'bog' will begin to transform into firm pasture with clear borders, landscape and rich colour" (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003, p217).

Once interviews were complete they were transcribed as soon as possible after the event, providing my first opportunity to review and digest the data. Once all the interviews had been transcribed I read (and re-read) them, building up a high level of familiarization with the men's accounts, and making analytical notes and reflections in the margins. At this stage I was able to identify a long list of initial themes or concepts which were emerging from the narrative, paying particular attention to similarities and differences between the men's experiences. I was able to reflect on what aspects of the interviews seemed particularly relevant to my research aims and to note themes which I had not considered. I decided against using a computer-assisted analysis of the data to aid the coding, cutting and pasting that qualitative analysis requires, as I felt that the number of interviews I had conducted meant that it would be manageable to code and sort by hand.

These initial themes were then grouped into "a smaller number of broader, higher order categories or 'main themes'" (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003, p221) which to a large extent overlap with the interview questions.

From the first set of pre-birth interviews these included:

- Planning a family
- Male experience of pregnancy
- Views of fatherhood
- Work and family life
- Relationship with partner

From the second set of post-birth interviews these categories included:

- Labour and birth
- Homecoming and settling in
- Returning to work
- Support and social network
- Relationship with child
- Relationship with partner
- Reflections on the experience of becoming a father

For example, the "relationship with child" category included the sub-themes of involvement with care and day-to-day activities; interaction with child, the sense of a two way response to one another seen as a crucial stage in development of a bond/connection with child; getting to know child – recognising different cries, understanding what they are trying to communicate; love from the first, but grows with time and contact and child's recognition of father; investment for the future relationship; time together alone with child, time together as a family; and it's different for women.

For each of these broad level categories I created a thematic grid or chart where I copied and pasted relevant quotes from each of the interviewees, and in this way "sorted" the data to provide a way of focusing on each broad category or subject in turn "so that the detail and distinctions that lie within [could] be unpacked" (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003, p229). As well as one column containing the quotes, the grid included a second column for my own notes, reflections, observations and questions. This physical clustering of material with similar properties allowed me an opportunity

to review the emerging themes[8] and begin to develop explanatory accounts of the data.

Each of the categories were reviewed and coded to identify sub-themes, paying particular attention to detecting patterns and assigning meaning, and in this way the analytical procedure moved from descriptive to explanatory accounts (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003). After the sub-themes were identified I returned to previous studies in an attempt to integrate and interrogate the findings by comparison with the corpus of relevant literature.

In an attempt to ensure that the interpretations I was making as a researcher were well supported by the evidence, and to ensure that the themes and sub-themes I had identified were systematic and comprehensive, I asked two colleagues familiar with my research project to review one of the thematic grids to identify what they thought were relevant patterns and meanings in the data. Their findings were both consistent with my own, suggesting that my analytical approach was reliable.

In terms of the following interview findings chapters I made a decision to try and integrate the findings from the pre-birth and post-birth interviews by theme, as it immerged that there was a strong overlap between the before and after interviews, rather than taking a purely chronological approach. With the exception of the first interview findings chapter, **Chapter Five: Setting the Scene**, which focuses solely on the pre-birth interview and the approach of the men and their partners to becoming parents, the subsequent chapters attempt to integrate the narratives from both interviews. **Chapter Six: Experiences of Pregnancy and Birth**, focuses on the men's sense of unreality during pregnancy, their attempts to compensate for this, and their emotional response to the birth of their child. **Chapter Seven: Doing Fatherhood**, examines the fathers' aspirations for their fatherhood, the legacy of their own family and the reality of their child's early infancy, their connection with the child and their adjustment to parenthood. **Chapter Eight: From Couple to Family Unit**, provides insights into the shifting dynamics of the fathers' relationship with their

[8] For an example of the grid used for the Planning a Family theme see Appendix 6

partners. And **Chapter Nine: Employment and Fatherhood**, examines the fluctuating and sometimes ambivalent relationship towards work described by these men as they transition into fatherhood.

In relying on direct quotes from the interviewees in the chapters that follow, I have attempted to stay close to the original data and to give the fathers an opportunity to express themselves in their own words, baring in mind the injunction that "it is important that the subtlety, richness and detail of the original material is displayed while keeping the right balance between description and interpretation" (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003, p301). I have slightly edited the quotes to aid in comprehension and readability, taking out some word repetitions, some phrases such as "kind of", "if you know what I mean", "like" and "you know". Any omissions in a quotation are indicated by ... and inserted words are in square brackets. All participant names used in this thesis are pseudonyms.

Conclusion

This chapter has presented a discussion of the research process, highlighting the methodological approach, the issues of recruiting and interviewing a sample of first-time fathers, generating the interview data and interpreting and analysing the data. I have reflected on some of the challenges involved in interviewing men and the impact of gender on the research process.

In giving a detailed description of the research design, this chapter illustrates how I have attempted to ensure the trustworthiness of the research findings, by building in elements of triangulation throughout the research process. This includes using the quantitative data generated by the questionnaire as context for the qualitative interviews, as well as to provide background which gives a clear idea of how transferable the findings are.

However, as with any research, there are also limitations to the claims that can be made. For example, I chose not to interview the men's partners, who may have been able to verify the fathers' accounts, or to provide an alternative point of view and interpretation of the experience. In making the decision not to interview the women, however, I was careful to weigh up whether there were benefits to adopting an alternative strategy (Valentine, 1999). Ultimately I felt that a number of factors persuaded me to focus solely on the men. One is that women's experiences of the transition to motherhood have been thoroughly explored in previous research (Miller, 2005). Primarily I was concerned with maximizing the level of trust that the men would have in me as a researcher, and felt that if I interviewed their partners as well, there was a danger that they might be concerned I would give weight to one account over another, or that they might feel less inclined to be open about their feelings for fear that I would 'side with' their partners.

By relying solely on the accounts of the respondents of their attitudes and behaviours there is a potential limitation in how accurately these accounts reflect the reality of their behaviour and attitudes. As other studies of fathers have found (Henwood and Procter, 2003) without the account of their partners' there is no witness to back up their stories. It is possible that a social desirability bias could influence the fathers to exaggerate their involvement or present themselves in a positive light. Other studies have also found that "self reported accounts of domestic labour and caring often reflect aspirations rather than time actually spent....in couples where there is a strong belief in egalitarian sex roles both partners tend to over-estimate the amount of time men spend on household work" (McGinnity and Russell, 2008).

However, two points mitigate this limitation. One is that fact that this limitation is arguably a feature of most qualitative research, as in any qualitative study there are absent accounts and it is nearly always possible to indentify groups or individuals who were not included in the study. "The primary 'validity' question which qualitative researchers have to address, at least as far as internal validity is concerned...[is] are we accurately reflecting the phenomena under study *as perceived by the study population*?" (Ritchie and Lewis, 2008, p274, my italics). Given that in this case the

study population is fathers and not mothers, it seems fair to claim that it reflects their perceptions.

Secondly, I believe that there is evidence in the way in which the men talk about their involvement, the level of detail that they are able to provide and the intimate knowledge of their babies, and their babies' routines, strongly suggests that their accounts are authentic reflections of their attitudes and their behaviour. It is this "thick description" (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003, p21) that provides weight to the credibility of the respondents' accounts.

Another limitation is the fact that the men recruited to take part in the interviews predominantly have a higher level of occupational status and education than the general population of first time fathers, making them a very middle class sample. Alternatively recruitment strategies would be required to recruit a more diverse sample of men to include more men from a lower socio-economic background, perhaps through community organisations and health services based in lower socio-economic areas or through targeting the public health clinics in maternity hospitals. It is possible that men becoming fathers in different socio-economic circumstances would have very different attitudes and experiences and clearly this would influence the findings of a study like this. Research evidence of previous studies points to the fact that "those who are economically privileged have more stable family lives" (Smock and Greenland, 2010, p589) and that "the timing of transitions to marriage and parenthood is strongly related to parents' income, education and marital status" (Osborne et al., 2007, p29, Meier and Allen, 2008).

However the evidence of recent studies into socially marginalised fathers such as Afro-American teen fathers (Paschal et al., 2011) and young urban fathers (Lemay et al., 2010) provide evidence that suggests fatherhood roles are seen similarly by the men from these backgrounds as by the fathers in this thesis. Paschal et al.'s (2011) study found that the primary fathering roles identified by their respondents were as provider and nurturer. "Many of these teen fathers provided or attempted to provide some kind of support to the mothers of their children... many were involved in their children's lives and did what they could to meet their perceived responsibilities of the nurturing father role" (p73). This study found that the minority of fathers who did not

adopt these roles were those who had negative feelings of resentment and hostility towards their child's mother. Similarly Lemay et al's (2010) study found that for young urban fathers "being there" (p224) was the primary characteristic of a good father, along with providing financial and emotional support, teaching lessons and values and taking responsibility for their child. Similarly Corcoran's (2005) study of young marginalised non-resident fathers in Dublin found that "almost all shared a sense of commitment to their children and to embodying a fathering role, even in the face of institutional, social and economic barriers" (Corcoran, 2005, p150).

Another recent study (Shows and Gerstel, 2009) has examined the approach to fatherhood taken by two different socioeconomic classes, professional men (doctors) and working class men (emergency medical technicians or paramedics). The authors found that the "upper-middle-class fathers fit the daily demands of fatherhood on the edges of their jobs" at the cost of "missing out on close relationships with their children" (p180). By comparison the working class men "do not prioritize work over family, nor do they simply balance the two. Instead they value and are deeply involved in both" (p180). Shows and Gerstel conclude that "fathers who are least likely to ideologically endorse gender equality (the working class) are the most likely to engage in equitably actions" (p179) and that the working class fathers in their research are "undoing gender" while the professional fathers "reproduce the conventional gender order" (p161).

Shows and Gerstel's (2009) findings that the ways in which fathers from different socioeconomic backgrounds "do" fatherhood vary is also echoed in a recent study by Gillies (Gillies, 2009) which highlights the way in which middle-class models of fatherhood are more visible and possibly more valued when social policies to encourage involved fathering in the UK were critiqued. "Policy constructions of involved fathering seek to impose a middle-class model in which educational facilitation is prioritized, disregarding the alternative values working-class fathers might hold while undermining the more mundane aspects of care" (p58). Gillies (2009) concludes that "participation in domestic labour and time spent with children risks being overshadowed by a dominant policy construction of good fathers as an educational or developmental resource" (p59).

This literature suggests that researchers are uncovering a complex and sometimes ambiguous relationship between class and parenting values and behaviour. It is possible that the findings of this study would have been very different if a more socioeconomically diverse sample had been recruited, but also possible that many similar themes would have come to light and future research should seek to include a more diverse sample to explore these issues further.

In the following chapters the results of the recruitment questionnaire and the interview data of the twenty fathers will be presented and analysed. By exploring men's own accounts of the transition from pregnancy to fatherhood, from couple to family, from worker and partner to father it is possible to understand men's interpretations of themselves and their different roles both within and outside the family context, and to explore the lived experience of the challenge of integrating these roles.

Chapter Four: Families and Change in Ireland

The aim of this chapter is to contextualise the interview phase of the study by exploring the changing patterns of family formation in contemporary Ireland. It also describes the interview sample's demographic profile in comparison with the larger group of expectant parents who completed the "Becoming A Parent" questionnaire, and compares this with what is known about the Irish context in the light of national research and data.

Demographic characteristics collected in the questionnaire are explored in the light of changes to family formation in Ireland in the past few decades, providing a panoramic portrait of family life in Ireland. The chapter then focuses on the specifics of the group of men who volunteered to take part in the interview process and explores how they 'fit' with broader patterns and trends.

The logic of this approach is clear given that "an understanding of the family is also central to any discussion of gender relationships, for it is through this institution, and others, that our experiences and understandings of gender and sexuality are formed and mediated" (Tovey and Share, 2003, p243).

One of the key sources of information on family formation in Ireland is the recent publication *Family Figures: Family Dynamics and Family Types in Ireland, 1986-2006* (Lunn et al., 2009), which uses analysis of the Census over the relevant 20 year period to explore and illustrate changes in family structure in Ireland. The findings of this report support the broad consensus from many commentators on Ireland that "over the last fifty years the behaviour of Irish people in relation to birth, marriage and family formation has changed quite dramatically" (Tovey and Share, 2003, p135).

This chapter will also outline some of the social and economic changes that have taken place in Ireland, in the latter half of the twentieth century, particularly from the 1970s onwards, this era being the one when those becoming parents now were likely to have been growing up themselves, and also because it was the era when social and economic changes started to be felt throughout Irish society.

Forming a family

Age at first child

In common with most countries in the developed world, the average age for first time mothers has been increasing in Ireland over the past 30 years, from 25 in 1980 to 27.4 in 2000 and 29.1 in 2009 (CSO, 2010, most recent figures available).

The average age of first time fathers in Ireland does not seem to be collected or reported, which in itself could be seen as a reflection of how family formation is assumed to be primarily related to women's lives and life course. The average age of first time mothers in Ireland in 2008 was 28.9 years old, and in Dublin it was 29 years old (CSO, 2009b). However, for married women, the 2008 average age for first time mothers in Ireland was 31.3, which is very similar to the average age of the women who completed the "Becoming a Parent" questionnaire.

When it comes to the age of the expectant parents involved in this study, the mean average age of the men who completed the "Becoming a Parent" questionnaire was 33.5 (range 21-50), while the women in the questionnaire group was 31.8 (range 20-42 years).

This compares with a mean age of men who took part in interviews of 34.5 with a range from 26 to 41 years, while their partners' mean age was 33.7, with a range from 22 to 40 years. This shows that the men who were interviewed were just over a year older than the average man who completed the questionnaire, and their partners were almost two years older than the average woman who completed the questionnaire. However, the majority of expectant parents fall into the 30 to 35 year old age group.

Table 2: Age at First Child

	Interviewee Group	***Questionnaire Group***
Men	34.5 (range 26-41)	*33.5 (range 21-50 years)*
Women	33.7 (range 22-40)	*31.8 (range 20-42 years)*

Marriage, co-habitation and fertility

According to Lunn et al (2009): "Irish people have a long history of either marrying late or not marrying at all. It was only for a period from the late 1960s to the early 1980s that youthful and widespread marriage became the norm" (p13). Numbers of marriages peaked in Ireland in 1974, when the average age at marriage was 26 for men and 24 for women (Fahey and Field, 2008). In the two decades following this peak the number of marriages declined, and the age at marriage increased. By 2005 the average age of marriage was 33.1 for men and 31 for women.

Lunn et al report that in 1986 43% of 25-29 year olds were single; 16 years later in 2002 almost 80% of 25-29 year olds were unmarried. Although part of this change can be attributed to the increasing number of cohabiting couples (a fourfold increase between 1996 and 2006) Lunn et al conclude that cohabitation is usually a prelude to marriage, and that in fact there has been "a real decline in couple formation since the mid-1980s" and "delayed marriage has become the norm in all social classes" (Lunn et al., 2009, p24).

Patterns of cohabitation and childbirth outside marriage have also altered over the past forty years. "Prior to the sexual revolution of the 1960s and 1970s, marriage was the gateway to sex and reproduction: pre-marital sex and, even more, non-marital childbearing were strongly disapproved of and, as far as we can tell from the available evidence, occurred at a relatively low rate" (Fahey and Field, 2008, p18). Between 1996 and 2006 the number of cohabiting couples almost tripled from 3.9% to 11.6% of all family units (Fahey and Field, 2008). The number of babies born outside marriage also saw a rapid increase, from 5% in 1980 to 33.2% in 2006, and the average age of mothers giving birth outside marriage also increased from 22.2 in 1980 to 27.1 in 2006.

Central Statistics Office figures for 2008 show that in the 30-34 year old cohort of mothers 81% of babies were born to married mothers (CSO, 2009b), and Fahey and Field report that the 30-34 age group has become the dominant age for childbearing among women, which would seem to suggest that those taking part in the study were typical of the broader pattern.

Despite the fact that couples in Ireland appear to leave marriage and starting a family until relatively late, Ireland has seen an increase in fertility since the early 1990s, giving it one of the highest rates of fertility in the European Union (only Iceland had a higher rate in 2008), with a total period fertility rate[9] of 2.1 in 2008 (CSO, 2009b). This compares with the average rate of fertility within the EU of 1.57 in 2007, according the latest figures available from Eurostat.

Although the 1990s and early part of the twenty-first century have seen a surge in new family formation in Ireland, the size of families has also become smaller. In 1981 38% of children were living in households of four or more children, compared with 13% in 2006, while 35% of families had one or two children in 1981, compared with 62% of families in 2006. Lunn et al compared the numbers of children born to women aged 45 and those aged 59 in 2006 and found in this context "the decline in the likelihood of having four or more children, from 41 per cent to 20 per cent between women born just 14 years apart, is severe" (Lunn et al., 2009, p64).

Of the couples who completed the "Becoming a Parent" questionnaire 77.8% were married couples and 21% were co-habiting couples. Of the interviewee couples, 16 (80%) were married, 4 (20%) were living together (including 2 who were engaged). This is very similar to the larger sample group.

Education and employment

Education level

Educational attainment has been on the rise in Ireland since the 1970s, after free second level education was introduced in 1967 and third level fees were abolished in 1996, and "since the mid-1990s educational attainment has actually been higher among young women than among young men in Ireland" (Russell et al., 2009, p4). The increasing number of women with a third level education has led to the "feminisation" of some professional occupations such as law and medicine.

[9] The total period fertility rate or TPFR represents the number of children a woman would have in her lifetime if she experienced current age specific fertility rates. A value of 2.1 is considered replacement level for a population.

Although the pattern of education among the interviewee sample and the questionnaire sample was broadly similar, with slightly more women than men completing third level education, overall, the level of education among the interviewee group was higher than the questionnaire group. Both the questionnaire group and the interviewee group were highly educated compared with national figures.

Table 3: Educational Attainment

Men	**Interview Sample**	***Questionnaire Sample***	***National** (men aged 25-64)*
Secondary level	10%	*22.9%*	*43%*
Third level or above	90%	*77.2%*	*31%*
	N= 20	*N=84*	*Source: Quarterly National Household Survey (2008)*

Women	**Interview Sample**	***Questionnaire Sample***	***National** (women aged 25-64)*
Secondary level	5%	*15.5%*	*41%*
Third level or above	95%	*84.58%*	*37%*
	N= 20	*N=84*	*Source: Quarterly National Household Survey (2008)*

This shows that those men who took part in the interviews had completed a high level of education, as had their partners. The education level of the interviewee sample was also much higher than the national average.

Comparing the sample with national educational attainment figures for Ireland, the Quarterly National Household Survey (CSO, 2008) reports that 29% of all 15-64 year

olds have a third level qualification. In the 25-34 year old age group, the age group most likely to be starting their families, 37% of men and 52% of women had attained a third level of qualification, showing a broadly similar pattern to both the questionnaire sample and the interviewee sample in this study, with more women than men in Ireland having a third level qualification.

Overall, both the questionnaire sample and the interviewee group were highly educated compared with national levels of educational attainment.

Employment and socio-economic class

There have been substantial changes in the Irish labour market over the past forty years, which include the strong economic growth period of the Celtic Tiger years, from the mid-1990s until the current recession, and the majority of those taking part in the study had experienced most of their working lives during this boom. One key change has been the dramatic increase in women's labour market participation, which in the ten years preceding this study grew by 55 percent, "an exceptional increase by any standards" (Russell et al., 2009, p1).

The economic boom in Ireland was driven by a demand for labour which generated employment opportunities and higher wages, particularly in sectors such as finance, communications, health, education and public administration, all of which saw major increases in women's employment (Russell et al., 2009).

In tandem with women's increasing labour market participation, "attitudes towards maternal employment have changed rapidly in Ireland, with a decline in support for the gendered division of labour" (Russell et al., 2009, p5). The 2002 International Social Survey Programme module which examined attitudes towards families and changing gender roles found that 23% of men and 18% of women agreed that men should be responsible for earning money and women for looking after the home and family.

When it comes to work, in the interviewee sample, 92.5% of respondents were in some form of employment, with slightly higher employment rates among women

(95%) than men (90%). The general pattern of employment was similar to the questionnaire sample (men 95.1%, women 91.7%), with no men from either sample describing their employment status as looking after the home.

This compares with employment rates of 75.6% for men and 60.5% for women aged 15-64 in 2008 (CSO, 2009c). Employment rates for men between 1998 and 2008 rose slightly from 71.1% to 75.6%. In the same period, women's employment rates rose substantially from 48.1% to 60.5%. This continues the trend for increasing female participation in the labour force which started in the 1970s (28% in 1971).

According to the CSO, 92.2% of men and 77.6% of women in the 25-34 cohort are in the labour force. The employment rate of women aged 20-44 with a youngest child under the age of three is 56.9%, suggesting that many women leave employment when they have young children. Of those not involved in the labour force 61.4% of women were looking after home or family, compared with only 1.4% of men.

Compared with the questionnaire group, a high proportion of the interviewee group were in either the professional or managerial socio-economic occupational groups, with a total of 79.5% falling into one of these two categories, compared with 64.1% of the questionnaire group. As Table 3 below shows, although a slightly higher proportion of both men and women in Dublin fall into the professional and managerial classes compared with national figures, the majority of respondents to the questionnaire and the interviewee sample fall into this socio-economic class, clearly illustrating that they are a middle class sample.

Table 4: Socio-economic Class

Socio-economic class	**Interviewee Men**	***Questionnaire Men***	***Dublin*** *(Census 2006)*	***National*** *(Census 2006)*
Professional	30%	*29.3%*	*9.41%*	*7.24%*
Managerial/technical	50%	*35.4%*	*26.66%*	*25.17%*
Non-manual	10%	*18.3%*	*13 %*	*12.7%*
Skilled manual	10%	*11%*	*18.58%*	*22.5%*
Semi-skilled	0%	*4.9%*	*10.4%*	*11.71%*
Unskilled	0%	*0%*	*3.7%*	*5.04%*

Socio-economic class	**Interviewee Women**	***Questionnaire Women***	***Dublin*** *(Census 2006)*	***National*** *(Census 2006)*
Professional	26.3%	*15.2%*	*7.45%*	*5.82%*
Managerial/technical	52.6%	*48.1%*	*28.01%*	*27.57%*
Non-manual	15.8%	*30.4%*	*22.12%*	*21.35%*
Skilled manual	0%	*3.8%*	*9.6%*	*11.74%*
Semi-skilled	2.6%	*2.5%*	*8.33%*	*19.43%*
Unskilled	0%	*0%*	*3.19%*	*3.46%*

According to the 2006 census (CSO, 2006), 35.8% of the population of Dublin were categorised as in the professional and managerial occupational groups, compared with 32.9% nationally. The census also showed that 3.44% of the Dublin population were categorised as unskilled and 9.34% as semi-skilled. Clearly both these categories of social class were not represented in the interviewee sample, and were

under-represented in the questionnaire sample. In contrast, men and women from the professional and managerial occupations are over-represented in both of this study's samples.

Healthcare option

In terms of the kind of healthcare options the couples had chosen for their pregnancy and birth, there was a fairly even distribution among the questionnaire sample between public, semi-private and private healthcare. Although there were proportionally fewer public health care patients in the interviewee group, with 20% as opposed to 32.3% in the larger group, there were not substantially more couples under private care in the interviewee group. In both the interviewee and questionnaire groups the largest group of patients were receiving semi-private care (45% and 36.1% respectively).

Table 5: Healthcare Option

Healthcare Option	Interviewee Group	*Questionnaire Group*
Public	20%	*32.3%*
Semi-private	45%	*36.1%*
Private	35%	*31.6%*

As previously mentioned in **Chapter Three: Research Methods**, the hospital offers free ante-natal classes during the day, at various different times, and charges a small fee for evening courses, which should mean that they are accessible to expectant parents irrespective of their income, although there is some evidence that social class has an impact on antenatal class attendance: "women who are socially isolated or concerned about housing, money or domestic violence may have little time or energy to explore antenatal classes" (Tighe, 2010, p295).

Is Ireland increasingly multicultural?

Ireland remains an ethnically homogenous country, and this is reflected in the findings of the questionnaire and the interviewee sample. The overall sample of the interviewee group was 97.5% white, with 100% of men and 95% of women describing themselves as white, with 5% of women describing their ethnicity as 'other' (representing just one individual). This compares with data from the 2006 census that finds that 92.7% of the 30-34 year old population is white, and 94.8% of Ireland's total population is white (including non-Irish white and the Irish Traveller Community).

For the first half of the twentieth century Ireland's population was in decline, with high levels of emigration, particularly among women, and in the late 1980s "the net emigration rate was higher at over 70,000 per annum than in the first decade of the century" (Tovey and Share, 2003, p149). From 1996 on inward migration to Ireland began to outweigh emigration, with a steady increase to a peak of almost 110,000 in the twelve months to April 2007 (Quinn et al., 2008), meaning that Ireland had been transformed from a traditional sender of emigrants to a receiver of immigrants. However, the impact of the economic crisis could well see new patterns emerging, as is suggested by the fact that 2009 saw net emigration from Ireland for the first time since 1995 (CSO, 2009a).

Seven non-Irish nationalities were represented in the interviewee group, with 67.5% Irish, compared with 74.1% in the questionnaire group. Among the men in the interviewee group, 35% were non Irish, with five men coming from the UK, North America or Australia, and two from other EU countries, compared with 24.1% in the larger group. Among their partners 30% of women were non-Irish, with three from the EU countries and three from the Americas, compared with 25.9% in the questionnaire group. This illustrates that a higher proportion of the interviewee group were non-Irish than of the overall group, particularly among men.

Table 6: Nationality

Men	**Interviewee Sample**	***Questionnaire Sample***
Irish	65%	*75.9%*
Non Irish (EU countries)	25%	*19.2%*
Non Irish (Non EU countries)	10%	*4.9%*

Women	**Interviewee Sample**	***Questionnaire Sample***
Irish	70%	*72.3%*
Non Irish (EU countries)	15%	*15.6%*
Non Irish (Non EU countries)	15%	*12.1%*

According to the 2006 census, Ireland had a population of just under 4.23m and non-Irish nationals represented 10% of the total population. Clearly both the questionnaire sample and the interviewee sample had non-Irish men and women somewhat over-represented compared with the national picture.

While many of these immigrants were Irish nationals returning from living abroad (these accounted for 40% of all immigrants in 2002, dropping to 18% by 2007), many immigrants come from countries within the EU, including the ten new member states that joined the EU in 2004. According to the 2006 census, almost 60% of immigrants are aged 25-44, a period which also includes the peak years for family formation and childbirth, and in the 25-44 year old cohort, 16.7% of the population is non-Irish.

Figures from the national Perinatal Statistics Report 2007 (ESRI, 2009) show that 20.7% of mothers were non-Irish, and 20.2% of fathers were non-Irish. Given that Dublin has the highest proportion of the non-Irish population (CSO, 2007) perhaps this goes some way to explaining the higher number of non-Irish participants in the questionnaire and interviewee samples, compared with national figures. Figures from the hospital used in this study suggest that 78% of babies were born to Irish women (2006 figures).

Unsurprisingly, given the higher numbers of non-Irish individuals in the interviewee group, the make-up of each couple by nationality was also different to the larger group, with only 50% of the couples being made up of two Irish people. The group of couples made up of Irish women with a non-Irish partner was markedly larger than in the questionnaire group – 20% versus 7.3%.

Table 7: Couple formation by nationality

Couple formation by nationality	**Interviewee Group**	***Questionnaire Group***
Both Irish	50%	*64.6%*
Neither Irish	15%	*15.9%*
Man Irish/Woman non-Irish	15%	*12.2%*
Woman Irish/Man non-Irish	20%	*7.3%*

Unfortunately it is not possible to compare the couples' composition by nationality with figures for the country as a whole, as the household data for this type of analysis is not available from the census. As yet it has not been possible to "look at the extent to which couple formation crosses boundaries between social groups" (Lunn et al., 2009, p98) and to establish the extent to which immigrants and Irish natives have formed couples, although the CSO reported that the "overall share of families consisting of Irish nationals only fell from 90% in 2002 to 85.9% in 2006" (press release, 12 July 2007) and that the numbers of families made up of only non-Irish

nationals and a mix of Irish and non-Irish increased. What is clear from the national data is that although the number of immigrants in Ireland has increased, when it comes to the questionnaire and interviewee sample the number of non-Irish or mixed Irish and non-Irish couples is not representative.

In addition to the social and economic changes that have taken place in Ireland, this group of respondents became parents in an environment where entitlements to parental leave (Parental Leave Act 1998 and Parental Leave (Amendment) Act 2006) and maternity leave (Maternity Protection Act 1994 and Maternity Protection (Amendment) Act 2004) had been introduced. Yet in Ireland these entitlements remain heavily gendered, with Ireland having one of the longest maternity leave entitlements in comparison with other European countries, with 26 weeks paid and an additional 16 weeks unpaid leave. At the same time, the rate of payment for maternity leave is one of the lowest in Europe (Dunne et al., 2009) and Ireland provides no statutory rights to paternity leave. Both mothers and fathers in Ireland are entitled to parental leave of 14 weeks per child, but this entitlement is unpaid and take-up is low (Dunne et al., 2009).

Ray et al.'s (Ray et al., 2010) recent comparative analysis of parental leave underscores how apparently generous parental leave policies can act to undermine gender equality. "Policies that allow families to allocate paid and unpaid leave heavily or even exclusively for mothers can reinforce traditional gender roles and women's disadvantage in the labour market" (p205).

The struggle for parents in Ireland to balance work and family life is also exacerbated by the fact that "there is currently no statutory right to flexible working nor child-care in Ireland and public provision for the 0-3 age group is extremely limited" (Drew and Daverth, 2007). In addition Ireland has the highest childcare costs as a proportion of earnings in the OECD (OECD, 2007).

Previous literature has identified that one of the key barriers to gender equality has been the difficulties women face in combining paid work and family care responsibilities, given that "parenthood brings a reallocation of time for both men and women, resulting in a more traditional division of labour" (McGinnity et al., 2008, pxi). There have been debates about whether the role of the state is to support women's

employment opportunities or whether it is to support women's role as caregiver. In an attempt to bridge these two competing versions of the state's role, a social model which combines the two strands has emerged (Ray et al, 2010). "The 'earner-carer' model envisions a society in which men and women engage symmetrically in both paid work and unpaid caregiving" (Ray et al, 2010, p198). This model sees the state's role as supporting men's ties to caregiving and women's ties to employment, and also that the state will support parental caregiving during children's early life.

Family friendly social policies such as childcare policies, working-time policies, flexible working policies and parental leave policies (Warren, 2009; Russell et al, 2009) have all been explored as possible routes to addressing the imbalance in responsibilities between the genders, as well as reconciling work and family life.

Work-family policies clearly have the power to influence gender relations and gender equality, with two broad understandings of relationship between state and gender. "One sees states as contributing to the reproduction of gender inequality while the other recognizes that state policies may contribute, to varying degrees, to the development of gender equality" (Brandth and Kvande, 2009, p178). Of course it is also possible that different but concurrent policies may serve to contradict one another, such as the policy introduced in Ireland in 2004 which entitled expectant fathers to attend two ante-natal classes and yet did not provide a right to time off work to attend the birth.

It is possible to argue that Ireland's current structure of welfare settlements and employment entitlements fails to promote gender equality, positioning men as entrenched in the workplace and women in the home. Women's primary role in the home was enshrined in the Irish Constitution (1937) which recognises that in Section 41.2 that "by her life within the home, woman gives to the State a support without which the common good cannot be achieved" and identifies the State's role as "endeavour to ensure that mothers shall not be obliged by economic necessity to engage in labour to the neglect of their duties in the home". In their examination of work-life conflict in Ireland Russell et al. (2009) identify tensions in Irish government policy when "employment policy explicitly aims to increase participation rates for all women, yet health and welfare policy is predicated on there being an unpaid, female

adult in the home who does the caring work" (p77). This argument is supported by a recent analysis of the division of labour among European couples (Buhlmann et al., 2010) which found that "the shift to gendered practices following the birth of first child can be mitigated by policies that aim to develop child-care services" (p 63) and that women's return to employment once their children start school is facilitated by long parental leaves.

What has changed?

When it comes to family formation in Ireland, it is clear that patterns have changed substantially since the previous generation. Compared with their own parents, the men who volunteered to take part in this study were more likely to have cohabited in their 20s, and then gone on to marriage in their 30s. "Members of the present cohort of adults have chosen to delay the process of family formation and childbearing, especially among the increasing proportion who have third level education" (Lunn et al., 2009, p93). This means that both they and their partners are marrying on average seven years later than their own parents were likely to have done, and also having their first child five years later than their parents.

Meanwhile many other social and economic changes have taken place in Ireland, which have transformed the role of women in society, meaning that the current cohort of new mothers are more likely than their own mothers, who started their families in the 1970s, to be working outside the home, and they are more likely to have third level education. They are also more likely to have cohabited before marriage, and some may have chosen not to marry at all, and they are more likely to go on to have smaller families than their own mothers. In addition, compared with their own parents, this cohort of new parents are less likely to have emigrated, but more likely to have formed a partnership with a non-Irish person.

When it comes to the interviewee sample, as has been previously highlighted, it appears that generally the interviewees are slightly older, a majority have completed higher levels of education, and a large majority come from the professional or

managerial occupational classes, when compared with their peer group. There are also a higher proportion of non-Irish respondents in the interviewee group, especially among the men, and in line with this, a higher proportion of the couples have a mixed nationality or totally non-Irish make up.

However, the demographic and statistical evidence provided by the national data strongly suggests that the interviewees are broadly in line with current demographic trends and the nation profile of their peer group counterparts. As with most qualitative research, those who took part in the interviews for this study are self selected. However, they are not radically different to their peer group and in many ways seem to reflect the typical experiences of those likely to be making the transition to fatherhood in contemporary Ireland. This chapter illustrates the key changes that have taken place in Ireland, such as later marriage and childbearing and the increasing number of women working outside the home, providing the context for an in depth analysis of contemporary fatherhood and family practices which follows in the next five chapters.

Introduction to qualitative findings

There are really two main "stories" that emerge from the qualitative interviews with the 20 men who volunteered to take part in this research project.

One story is about the way in which as individuals they evolve into fathers, from the pregnancy through to the early months of their first child's life. This story is about a process that each man goes through, of coming to terms with the reality that he is going to be a father, through tackling the demands of a newborn infant, to starting to reap the rewards of his investment in his child.

The other story is about the meanings of how they father, how they view their role as fathers, what they actually do as fathers, and as partners and workers, and how these roles are interlinked, sometimes conflicting with one another, sometimes complimenting one another. This story is linked to the discourse around culture and conduct in contemporary fatherhood, and offers an insight into why according to much previous research, there appears to be a contradiction between the two.

In order to explore these stories in detail the following sections focus quite heavily on the experiences of the fathers during their transition to fatherhood, using previous literature to provide a context for these findings.

What these stories share is the portrait they paint of a group of men who at this early stage of their parenting experience express, and provide evidence of, their strong desire to build a complex, meaningful and fulfilling relationship with their child.

Chapter Five: Setting the Scene

Anticipating fatherhood – the route to pregnancy

During the interviews the background to the pregnancy was explored with the interviewees. In all but one case these pregnancies had been at least expected and for the most part carefully planned for and the interviewees were probed to explore how the choice to start a family had been arrived at. The literature on pregnancy intention and planning is dominated by quantitative, psychological and medical accounts which tend to focus on the decline in marital satisfaction during the transition to parenthood (Mitnick et al., 2009, Delmore-Ko et al., 2000) or on issues of contraception and family planning.

Meanwhile, other studies have examined women's experience when it comes to their decisions about the timing of motherhood (Benzies et al., 2006), although these tend to focus on the impact on women of delayed childbearing. Benzies et al identify the fact that "there is limited knowledge on the factors that influence women's decisions about the timing of motherhood", and given that research into fatherhood has tended to lag behind research into motherhood it is not surprising that the way in which couples come to the decision to start a family remains an under-researched area. However Rijken and Knijk's (Rijken and Knijn, 2009) recent qualitative study into couples' decisions to have a first child suggested that this process of decision making is often implicit, rather than explicit. They found that "a first birth is not typically preceded by an extensive and explicit decision-making process" (p795) although they acknowledge that this finding may be a "Dutch phenomenon, partly reflecting the easiness of combining part-time work with having children" in the Netherlands. In contrast the decision to remain childless has received some academic attention (Park, 2005, Carmichael and Whittaker, 2007) illustrating that men who reject parenthood tend to do so because of the perceived sacrifices they will have to make, particularly financial loss and "lifestyle opportunity costs" (Carmichael and Whittaker, 2007). This would seem to suggest that those couples making the decision to have

children would have gone through some sort of process of rationalising these "costs" of having children.

The desire to have children

The extent to which the interviewees had a personal and individual desire to have a child or children varied, although in most cases, despite this variation in the strength of their desire, there was a strong assumption on the part of these men that they would have a family at some point in their lives.

> *"I suppose as you go through life, you always presume that it's something that's going to happen." Michael*

> *"I suppose it's a bit blasé to assume that you're going to be a parent, but I suppose everyone nearly does, I think, d'you know?" Frank*

This would seem to coincide with the fact that, despite falling fertility rates across Europe, the vast majority of adults wish to become parents at some stage in their lives, and those expressing a desire to remain childless, remain in a small minority. For example a recent Eurobarometer survey (Testa, 2006) reported that just 5% of Irish women aged 15-39 in Ireland wish to remain childless, and the same report finds that, within the European Union as a whole, only 4% of people would prefer to remain childless.

Some of the men interviewed articulated a strong desire to have children, and a certainty that this was a priority for them, and that they couldn't remember a time when it hadn't.

> *"It was always my intention that, you know, no matter who I settled down with, that I'd start a family." Jim*

> *"I think it is something that I, coz I've known I've always wanted it." Nick*

"I always wanted a family… we always knew we'd have a family." Tom

Tied in with this assumption that they would have children at some stage in their lives was the reference to their own family of origin as a model – it's what they knew, so they replicated it, or planned to, almost without any deep analysis. It is as though their idea of what a family is has to include children, and that this cultural script is so familiar as to be unquestioningly accepted.

"We're both from reasonably big families. Um, I'm a family of four boys, and Sarah is two boys, two girls… so it is just a natural part of, you know." Jim

Others were less emphatic about their own wish for a family, with a more take-it-or-leave-it approach, sometimes placing an emphasis on being with the right woman, and seeming to imply that they would have been content not to have children if their partner was also content with that. This would seem to be in line with Rijken and Kinjn's finding that some people are "quite indifferent towards having children and are easily convinced if their partner wants to have children" (p793).

"I always assumed I would. I never gave it any – it certainly hasn't been a burning issue for me or anything. It's, it's also important to me to find the right person to have; children were presumably part of that, well, great. But it was never the other way round, if you know what I mean." Donal

"It wouldn't have been a sort of desire, necessarily. But I wouldn't have been against the idea." Shane

"I wouldn't have been surprised either way. I just thought I met the right person." Alex

This seems to suggest that in some cases it was the woman's desire to have children that was the driving force behind starting a family, and several of the men expressed another assumption, that their partners or wives would want to have children, which

again would appear to be in line with findings of the Eurobarometer survey that most women would like to have children (Testa, 2006).

> *"I would have just known really, or assumed, I don't know which, that she would have wanted children, you know? I mean, she's, er, I guess that kind of person." Aidan*

Others started from the position of not having any desire to have children as young men, and described how it was a concept that they adopted more gradually, as they got older.

> *"When I was about 20, if somebody had've said to me, I'd have said 'no'. Er, but over time, you change. And priorities change." Tony*

Some talked about the desire to have children as being a shared goal or aspiration with their partner, possibly something that contributed to them being together.

> *"It was something that we both wanted, and it was something that we were trying for. Um, and er, it was, yeah, a mutual goal, a mutual want, a mutual need." Andrew*

Again this appears to be in line with Rijken and Kinjn's assertion that "a couple's decision process is often a shared experience" (p794). It is possible to argue that perhaps those men who had not wished to have children, or who had not planned the pregnancy, may have felt more ambivalent about having a child, and thus may have been less likely to volunteer to take part in the interview phase of the study. However, it is clear that in the case of those who did volunteer that they were entering fatherhood willingly and often with great enthusiasm. It seems likely that this positive attitude towards having a child makes it more likely that the men in the study would want to be actively involved in the care of the child once it arrived.

The importance of men's pregnancy intentions in terms of outcomes for both the child and the couples' relationship have been illustrated in recent research (Bronte-Tinkew

et al., 2009) which shows that "unwanted and mistimed" pregnancies resulted in negative consequences for the children and higher levels of couple conflict.

Deciding to have a baby

The amount of discussion each couple had about having a child prior to conception varies. Some explained how it had always been a topic of discussion for the couple, and that the nature of the discussion shifted over time, from being a general talk about the possibility of having children at some point in the future, to more 'serious' discussions about the specific timing for having a baby.

> *"We talked about it very generally… before we were even engaged, and then I think, after that more seriously… we had lot of discussions about it late last year and then early this year. Just to clarify exactly when, and then we, we kind of made the decision." Conor*

> *"We probably talked about that, er, about a year before we got married. Probably a little bit before we decided to get engaged… we would have talked about, options of, you know, personal interest in having children, relatively early, I suppose, probably one year into us being a couple." Eoin*

Others talked about knowing that their partners wanted to have children, and that it therefore wasn't something that was discussed, as it was already a taken-for-granted fact, suggesting that the couple have reached a "spontaneous consensus" (Rijken and Knijn, 2009).

> *"We never really talked about it, it just, I know she's, she's thirty-three going on thirty-four, she wanted to, you know, there's obviously the health risks, the older you get, the harder it gets, so she wanted to try and have two kids before she's forty." Peter*

"If it wasn't stated, I knew that Aoife did want to have children. [sure] And there was never really any, er, doubt that we'd try for children at some stage." Nick

In most cases it appeared that a mutual decision was made by the couple, although in some cases it seemed to be a decision led by the woman. In a minority of other cases it seemed to be left to chance/fate – no contraception was being used, but there wasn't an 'official policy' of trying for a baby.

"We became a bit more lax around using [contraception], you know what I mean, and then a couple of years ago we just kind of stopped, not a real conscious decision, but we kind of stopped using." Frank

"We weren't using contraception. So I said, you know, this is a possibility it could happen, so I'm fine with it happening, just make sure you are." Fergal

In another case there was a reluctance to be labelled as 'trying' (and failing?) although they had actively decided that they wanted to have a baby, and agreed to 'stop stopping' to try to have a baby.

"The decision I suppose to use that horrible expression, trying for a child, trying for a baby, it was a stopping using contraception, and just see what happens, I suppose, leave nature to take its course… while we hadn't made a conscious decision to try for a baby, we had made a conscious decision to stop stopping trying to have a baby, if you see what I mean!" Donal

In just one case the pregnancy was described as completely unplanned, although the couple were already co-habiting and had discussed having children together in a few more years. However, the majority of couples were actively trying to conceive, with reference made to ovulation predictor kits, the length of time it took to become pregnant and in three cases the experience of previous miscarriages, while one couple revealed that they had undergone fertility treatment in order to conceive.

Life stage and age

It was common for the men to refer to being "ready" or at the life stage where it is "natural" to start having children and some men talked about having had their "wild times" or their "adventures" and now being prepared to settle down, suggesting that unlike Carmichael and Whittaker's childless couples (Carmichael and Whittaker, 2007), they were reconciled to the potential "costs" of becoming parents.

> *"At my stage of my life, I'm more than happy like, I've gone out and had my wild times and I've done all that when I was younger." Fergal*

Others referred to their peers, and how having a family was the "norm" for their friends and siblings at this stage of their lives. This is similar to the findings of Lupton and Barclay whose research participants also talked about becoming a father as "normal" and a "natural progression" (Lupton and Barclay, 1997, p119). In some cases there seems almost to be a sense of rivalry with siblings over producing the first grandchild.

> *"I suppose it was, first grandson wins, competition in the house. So, I suppose there was a degree of that as well, you know and I know it sounds silly and childish." Jim*

> *"Most of my friends have got babies nowadays, so it's, it's the norm isn't it?" Peter*

There was frequent reference to the "natural progression" in the couples' relationship, and that marriage was still regarded by the majority as the "stepping stone" to having a family. The need to have marriage/house/job/money as prerequisites seemed to be common to most interviewees, suggesting that there was a desire to have conditions optimised before starting a family.

> *"I suppose getting married was one progression, we were of the opinion that we wouldn't have children before we got married." Tony*

"Once we had the house we were like, okay, we've kind of, that excuse is gone now, so let's, let's look at this. So that was when we made the decision to try and see if we could have kids." Shane

"We didn't start trying until last year, um, cos we just didn't have the money." Aidan

A number of the couples had moved house or job in advance of starting the family, partly to facilitate closer geographic location to the support network provided by their own parents, or in the hopes that their work will be more "family friendly".

"We decided...it might be easier because you have family and friends and all the support around you ...So that kind of prompted the move back [from living abroad]." Robert

It would seem that being married is an important indicator for this group that they are in a settled and stable relationship. Of note is the fact that of the four couples who were not married in the interviewee group, two of them were married shortly after the birth of the child, prior to the second interview, and one of the couples who remained unmarried were also the only couple who described the pregnancy as unplanned.

These prerequisites for starting a family seem to correspond to the findings of Benzies et al (2006) who also report that the women in their study had "satisfied their desires for travel and personal fulfilment, a stable relationship and financial stablility" (p630), suggesting that both men and women have similar goals around what they want to have achieved and in place before starting a family. Again, this also corresponds with Rijken and Kinjn's finding that couples start thinking about having children once they have experienced "an 'extended' period in which life was full of other things, such as study, career, friends, going out or exotic travel" (p794).

Hitting their 30s also seems to be a significant point for the interviewees, who seemed to regard it as the time when they came to maturity. Several men talked about their

own age being a factor – not wanting to be pushing a pram as an old man, or not wanting to have too much of a generation gap between themselves and their children, and also not being able to "wait forever".

> *"Now is definitely the time, and I don't want to be messing around any later, like, so. A sixty year old pushing a pram is not what I want to do." Eoin*

However, there was also even more of an awareness of their partner's age, and the biological clock meaning that the window of female fertility was getting smaller as time passes. Age was also mentioned as a factor by those men who suggested that they were planning to have more children and therefore needed to start a family to allow for "reasonable spacing".

> *"Eimear was probably more, it was more of an issue for her, I think, I think probably purely physiologically, because she's a little bit older and you know, it was a narrowing window I suppose, of opportunity." Donal*

The fact that the majority of these men saw themselves as becoming fathers at some stage in their lives counters the stereotype that it is women who are the only driving force behind having children. Indeed, some men who had partners younger than themselves suggested that they were "ready"' to start a family before the women were.

> *"She's two years younger than me, so maybe, three or four years ago she felt it wasn't quite time, and maybe I thought it was." Tom*

This finding is consistent with a previous quantitative study (Thomson, 1997) which found that "husbands' desires and intentions influence couples' births, with approximately equal force to that of wives' desires and intentions" (p343). It would also seem to suggest that while men did have the same biological clock that women did, they did see timing as a significant factor in their readiness to become a father, not wanting to leave it until later in their life course to start their families.

Anticipating fatherhood – plans and aspirations

In the pre-birth interviews much of the focus was on the expectant fathers' plans for their involvement with the baby, from both a practical and an emotional perspective. This discussion led to a broader discussion about how they viewed the role of a father in a theoretical sense, and the extent to which their own experiences as children, with their own fathers, influenced these ideas, and how they expected their gender, and the baby's gender, to impact on their involvement.

The role of the father

One of the key issues discussed in the pre-birth interviews was how the interviewees saw their role as fathers, and what kinds of plans or aspirations they had for their involvement in their child's care and in their lives in the future.

The breadwinner role, providing financial support for the family, "was seen as the key component of good fathering for most of the twentieth century" (Dermott, 2008, p25) and yet it was rarely suggested as a major part of their fathering role by the interviewees during the pre-birth interviews, perhaps suggesting that their conception of a father's role has broadened to include many other attributes besides economic provision, or perhaps that the provider role remains a taken-for-granted (and therefore perhaps unacknowledged?) aspect of fatherhood (Christiansen and Palkovitz, 2001).

> *"It's a caregiver role, there's a traditional element of being a provider as well, but I would see myself as being quite, maybe not entirely traditional in the sense that, it's hard to say what is traditional now. I certainly wouldn't consider myself at a remove from the actual process of raising the kid. I would be involved as much as possible." Conor*

It is interesting that Conor mentioned the caring role first, and seemed to equate being a provider with being traditional, and in turn, being traditional as perhaps being

"removed" from the process of childrearing, a possibility he clearly rejected. This relative lack of emphasis on the breadwinner role contrasts with the findings of Gerson, who almost two decades ago, reported that over a third of the men in her study defined "their family and work commitments in terms of primary breadwinning" (Gerson, 1993, p11). In contrast to the breadwinner role, other more traditional fatherly qualities, previously identified in the literature, such as acting as a moral guide, an educator and as a playmate (Lamb and Tamis-Lemonda, 2004, p3-4, Pleck, 2004, Lupton and Barclay, 1997), were apparent in many of the accounts.

> *"I suppose, discipline and, do the right thing, know right from wrong, all that sort of stuff, you know?" Peter*

> *"I have visions of myself playing with him, with all his toys, and playing football with him, or playing golf with him and spending that fun time with him. But also, on the practical side, spending time with him from a learning and a development perspective." Andrew*

However, the interviewees seemed to recognise that expectations of fathers have expanded to include a more emotional and care-giving role, providing support for McKeown's view that "investment without involvement no longer carries the esteem that it once did" (McKeown, 2001, p10).

> *"Times have changed, very much, I suppose, the perception now is that fathers do have an influence on their children. A greater influence than maybe was previously thought. So therefore, it's good to have an interaction with your child and be involved at every single stage." Michael*

This group of men placed a great emphasis on the importance of "being there" (Lupton and Barclay, 1997, p122, Hatten et al., 2002, p72, Dermott, 2008, p56), actively involved, in the day-to-day care and nurture of their children, perhaps suggesting that the distant or detached father stereotype of previous generations was being rejected by this group of men, and also that they wished to do more than be a "father figure", and want to be "actively involved", as Andrew puts it.

"Being more involved in just the more mundane elements, not the key 1970s schlocky movie kind of 'dad moments'. The more basic just everyday stuff." Conor

"I want to be there, as much as possible, as the baby is growing up and be a positive presence and be a positive influence. And be a father, not just a father figure, but a father who's actively involved in this person who's going to become a different person unto their own right." Andrew

Often the desire to be emotionally available, approachable and communicative was articulated as an important, if not *the* most important, aspect of fathering. A number of the men either hinted at, or explicitly described their aspiration to be considered as a friend and confidante by their adult children.

"I suppose it's, like, to be there like, emotionally for the children. I'd like to be, er, I wouldn't like to be strict, but I'd like to be guiding." Sean

"I would like to think in years to come, my child or children would be able to talk to me… To want to come back and say, twenty year old child, you know, 'would you like to go for a drink, daddy, and have a chat?' Or, 'I need advice, what do you think?'… And, I'm making sure that we talk to each other, and one thing I'll do, is, we'll eat dinner as a family, at a table. 'How was your day?', you know." Tony

Like a number of the other men, Tony clearly believed that the foundations for a future intimate relationship are laid via the day-to-day family practices, such making a habit of eating a meal together on a daily basis.

There's a strong theme of "doing fatherhood" (Marsiglio et al., 2000) through various activities, references made to getting children involved in their interests, taking them to football, or gardening together, and many of the men seemed to have very clear visions of themselves with their children in the future, although in common with

previous studies these "expectations appeared to revolve around a vision of a son or daughter as an older child" (Lupton and Barclay, 1997, p121).

> *"Sitting down, having conversations, you know, going for walks, you know, just spending time basically finding out what's going on. And activities, like I have a vegetable patch in the garden, so when the kid, when she gets a bit older, getting her involved in doing what I'm doing, and just things like that, just being involved. And when they ask questions, answer the questions and, just talk, read stories and, you know just be there like, and just be supportive, know that you're there for them. Um, I think that's really what you just have to instil." Shane*

> *"I'd sort of see myself sort of cycling up the Wicklow mountains with him later on in life, and so on." Aidan*

As well as these "fun" activities, there was also an almost taken for granted assumption that these men will be involved in the more "mundane" aspects of caring for their babies, feeding, changing, bathing and soothing them. This would seem to reflect the findings of the "Becoming a Parent" questionnaire carried out at the first phase of this study, which found that fathers, and their partners, expected to have a high level of involvement in the day-to-day care of their babies.

> *"I do hope to have a very close relationship and of course, in everything, feeding, bathing, changing, everything." Frank*

> *"I'll be pretty involved, changing nappies and bathing the baby and, you know, all that kind of stuff" Shane*

> *"The whole lot, the feeding, the changing, you know, I'll be there." Alex*

> *"If in that time baby needs a nappy changed, or fed or walked, or put in the back seat of a car and driven around 'til it falls asleep, I'll do whatever. If the baby needs to be bathed, I'll do whatever." Tony*

One aspect of the babies' care that the men anticipated they may be less involved in is feeding, and this is due to the fact that all the interviewees' wives and partners planned to breastfeed. High level of breastfeeding intentions were reported in the "Becoming A Parent" questionnaire, with 82.6% planning to breastfeed, compared with 7.8% planning to formula feed and 8.4% planning to mix breast and formula feeding. Some of the men were very keen on the idea of breastfeeding, and would saw themselves as a driving force behind the decision. This is consistent with research into women's decision to breastfeed, which has consistently found that men play an important role in influencing the decision (Giugliani et al., 1994, Littman et al., 1994) and that fathers act as the main source of support for breastfeeding mothers (Bar-Yam and Darby, 1997).

> *"The only thing I was keen on was for Liz to breastfeed. I was quite, and um, she, I don't know what her initial thoughts were, but she seemed to be happy to go along with it." Alex*

> *"I've fairly set views, but then I'm a guy so I'm not doing it, but, you know I've read so many articles and things saying, that breastfeeding was the best way to go forward... I think I did mention it to Sarah a couple of times. That that's what I thought. Um, you know, that that was my opinion. I think Sarah was more worried about um, [chuckles] sort of rash, er, chaffing and things like that... I suppose I have been a driving force behind Sarah's decision to breastfeed. We'll see how it goes. If it doesn't work at least we've tried it and you know, we can go back to formula like other people.... I think Sarah probably thought that she was going to do it all the time anyway, but, just the, er, additional nudging probably, went that way." Jim*

Other interviewees saw the feeding choice as a decision for the woman to make or felt a little ambivalent about it, as they felt that they would not be as able to share the load of childcare if their partners were breastfeeding, and a few felt that they would miss out on the experience of feeding the baby.

"That's her decision though. I wouldn't have an opinion either way. She one hundred per cent wants to breast feed. Especially after the antenatal class when they were saying the benefits, that it gives to the child, you know." John

"I think it maybe natural if she wants, if she could breastfeed, great. But if she couldn't, I wouldn't be disappointed at all, because everyone's different and I don't necessarily think it's going to affect the child in the long run... in some ways, I'm thinking, we'll share the load, maybe she shouldn't breastfeed, or if she does, maybe not for too long." Tony

"I was a bit disappointed by, not the fact that she's breastfeeding, but the fact that if she's breastfeeding, I don't get to feed the kid. And I kind of thought that's an important thing to do, you know?" Shane

Most of them made some kind of reference to the challenges that women can face with breastfeeding, and seemed to adopt a pragmatic approach – if it doesn't work out we won't beat ourselves up about it. However, the majority seemed to refer to breastfeeding as the "natural" or "obvious" choice, made reference to their awareness of the health benefits to mother and baby, and drew parallels between their own choice to eat healthy, natural foods rather than processed food and the decision to breastfeed, similar to the findings of Okon (Okon, 2004), whose study also found fathers using words like "good", "natural" and "better" to describe breastfeeding.

"For me it just comes down to natural. I much prefer to eat natural foods, unprocessed foods. So why would I feed my baby processed [food]?" Nick

"My opinion is that breastfeeding is obviously what you should do." Tom

Peter seemed to have doubts about the likelihood of his wife succeeding at breastfeeding, as he saw her as someone who gives up if things prove challenging. He was also one of the few men who admitted to a self-serving interest in his wife breastfeeding, as he believed it would relieve him of one of the chores of baby-care:

"I'd rather she did it. And there's a selfish side to it as well. Where, I don't have to do anything, right, [laughs] she has to do the feeds, and that'll save me having to get up and get something out of the fridge and all that sort of gear,

you know? Really it's to see if she can do it, if she can cope, hopefully she'll, Orla, bless her, she's not the best in, if something's hard then she'll just stop doing it. That's what she's like. So she's going to have to try and stick at it and that's up to me to try and encourage her, I know that right?" Peter

Clearly the interviews suggested that the majority of those in this group of men had given some thought to the role they expected to play as fathers, although in some cases the interview was the first time that they had articulated it. In addition, most had had some discussions with their partner about the practical involvement they were likely to have in caring for the baby and had discussed issues, such as feeding method with their partner. This corresponds with the results of the questionnaire, which also found that 97.6% of couples had discussed feeding with each other.

Most aspired to an emotionally close connection with their child and believed that the groundwork for this ideal relationship would be laid through their involvement and participation in day-to-day care, from the earliest days of their child's life.

Gendered fathers

There was a clear sense among many accounts that the parental relationship differs for men and for women, and this echoes previous literature which points to a common assumption that "the father's main role is seen to support the mother whose views on how to look after the child are treated as paramount" (McKeown, 2001, p14). However, the interviewees' frequently gendered view of mothers' and fathers' roles often simultaneously gave the parental roles an equal weight, and illustrated a belief that the roles balance each other out, even though their descriptions drew strongly on traditional gender stereotypes.

"I think the mother provides the more, the intimate kind of love, where as the father can provide more, I don't know, I suppose, the role model, I suppose, is that one way of putting it? I mean it's, I mean, I think it's an equally important role, it, it's two parts... you have the two total opposites, you might say,

complete opposites. But, together they make the whole. And somehow that I think is how the mother and father play a role." Frank

"It's just a supporting role because Sarah will be the prime person for the baby." Jim

"The mother is the closer person to the child, she will spend more time with the child, especially in the early stages." Aidan

"The father is a fun figure, very often, in families, and also the advice giver as well. I suppose the mother is kind of the authority." Michael

"The man of the house, still, the protector, the guy who's taking care of everybody." John

This evidence would seem to support Wall and Arnold's assertion that mothers continue to be "positioned as primary parents" (Wall and Arnold, 2007, p508), with fathers playing a secondary role as mothers' helpers or "bumbling assistant" as Sunderland's discourse analysis of parenting guides illustrates (Sunderland, 2000). Some interviewees seemed to view themselves as their partner's delegates, and described how they left certain decisions to the mother, or how they expected the mother to guide them in what role they play.

"[She's] pretty much taken the decisions on this… we have a room beside ours with like the baby monitor or whatever you call it and I think, the idea after three weeks is to chuck the baby in there." Aidan

"I'll be involved in whatever she wants, if she wants fifty-fifty, that's fine." Tony

"She's determined that I'm going to have a fifty-fifty role, and I think that's fair enough, I mean that's very much the modern way." Frank

"I don't know what my role is, but, help out, I guess." Donal

Doucet also reports that in her three studies on fathering "the majority of fathers (and mothers) express the profound belief in distinct differences between mothering and fathering" (Doucet, 2009, p85). It would seem that at this stage in their transition to parenthood the interviewees also felt that mothers have a "heightened importance" (Dermott, 2008, p81) and that gender does make a difference.

Notably, the relevance of gender also seemed to play a part in how these men viewed fatherhood when it came to the child's gender, with a recurring theme of some of the men believing that the gender of the child has an impact on how they will parent, and some stating a clear preference for a boy, although they were often quick to qualify this preference in some way, possibly out of an unwillingness to be perceived as sexist by the researcher. They viewed this preference as a normal feeling for men, or they ascribed it to a lack of confidence in understanding how girls 'work'. (Despite the fact that their wives are presumably 'girls' and some have close relationships with sisters!)

> *"I'd rather have, I want a boy. Just cause I'd rather have a son but obviously if I had a daughter I'd be delighted and I'm not, you know, I wouldn't treat it any differently ... I'm sport mad, I suppose, and it'd be nice to have a son, or even a daughter, to share that with, right? Um, a daughter can play football nowadays, I suppose, [laughs] that's a bit sexist." Peter*

> *"I was a bit worried that I was going to, you know, if it's a boy then I'm going to love it more, and if it's a girl then I'm not. And that concerned me... I think I'd be a dreadful father to a daughter, you know, sort of, first time the boyfriend comes round sitting there going 'so, what are you doing?' [fierce voice]. Yeah, I think I could be quite, quite menancing." Jim [scan confirmed it was a boy]*

> *"When I first found out she was pregnant, I wanted a boy, obviously, I think a lot of men do. But by the time we found out it was a boy, I didn't care, I'd changed me mind and I'd grown to, I was growing to the idea of having a little girl." John*

"It's a girl, so, it's probably different in terms of what kind of things you'd have to do for it being a boy… I understand boys, and I understand how boys think. I don't understand girls as much, even though I would have reared my sister." Shane

The preference expressed by men for a boy has been highlighted in previous literature (Hank, 2007), which has suggested that "modernization and increasing gender equality do not necessarily bring about parental gender indifference" (Hank, 2007, p765). Marleau and Saucier's 2002 literature review of studies between 1948-1996 of parental gender preference for first born children, revealed that 47% of men stated a preference for a boy, compared with 25% preferring a girl child, and 28% having no preference (Marleau and Saucier, 2002).

Other comments relating to the child's gender also indicated a belief that the child's gender makes a difference to parenting style, and also reflected the discourse that boys in particular benefit from a father. The interviewees also drew on popular narratives about fatherhood which reflected the idea that 'deadbeat' dads are responsible for social problems – such as suicide or delinquency – or that fathers have a "distinctive value as parents" (Freeman, 2003) and also the discourse that society is suffering from a crisis in masculinity (Gosine, 2007).

"If you're dealing with a boy, there's I think, a large benefit in having a male presence as well." Conor

"Particularly with young boys, there is big problems with male role models, that there is a lack of them, there is an inability to deal with serious setback at a young age. Which bears that out in the suicide figures". Donal

"If fathers were given more important role in the bringing up of the kids we might not see the same amount of, problems in the streets and things like that." Jim

These views appeared to reflect the growing emphasis in social policy on making parents responsible for their children's antisocial behaviour, and the expectation that "responsible parents will try and ensure that their children behave considerately to others" (Featherstone, 2009, p144).

It would seem that many of the fathers held quite essentialist views on the gender roles that each parent plays, and these gendered discourses permeated many of their comments on both their own role and the role that their partner is expected to play. This raises a question about the extent to which, as posited by Lupton and Barclay (1997) and Hollway (Hollway, 1995), in an attempt to deal with the "unconscious anxieties" of new parenthood, "both men and women may seek recourse in taking up the gender-differentiated discourses available to them" (Lupton and Barclay, 1997, p146).

In addition, it appeared that these essentialist gender views also permeated the interviewees' expectations about their children's development and their own relationship with a child of a particular gender.

Legacy of their own fathers

Previous literature has explored how much contemporary fathers draw on their own experience of being fathered as a basis for their own style of parenting, whether by modelling their own fathers' involvement or by compensating for their fathers' lack of involvement (Pleck and Masciadrelli, 2004, Daly, 1995). Lupton and Barclay reported that the fathers in their study "often positioned themselves as attempting to achieve a different and 'better' relationship with their own children" (Lupton and Barclay, 1997, p121) and previous literature has identified that "a recurrent theme is men's assertion that they are doing a better job of fathering than their own fathers" (Dermott, 2008, p71).

This is consistent with the findings of this study, where there was more evidence of the interviewees wanting to move away from their own experience of being fathered,

rather than replicating their own fathers' style. In the "Becoming a Parent" questionnaire only one man selected his own father as a useful person to talk to about having a baby, and this was as part of a list which also included his mother and friends. This strongly suggests that the expectant fathers did not view their own fathers as a potential fathering resource.

Even those interviewees who said their parents did a "great job", tended to qualify their statements with a "but" – they wanted to build on their own father's good points and be more "involved". The majority of men described their own fathers as "old-fashioned" and generally uninvolved in the emotional side of parenting, even though they may have played other supportive roles for their offspring.

> *"From my relationship with my own father, who certainly did many good things, particularly in terms of all the financial type support, but maybe not so much in terms of emotional development, or anything like that. So, I'd like to try and correct that, if I can." Eoin*

> *"He would have been… somewhat typical, sort of old fashioned Irish male, emotional matters would be discussed through with my mum as an intermediary… he'd be fairly good at saying 'no'… there are different sides to his personality. You know, so he would have been strict in ways, but very playful in others." Aidan*

> *"I missed having a father who had an interest. It was an old fashioned fatherly thing, you know. Distanced. Shirt and tie. Every day. Would never come and watch me football. Would never ask how your day was, would never do anything like that. And I'm not necessarily saying that's wrong, that was just a way of doing it. But it wouldn't be my way. You know. I would tend to do the opposite, I feel like I missed out, and I would have been jealous years ago, of seeing my best friend's father come in from work and get out of his car, and a football would be kicked over to him and he'd kick football with his son for ten minutes, fifteen minutes, and you know, to a five year old, that's probably very*

important, you know? So, that's probably what I kind of tend to go to, more so than the shirt and tie man." Tony

This emphasis on avoiding the "emotional remoteness" (Dermott, 2008, p72) of their own fathers is also a crucial part of the "intimate fatherhood" Dermott describes (2008): "a central plank in fulfilling the idea of being 'really involved' with his own children means being open with them on an emotional level" (Dermott, 2008, p73). There was a common tendency for some of the men to justify their own father's parenting style as typical of its era and this suggested that they were reluctant to be critical of their fathers' approach, minimising the amount of choice they see their fathers as having.

"My parents were old school. In the best possible sense… to a degree it was very much 'kids should be seen and not heard', sort of thing, but I think now, society has changed… and kids are encouraged more to, interact and do what kids like to do." Andrew

"The role I guess my father had, I'd say many fathers of his generation, just a little bit stand-off-ish." Nick

Interestingly, the interviewee who gave the most positive account of his own father's parenting style was John, who at 26 was the youngest of the group, and it is possible that his own experience reflects the beginnings of a shift away from the "old school" traditional model of fatherhood in Ireland, towards the more nurturant model of fatherhood which began to emerge in the 1980s. Alternatively, it is also possible that John's father was one example of the many men who have bucked the trend by rejecting the prevalent fathering model of their era. Part of the researcher's job is to be aware of the "danger of oversimplifying the history of fatherhood into 'then' and 'now' categories" (Daly, 1993a, p511), and previous literature has been at pains to point out that emotional and nurturant fathering has existed for centuries (Burgess, 1997). John used frequent examples from his own childhood to describe the style of fathering he would like to adopt.

"I had a great dad, so I was lucky, my dad is brilliant, I wouldn't say I want to try and copy him, but I'll definitely use a lot of his traits, a lot of his styles of parenting. I thought they were very good…I don't want to be one of these parents that's bothered by their children, children are in their way. I hate seeing, kids coming up and saying 'daddy, daddy, why is the sky blue?' and turn around and go 'it is, cause it is'. That attitude stinks, I think. Or 'why is there stars in the sky?', 'there just are'. I hate that. My dad wasn't like that at all. He'd always, even if he made it up, he'd have an answer for you. [small laugh] You know, so, I'd like to be that kind of dad. Always have time for the kids… I'd like to be fun, coz that's what my dad was, he was fun… he does work shift work, but he was always there, he was always at home, he was never away. He was never down the pub, or, he's a family man, so if he wasn't in work, he'd be at home, simple as that. He didn't have something, somewhere else better to be. That's the kind of dad I'd like to be." John

A number of the men had fathers who had serious alcohol addiction, while others had experienced family break-ups at an early age, and while they may not have described this as traumatic, they did seem to feel that their relationships with their father did little to provide them with a role model of how to parent themselves.

"He's an alcoholic… we grew up with it so we're used to it, like, I could tell you a thousand stories… he did his best, and I think that's all you can do in any situation… in some ways I think he was a very good dad to us, in that he allowed us freedom to be who we were, and I always thought that was great." Frank

"My parents split up when I was about seven or so…. So I've got kind of a different perspective on what you're dealing with in terms of a parent being there, or not being there." Conor

"My father didn't have much to do with my life. When I was a child. After the age of six, my parents separated when I was six, and I saw him probably three or four times a year… my first hand example of what a father does, perhaps,

well, it isn't the same as somebody else's… I never had a father who came out in the back garden and kicked a ball around with me. That's probably something that I would, I would enjoy doing, enjoy playing with my child… at the back of my mind I'm worried that because I didn't have a particularly stable childhood, well, I had a stable childhood, but not a conventional childhood, I may not know what to do." Tom

For those that regarded their fathers as the last person they would wish to emulate – for their absence, disinterest or unreliability – there was a concern that they wouldn't over compensate for this legacy.

"Obviously, you know, with my dad being not reliable, and him not showing, not being there and not being involved… you're going to react to that and sort of go the other way and say well I'd rather be there, and spend the time, do it, so it's just trying to balance it so that you don't go too extreme." Shane

"My concern is that I don't go too far over the top… That's my worry, is that I over compensate." Jim

In terms of what influenced their ideas of fatherhood, there was no sense that this group of men had any single source as individuals, but in fact they were cherry-picking their examples of what to do, or what not do, from a range that included their own fathers, or aspects of their own father's parenting style, but other examples also included family, friends, colleagues, rock star Ozzy Osbourne and cartoon character Homer Simpson.

"I don't want to be Ozzy Osbourne." Sean

"You're looking at different models and you think well this one is working, this one isn't working, from my own father to Homer Simpson." Alex

"I think my brother's wife, she should just write books on parenting, she seems to have done everything right." Andrew

"[My instructor], he's just so patient, and he's so relaxed and he's a great teacher as well, and, big calm man, very, you know, very strong man, and he's someone I think, yeah, he is, I'd love to be." Frank

This tendency to be influenced by a variety of sources is consistent with Daly's findings that men do not necessarily see their own fathers as good role models, and that they tend to "select particular behaviours to incorporate into their roles" (Daly, 1993a, p510) and in Lupton and Barclay's study the fathers were reported "observing other men's interactions with their children" (Lupton and Barclay, 1997, p122) as a way to develop their own fathering skills.

Conclusions

When it came to taking the decision to become parents, in common with the majority of adults (Testa, 2006) the vast majority of the interviewees had always seen themselves as having a family at some stage in their lives, and most had taken a conscious decision with their partners to start a family. The momentum for this decision varied, and the extent to which it was planned out varied a great deal, from a laissez faire 'if it happens, it happens' attitude to the more strategic, 'let's get the ovulation predictor kit out' approach.

All the men, other than the one who experienced an unplanned pregnancy, appeared to feel they had reached the stage in their life where they were ready to become parents. What varied somewhat between the men is whether this stage depended on having the structural supports of house, job, local family in place, or the extent to which they felt they had had their 'wild' times, and would not feel they missed out on life experiences by becoming parents. Even the unplanned pregnancy was ultimately embraced, and although the timing of the pregnancy was acknowledged as perhaps not being ideal, it was also not resented or seen as a disaster.

"We'd always wanted to have kids. But it wasn't a planned pregnancy [small laugh]. But it was something we talked about, but ideally maybe wouldn't have done for maybe another three or four years." John

However, in contrast to Rijken and Kinjn's (2009) finding that most couples make more of an implicit decision than an explicit decision, in the case of the majority of the men in this sample, there seems to have been a good deal of explicit discussion about having children, whether in theory at some point, or about the specific timing, and in many cases also some other planning and life style changes in anticipation of starting a family – for example, moving closer to family, changing jobs, using ovulation prediction tests. This would seem to imply that the couples had discussed the implications of having a child in some detail, leading them to make these other decisions in relation to their anticipated parenthood.

It is possible to speculate that a reason for this greater level of explicit discussion and planning for a family is due in part to the Irish context, where there are far fewer structural supports for having a family than in the Netherlands (for example, Ireland has no statutory paternity leave and unpaid parental leave, and minimal state provided pre-school childcare and childcare subsidies, while the Netherlands has two days paternity leave and "parents have a legal right to lower their working hours by 50 percent over a period of 26 weeks" (Plantenga and Remery, 2009), plus childcare allowance benefits for working parents which significantly subsidise childcare costs).

The minority of men and their partners who seemed to have a more fatalistic approach to getting pregnancy often seemed to have an almost superstitious approach, as if by "planning" a pregnancy or "trying for" a baby, there was a danger of tempting fate to disappoint their hopes and expectations. This was clear from those who talked about being "blessed" or "lucky":

Overall, the group of men interviewed for this research had clearly seen themselves as becoming fathers one day, and like Lupton and Barclay (Lupton and Barclay, 1997), there was very little evidence of non-fatherhood being an option, apart from among the small number of men who said that they wouldn't have minded either way. They presented themselves as ready for parenthood and positive towards it, embracing the reproductive phase of their life course.

To summarise how this group of men regard their role as fathers, it would seem fair to say that all the men aspired to make an active contribution to their babies' lives, and later on in their children's lives. It also appears that they were not completely rejecting the traditional view of fathers, as moral guides, educators and providers, although the harsher, more authoritarian approach was certainly not embraced. Rather, they were incorporating what they saw as the benefits of these roles into an evolving notion of fatherhood, one which emphasises the importance of an emotional connection with their children, and the importance of communication and respect for their offspring.

> *"That you treat them as a human being and they have a voice too, and that it's okay. You give them guidance in what's required, and they have to learn from you initially, but that they too have thoughts and that [laughs] and – no more than when I was growing up myself – that they're listened to. And that their opinion counts as well." Michael*

In addition, even in anticipation of fatherhood, these men appeared to view themselves as playing an important supporting role to their partners' parenting. Even though some of the men continued to give support to the idea that the mothers are the "primary" parent, they also regarded their own role as crucial in shaping their children and their future relationship with those children. This seems to suggest support for Doucet's (2006) argument that the emphasis should be on "gender *symmetry* rather than gender equality" (Doucet, 2006, italics in orginial).

The following chapter explores the next phase of the interviewees' transition to fatherhood, as they tackled the realities of the pregnancy and the birth.

Chapter Six: Experiences of Pregnancy and Childbirth

The experiences of pregnancy and childbirth have long been viewed from the perspective of the expectant mother (Miller, 2005, Bailey, 2001, Barclay et al., 1997, Lazarus, 1994). In contrast the male experience of pregnancy and childbirth has received much less attention (Draper, 2003), despite the fact that it has become normal for expectant fathers to attend antenatal classes and appointments, and for the vast majority of fathers to be present at their child's birth, so that "fathers are not only welcomed but *expected* [emphasis in original] to participate in antenatal classes, labour and delivery"(Draper, 2003). Evidence of this expectation was supplied in the maternity hospital, where the interviewees were recruited, when a member of staff pointed out to me that there was no longer a fathers' waiting room in the hospital. However, as Doucet points out "men's entry into this world [of pregnancy] is much more ambivalent and much less documented" (Doucet, 2009).

How the interviewees in this study perceived their involvement in the pregnancy varied greatly from those who saw it as primarily the woman's experience, to those who felt fully engaged in the process. However, it is important to note that the majority of men said they had enjoyed their partners' or wives' pregnancies, the exceptions to this being those whose partners had suffered from ill-health during the pregnancy.

Before the arrival – feeling detached

When it comes to the expectant father's experience of pregnancy, a common theme that emerges is a sense of disconnection from the pregnancy. This theme of disembodiment from the pregnancy also emerged in Draper's study of men during pregnancy and childbirth (Draper, 2003, Draper, 2002), which she ascribes to men's "detachment from the direct physiological experience of pregnancy and labour" (Draper, 2003).

Many of the men describe a sense of unreality about the pregnancy, and say that the actuality of their impending fatherhood won't hit them until the baby is born.

> *"I don't know if it's ever sunk in really. I don't think it'll sink in 'til it's here, you know."* Peter

> *"The whole idea has been, been quite, foreign. You know? It's, you're sort of going into another world and you won't really see what it's like until you get there."* Aidan

> *"I don't really feel any different at this stage. I know, at the back of my mind there's always this, thing, that, you know, life is going to change."* Alex

However, what seems to differ is the way in which the men in this group of interviewees respond to the sense of detachment that they describe. There are varying degrees of attempts to engage in the pregnancy from the fathers, with some fathers seeming to view themselves as full co-parents from the beginning, and the pregnancy as a joint project, reflecting a move from perceiving themselves as a couple to a family unit. Others see themselves as secondary to the mothers, or alternatively see caring for their partners as their first priority, and the baby as secondary.

> *"It is very centering in the sense that it gives you a very strong feeling of being kind of a unit… It gives you a kind of strong sense of kind of purpose, and kind of shared purpose."* Conor

> *"I think the focus should be on the mother, because that's, you know, that's important."* Shane

> *"She was, and still is, the priority. Because, I mean, touch wood it won't, but if anything happened, I couldn't have anything else without Bridget."* Tony

It seems that there is a delay for fathers in absorbing the fact that they are going to become parents, and that their physical detachment from the pregnancy contributes towards this.

> *"It was in her, so from day one she had to become a mam, whereas I kind of felt that I'd a few months left where I wasn't a dad." John*

Often it is the physical external manifestation of the pregnancy, whether the scans or the growing bump itself, that helps to make it more real to the fathers. The baby as a concept is one that gradually becomes more concrete, particularly as the kicks and movement of the baby become something that the men can share in.

> *"He reacts to my voice now, and you know, you'll sometimes sit there and you'll say something just, see the tummy going and things like this, and you know." Jim*

> *"The scans have been great as well, when they're, just being able to visualize, things, is just a real, it, there's something about that that really brings it home." Eoin*

> *"What got to me more was when I first felt it kick. That was amazing. Really amazing." John*

These findings are similar to Draper's, who described how the fathers in her study described how the reality of the pregnancy began for them when "seeing the baby during ultrasound and feeling the baby kick, a kind of proxy embodiment conferred through the medium of technology or his partner's body" (Draper, 2003).

Some men talk of their partners having not just a physical connection, but almost seem to assume that the women just automatically 'know' more about the whole process of pregnancy and that their relationship to the baby is already different to that of the father's.

"The father's role, I guess is a funny one, in that, it's never going to be the same connection as the mother, because, you know, obviously, the birthing process and everything is a whole different gig... Men only know a certain amount of what's going on, and women know more, and it's even like in the classes, it's like Judy would be like, 'I can't believe you asked that question. [laughter] What a dumbass'... Women understand the process much more than men do. So kind of like, you get into a funny situation where you're not quite sure where you fit there". Shane

This sense of feeling excluded from the pregnancy experience can also be exacerbated by the attitudes of some of the medical personnel the fathers come into contact with.

Invisible fathers

The culture of the medical process and the hospital procedures provide a contrast to their partner's experience, illustrated by the way in which many of the fathers talk about feeling "invisible" and unacknowledged, particularly by some of the doctors and midwives they come into contact with.

"To be honest with you, it's very much a case of being invisible at those things. It would be rare indeed that somebody would actually look at you while you're there, or acknowledge your presence." Conor

The mixed message that fathers are receiving – you are expected to be involved here, but we're going to ignore the fact that you're in the room – is reflected in their own ambivalent reaction to such treatment by medical professionals. They seem to feel that the focus should be on the woman, she is the person having the baby, not them, but at the same time they also crave some acknowledgement of their part in this process.

"[The consultant] literally, completely, ignored me… I'm fully conscious that it, from a medical perspective, it's a female experience, and should be. Um, and so all the attention, and so on should be focused on the mother. Having said that we, it is a joint project, so to speak. I really wasn't looking for much, other than, 'how are you?' 'Congratulations'. That was literally all, just acknowledgement that you are part of the process." Donal

It seems that the men are able to make a distinction between the fact that while their partners are physically "having the baby", they want the fact that they, as fathers, are *emotionally* having a baby to be acknowledged.

Different men seemed to adopt different strategies for overcoming this detachment from the pregnancy. Some seem to focus on practical preparations – getting the nursery ready, going shopping for baby gear, making sure the family finances/house/insurance are in order – and leave the decision making and preparation for the baby to their partners.

"I haven't read it as much now, because, moving into a house, [yeah]. Some things I've had to, I'd rather have the house ready, than, have less done because I've been reading too much." Tony

"I'm kind of like dealing with the, the more immediate, issues, which are, you know, the sale of the apartment, the purchase of the house, making appointments, shopping for insurance, [yeah] things like that. Um, I, I suppose I, I'll deal with it when, when the babies, when the babies do come." Alex

Others, though, seem to immerse themselves in gathering information, either by reading pregnancy and childbirth books, or by signing up to websites that week by week give updates on the development of the baby in the womb, or in accompanying their partner to multiple appointments and classes, to the point that, as one member of staff in the hospital commented, some fathers would "have the baby for them if they could".

In the "Becoming a Parent" questionnaire 78.6% of the men said they had read books or articles on baby-care (compared with 94% of women). Although women appeared to be a key driving force behind this knowledge seeking behaviour, with 25% of men saying that they had sourced their reading material as a result of their partners' purchasing or recommending a book. This compares with no women reporting that they sourced reading from their partners. However, this is not to say that men did not seek out information independently, as 17.2% of men said they had sourced information from bookshops or libraries, compared with 22.7% of women.

> *"I guess we did a lot of homework around the pregnancy,* What to Expect When You're Expecting*, a great book, so that's been a regular on the coffee table… I'm starting to read,* the Dummies Guide to being a Dad*, I picked that up on a second hand book store, [and] the* What to Expect in the First Year *[book]" Nick.*

> *"I turned up to the breastfeeding class, with Judy… and I was the only guy there. And I think they were a little bit shocked like, so obviously it doesn't happen that often, that a guy turns up to the class" Shane*

Once again, it seems that the ambivalent messages about whether or not they are included in the pregnancy are given by the medical community, as in some cases they are not encouraged to attend certain appointments, and one father reported how he was going along to all the antenatal appointments with his partner until he was dismissed by the consultant.

> *"The [doctor], at the, at [the hospital]… he sort of went, 'there's not really much point in you coming, because basically all I'm going to be doing is weighing, measuring, making sure that everything is okay', so, er, I don't attend those ones now. But I attended everything up until the point that he said that."*
> *JB: "Yeah. And what, what did you feel about him saying that?"*
>
> *INT: "I was quite happy actually [laughs]. It was, it was a case that basically I was sitting there and it kind of feels like, you, you're somebody that's not part*

of it. Um, you're watching, the two of them are discussing things, and you really have no input, [yeah]. You can sit there, and, well I am fifty part, I am fifty percent of what's happened, but at the same time at that stage you're not doing anything, you really are just a third party. You're just watching." Jim

Again this is consistent with Draper's findings (Draper, 2003) which also suggest that there is a "cultural ambiguity"[10] in the way in which the current cultural discourse expects men to be "involved" in their partners' pregnancy and delivery, and yet the experience of this group of men suggests that they often feel excluded, not only by their physical detachment from the pregnancy, but by the way in which they are treated by some medical personnel.

Jim's attempt to reconcile how he is simultaneously "not part of it" and yet at the same time "fifty per cent of what's happened" is typical of the struggle many of the men in the study seemed to have, to be more than "just watching".

Draper reports that, in common with some previous studies, the men in her study expressed an ambivalent attitude towards the physical changes in their partner's bodies, the bump acts as a "barrier" (p757), and the bump is constructed as problematic in "the way in which it challenges the idealised slender female body". However, in this study none of the men seemed to view their partner's changing body shape as problematic, and in contrast, many of the men referred to how much they enjoyed the bump and seeing their partner "blooming".

"Just having the bump, it, it's nice. [pauses, fumbles for words]. It, I think, Sarah's, Sarah's glowing." Jim

[10] I would also like to note here that there is evidence that women do also experience ambivalence and uncertainty about pregnancy and the transition to parenthood – see Bailey, L. (2001) Gender shows - First time mothers and embodied selves. *Gender & Society,* 15, 110-129. and Lupton, D. (2000) 'A love/hate relationship': the ideals and experiences of first- time mothers. *Journal of Sociology,* 36, 50-63.

"Every fourth week, since week five, we've taken a side profile picture of Hazel, and we've that libraried and catalogued and it's just a, just a thing we do." Andrew

"She just has a kind of, look about her, like she looks great like, you know. It's enjoyable." Shane

It is possible that part of this apparent acceptance of the changing body-shape of pregnant women can be attributed to the way in which it has become more socially acceptable for women to show off their swollen bellies in public. There has been a shift in the way in which the pregnant body is viewed, from something to be disguised to something to be celebrated (Longhurst, 2005), and this has manifested itself in the vast amount of media coverage given to pregnant celebrities, with headlines in newspapers and magazines frequently focusing on the bump (for example, "Blooming beautiful: Heidi Klum's enormous bump takes centre stage at the Emmy's", *The Daily Mail*, 21 September 2009).[11]

Anticipating and preparing for the birth

Not surprisingly, much of the conversation around the experience of pregnancy related to how the men and their wives or partners were preparing and anticipating the birth. On the whole, most men said that they had found the ante-natal classes they attended useful or interesting, and felt that it had allowed them to build up a relationship with the hospital, and many of them expressed great confidence in the abilities of the midwives and doctors.

"Obviously, the baby and Orla coming out healthy is the main thing, right? But I think, just, I trust medicine here so, I'm not worried about it." Peter

[11] This is not to say that this shift is unproblematic, given that it raises other question around the commodification of pregnancy, given that "increasingly pregnant women are being expected to look attractive, well-groomed, fashionable and 'sexy'.... 'pregnancy chic' represents... a new set of pressures to perform the self in yet another tightly prescribed manner" Longhurst, R. (2005) (Ad)dressing pregnant bodies in New Zealand: Clothing, fashion, subjectivities and spatialities. *Gender Place and Culture,* 12**,** 433-446.

"It kind of builds up confidence in the hospital as well, you go there and you see, these people deal with this every day." Fergal

"The antenatal classes in [the hospital] have helped, in terms of, getting rid of the myths about the whole thing. And um, and basically putting me at ease on, on what's going to happen and stuff." Michael

In contrast, a small number, generally those who had spent more time reading up on pregnancy and birth, or talking to other people about their experiences, felt that they the classes had not told them much that they didn't already know.

"Because I done my own reading and we'd talked about it, and my own research, a lot of what was talked about, I found it was more reinforcement… But again, I found it useful to have those people there telling me that information, or to be surrounded by people who were in the same situation." Andrew

Understandably, most of the men expressed a degree of nervousness about how they were going to be affected by the birth, from a concern about watching their partner or wife in pain, and being unable to 'do' anything to alleviate it, to a worry about what their role during the birth would be and a concern about how they were expected to react to the birth itself. This is similar to Draper's findings that the men in her study were concerned about the impact of the birth on their partner's bodies and their own "reactions to 'blood and guts'" (Draper, 2003, p759).

"Everyone says, ah, you know, 'it's natural' and blah, blah, you know, how many million billion people have gone through it, but when it's your partner for the first time, it's obviously something different. So, um, a bit nervous about it, I would have to say." Eoin

"I'm excited about it, but I guess, my biggest concern is, is just, I don't want to be in the way, d'you know what I mean like, coz, I'm sure the midwives are going, 'oh, I wish these feckers'd just get out', like. You know what I mean, coz

you can tell, there's a whole disdain for men, by the, from the midwives, coz like, I'm sure most of them, 'men are just useless and causing trouble and getting in the way and doing stupid things'.... I still think that it's not very clear, what you're expected to do. You know what I mean, there's almost like, like they, they should have as part of the antenatal classes, or er, like a little bit more time spent on sort of like, here's what you should do and, you know, even just, even just explaining the experiences of the midwives, like what the midwives attitude towards the men is." Shane

Shane seems to feel that the midwives resent the fathers' presence at the birth, and that he is concerned that he will be in the way, rather than focusing on the positive support he can supply to his partner. It is not clear whether this is tapping into actual experiences he has had with midwives in the hospital (he did not relate any), or whether it is reflecting something about his own anxiety about his role, but he certainly seems to want some reassurance from the 'experts' that his presence is worthwhile.

A small number of the men expressed some ambivalence about being present at the birth, and seemed almost nostalgic about the 'old days' when fathers would wait outside the delivery room, or in the pub, until the birth was over. But they seemed to feel that they should overcome these doubts as a way of showing their partner support for what they are going through, and as a way of sharing in the experience.

"Maybe I'd be the old fashioned type, but I was thinking, I don't want to be there for the birth. I'm, I'll meet you in [the pub], which is across, which is the Irish way, but she's like, 'no way, if I'm doing this, you are'. And I'm going, right, well I'm staying up the cop end... Bit nervous about the whole thing... But if she wants me there I'll be there. If it means less stress for her, which means less stress for the baby, without a shadow of a doubt I'll be there." Tony

"It's fifty, fifty. Like, where, guys in the old days didn't have to be there, like, that kind of seems, but then I feel selfish, when I feel like that. Like some part of me says it'd be great to just sit in a waiting room and then, come in when it's

all over and, and you know, just swan in then and everything's hunky dory. But that, I feel that, I feel guilty when I think like that because that's selfish, I feel like maybe I should be in there when, things aren't going too well [mm]. So it's fifty, fifty, I haven't decided me answer on that one". John (did go on to attend birth)

A few of the men talked about feeling a lack of clarity about what they were supposed to do at the birth, other than actually be present, and there was a sense that 'being there' was in some way an insufficiently significant contribution to the event. And yet at the same time, this was what they reported the women had said they wanted.

"In terms of women I've spoken to, who felt yes it was useful to have their partner there, I've spoken to some men who were there who said it was a great thing to be there, but when I ask them what they actually did, there's, it's very, very vague [mm]. And I would think that that would indicate that there's not a huge amount of practical things you can actually do." Conor

What appears to trouble some of the men, during the pregnancy and in anticipation of the birth, is the mixed messages they receive, the lack of clarity about what their role actually is, and a concern to discover what is expected of them. There seems to be a fear of failing to live up to expectations, and this tension seems to come to the surface particularly around couples' dealings with healthcare professionals and the birth.

"When the baby's born, that, that, like, I don't know if I'm going to cry, if I should cry, if, what, if there's something wrong with me if I don't cry, if I just stand there, if I don't feel any emotion towards the child. All these kind of feelings. Like I don't know what I'm supposed to feel. Don't know what I will feel." John

"The men's role, in the whole process is a bit funny… I still think that it's not very clear, what you're expected to do." Shane

The lack of a clear role expectations or scripts for the men when it comes to pregnancy and birth means that they are left to improvise and invent their own.

Fathers' experiences of birth

Once again, there is a dearth of research literature on the male experience of childbirth, and those studies that have been done tend to be found in the medical literature, and often take a quantitative approach. However, these provide some insights into how men experience childbirth, suggesting that childbirth is an important rite for many men, as this is when "they actually become fathers" (Vehvilainen-Julkunen and Liukkonen, 1998). This Finnish study found that 98% of fathers said it was important or very important to be present for the birth, and they "stressed their feelings of responsibility for their partner and the baby, and the experience of family togetherness as well as the uniqueness of the situation" (Vehvilainen-Julkunen and Liukkonen, 1998). Most fathers (or indeed any birth partner) are concerned about how they are going to cope with witnessing their loved one in pain. Another study looked at fathers' attitudes towards labour with and without epidural pain management (Capogna et al., 2007), and found that pain relief for the men's partners reduced stress and anxiety for the men and improved their participation and satisfaction levels with the experience of the birth.

The reality of the birth experiences

Without exception the men in the research reported that they were glad that they had been present for the labour and birth experience, although there were a wide variety of experiences from the relatively simple and straightforward births to those who experienced more traumatic events, such as an emergency caesarean or a baby arriving prematurely.

Although some parts of the experience were described as "scary" or "worrying", overall the men felt that the labour and birth were a positive experience, "exciting" and

"amazing". In the interview prior to his baby's birth Conor had expressed some frustration that other men he had talked to who have been present at their child's birth didn't provide him with enough feedback on what the experience is like and what to expect.

When it came to his own experience he explained:

> *"It was a very good experience, there wasn't the panic or the kind of fear that I thought would be there as well... I think kind of people don't describe it very well because it's not very easy to describe but I think maybe that's not a very helpful thing. Because I think it would be good to know, that barring something going wrong, it's a tough experience, but it's not an unpleasant experience... I think I would have liked to have known in advance that it's not that it's enjoyable, cos it's difficult to watch someone in pain, but it is, you have a great sense of purpose and a great sense of something very important happening and being involved in it, which seemed to override the normal worry that you'd have." Conor*

A common fear for the fathers was that they would feel helpless or useless during the labour, and some of them found that they did feel this way, and talked about the frustration of "sitting there", doing nothing. However, they also acknowledged that their partners often expressed the feeling that the fathers were far from useless and in fact played an important role in supporting the women during the labour and birth, sometimes simply by being present, and other times by helping with breathing or talking to their partners.

Several of the men seem to rely on the feedback from their partners that their presence was beneficial, and for the women it seems that "being there" was an important part of the fathers' contribution to their experience, despite the fact that for some of the fathers being there was not a significant contribution.

> *"That's the one thing I found really hard, is not being able to do anything to help. It was just a case that, you're sitting there watching and, that was really uncomfortable." Jim*

"You're sitting there, you're trying to be supportive, but you feel a bit helpless." Fergal

This sense of feeling helpless was also reported by the men in Vehvilaineen-Julkunen and Liukkonen's study, and it is possible that this is connected in part with the finding of an Italian study that "the degree of pain the women experienced during labour had a tremendous effect on the men's experience during labour... paternal feelings of frustration and helplessness were decreased by the use of labour epidurals" (Capogna et al., 2007).

There is a difference between some of the interviewees when it comes to the extent that they felt they played an active role in the labour and birth. Some saw their role as limited "just to be there for support, just to hold her hand" (Nick), while others seemed to feel empowered by the experience and that they played an active role, particularly with the encouragement of the hospital staff:

"I found it wonderful that way, that I was able to help. Someway. You know. Normally you're just, dads are just stand by there and hold hands and stuff like that, she seemed to say that I'd really helped, so that was wonderful." Michael

"Like I could've delivered the baby that day, do you know what I mean?... I cut the cord and everything, they let me cut the cord which is good .... I felt like I actually did something, I had a role, I didn't feel out of place, I didn't feel uncomfortable, I felt like I was there, the nurses were very good at sort of like catering for ya... it was good, I felt like I was actually doing something." Shane

"I felt like I'd be like a spare tyre, like I wouldn't know what to do, I'd be useless, but that wasn't the case. They involved you, all the nurses involved me in things, and I just felt like I should have been there." John

It is interesting to contrast Shane and John's experiences with their expectations, as it would seem that their fears about getting in the way or being treated with 'disdain' by the medical staff did not come to fruition, and in fact their experience was much more positive than they had expected.

Others were matter of fact about the experience, or intrigued by the novelty, for example, Alex, whose wife had twins by a caesarean section, said:

> *"I don't know if you've seen a film Artificial Intelligence with Steven Spielberg where these robots have been destroyed but they still maintain their function? That was what Liz looked like. On one side of the curtain she was there talking to me and on the other side there was this disembowelled body with hands in it… but I wanted to see it because when will I have the chance to do, to do that again?" Alex*

> *"I come from a farming background so I've helped deliver calves and lambs, not that it's the same thing but the principle is the same you know, [sure] so I kind of know what to expect more or less. But of course it's an awful lot different when it's, when it's a human being and it's your wife and your own child isn't it? But … it was great, yeah, absolutely enjoyed it, wasn't nervous, didn't faint or anything." Robert*

Unsurprisingly, the extent to which the men felt that there had been an element of distress or trauma to the event depended on the circumstances around the birth, and two men whose partners had an emergency caesarean gave harrowing descriptions of listening to their partner's howls of pain from outside the operating theatre while medical staff were attempting to insert an epidural for pain relief:

> *"You could hear her screaming from miles away, so they had three goes at giving her that and they couldn't get it in so she just said "right give me a general anaesthetic". So they don't let the husband in for general, because she's not awake, obviously she's gone, so I just sat there and she went under." Peter*

> *"When the labour is already taking place, it's difficult to get the epidural in. So that was painful, and they didn't let me into the, operating theatre, you know. And personally I would have liked to have the option… They just said you stay out here … And that's the kind of thing I'd like to have an option in that, you know. Um, because by the time they let me in, they had cut her open and she was in a state. You know. She was really shaking."*

JB: "And so she was still awake, it wasn't..."

INT: "Yes, yeah. And she was frightened, you know?... half way through, when they'd cut her open, but not taken [the baby] out, you know, I was allowed in, so I was just trying to comfort her and so on. And she was very freaked out." Aidan

Peter seemed to downplay the impact of this experience, saying that he never really got "too upset about anything" and showing a consistency with his pre-birth comment that he would "trust medicine" to keep his wife and child safe:

"I was never panicked at all really cos you know I mean, we'd done all the pre-birth stuff at the, in the hospital and they'd said 'if you see this don't panic' ... I never got worried about it you know, they're very good in there. And the only thing was that it was distressing for Orla." Peter

In contrast, although Aidan seems to have put the experience behind him, he seems to have struggled more with it at the time:

"Obviously, no lasting trauma because we got what we wanted, you know? But you know, at the time it was happening, I was sort of pacing outside the theatre, and Fay was howling, you know, and that was very rough?" Aidan.

Interestingly, Aidan attended only one of the five antenatal classes in the hospital, and had not attended the classes where the labour and birth process was explained in more detail, so it's possible to speculate that unlike Peter, who felt well prepared, Aidan's experience of the trauma of the emergency caesarean was exacerbated by this lack of knowledge.

In contrast, and despite being in a position where they were witnessing their partners in pain, and struggling to cope, many of the fathers commented that they felt calm and relaxed throughout the experience, and that they generally felt well prepared for the labour and birth experience, a point they attributed to their attendance at the antenatal classes and the reading that they had done during the pregnancy.

"I think in terms of understanding the process which, most of which I've forgotten now, I thought they were very good and in terms of having an awareness of what Rachel was going through I thought they were very good." Conor

"The class did prepare me, I knew what to expect. You know there wasn't any panic [laughs]. The strange thing is just how calm I felt, remarkably, the whole time." Jim

One aspect of the labour that a number of fathers commented on was that they felt unprepared for was the so called 'pre-labour', where a woman is having painful and frequent contractions, but is not technically in labour as her cervix has not started to dilate. This becomes relevant when it comes to pain relief options, as in the research site hospital pain relief, such as gas and air or an epidural is only available once a woman is in full labour e.g. her cervix is 1cm or more dilated.

"No one had told us about the pre-labour thing eh [that you don't go straight in] cos tech, technically she wasn't in labour, but she was in a lot of pain and anyway distinction is sort of arbitrary." Donal

"They said you're not in labour yet, we were like, nobody told us there was a pre-labour." Shane

There was also an attitude among some of the fathers that the pain of labour and birth was productive pain, a means to an end, and that this helped them not to be distressed by their partner's pain.

"The fact that the pain, it's not pain through hurt or illness or, it's pain through a wonderful thing and that it's a necessary part of it and there was nothing that I could have done to relieve it, so I couldn't feel guilty about it, it's a wonderfully natural thing." Nick

"It seemed kind of very kind of calm and kind of controlled and it wasn't, other than the fact it was physically stressful, I don't think it was mentally stressful in

any way, it was kind of a good environment, it felt private, it felt purposeful." Conor

Others felt that once their partners had received some sort of pain relief, usually an epidural, the atmosphere of the experience for both partners changed. Fergal sums this up:

"I was very on edge like, because I could see she was in a lot of pain and ... and I could see it was just getting worse and worse for her...and once she had the epidural I think she kind of got a sense of control back and again, and she felt like she was in control, so her anxiety levels went right down, of course, and me feeding off it, mine went down as well." Fergal

Once again, this would seem to be consistent with Capogna et al's findings that "men who find childbirth stressful may find it difficult to be as involved as they had hoped. A pain-free companion seems to be less stressful and may make the expectant father feel more helpful to his partner" (p114). This preference that men have for a pain-free birth for their partner is logical, given how distressing it can be to see someone suffering pain.

The emotional impact of labour and birth

Perhaps, due to the fact that the majority of literature which examines the fathers' experience of labour and birth comes from the medical and healthcare academies, there seems to be very little attention paid to the emotional impact of the birth on fathers. While it is a struggle to find qualitative accounts of how men felt at the moment of their child's birth and in the immediate aftermath, studies such as Susan Chandler's study of 14 men's experience of labour and delivery (Chandler and Field, 1997) provide some insights. There are a few examples to be found in previous thesis work which explores the experiences of fathers such as Nick Williams' in-depth qualitative study of five fathers (Williams, 2006) as well as Draper's study (Draper, 2000, Draper, 2003). This is an interesting omission, given that popular accounts of fathering such as, in the Irish context, Pól ÓConghaile's book *That's My Baby!* where

he talks about the "all consuming love" (O'Conghaile, 2007, p161) he felt at his daughter's birth, are full of emotional revelations.

The interviewees recounted a wide range of experiences and emotions during their partners' labours and their babies' births, with great honesty and seemed comfortable in openly describing their own emotional responses. Some men described a sense of detachment, almost stepping outside themselves as some points of the experience.

> *"There was times watching when I felt this isn't even happening to me, and then you wake up and you realize, now I'm here." John*

> *"I felt a little bit kind of detached from it in that I was actively participating but was able at the same time to go, well, to almost, as if you can sit at the back of your own head and say well don't react to that." Conor*

Others report making a conscious effort to remain calm or at least retain the appearance of calm, as a way of supporting or protecting their partners.

> *"I was almost trying to keep unemotional about it in some respects, cos I thought that was the best sort of practical benefit and then [kind of staying calm and] just staying calm and just staying nice and relaxed." Nick*

> *"When [the baby] did arrive there was a lot of bleeding from Sarah. And I got really sort of worried, but you can't, you know, look worried or anything, coz if she picks up on it, then it's going to make her more worried." Jim*

This is consistent with the findings of Chandler and Field, that for the men in their study there came a point during the labour when "each man when he had to control and hide his true feelings from his wife" (Chandler and Field, 1997, p21). One father describes how annoyed he was at his own reaction, when he fainted in the toilet at the hospital just after his wife's first examination in the hospital, illustrating his focus on trying to ensure that his wife's experience is as positive as possible and that his own experience and feelings are secondary.

> *"I completely conked out, for no reason, I don't know what it was, it must have been just sort of adrenaline or whatever the hell it was. I just whopped, you know, I was in the toilet, closing the door go, sitting down and next minute,*

boink, knocked the back of the door and of course sure the women were having the crack… then of course I was like, Judy's now, is gonna be worried about me the whole bloody time, you know what I mean? I was like, oh for fuck's sake, the last thing I wanted." Shane

A number of the fathers describe a sense of awe at the actual birth and a new admiration for their partners and for the female body's capacity to give birth, and again this is similar to Chandler and Field's finding that men had new feelings of respect for their partners (Chandler and Field, 1997).

"The actual pushing when the baby's coming out is fairly incredible… it's like watching somebody walk through a brick wall and even afterwards you think it's as if, it's not possible to actually do that and if I hadn't seen it I wouldn't believe it, and it seems to kind of defy laws of physics." Conor

"You do have a whole level, new level of respect for women I think generally after, but it was an amazing experience the whole thing." Donal

"I think my wife was brilliant like she really was fantastic…. she's just handled it brilliantly like, just you know focused on what she was there to do and you know and did it brilliantly" Eoin

Many of the fathers, like Ó Conghaile, also talk about the emotional release that came with the moment of birth and seeing the baby for the first time and often being the first person to hold the baby:

"We were both just totally you know what do ya say when, there was a mixture of laughing and crying and elated, and they took her for a second and they gave her in to Laura and I remember saying, 'she's so, she's so small'." Frank

"I held him straight away, I think I held him before Aisling, actually, he was handed to me. He was gorgeous… I felt.... straight away I felt very attached to him, very close... Like I knew him, you know. I felt like, love, initially, which is strange for somebody you don't know." John

"I don't think anything can describe when you first see your child you know." Tony

"I had to kind of put my finger in her fist and she kind of gripped it and it was then it hits you that it's, you, you're past the physical endeavour and that's something kind of momentous has happened." Conor

These descriptions correspond with some of the descriptions given by the fathers in Williams' doctoral study (Williams, 2006), with one father reporting that "I didn't understand the fact that you can instantly fall in love" (p80).

Other men describe more mixed emotions or a delayed emotional response, such as Tom, who felt emotional on saying goodbye to the midwife who had looked after his partner throughout the labour, while Philip's partner had to have some surgery after the birth and he was left alone with the baby.

"It was kind of weird, cos they handed him to me once, while they sorted her out, I'd sort of wondered how I'd feel about that moment but I didn't really, I wouldn't say I felt anything, I suppose…. I found it quite odd when we said goodbye to [the midwife], it's almost like, off she goes to do the rest of her day or whatever and this has been the most monumentous occasion for the two of us and him and yet she just kind of puts it down and goes off." Tom

"If I think back, [the baby] was looking quite ugly, medium ugly, I would say so, when she was coming out, there was a lot of blood… [they] basically gave her to me to mind, told me to put her, under my t-shirt, and to sit myself into the changing room in the hospital, and that's what I did. So I had all the clothes, and Miriam was in the operation theatre, and I had [the baby] under my shirt. And was worried about how she can breathe there…. directly right up against my skin. And I think that was the only time when I cried a tiny bit. Because it was so, quite unusual…. I didn't expect that." Philip

Bill's baby was premature and born by caesarean delivery.

"Seeing the little guy when he came out, even though, as I've discovered, babies tend to look like purple aliens when they're born [laughter]. It was great. I mean, he was tiny. That was probably the thing that scared us both, most, he, he was absolutely tiny." Bill

Others described their emotional reactions to other events surround the labour and birth, such as Robert who broke down when his partner requested pain relief.

> *"I just got so upset I cried when she said she was going to take the epidural. I don't know why and I can't, to this day I can't, she looked at me and she said "what's wrong?" and I said "I don't know"... really upset... maybe cos she wanted to feel everything and I dunno, but I think it was the emotion of the day that got to me and that's why I cried." Robert*

Another father described how his reaction to the early arrival of his baby was delayed by some days or even months:

> *"I don't think it, you know, it freaked me out at the time cos I think I was still going through the practical side of things and what do you need, I need to go to this and that's it. I remember going, must've been day two when she was in hospital to go into the Mothercare or something to buy something and something cringy [laughter] it was, like breast pads or something like that, and I remember on the way, that was probably the first time I'd actually got to myself the whole time and just on the way there I remember going, just going, 'this is amazing'... but I still don't think it really kicked in until possibly two or three months in." Des*

Whilst on the whole the fathers reported positive experiences in their interactions with midwives and hospital staff during the labour and birth, a number expressed disappointment at the care after the birth. This contrasts with studies that were published during the 1990s (Chandler and Field, 1997, Draper, 1997) which suggested that some healthcare professionals continued to treat the presence of men in the delivery suite as tolerated but not welcome. In this study, by contrast, there is a sense that after the positive efforts made to include the fathers in the labour and birth process, once the baby has actually arrived, a number of men felt marginalised and unable to provide support for their partners to the extent that they would like to, or to spend as much time in the hospital with the new baby as they would have liked.

> *"Sylvia certainly, I think, was uncomfortable with me not being there, in particular, because [the baby] was small, he was weak, she was extremely*

tired, she'd just had a caesarean, she couldn't move much, and you know, she certainly was saying, 'just walk down and come back, and don't let them'... and you know, she wasn't happy about me going, and I wasn't happy about me going." Bill

Bill compares the situation he found himself in with the situation of his brother in law who lives in a different country with a different hospital set up.

"When my nephew was born in [another country], my brother in law was able to spend the night, in the room, they had a semi-private room, not even a private room, and their semi-private room was more private than our private room, and the bed was a normal double size bed, which was big enough for them both to sleep in, and the husbands or the partners are encouraged to actually spend the night there. And you know, I was basically kicked out at eleven o'clock, or whatever. So I felt, I felt very, that's probably the thing that's upsetting the most about the whole process, the experience in the hospital, that as the man, you really do feel like the outsider in the hospital." Bill

Shane also felt that the care and support provided for the women after the babies had been born was inadequate and would have liked to have been on hand to support his partner but was reluctant to challenge the hospital regulations.

"I think that's the hardest thing is that afterwards the mother felt, they feel a bit abandoned, cos the hospital's understaffed there's people flying around and you're kind of like 'ooh what'll we do now like I don't know what the hell to do here'. You're just kind of like confused. Now they're very nice and very helpful but it's just they're, they're just overworked like there's just not enough of them and you just feel like you're a little bit left on your own. Even then the fact that I had to leave, on the night rather than staying with her, especially because there's a bed next door or bed beside her she, I probably should have just stayed really, to be honest. They probably wouldn't have actually have kicked me out like you know. I don't know, but I was like 'look it, I better just stay with the rules'... I think Judy found that very hard, she was completely just on her own, baby's beside her, she doesn't know, she's just like sore cos the epidural is wearing off, she had to have a couple of stitches, do you know so, she's

bleeding a bit, you're just wrecked like, you just, ah you just need a bit of support." Shane

These experiences of being excluded from the hospital by regulations and hospital staff were also common to some of the men in Draper's thesis study (Draper, 2000), who felt "torn" and "uprooted" (p247-248) from their partners and newborn babies. It is possible that this strong desire to remain physically close to their partners and newborn babies reflects these men's strong sense of emotional connection to their new family.

Conclusions

To sum up the findings presented on the men's experience of pregnancy, it would appear most of the men describe some sense of distance, and a feeling of unreality in relation to the pregnancy.

What differ between the men are the strategies they adopt to deal with this detachment. Some seem to accept this distance, and focus on the tangible and material elements of the pregnancy and the preparation for a baby, such as the physical manifestations of kicks and bumps, or by decorating the nursery and sorting out the health insurance.

I would suggest that this approach puts much of the fathers' relationship with the baby 'on hold' until the birth makes their parenthood 'real', and also makes the woman the focus of the pregnancy. By delegating decisions to the mother, as the 'expert' or existing 'parent', the fathers seem to place themselves in a position of witness or observer, and perhaps even experience the pregnancy by proxy.

In contrast, others seek to compensate for their disembodied experience by immersing themselves in the preparation for birth and early parenthood, reading as many books as they can manage, and attending as many check-ups and classes as possible. I would suggest that this approach serves a dual purpose, of moving them

towards their own impending parenthood *and* initiating their relationship with their child.

There are also some men who seem to adopt both these stances at different stages of the pregnancy and at different events during the pregnancy. These men illustrate the ambivalent and complex experience that pregnancy can be for some expectant fathers. I argue that being able to hold two apparently contradictory positions at the same time is evidence of men's ability to manage apparently conflicting internal and external expectations.

Both this sense that " the emotional connection and relationship between father and foetus is often more tenuous and experienced as more 'unreal'" (Lupton and Barclay, 1997, p124) and the various ways that men have adopted in preparing for their baby's arrival, have been found in previous studies (Lupton and Barclay, 1997, Draper, 2000, Draper, 2003), suggesting that this is a universal theme for expectant fathers.

When it comes to the birth, the majority of the men in the study were understandably concerned about how they would cope with their partner's labour and the birth of their baby, and many felt unsure of what to expect, particularly in relation to what was expected of them, in anticipation of the birth. This seems to be connected with the ambivalent messages they have received during the pregnancy about how much they are, or are not, part of the pregnancy and labour process. However, in the event of the birth, many of their fears about how the respond to the stresses and anxieties of labour and birth, proved unfounded, in that they were able to deal with it, and on the whole they felt as though they had an important role to play during the labour and birth, and felt that it was a genuinely life-changing experience.

"It was an amazing experience, the whole thing." Donal

Particularly clear in the descriptions of the men's emotional responses to the labour and birth is the sense of closeness to both their partner and their baby. What is also clear is that they are playing a dual role of supporting their partner through the pregnancy and birth and caring for their baby by the various ways they are preparing for the child's arrival. It is often difficult to distinguish between these two roles. In

playing this dual role, the men are also challenging the culturally ambiguous messages they receive in relation to the expectations of others of their role, particularly within the structure of the medical setting. I argue that this ability to write their own script provides evidence of the way in which the men in this study are "reinventing fathering" and "revisioning masculine care" (Doucet, 2006, p237).

Chapter Seven: Doing Fatherhood

Unsurprisingly the core themes that immerged from both the pre-birth and post-birth interviews were concerned with fatherhood, the men's expectations and aspirations, and their experiences with the reality of new fatherhood.

The focus of the post-birth interviews was obviously much less theoretical, given that the interviewees were on average five months into their lives as fathers. Although there was still some talk of future aspirations and plans, these interviews concentrated more on the realities of adjusting to parenthood, for both parents, as well as reflections on how their relationship with their child had developed and continued to evolve. What immerged was a detailed account of the fathers' practical day-to-day care of their infant, and how their new identity as fathers had impacted on them.

How these men conceptualise fatherhood is intricately bound up with how they view their potential contribution, and how this compares with their own fathers' role. How they "do" fatherhood draws on these concepts of fathering, but is also profoundly influenced by the practical demands of adjusting to a new baby.

Early days

The first few weeks after the babies' births were a time of adjustment, to the patterns of an infant's behaviour, to learning new parenting skills, as well as adapting to the different family dynamic, with the baby and the mother the focus of attention. Almost all the men faced some challenges during this period, however, some struggled more than others with their new reality.

Adjusting to parenthood

A number of the fathers talk about how daunting it was to return home from hospital with full responsibility for a newborn baby. For Jim, the emotional experience of taking the first steps outside the hospital came as something of a surprise.

> *"That was a really emotional, when you take him outside for the first time, just people looking at him, and just the pride, that surprised me actually." Jim*

Several fathers talk about how daunting and overwhelming the first few days at home with the baby seemed to be, and how it took some time before they could begin to relax and even to enjoy the changed family.

> *"The first few weeks is just, it's, the whole thing it's very daunting, even the first night he came home, you don't sleep, you'd be lucky to sleep an hour or two, he moves, you move." Tony*

> *"The first two weeks are like are probably the hardest thing, I know everybody says that anyway, just in terms of getting used to the new person and who they are and what they need to do." Shane*

> *"At the beginning it's so enormous it's very hard to take on board and all you're doing is trying to get from day to day without killing him, you know, you're going, I'm not sure what to do, so you just take it day by day and you're very practical about it. I think it's only once you feel secure about that that you start to enjoy it more." Des*

Other men talk about how their focus had been on the labour and birth, much more than on what comes after, which also reflects the primary focus of the antenatal classes. Although for most, the hands-on experience of caring for the baby was a novel one, it was one that they soon grew in confidence with.

"I guess leading up everything was so focused on the birth, once that was out of the way it's like, phew, ok, we got that out of the way, alright what are we doing now?" Nick

"In hospital it's part of an event as opposed to any reality… it's a medical event still. All of a sudden you're home and it's just the two of you again, well, three of you now, and that, that is a fundamental change." Donal

"I wouldn't have had any experience with babies and I never held a baby or done anything with babies but six months on, everything's easy now, cos you just get used to it, changing him, dressing him, feeding him, it's all easy, but it's just practice and whatever anyone says to you, the only way you'll learn is through doing it." Peter

The period of adjusting to a new role and a new addition to the family clearly varies from one individual to another, but on the whole by the time the fathers took part in the second interview, approximately five months after their child's birth, all of them seemed to feel that they were returning to some sort of equilibrium and had managed to establish patterns and routines to their new lives as fathers.

Feeding and sleeping

Probably unsurprisingly the main issues that concern fathers in the early days after the baby's birth are feeding and sleep. All the participants and their partners had expressed a preference for breastfeeding in the pre-birth interviews, and this was in line with the findings of the "Becoming a Parent" questionnaire, with 82.6% of the sample planning to breastfeed. These figures compare with the hospital's reported figures of 61.8% of all mothers initiating breastfeeding in 2008, with 58.6% still exclusively breastfeeding at the time they are discharged from hospital.

The most recent national figures (2007) available report that 45.4% of women are breastfeeding when return home from hospital, and that "infants born to mothers in

the higher occupational groupings were more likely to breastfeed... 63.8 per cent of infants born to mothers with a higher professional occupation were breastfed" (ESRI, 2009, p67). Given that the majority of the interviewee's partners were employed in professional or managerial roles it is not surprising to see a relatively high level of breastfeeding intention.

However, there was a wide range of experiences when it came to the reality of feeding their infants. The interviewees report that all the mothers made at least some attempt to breastfeed, and for some the experience seems to have been a positive one, with few, or only minor, problems.

> *"He took to the breast straight away, and she loved it because of the bonding and everything that goes with it, and he put on weight straight away, he was a very healthy baby, so feeding wise, that was brilliant." John*

> *"Literally since day one breastfeeding has been fantastic... [the baby] has just put fantastic weight and size... the breastfeeding has been an unmitigated success." Nick*

> *"Eimear took to the breastfeeding like a duck to water. I mean she didn't have any problems at all." Donal*

However, these examples are very much the minority experience; almost all the other mothers had various struggles with breastfeeding, finding it a challenging experience in the early days. Problems included finding feeding very painful, being anxious about whether the baby was getting enough milk, getting mastitis, and premature babies not being strong enough to feed:

> *"Sylvia obviously had to pump initially because he wasn't strong enough to really, breastfeed, so she pumped and put it in a bottle, and we fed him like that." Bill*

"[The twins] were quite fragile and they couldn't latch on the breast... from the beginning they were a mixed feed, cos specially [one baby] was too small to take anything from the breast... since I'm doing most of the night feeds, like the night feed will be formula and then during the day they would be given breast milk." Alex

A number of the women decided to switch to formula bottle feeding within the first few weeks of the baby's birth (in some cases within days of birth), while others struggled on for six or eight weeks before moving to formula.

Others persevered and went on to breastfeed for several months. A number of the men reported that their partners were still breastfeeding at the time of the second interview (five to six months after birth), some exclusively and some mixing with formula feeding.

Given that Ireland's rate of breastfeeding is among the lowest in Europe, with 45% of mothers breastfeeding at the time of discharge from hospital in 2007 (ESRI, 2009), despite their difficulties, these women would not appear to reflect the average experience, in that all of them had initiated breastfeeding and were breastfeeding when they left the hospital. However, by six to eight weeks at least half of them had switched to formula feeding. Unfortunately it is difficult to compare this pattern with macro level breastfeeding patterns, as there is no data on national figures for breastfeeding duration. Some small scale surveys undertaken by health boards provide data which suggests that at 16 weeks between 6 and 12% of mothers are still breastfeeding (Health Promotion Unit, 2003).

A number of the men comment on how difficult it was for their partners to make the decision to switch to formula feeding, and that they felt disappointed that breastfeeding had not worked out for them, but they also emphasized that they wanted to support whatever decision the woman made and were sympathetic to the demands breastfeeding was making on their partners.

"I discussed it with her, because I felt it was important. In that, she had the support if she wanted to change…. but I think she felt she was letting us both down." Jim

"I wanted her to try it cos I know breast milk is the best for the baby and all that… but in fairness you could see she was shattered and the whole baby thing is, I mean it's so tiring, that's the hardest part, sleep deprivation and she was wrecked, so I was happy for her, when she said 'that's it', fine, I've no problem, stop then, we'll just put him on the bottles." Peter

A number of the men whose partners had struggled with the breastfeeding commented on how powerless they had felt, despite being encouraging and supportive, they acknowledged that there was a limit to what they could do to help, by the very nature of breastfeeding, they could not step in and do it for their partners.

"I remember at the time thinking there's not much I can do in this instance, I can't make her feed, I'm not the one, I don't have the breasts to feed… I think Laura had a bit of a crisis of conscience, would she do it, whereas I was more, look, it doesn't matter, she's healthy, she's alive… once she went onto the bottle then everything became far more routine and I was able to then play my part." Frank

"There was absolutely, as far as I could see, nothing I could do, I mean I was trying to help positioning and all, you know, and let's get this video out again and is there anyone, do you want me to bring you somewhere, can we ring anyone like, but at the end of the day there is only so much you can do. So I suppose that was it. I mean it definitely was a fairly stressful maybe week that was in there but it really, once we moved over to formula it just went away, wasn't an issue at all." Eoin

Previous studies have also found that while fathers were positive about breastfeeding prenatally, once the baby was born their attitude towards breastfeeding became more ambivalent (Jordan and Wall, 1990, Gamble and Morse, 1993). In Jordan and Wall's

study fathers spoke of a lack of opportunity to develop a relationship with their child, ascribed to the exclusivity of the breastfeeding dyad, and their feelings of inadequacy around meeting their infants' needs. In Gamble and Morse's research fathers felt "increasingly inadequate and frustrated when faced with caring for their infants in the absence of their spouses" (Gamble and Morse, 1993, p360). These findings contrast with the experiences of the fathers in this study, which would seem to suggest that the struggle was to find ways to support their partner in their attempts to breastfeed, rather than on the impact of breastfeeding on their relationship with the baby. It is possible that this is due to the fact that the majority of those who had problems breastfeeding switched to formula relatively early on, meaning that fathers did not cite the breastfeeding dyad as a barrier to their relationship to the child.

For one couple in particular, Michael and Anne, the early weeks were a "trial", and much of this Michael attributed to the difficulties they encountered with breastfeeding.

> *"We managed to get through eight weeks of breastfeeding... it wasn't the joyous experience of bonding experience that you hear explained sometimes, that it's great bonding experience between the baby... because of the difficulties, it was, it was a trial... it was a tough, tough time, and she was all over the place, hormones all over the place, not knowing if she's doing the right thing or not." Michael*

Michael goes on to describe how difficult it was for him to witness Anne having such difficulties and how worrying it was for him to see her "in trouble", and how ultimately the intervention of the family doctor helped them to move on from this period.

> *"I wasn't worried about [the baby]... She was thriving... It was Anne that I was worried for... We had a wonderful doctor... and she basically guided us in the end, after the eight weeks, she gave us the cue. She said, you should stop breastfeeding, go on the bottle, she said, we basically after twelve weeks, we moved [the baby] out of the room. Because we weren't getting any sleep with [the baby] in the room. So she said, move her out into her own cot, we put her,*

put her out there, and Anne went on sleeping tablets, and, you know, to get herself back to normal." Michael

Michael explains that his own connection with the baby was hampered, partly as a result of the stress he felt the child was putting on his wife, but not as a result of the breastfeeding relationship between mother and child per se.

"I was just more worried for Anne. Um, [the baby] couldn't connect. I don't think, I don't think you can connect, because you're not getting feedback, from the child. The child is reactive. Um, and, you're not getting full feedback, from the child. And I suppose, myself, I was seeing this little being affecting my wife so much, and having put my wife through so much." Michael

Michael also describes how when he returned to work after three weeks of paternity leave, Anne went to stay with her parents, to get help and support, for two or three weeks. Michael gives a moving account of how his dominant emotion was one of guilt:

"The biggest emotion I suppose was guilt. In terms that, I wasn't going through it as much, half as much as what Anne went though. And I suppose the physical separation that we had as well, with her being down the country, and not being there as well. I was, it was all well and good me being up here and getting sleep, and stuff like that, but still, and it was great that I did get it [laughs], but I still, I came back one evening, and I was on the phone to Anne, and Anne was all over the place, and I came home, and I just cried solidly for two hours. I just couldn't, there was nothing I could physically do, I felt absolutely helpless and guilty and everything, that was my low point I suppose." Michael

Although Michael's experience is more extreme than most of the accounts given by the men in this research, a number of them view the decision to stop breastfeeding and switch to formula feeding as the moment when their experiences began to improve, and that they saw the main advantage of formula feeding as enabling them

to step into their partners' role, and give the mothers much needed respite from the unrelenting demands of their infants.

> *"It meant I could give Sarah peace, let her sleep and rest and catch up… so it meant that Sarah got some sort of quality sleep, and I could mind him." Jim*

The formula feeding also allowed for a more flexible division of labour between the parents, and a number of men talked about how they devised a system of taking the 'night shift' in turns, or how they took over night feeds at the weekends, while their partners took on the bulk of the night feeds during the week, so that the men could go to work with a relatively full night's sleep behind them.

> *"What we did was went onto a night on-night off, so basically one of us, whoever was on night on would sleep in our own bedroom [the baby] was in the cot and whoever was doing the feed, whereas the other person would go into the other room, the spare room and sleep the whole night through. So basically I would, we would just take turns from day one and we still do… around the time we went onto bottles and everything just seemed to slot into place a bit more… the routine is the kind of holy grail." Frank*

> *"It meant I could share in the, the feeding, and looking after him, so that was fine, so we tend to split the feeding fairly, down the middle." Jim*

Just as importantly, many of the men talk about how their ability to feed their child, whether formula or expressed breast milk, enhanced their sense of connection with the baby. This is similar to the fathers in Lupton and Barclay's study, who "found that feeding the infant brought emotional rewards and allowed them a closeness and sense of satisfaction in their role that they thought had been missing" (Lupton and Barclay, 1997, p139).

> *"There's also a connection then that I can make with [the baby] that I wouldn't if Judy is just purely breastfeeding… if she sees you're feeding her she kind of goes 'right, you also provide for me as opposed to just I get all my food over*

there and you're just there as this sort of an odd person that makes funny noises' and so there's a much more connection you can make. So I think from that point of view it's good and also just to literally share the load ... so we basically just have somebody who's on duty during the night so if she needs to be tended to during the night then somebody's on duty so we sort of share that basically." Shane

Whether or not breastfeeding acts as a kind of barrier to the fathers' ability to form a connection with their baby is hard to ascertain. Although some of those fathers whose partners continued to breastfeed beyond the first few weeks do talk about how their experience of giving a feed of expressed milk added an extra dimension to their feelings of connection, they also seem to relish the advantages of breastfeeding.

"It's brilliant now like... I was more than happy if she wanted to go onto the bottles but I'm very happy she hasn't done either, it's very, very convenient for us. I mean it's extremely convenient. I mean you could be walking down the street and it's like nobody would even realise, I mean, we've been standing talking to friends and [the baby] would start breastfeeding and they wouldn't even realise." Fergal

Fergal is one of the men whose partner had a tough time with breastfeeding in the early days, but who persevered and was still breastfeeding at the time of the second interview. Like other 'successful' breast-feeders, Fergal and his partner came up with different strategies to try and get through the difficult days, often using an occasional bottle of expressed milk or formula to give the mother a break.

"I'd say she had a month of hell to be honest with you and then it gradually just, it didn't happen overnight, it just gradually and gradually got easier... Katie got a bit overwhelmed with it at times and she'd get quite emotional and burst out crying for no reason but, I'd just go 'listen you just go have a nice sleep and I'll take [the baby] tonight' and I could just get bottles or whatever like that, or she'd express milk or whatever and then she'd have a good night's sleep." Fergal

"We got it to work and just by being persistent, but being relaxed about it and also using the bottles if, look it, he's hungry, it's not working, he's getting frustrated, well we'll do the rest with the bottle and that's the way we did it." *Robert*

Besides the benefits of convenience, a number of the men comment on the fact that breastfeeding also gives them a good excuse not to have to get up at night and feed the baby, and they admit that their level of sleep deprivation has been less than they expected, and also less than their partners'.

"At the beginning I used to wake up for every feed you know or, or I'd turn over, Clodagh will tell you I didn't, but I did, turned over and I'd go 'is everything alright, yeah, yeah, everything good here?' and then I'd turn over and go back to sleep [laughter] and gradually I'd miss one or two feeds and slowly I'd just wake up then to do the token hand [laughter] just to make sure [pat, pat] she's ok yeah, yeah, everything good here." *Des*

"From a selfish perspective, from a male perspective I mean, it means you can sleep." *Donal*

They do acknowledge that one of the disadvantages to breastfeeding for the mothers is that they can be restricted in what they can do and how long they can be away from their baby, but they accept that this is part of the parenting deal and a temporary state of affairs.

"It got a bit tough after a while, she was so restricted, she couldn't leave him – but we knew that was part and parcel of it. But he's on bottles now, he's been on bottles for about two months… She wanted to breast feed him for three months, that was her plan and she carried on into the fourth month really." *John*

Those men whose partners had struggled with breastfeeding, and ultimately switched to formula feeding, reported a range of reactions from their partners, with some seeming to welcome the switch to formula, while for others it was a huge disappointment not to be able to continue breastfeeding.

> *"She breastfed him until she got hay fever... about 6 weeks in... I think she was almost quite relieved about the fact that she'd, it was quite a stressful process because you're not quite sure is he getting enough... you're quite anxious that, is he getting enough to sort of survive and he kept falling asleep and, so that was a slightly stressful period." Tom*

> *"She just felt like she was just, 'I can't feed my baby' kind of thing, do you know? So that was really upsetting for her, she got very upset by that whole thing cos she just felt like she'd let [the baby] down and herself down and you know she just took a long, like you'd mention it and she'd cry." Shane*

Sleep deprivation

A number of men cite the hardest challenge of having a new born baby as being the sleep deprivation, like those fathers in Lupton and Barclay's study who found sleep loss a "highly negative experience of early fatherhood" (Lupton and Barclay, 1997, p138) and the impact this has on both the father and the mother's capacity to cope with the demands of the day.

> *"I'd say sleep has probably been the major issue, again first month is, yeah, it's horrendous, I mean it's horrendous, just up, she'll sleep for two hours, she'll be up crying... there's those moments where, you know, I'm trying to put her down and having absolutely no success and I'm just getting angry, but who am I getting angry with... yeah, it's tough but you've just got to get all reserves of self control and patience and just, just focus." Nick*

"A few night's sleep deprivation can put you over the edge and just makes problems where there are no problems and once you have a good night's sleep then you're fine." Fergal

"It's not easy on the relationship, at that stage, she'd, you know, you start to get really tired and get on each other's nerves and you're always arguing and you know, 'you get up', 'no, you get up' that sort of stuff." Peter

A few fathers were lucky enough to have a baby whose night time waking was kept to a minimum and so the new arrival made little difference to their sleeping patterns.

"It turns out [the baby] is one of these babies that when you tell your friends about it they think you're lying and saying 'you'll be saying he makes you hot chocolate before you go to bed next!' But I think he's only ever woken up in the middle of the night three times in six months. Basically since the day he was born he's been going to sleep about, in the early days he was probably going to sleep about 10, 10.30 sleep through til 7." Eoin

"He was a little angel, still is a little angel... he has slept from 11 to 7 pretty much consistently." Tom

Others found that they needed to prioritise their own sleep once they went back to work and a number of the men reported that they had started sleeping in a separate room from the mother and baby, to reduce the amount that they would be disturbed at night. Others would sleep through the night waking during the week and then provide their partners with some night time support during the weekends.

"I'm working, so, you know, I would have tended to sleep with them for maybe the first part of the night, and then maybe the last few hours go and sleep in a different room." Aidan

"She was understanding though, I was back to work so gave me more lie-ons but eventually like you have to stand up and go 'right listen you're knackered', I've got to do the night feeds for a while." Tony

These detailed accounts of the first few weeks of parenthood paint a vivid picture of how this group of fathers became immersed in the minutiae of caring for their new babies, how some struggled to deal with the broken nights and the pressures of breastfeeding, and with the impact of the new baby on both themselves and their partners. In many cases the focus seems to be on the fathers maximising their own participation in care, and this primarily seems to be driven by the desire to give respite to their partners, who are responsible for the bulk of the care once the fathers are back at work. In these early days, there seems to be less focus on the child, and more focus on the woman, similar to the way in which many of the men described their focus during pregnancy.

Baby blues

Although none of the men talked about their partners suffering specifically from post-natal depression, it was common for references to be made to the "baby blues", "nerves" and "hormones" to explain some of the behaviour of their partners in the weeks soon after the baby's birth. The extent of these "baby blues" seemed to vary from a few days to several weeks, and some seemed to "fade away" of their own accord, while others sought help from doctors or extended family.

"Then the baby blues kicked in, I think she went to the GP once and people were saying look it's perfectly normal and you'll get through this and blah, blah, blah, and, I found that a very strange thing to get my head around. I knew it happens but it just seemed so illogical that and, I know it's hormones and the whole lot but I was still going 'I can't get my head around why you're crying at the minute'." Des

It was common for those men whose partners had suffered some sort of "baby blues" to struggle to understand what was happening to their partners; similar to the findings of the few studies into fathers' experiences of a partner with postnatal depression. These show that fathers had "difficulty understanding what their wives were experiencing"(Meighan et al., 1999, p203) and also found that it was a situation resulting in "overwhelming feelings of frustrations and helplessness" (Davey et al., 2006, p213) even though they were aware that some sort of post natal depression was common.

> *"I had read about it but, read about one thing and having it actually happen, and not exactly being able to change anything about it, it's quite a difficult position, I would say so. Feel kind of helpless." Philip*

Overall, it was common for the fathers to provide support to their partners in the early days, primarily by taking on responsibility for all the household chores, allowing their partners to focus themselves entirely on the new baby, whether or not they seemed to be suffering some sort of baby blues.

> *"I was trying to, to make sure everything was completely kind of spick and span all the time, there was nothing really that could be a hassle or that would in Rachel's peripheral vision be something that she was, 'oh I wish this was done', so I was trying to just clear all those factors out of the way." Conor*

> *"For the first three weeks I basically did everything in the house, Anne just basically survived, and I fed her, and you know, I took care of the house and did the shopping, got out and did the shopping on me own, and I did everything basically in the house, house-wise. Anne concentrated on [the baby] and that was it." Michael*

It was frequently the case that fathers took on, or already had, responsibility for much of the domestic chores, and I will return to explore this theme in more detail in the section looking at the couples' relationship.

Once again, what is clear from these accounts of the early days of fatherhood is that the men's focus is as much on their partner and on providing support to her, as it is on the baby. Given that even with the most generous paternity leave packages, most of the men were back at work within a fortnight of the birth, meaning that the bulk of the childcare fell to the mothers, and given that many of the men had dealt with their feelings of detachment during the pregnancy by focusing on their partner, this is probably unsurprising. What is striking is the willingness of the majority of this group of men to take on as much of the burden of care for the baby as circumstances allow. According to their own accounts, at least, there were no shirkers!

The role of extended family

The key source of support for the fathers, their partners and their new babies was the extended family, usually the grandparents, but often also including siblings and in-laws. This is consistent with the pattern found in the "Becoming a Parent" questionnaire, which found that the most frequently cited source of expected support would be the couples' mothers, closely followed by friends (although only one respondent listed his father as a potential source of support).

Support or tensions?

Some grandparents – usually grandmothers of from either the paternal or maternal sides – provided an important source of practical support by providing babysitting and allowing the new parents some respite from their new responsibilities. Obviously the ability to provide this kind of support is somewhat dependent on the grandparents living relatively geographically close to their children. The importance of geographical distance in promoting contact between grandparents and their grandchildren has been established by previous research (Whitbeck et al., 1993).

> *"Her family have been excellent especially her mother... they live ten minutes away, close but not too close and you can just, you can ask them anything."*
> *Tony*

"A few times we've left her over with my mam and we'd go out for the night and my mam would look after her and you know we'd come back and we'd stay over in my mother's. If we couldn't do things like that then you might start to see her as, okay she's kind of getting in the way of stuff, but she doesn't because I think having the support network around enables you to do fun things." Frank

Making use of grandparents as babysitters is common among parents, as in Clarke and Cairns' study (Clarke and Cairns, 2001), which found that "over one third of children under five years (35 per cent)... had been looked after by a grandparent in the last month" (Clarke and Cairns, 2001, p15).

Some fathers commented on their own parents being somewhat passive in their approach to providing support, and seem to have worked to encourage their parents to step in. This would also be consistent with research that shows the importance of the parent in facilitating the relationship between grandparents and grandchildren: "the mediating roles of parents indicate that high-quality relationships between parents and grandparents are associated with greater contact and more emotional closeness" (Whitbeck et al., 1993, p1026).

"You have to ask them, they wouldn't be very forthcoming... I have tried to bring [the baby] down and then kind of go like 'do you want to have [the baby] for the night?', not asking them to baby-sit but just like so they can spend time and they are starting to get better." Fergal

"My mum wouldn't tend to be that much of a kind of a hands on granny in terms of she, she loves [the baby] and she's very good with him and all that but she wouldn't generally be kind of volunteering to baby sit." Eoin

Whether or not the grandparents provided support, there was a common theme of the fathers and their partners placing more emphasis on spending time with their extended family, and a sense that they needed to invest in the relationship with their

family in order to facilitate a relationship growing between their child and their extended family. Clearly this is an important and new priority for them, which has arisen since their baby's birth. For Michael and Bill, this priority has even seen them planning to move closer to one or other set of grandparents.

> *"They want to see him more and more… me mum's retired and this is, me dad was 65 just recently so he's in his last year of work now, so I anticipate from next year they'll probably be here more if anything." Peter*

> *"The big impact [the baby] has had overall, I which would probably have been a surprising thing for us, is that the family becomes more… you have to bring family more into things now. So you have to do more events that involve your family, even though you don't necessarily really want to, to a degree, but it does put the emphasis on family more." Shane*

> *"It would mean that we, I probably make more effort to see them more frequently." Eoin*

> *"I'm going to be transferring down to [wife's home town], we get our planning permission, so we'll be building down there… I want my, our kids, it's a lovely small village that Anne is from, and it's a small little school, and stuff like that." Michael*

> *"We both, agree that long term we'd like to be either near her family or my family… We'd always said, you know, we'd go wherever jobs took us, but actually, that's another change that the baby's brought on, we have realised how important those family networks are, and that, both of our parents want to have their grandchildren near them, and that it's probably important for the baby to be around family as well, growing up." Bill*

Even those who do not have geographically close parents to call on have found that they have been able to rely on occasional support when their parents come to visit, whether from within Ireland, or from overseas.

"My mum and dad came over when he was born and said to us 'right, what do you wanna do?' they'll look after him, 'go and do whatever you want to do', and we want to go to bed which is desperate isn't it, aye, it's like 'what're you gonna do?', right 'we'll go to bed for 13 hours' and that's what we did." Peter

"My mum's in Galway so I wouldn't, so we wouldn't be getting much support from my mam but saying that like she came up, she came up for a weekend, stayed, Judy went off, up to, up to a wedding and my mam stayed with me so she was able to help me out so that was good." Shane

Two couples arranged extended stays of nine weeks in total for their parents around the time that their babies were born, even though in Alex's case there were some tensions related to having his mother-in-law and his mother to stay for such a long period.

"We had Liz's mother over for six weeks and my mum over for three weeks… Liz's mum got a bit cross with me cos now, we were spending like we spent six weeks together and all the bad habits would come out on open view… I like to walk around the house in my underwear for example and I wasn't gonna give it up because my mother in law was around [laughter]… With my mother we got to kind of like get to know each other again, we had a difficult three weeks… there were all these little things that we kind of had forgotten about each other or had drifted apart. I mean, I'm not the same person I was when I left home when I was 18 and nor is my mother, so it took us a while to figure that out." Alex

"Sylvia's parents were here for five weeks, and my mother was here for four weeks. So the baby was over two months old… when her mum was here and my mum was here, you know the support was there." Bill

In other cases, it did not require a long stay for tensions to arise between the new parents and the grandparents' generation, as Tom describes.

"The whole granny support thing hasn't really worked."

JB: "Ok, tell me more."

"Sinead's mum would be very kind of like um...not really wanting to get involved or not really wanting to interfere... they get on very well as mother and daughter but they don't, she didn't really take the initiative... then my mother, I don't know, I don't know...I always knew my mum would be a challenge because she's a, um I think I mentioned before she's a sort of doula[12] type person and to her this is the, I'm 35 and my sister's 33 and neither of us have had, this is the first child so this is kind of like a big deal... so she came and despite the fact that I was saying, I said to her that you know 'now, you need to sort of, can you just sort of stand back a bit and just sort of you know Sinead's in charge but she'll, she'd appreciate the support kind of thing'... it didn't work... there's always been a sort of slight, there's always been a slight, I wouldn't say my mum and my wife are particularly similar people so there's probably, it's always been a bit of a [disparity between them?] yeah, disparity, you know, they were never gonna be sort of, they were never going to have the same view about things... mum's clearly very excited about the whole thing and means, means terribly well and doesn't, would be the last person who wants to offend anybody [hmm] or impose her will on anybody, she's, she's just not like that but there just, the two of the them just don't kind of meet." Tom

In other cases it seems that the new grandchild has provided a new focus for the grandfathers, particularly those who have suffered some sort of recent loss or trauma.

"With my dad it's, it's almost like we feel like we're supporting him. Um, just by having an extra grandkid around and having him round to dinner and so on, um, coz with my mother dying recently it's, er, more difficult for him than for anyone." Aidan

[12] A doula assists a mother with the non-medical physical and emotional aspects of pregnancy, birth and early infancy, offering practical and emotional support.

"He had a kind of a breakdown and he was very depressed then for a long period afterwards and then my sister had a baby... the two babies in the, in our family are playing this hugely important role, I think in helping him you know recover. And you can see him with them, and it is nice to see him, you know, he'd hold her finger and look at her and you know give her a little kiss and it is lovely. And yet, he had, I think he always saw himself as a man and 'ah babies you know are for women' and yet despite himself, he's kind of reaching out to them and they're kind of bringing, drawing out a good thing in him." Frank

What these accounts reflect is the complexity of the intergenerational relationships, showing how it is not possible to take intergenerational solidarity (Bengtson and Roberts, 1991) for granted, and that the relationships between generations can involve ambivalent feelings and sometimes even tensions and conflict (Luescher and Pillemer, 1998).

Reflecting on their own fathers – replicate, refine or reject?

Although the influence and role of their own fathers had been discussed in the first interview, there was further reflection on the father's own experience of being fathered and parented once the babies arrived. A number of the fathers have been surprised by the level of interest or involvement that their own fathers have taken in the new child, and some hint that perhaps this is partly attributable to a desire to make up for the lost opportunity to spend time with their own children.

"We've been gob smacked at how much interest my father has taken in [the baby] which is brilliant to see, after some initial slagging and jibing from my mother saying 'that must be a world's first, I don't think I've ever seen that man pick up a baby'. Eh, you can see he's genuinely interested and so that has changed things a little bit... is it a bit of a making up for, realising that he didn't spend enough time or didn't make enough effort?" Eoin

"He's more interested than I thought he was going to be [hmm] he's not, you know, he's getting old now, I suppose, but he's, he's never been a particular, a particularly good parent to me so why would he be any good at being a grandfather? But he's, he's turned into some, into what I, what you'd imagine he'd be, you know, he writes to [the baby], so you get these letters addressed to [the baby], you open, you have to read it out sort of thing. 'Today I did this and this and this and you know and here's a picture' which is really quite sweet, the sort of thing my granddad used to do. But I would never have, you know, reckoned my father would do it." Tom

In Frank's case he became annoyed and frustrated at his father's attitude when he was attempting to talk to him about how he had found the early days of fatherhood.

"I felt very annoyed at him cos his attitude was you know, 'no I didn't find it all hard because it was nothing to do with me and if you'd any sense you wouldn't be kind of being dragged into it like this'. And he was kind of going on about something he'd read in the Daily Mail, how some doctor said that males shouldn't really be involved and that they're kind of being emasculated and the women have them doing all this work and it's not their role and, and I remember thinking so that, that's what you're telling me, here I am coming to you, you know what I mean, we've had eh, I think I mentioned before I mean I eh, he used to, he drank an awful lot and eh he had a, you know it's not easy but eh I remember feeling, 'god, is that the best you can come up with?'." Frank

Once again, similar to the pre-birth interviews, several fathers comment that they do not wish to replicate the kind of parenting style that their own fathers had, or that they wish to prioritise spending time with their babies in a way that they feel their own fathers failed to do, usually because of their work commitments. This is similar to Daly's (1995) findings that "the emphasis that their own fathers placed on work, at the cost of their family experiences, was something that concerned these men" (Daly, 1995, p29).

"The father was the old type, the mother was very good when I was young, but I think he came to one of my football matches and that was because they had an argument and he just got out of the house 'where will I go, I'll go and watch your match' whereas I'll be there all the time." Tony

"My dad would've been working the whole time… he wouldn't have been particularly hands on… I am quite different from my dad and I'd like to some ways, with no disrespect to the man, be quite different… I'd like to be a more, you know, I'd like to feel a lot closer now to [the baby] hopefully than I would've felt with my dad." Eoin

"When he grows up we'll be close cos I wouldn't say I'm particularly close to my dad… I kind of give out to him because he's, his conversations aren't very deep and meaningful and are just kind of, he's almost like a salesman nearly and that annoys me, it bothers me… I'd hope that myself and [the baby] will have really good chats." Robert

"My dad worked an awful lot and he had unsociable hours and I wouldn't like that." Des

Others talk about how they are already conscious of repeating the same patterns that they remember from their own upbringing, or that they would like to cherry pick the positive aspects of their upbringing, and avoid the faults.

"I kind of like the way I was brought up so… I might kind of mimic things like they did, like reading stories at bedtimes and stuff like that." Fergal

"I find myself saying things that he'd say. Already. Like songs that he used to sing to me when he was changing – well not that I remember him changing – when he'd put me in my jamas when I was a baby of four, five, whatever, as a kid. He used to sing songs, and I find myself singing them songs to [the baby], when I'm changing him, giving him his bath. They just come back to me, you know." John

"Definitely you look at the way things happened for you and you tick boxes of things you like and things you didn't like, like the unsociable hours were hard, I mean he worked 60 hours a week or insane stuff. So I wouldn't like to go down that route, but again when he was home he was great, you know, so you, you'd like to take that on." Des

"When we had time together it was quite good... I would certainly like to continue on, in that vein, and probably even more so, than my father was able to do. Um, and my father and I were fairly close when I was growing up, but probably in the past fifteen years we've become very close.... I played baseball as a kid, and sometimes he'd be able to make it to the games, sometimes he wouldn't. Sometimes he was there to throw the ball around um, and I sort of think I want to make sure that I'm there more for my boy to be able to do that." Bill

Clearly although they are at pains to emphasise that their approach to fatherhood will be different to their own fathers', the men are also able to "identify aspects of the relationship that had some influence" (Daly, 1993b, p519) on their own approach. A number of the men show an awareness of how much has changed in the wider environment since their own parents had young children, and some comment on how they feel fortunate to be embarking on their own parenting journey at a time when some things are easier than for previous generations, while some comment on how things are harder, and also reflect on how expectations of fathers have changed since their own childhoods.

"The world now is so different, is so, so different from the world in the 70's or whenever when I was growing up like that it is moving so much faster and demands are much, much more, both in terms of work and just physically getting from a to b." Eoin

"It's a lot different now than it was 30 years ago... Orla and me financially are...well off, we have no, no question about it, we're well off in, especially in

Ireland, we've both got good jobs and you know, if we want anything for him or for ourselves we can get it, no financial restraint . Whereas my mother and father when they had us, they would have had a much different [more of a budget to work with?] yeah, absolutely, they would have had it a lot tougher than, than we do." Peter

"If you compare me to my dad even, my da would've had no interest in any of this, in how a father should feel, or going into the labour ward and all that sort of stuff, whereas my friends, my, my generation now 90 percent go into the labour ward and analyse their feelings." Des

"[An older male family friend] said 'Frank I wasn't even let near the child, you know I was just told to go out, to go out to a match or go out to have a pint', that there were lots of women around, her sisters and they all, he was a real, he's like inner city Dub, like, a real close knit community and he said he wasn't more or less allowed nearly touch the child." Frank

Again this echoes Daly's findings that some fathers blamed their own fathers' failings on "the cultural expectations of the time" (Daly, 1995, p30). An example of how expectations have shifted can be found by contrasting these accounts with those of John Gillis, who was moved to write his book about family myths and rituals after his own adult son's death and his realization of what he had forfeited by his own commitment to his career: "Nothing had prepared me for the difference between [my wife's] memories of Ben, so crisp and ready, and mine, so vague and elusive...they reminded me of just what a stranger I had been, that I had found so little time for the boys during the first decade of their lives, and in fact had chosen to teach on the very day that Ben was born" (Gillis, 1997).

Some of the men also seem to have reflected on their own parents' experiences, particularly their mothers, and express a new respect and admiration for them, and to comment on how they see their own parents in a different way now that they have become parents themselves, and that in some cases it has served to bring them together.

"You have an appreciation of maybe the other side of their relationship with you or with your siblings… you see a relationship from a completely different perspective, you can empathise to a certain extent." Conor

"You kind of realise that she's a woman who has had a child, before that she's your mother, and you kind of appreciate her a bit more as a woman or something I think ,yeah, there's another dimension to the relationship." Robert

"Jesus, we should phone our parents and just apologise and thank them and again you don't think about it until you go through it." Des

"My mam has been wonderful because I've talked to her a bit about [the baby] and she's looked after her a few nights and she came over and she was so good to us and she actually gave us so much financial help in buying all the stuff. As I said that's been wonderful and my mam I think has definitely drawn us closer because she knows, you know she'd be great with [the baby] and she wants to develop a relationship with [the baby] and me dad, I just feel [the baby']s been good for him and I feel just more, I suppose it has yeah, it's improved my relationship definitely with my own parents, in that I don't feel as sensitive to even what they might say or do and I don't feel, I feel, I, there'd, a slight separation in that like I'm living my life, I've got my child, I'm a parent now but then on another level a kind of a closeness you know in that I see their relationship with [the baby]." Frank

Others also comment on how they feel that they have become closer to their partners' families since the birth of the baby, and there is a sense that the boundaries between families have become more blurred, while for others, as Frank alluded to in the quote above, their newly formed family has replaced their family of origin as the primary focus. In a variation on this pattern of a realignment of family relationships, Robert comments that he feels that for his parents his new baby has supplanted him as a priority.

"It's probably made me closer to her family because they're more a family… I've always had my life but now I've got my family and, you know, number one priority." Tony

"I'm more relaxed. I feel like I'm part of her family more now than I did before… Definitely with her family because I'm not just Aisling's boyfriend any more now you know. I'm kind of in a bit more than I was." John

"That's where I feel excluded, actually, cos anytime I call home it's a 'hi and how's [the baby]?' Like, the second question is 'alright, how are you?'… you don't get much of a look in cos your grandchild now is the all important number one." Robert

A minority said that they have not become any closer to their parents because they felt their existing relationship with them was a good one, but Shane feels that in the case of his in-laws, the arrival of the new baby may even have had a negative impact on his and his wife's relationship with the maternal grandparents.

"I've always had a very good relationship with my mum and dad." Peter

"I always thought they were cool anyway, they were very good, I had very good parents." John

"Her parents are nearby but you'd rather leave [the baby] with a dog to be honest, sorry, I know that's a bit harsh but they're just, you wouldn't … if she dropped [the baby] it would be [the baby's] fault or some or something else and she mightn't even tell you. That's the big worry, like, we couldn't trust her to actually tell us… it's a hard thing to say but that's the reality of it to be honest… I don't think anything positive has come out of it at all from her relationship with her parents and even my relationship with her parents cos I'm like I, I'm even like I don't want her mother touching [the baby]." Shane

Shane's experience would seem to be consistent with previous research which suggests that parents who remember "negative experiences or emotional distance between themselves and their parents when they were younger may be less

motivated to encourage and provide for children and grandparent interaction or may even actively discourage contact" (Whitbeck et al., 1993, p1027).

In Donal's case, both his own and his wife's fathers are dead, and the arrival of the new baby has clearly caused him to reflect on this gap in his and his baby's life.

> *"I think it turns you to kind of reflect on family generally but in a good way, in a positive way, so in our cases it's probably a little bit more poignant as well ... I miss the fact that he, you know he doesn't have a grandfather he won't have a grandfather and I miss that I can't talk to my father about him you know, or about it generally... I think he would have been a good grandfather you know."* *Donal*

Overall, the majority of the fathers interviewed seem to have placed an increasing importance on the establishment and maintenance of a relationship between their newborn children and their own parents and parents-in-law, which would seem to contest some previous findings that married people, even those with young children, "have less intense intergenerational ties than the unmarried" (Sarkisian and Gerstel, 2008, p369) possibly due to the demands of their immediate family. In contrast, this group of fathers seemed to have moved their focus away from their social life and network of friends, towards their extended family.

Relationship with the child

One of the main foci of the post-birth interview was the relationship between the fathers and their babies. Like the fathers in Lupton and Barclay's study (Lupton and Barclay, 1997, p144) the men were "open in expressing the strong feelings of love they felt for their children" and were comfortable in describing how their relationship with their child had evolved over the months since the birth.

Father-child bond – instant or gradual?

The initial sense of connection that the fathers felt varied, with the men falling into two broad camps – those who had an immediate powerful emotional response to the child at the moment or soon after the birth, and those who describe a more gradual connection forming over the first few months of their babies' lives.

> *"I was just over the moon. Just to have met [the baby]… after I got out of the hospital I had the sort of, the sort of emotion, the sort of, "oh my god, I can't believe that this has happened"… but, you know, it wasn't, it wasn't crying. It's just sitting there, just laughing manically, just, you know, with, yeah, just delighted with it." Jim*

> *"He was gorgeous, when I first held him, and it was an amazing moment… I felt… straight away I felt very attached to him, very close... Like I knew him, you know. I felt like, love, initially, which is strange for somebody you don't know." John*

In the case of Philip, he attributes part of the strength of his feeling to the fact that immediately after the birth his partner had to have surgery and he was left with the newborn baby, holding her directly against his chest.

> *"At the beginning I had a very strong, I don't know if it's a bond or only a responsibility, because I had her like you know, under my shirt for a while, for a long, long while, I would say. So I think, I guess, making it absolutely clear that there is someone who relies totally on her parents, so I think … it was quite a powerful statement." Philip*

Those men who described themselves as having an immediate connection with the baby at birth are, however, in the minority, with the majority of men describing how it took some weeks or months for their sense of connection to develop, and even those like John who claim an initial powerful bond, describe how it has strengthened over time.

"I've grown to love him more, if that's possible. Each day, he does something, you know, I thought I loved him then, but each day I love him more and more." John

"There's no other situation or no other person that, or no other parallel that that you would just totally accept that this total disruption of your life and be delighted…it kind of got me thinking like you know what is it that just straight away you totally accept this person and you're delight, you love them so much and there's such a powerful bond in such a short period." Frank

In some cases, the fathers describe that they feel some sort of emotional bond with the baby, even before it is born, but that they were more focused on getting to grips with the practical aspects of caring for the baby to begin with, and only once their confidence had grown in the practical arena, did they seem to be able to make room for the emotional.

"You just take it like day by day and you're very practical about it and I think it's only once you feel secure about that that you start sort of to enjoy it more… I remember I thought, initially… yeah "I get on grand with him, I hold him and he's not screaming" – that's all you look for really." Des

For others, such as Michael, who found the first few weeks very challenging, it wasn't possible to feel a connection to the baby when he and his wife were struggling so much.

"You can't bond during a traumatic experience. I don't think." Michael

Perhaps Michael would find some reassurance in the fact that even some of those men who did not feel that the early days were particularly "traumatic" still felt that it took some months before they really felt connected with their infants, and that the crucial contributing factor seemed to be when they felt that they were beginning to get some two-way interaction with the baby.

"For me it was a stranger. I mean, you know, obviously visually it was a stranger but the connection between her and [the baby] was already there. You know. Um, and for me, not really, you know. It, it sank in gradually, you know, and it, it's still doing it… it's not just a question of you are the father, you automatically have these emotions" Aidan

"It was very important I think to spend a lot of time there at that period of time but with very young babies, what I found was it's kind of fairly much one way traffic… I mean they need all that support and love and care and attention and whatever else like but they don't really respond to you or to their environment, so I'd say it probably took some weeks after that that you begin to start seeing an element of personality develop, an element of recognition, and you kind of get an awful lot more back. That sounds a bit selfish but to me it's just a bit of a fact of life." Eoin

This is consistent with the findings of Lupton and Barclay, who report that by the time the babies were six months old, the fathers in their study felt that they had "managed to achieve a satisfying and enjoyable relationship with their infant… This process appeared to be closely linked to the infant's capacity to be responsive to them" (Lupton and Barclay, 1997, p137).

Despite the lack of response or interaction in the early weeks, the fathers still felt that it was important not to miss the early stages of infancy.

"It's very difficult to relate to something that doesn't really relate to anything, in the first week you know, I eh ah I held him a lot and fed him a bit in the first week but I wouldn't say, you don't get much of a reaction out of him. Having said that you wouldn't want to miss it." Tom

One father, Des, described how his wife and baby had gone away to stay with his in-laws for a month when the baby was about two months old, due to his wife needing some additional support, and how he had been surprised by his own reaction:

"I only got down one weekend and so when he came back from [the trip] I felt like I was nearly starting again with the whole process… I had all these ideas about this, this will be great I'll get loads of sleep and I actually ended up missing the two of them an awful lot… there was an awful lot of pining at home and 90% for him… and then I went down… that was weird as well cos they had their own little set up down there where the mam was involved and the sister was involved and everyone had their little roles and I was just sort of sitting there as a bystander watching it all you know, so that was strange as well, you felt jealous… he was so young you know and I felt like I was missing out so much."

Many of the men talk about the importance of being recognised by their child. Others talk about how important it is to make the baby smile or laugh – it acted as a reward for all the work and as a signal that the father was doing the right thing.

"He knows who I am yeah, it's great when you come in and you see the big smile… When he smiles at ya, you know you know you're doing something right." Tony

"First of all it was trying to knock a smile out of her, and when that happened that was wonderful, and then knocking a laugh out of her, a real belly laugh, that was just amazing." Michael

"You need to get stuck in there and do all those, like bonding times… like you could be changing a nappy really tired at 3 o'clock in the morning and the next minute you get a little smile or whatever and those are the little moments that make everything worthwhile." Fergal

Providing practical care – a route to intimacy and knowledge?

Another consistent feature for the vast majority of the fathers interviewed is the extent to which they have got involved in the day-to-day care of their babies. Unlike the fathers in Lupton and Barclay's study (1997), these fathers seem to have confidence in their competence to engage in care, and rarely seemed to defer to their partner as the "expert" when it came to practical care. There was little talk of the partners teaching the fathers how to do things, and more of a sense that they were learning either together or independently.

This confidence in their practical competence would seem consistent with the findings of the "Becoming a Parent" questionnaire that, for example, 66% of women and 56% of men had previous experience of bottle-feeding a baby, suggesting that on this basic but crucial baby-care task the gap between men's and women's previous experience is not that big.

Almost without exception the fathers interviewed were involved with the care of their infant from the early days, even once their paternity leave had finished, and had established various routines to enable them to spend time with their babies, before or after work, or at the weekends.

> *"I give him his bath most nights, and try and put him to bed most nights. Because I'm not there during the day, I do take over quite a bit when I get home." John*

> *"I get up at half six and take them away and then Liz gets another couple of hours sleep if she can... then she gets up and I get ready and go to work which is the handy bit cos eh you know I leave home at 9 o'clock." Alex*

> *"I get her up in the morning and even if I'm working at half 9 on my mornings on that still gives me time if she's up at 7 to feed her, change her you know everything we have a full two hours together in the morning, it's a beautiful time." Frank*

"Generally when I get home... then I take over for a couple of hours, and, you know, if he's awake, certainly. And I'll read to him... play a lot of games with him, you know, with his toys, and try to get him to interact." Bill

"When I can I do his bath ... but he has that before I come home mostly so, I do it at the weekends... and I'll spend more time with him at the weekends probably than, than Sinead does." Tom

This would seem to suggest that the majority of the men interviewed were closer to the "fully involved" dad model who "takes the lead in childcare and the tasks associated with it for substantial parts of the week" (Hatten et al., 2002, p7), than to the other models suggested by Hatten et al, of "useful dad" who primarily acts as a helper to his partner, or the "entertainer dad" whose focus is on playing with their children.

This is also consistent with the findings of the "Becoming a Parent" questionnaire, which found that the vast majority of expectant fathers intended to be involved in activities such as nappy changing, dressing, cuddling and playing, on a daily basis.

The importance of these kinds of nurturing activities in building the parent-child relationship has also been highlighted by previous studies. Lamb (2007) reports: "infants form attachments to those who have been available regularly and have responded to their signals and needs" (p13) and that "young children need to interact with both parents in a variety of contexts (feeding, playing, soothing, putting to bed, etc) to ensure that the relationships are consolidated and strengthened" (p 13).

The level of involvement these fathers have with their babies seems to have given them a strong sense of knowledge of their babies, in line with Walzer's observation that "doing becomes a kind of knowing" (Walzer, 1996,p 227), and they frequently talk about the way in which they are able to communicate with or read their babies.

"He'll just sit on my legs and the two of us are facing one another and we'll just sit and talk, you know, that's always great, coz he's always got so many things to say, and then he looks and expects you to respond, and that's, that's always great." Jim

"One morning, he was probably about two and a half or three [months], he just started babbling away to me at the table. And that was absolutely brilliant, and Sylvia was laughing because he was looking up at me, just, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, and I said the same thing back to him, just whatever sounds he was making and cooing, whatever, and it went on like that for five minutes." Bill

"Having that amount of time I feel very kind of comfortable and I act natural with her and I feel that I can read her kind of expressions and mood well." Conor

"You learn what he likes, the best way to get him to sleep, the best way to feed him the best way to do everything." Peter

"She communicates … she's quite young, but she can already have all these kind of expressions and emotions in her face. Like, you know, sometimes she looks absolutely curious, sometimes she is all smiley, then she's just, you know, quietly observing everything." Philip

Many of the fathers habitually spend time on their own with the babies, some a few hours, taking the baby for a walk or taking charge while the mother is out, while others have spent extended chunks of time in sole charge of the baby, for several days at a time. Arguably this is evidence of the mothers' readiness for "moving over and creating space for men" (Doucet, 2006, p232) and illustrates the lack of maternal gatekeeping taking place.

"After about a month she started going swimming on a Saturday and she'd leave bottles for him so I'd feed him during the day and that was great just to, I don't know, just to, to see that you could give him something as well." Des

"She ended up going to her mother's for a few days cos she was just so wrecked so I had him for a few more days and, ah, it's great, you know, he's, I've no problem, I always take him out for walks every day." Peter

"I was left in charge [for four days]… I impressed myself! I didn't realize I was that good until I was left on me own to do it but... she left a list of things, when he feeds and that, but I was fine."
JB: "And did you kind of follow her instructions or did you...?".
"No, I did for the first day, but I threw them out the window. I got into the swing of things and by the last night I had it nailed." John

The importance of a confidence in their abilities to provide for the practical needs of their child is apparent in several of the accounts of the fathers, and in some cases this seems to contribute to their growing sense of connection with the babies. Often this seems to coincide with a chunk of time spent alone with the child, or away from home, with just the partner and the baby. Others recall a particular occasion when they felt that the interaction between them and the baby had become two-way.

"At 2 months or so there was one particular day and I still remember it where probably for the first time or at least the first time in a while Clare had to go do something and she was basically so it was just me and [the baby] for maybe a full day from 9 o'clock until 6 o'clock. And it was fun, it was good, and that I suppose was a kind, I mean not that there was a turning point or anything but that probably was a step up in our relationship, development or whatever."
JB: "What do you think it was about having that whole day with him?"
"Well, just he had my full attention and I had his full attention and that was pretty much it, it was just the two of us sitting there going 'what are we doing next?' kind of thing… it was probably no more and no less than that. But it was at a stage where, I had certainly done that and a similar kind of duration maybe four weeks earlier, but he… hadn't developed to a stage where really it was much more than constantly looking at him… [I] had a degree of comfort with being able to handle him without literally dropping him, changing nappies, what

to do if he pukes, how to wind them, it was fine like at that stage, you're just so much more confident as well." Eoin

"Another 10 day period where it was just the two of, three of us and spending a lot of time all day with him, I think, he, probably, that was probably where we kind of clicked." Donal

"When we went on holidays, because he could recognize me, and we were in a strange place, there was no other family, there was no one else around except me, Aisling and him, and he was much.... he was enjoying being with me much more than he had been previously. I really felt that, I really enjoyed that. I wouldn't say that before that we hadn't bonded, it's just there was a real connection then." John

"I think that's the moment when, he must have been two and a half months then, when I really felt the bond, I mean, we, I spent a lot of time with him when he was young, and I held him, and everything, and I certainly, the emotions were there, and everything, but that was the first time I felt the interaction was there. And I, I don't know whether it's really possible to bond until you see that interaction." Bill

What seems clear from these accounts is that this group of mean feel that it is important to maximise both the amount of time they spend with their child, and the care that they provide. There appears to be a link here to Sayer's suggestion that time is "the ultimate parental resource" (Sayer et al., 2004, p10), and the views and behaviour of these fathers would seem to contest Dermott's finding that for the fathers in her study it was not the "total amount of time spent with children that counted in these fathers' version of good fatherhood" (Dermott, 2008, p62).

Still a secondary parent?

Despite the fact that most of the fathers seem confident in their abilities to care for their child and the fact they established a strong bond and reciprocal communication, many of the fathers talk about how the connection between the baby and the mother is the primary one. They generally ascribe this primary emotional connection to the time that the mother and child spend together and in some cases to the intimacy created by the breastfeeding relationship. This is consistent with the views expressed by many of the men prior to the babies' birth that the mother remains the primary parent, similar to the context described by Lupton and Barclay (1997) where "it is still considered that the mother is the more important to her child's welfare than the father", but refutes the claim that women "'instinctively' possesses a greater capacity for nurturance"(Lupton and Barclay, 1997, p147).

Despite the fact that the evidence of what these fathers do and the kind of relationship that they have with their child suggesting that they play an intimate part in their babies' lives, the fathers seem to ascribe to the discourse that gives mothers primacy, seeing it as a 'natural' situation.

> *"It's definitely more intense for her you know, cos she's breastfeeding all the time especially at the start... you definitely still know that you are kind of there as a secondary role, no matter how much you put into it, even the most involved father is a secondary provider... even if you're doing your 100% you realise that... what you do isn't the same 100% as what a mother does... I'm at work so she's with [the baby] like 24 hours a day, so she'd definitely have more of a bond with her, like but I don't think that's a bad thing either." Fergal*

> *"I'm a realist, I know he craves his mother, I'm not going to want for me to be the number one because I know what she's doing, I know the role I play. I know my time'll come, I'll go off and take him to football or ballet or whatever*

he wants to do we'll do it, but I understand he needs his mum now, at the moment." Tony

"She's obviously bonded much more with her mother because obviously Judy spends a lot more time with her." Shane

"He doesn't recognise me in the same way as he recognises his mum." Tom

This apparent contradiction between the fathers' practice and their attitudes is especially notable in the small number of men who seem to hint at a special relationship they have with the child, in that they are able to deal with certain situations better than the mother is:

"I know he'd fall asleep a lot quicker when I was sort of holding him, and I think because of my size, I know that, he finds it easier to, doze off on my shoulder, and also, um, burps and, he'll just sit on the shoulder and he'll burp, so he finds it easier, and, I know he, he tends to sleep more readily for me, than he does for Sarah for some reason." Jim

It is possible to argue that it is not surprising to find the fathers' essentialist viewpoint of the role of mothers and fathers at this stage in the baby's life, due to such factors as their physical dependence on the mother during breastfeeding, and the maternity leave provision meaning that they are likely to spend up to the first 40 weeks of their lives primarily cared for by their mother. As Dermott's study and a number of the quotes above illustrate, "the substantial amount of time their partners spent with the children was responsible for any dissimilarity between their partners' parenting and their own" (Dermott, 2008, p86).

On the whole the fathers do not seem to feel excluded by the mother-baby dyad, and again in common with Dermott's findings (2008), they are prepared for their own relationship with the baby to evolve at a different pace or at a later date. Some men refer to the fact that they expect the work they are putting into the relationship with

their child at this stage in their lives to pay dividends later on, while others have clear aspirations for the kind of relationship they want to have with their older or adult child.

> *"I'm gonna start with a good strong interested connection and it's like work on it every day [hmm] and that's the plan anyway. So that I never get to that point where I actually take a good long look and think "hang on, I haven't really spoken to my son or my daughter for the last week" ... I mean I don't like to use fancy words, bond or connection but I think it's, you know, I'm enjoying spending time with her and I make sure I do spend time with her." Nick*

> *"What I would be planning on doing is to try and be as kind of emotionally supportive [in a way] my father certainly wouldn't have been... without getting into all the gories of different era, different way of viewing things, I'd like to be a more, I'd like to feel a lot closer now to [the baby] hopefully than I would've felt with my dad." Eoin*

> *"I'd hope that myself and [the baby] will have really good chats, you know and have the craic and imagine getting drunk together when he's older or something stupid. I don't know falling in a lake or being silly... for him to be at ease with me as he gets older... see me as his dad, someone to respect ,and someone with a lot of experience and knowledge and wisdom hopefully, but also somebody who'll have the craic with him." Robert*

> *"I'm planning the first surfing trip together, the boy, and when am I going to get him on the golf course, you know, all those sort of things, I'm already thinking about." Bill*

Like fathers in previous studies, these men "seek to fill the space left by their own fathers with a fuller and more committed presence that they hope will be experienced and remembered by their own children" (Daly, 1995, p40).

In talking about how their relationship to the baby was different to any expectations they might have had, some felt that they had naïve expectations while others were reassured that they felt more interest in their baby than they feared they might have.

> *"I thought it was all going to be – we were going to best buddies from day one and, like, you don't get a smile out of them for weeks. He cried an awful lot – that's the only advice I'd be giving. Don't be disappointed when all you have is someone who sleeps, wakes up, feeds and cries. That's basically what you've got for about 6 weeks. I was a bit disappointed, not disappointed, just - I wasn't getting enough from him.... I was expecting from day one he was going to come home and be a "goo, goo, dada", from day one, but that didn't happen for a while, so that would be the only advice I'd give someone, bide your time, they will, they'll become cool in the end." John*

> *"I do actually feel quite a bit differently towards him than I did towards, towards other kids which is perhaps obvious but um you know I am interested in finding out what he's done today and what, what's going on and that's something, where as I would have been well why are you asking, I don't want to know, I'm not interested in what your baby's done today, but it's now my baby so I am… I feel more like I want to engage with him and his development… I feel a bit more reassured about how I feel about his future and how I want to, how I'll be a part of that future, than I perhaps, I was slightly worried that I wouldn't feel as, like I wanted to be as involved as, as my friends appear to be." Tom*

Alex reflects that although he is happy with his performance as a father so far, he feels that there are many tests yet to come, and he doesn't know how well he'll do at the other stages of fatherhood, and doesn't want to be complacent and perhaps is a little nervous of the future.

> *"I'm a dad of babies it's, it's definitely not the same as being the, the father of children so I don't think I have the full experience… I'm comfortable and I know very well what to do now but what am I gonna be like when they start crawling, when they start talking when you know they start saying no, I dunno, I might be, I might become the worst father in the world." Alex*

A number of the men reflected on the novelty of the emotion they felt for the baby, and reported a strong sense of having been through a life changing experience.

> *"You've never had a feeling about a person like this before, even Clodagh or my parents or anything. It's just the unconditional side of it and I know it sounds corny and I know it's in all books and films, but you actually do, it's scary, you'd lay your life on the line for this little thing that you just met there only a few months ago, the reality of that is, is, was quite life changing." Des*

> *"He's never gonna grow up and not be your son. He's gonna be your child for the rest of your days until you die and that's kind of overwhelming." Robert*

> *"You still kind of pinch yourself sometimes, like, you've got this gorgeous baby that you know you've created and is totally dependent on you." Eoin*

> *"For the first time you become not the most important person in your own life… but when there's something that is utterly dependent on you I think that changes. I think it's a pretty fundamental psychological change I guess, you know, so that, that has an impact on every decision you make from there on." Donal*

This sense of a unique life experience and that "the longer term consequences of become a father are incomparable to any other life experience" (Dermott, 2008, p68) provide an insight into the strength of emotion these fathers have about their transition to becoming fathers, which has been found in previous studies.

Reflections on being a father

Becoming a 'sap'

It was common for many of the fathers to comment on how having the baby had made them look at their world or their lives in a different way, seeing things through a new lens. For some this manifested itself in being more sensitised to events in the outside world, perhaps watching a movie and being reduced to tears. For others, they felt that they had become more emotionally switched on, aware of other people in a different way, and perhaps even prepared to be more emotionally available to other people, even beyond their immediate family circle.

> *"I've become a sap… you feel great cos you're like, jesus I had no empathy at all beforehand like you know, like you know whatever, but yeah a total sap, yeah, crying all the time, me and, and Judy too like, like we were watching this thing the other day there, there was a movie on channel four or something… that's probably the biggest change I've noticed, I'm a total sap."* Shane

> *"Has it softened them a bit? I'd like to know, is it just me, or are there other people out there."* Tony

> *"if I knew of somebody that I didn't particularly know, that was going through this, I would, you know, I would help them out… certainly I would feel more connection with my other friend who is going to go through it all, you know."* Michael

> *"I have kind of found myself eh I, am probably much more kind of compassionate I think in terms of eh just complete strangers… I find myself kind of looking at people just about here um eh just kind of at the edges of the eyes and kind of seeing them as kind of you know 2 month year olds or something like that. That's not something I would have thought in advance that I would have found myself doing."* Conor

"I think eh having a baby makes you more in touch, brings you more in touch so you can be kind of um wussy and like that's ok cos you're you've just got a baby [so you kind of] so you talk, men funny enough they open up and talk to you a bit more. " Robert

There is a contrast with Lupton and Barclay's (1997) findings here, in that they only had one man in their study explicitly discussed how becoming a father had led "him to see the world differently"(Lupton and Barclay, 1997, p149), whereas this experience of becoming more emotionally sensitised to other people and external events seemed to be common to many of the men in this research group. Other studies (Brannen and Nilsen, 2006) have also found that men attribute a new capacity to care for others as being linked to their fathering role, while others also comment on the unique impact becoming a father has had on them (Dermott, 2003).

New priorities, new behaviours

For many there has clearly been a shift in behaviour as their priorities have changed, and many comment on the way in which spontaneity is a thing of the past, and now everything has to be more carefully planned and organised.

"The thing for me used to be going out and meeting friends whereas it's not really a priority for me anymore like cos I'm thinking about other things, like I'm thinking about you know, getting up early in the morning, you know, hoping it's a nice day to go out to the park… Your freedom is being curtailed I suppose is, would be a big issue but at the same time you kind of accept that and you just, the sacrifices that are there and then there's rewards that are there and the rewards outweigh the sacrifices." Fergal

"You just got to accept you can't have everything instant, or you can't do stuff instantly that you would've done in the past." Peter

"Everything has to be organised, you've got to plan everything ahead, you can't just go to the door, so domestic life has got, it's tougher but it's not.. I wouldn't complain about it you know." John

Some have been surprised and even overwhelmed by the changes to their lives, while for others, they expected more change, and have been surprised that the upheaval has not been more extreme.

"When [the baby] was born, like the old life stopped and the new life begun, somehow, and it's heading in a totally different direction, and I was not exactly the one who was at the helm."
JB: "Yeah. And did that come as a surprise to you…?"
"I was surprised by the might. Like, I thought that you had more possibilities to influence it... I have underestimated the momentum of having a baby! [laughter]" Philip

"I was ready for 'oh you know this is, we have a baby that's the end of your life'… whereas it now, from my perspective it seems very much the same so, if anything it's less dramatic than I thought it would be." Tom

"I think we may have been a bit more realistic than say somebody 15 years younger than us, or so. So we were expecting it to throw us out." Bill

New responsibilities

A number of the fathers talk about the emotional impact of the responsibility of having a child has had on them.

"A child's not just for a few months, for a few weeks, he's here for good and that's oh, that's frightening sometimes like woah must think about that, like oh my god like forever." Robert

"I think quite quickly you become conscious that there is now considerable responsibilities, financial and every other way, and I suppose, protective sort of instincts." Donal

Reflecting back on how they felt prior to the baby's birth and how well prepared they felt they were, some fathers felt that no matter how much you tried to prepare, no matter how many books you read, it was very difficult to really comprehend what it means to be a father and that theoretical knowledge is no substitute for the actual experience. Others felt that the baby didn't really "exist" for them until it was born, it was a concept rather than a reality, linking back to the sense of detachment many of the men expressed in the pre-birth interviews.

"I think there's a big difference between reading the information and actually going through it yourself and you just have to kind of go through it and deal with it as it happens, I think, but you don't know how you're going to deal with things." Conor

"I tried to think about it and tried to kind of imagine what it would be like but I couldn't and lots of times I thought about what would it mean and how would things change… I guess I found out that you can't really know what it's going to be like so I kind just kind of trusted… hopefully we'll be equipped to look after the child and things will be ok." Robert

"To be perfectly honest I mean I um I didn't really think about a baby until he existed… typically male thing um you know my own primary concern was that Eimear was going to be ok… [also] the baby was going to be ok, but sort of an abstract concept until it exists … then it, it really exists and then you just start looking after it. But up until that point it was quite a kind of abstract sort of thing which was sort of difficult to get a, your head around…. but the actual and probably psychological flip happens when they exist… up until that point it's just a little bump and it's the health of another person, as opposed to an actual living thing" Donal

"You find it weird getting emotionally into it when nothing exists yet [sure, yeah] you know [it's just a kind of idea] yeah it, it's still the concept until he's actually there." Des

Good enough fathering – finding your own way

A number felt that it was important to try not to be too hard on themselves, and to try and find a way to do things and deal with things that felt right for them, and wanted to make it clear that what might be right for them as an individual may not be right for other fathers. There did not appear to be "a fundamental anxiety about who they should be or how they should act as fathers" (Daly, 1995, p39) and in contrast to the men in Daly's study, this group of men seemed to have a quiet confidence in their own abilities to write their own job description as fathers.

"I try not to be too hard on myself, you know, I just try like to think like this is my own personal experience of it and the way I do it is the right way for me, I try to take that approach to the whole scenario." Fergal

"I don't think there's any right way or wrong way, I think there's just everybody's different way and I don't think we're doing too bad." Tony

"It's very different for every individual, I'm quite proud of the fact that I was a hands on parent and somebody who wasn't afraid to get stuck in." Alex

"The two of us have just kind of done what we felt was right and seems to work, working, and he seems to be very happy and so I, and people have done this for thousands of years, so, by that method, so you know maybe it's not so bad." Donal

"I purposely didn't read the books and stuff cos I didn't want to have any expectations about anything… I wanted to form my own opinion and kind of go

my own way, do my own thing, like I'm kind of independent that way anyway, I think, generally." Robert

Experienced fathers

When asked what advice they would like to pass on to other men who are about to become fathers for the first time, this group of men came up with a wide range of suggestions, from the more light hearted to the more serious, and a number of them emphasised a resistance to the negative messages they felt they had received about becoming a father and having a family.

"I'd say don't listen to all that negative crap like cos it's all brilliant. It will be hard, there will be hard things to do but all the good things outweigh it and don't be listening to 'you'll never have a life again' and all that sort of crap." Conor

"There's been a change but it's, it's not been a disruption, it's not as if our lives have collapsed. Things have evolved and moved on. We're parents now, we're kind of, we don't go out as much, we don't want to go out as much, you know things have changed, yes, but they've changed for the better, you know, and they change in a wonderful way." Frank

"I would say it's fantastic, having a, I'm delighted I've got a son". Peter

"We were having advice from everywhere and anywhere, and everybody was giving us advice and you read books and everything like that, and, you just become totally confused. So I suppose the bit of advice was, try and stick to one bit of advice [laughs]. Pick a bit of advice and stick to it, and don't, try not to get confused. Don't buy all these baby books that contradict each other… I suppose a big bit of advice is to have your family nearby [laughs]. Yeah, that's the one thing I would change." Michael

"Bide your time, don't expect too much too soon, cos the really good stuff doesn't happen till they're past the little infant stage… Don't be disappointed when all you have is someone who sleeps, wakes up, feeds and cries. That's basically what you've got for about six weeks." John

"I would advise every father and every mother to go out and drink loads and party cos that's practice for when they have the kids!… I would say not to get frustrated, the first three months are very difficult… it's like a war breaking out , you stop thinking what your life was before the war broke out, you're not thinking what you're gonna be doing when the war ends, you're stuck in there and it's day to day survival. Three months, the most difficult of my life, but after that, things get better, a lot better, so be patient and [don't] be afraid to get stuck in." Alex

"Don't wear so much warm clothes when you go to the hospital, just don't wear woolly cardigans or woolly socks and the place is bloody roasting!" Shane

"It's about like just relaxing and taking things easy and a day at a time and appreciating what you have right now." Robert

"It's completely different life but it's great, but just in a different way." Des

When talking about the overall experience of the first few months of fatherhood in this way, it is striking that while the men acknowledge that having a baby has wrought huge changes in their lives, they do not seem to resent this upheaval and the challenge to their sense of control over their own lives (Lupton and Barclay, 1997) has not caused them any great "distress and frustration" (ibid, p145).

Conclusions.

What emerges from the interview data provided by this group of men during their transition to first-time fatherhood is a sense of the physical, emotional and psychological process they go through. Starting from a point of anticipating fatherhood, where they feel somewhat distanced from the baby and from the reality of what being a father means to them, they progress, via their involvement in the birth and the practical care they provide to their infant, to a state where they are immersed in the pleasures and the pains of fatherhood.

They also clearly "recognize that like all relationships in this post-traditionalist society they need to work at and earn the identity of father rather than assuming it as an automatic right"(Featherstone, 2003).

Their day-to-day involvement in parenting shows the investment of time that they are prepared to make in their fathering, serving the dual purpose of supporting their partners and building a knowledgeable and meaning-filled relationship with their child. This level of involvement suggests a move towards a more gender symmetrical model of parenting, which could offer a possible route to "back door equality" (Dermott, 2008), in that providing this level of childcare goes some way towards addressing the imbalance between the genders when it comes to domestic responsibilities.

In order to provide this level of practical care to their babies, the fathers in this study give priority to spending time with them, particularly solo time, which allows them to grow in confidence in their abilities to look after their child and add to their intimate knowledge of their child. The importance placed on this father-child interaction is set in contrast to the experiences of their own childhoods, which were characterized by fathers who seemed to have little time to spend with their children, whether due to work demands or cultural expectations. The lack of explicitly expressed emotional warmth and communication provided by many of their own fathers has been rejected in favour of a father-child relationship characterized by a close and supportive emotional connection. It is clear that emotion and care (Smart, 2007, Doucet, 2006) are connected in a self perpetuating loop: that providing care leads to a deepening connection, which in turn leads to a continued motivation to provide care.

This novel experience of providing nurturance and building a strong attachment to the child also seems to be connected to a broader sense of emotional awareness in the fathers, seeing them sensitized to people and events beyond their immediate family in a new way. This suggests the transformative potential of fathering, as taking men out of the normative roles prescribed for them, blurring the boundaries between hegemonic masculinity and traditional femininity. In common with Doucet's interviews, these accounts also "reveal significant movement and flow within households that disrupt the seemingly binary picture" (Doucet, 2006, p221).

Chapter Eight: From Couple to Family Unit

The impact of becoming parents on the quality of couples' relationships has long been a subject of academic interest, particularly in psychology and family studies (Belsky, 1985, Belsky and Rovine, 1990, Lawrence et al., 2008, Mitnick et al., 2009, Cowan and Cowan, 1995). The transition to parenthood can bring new challenges which "can outstrip existing resources, trigger new problems, or amplify pre-existing vulnerabilities and inadequacies" (Cowan and Cowan, 1995, p412). As Lawrence et al point out, there have been two "broad perspectives" on changes to marital relationships, where either "the transition to parenthood is viewed as instigating a shift in the marriage whereby most couples are expected to experience a qualitative change in their relationship that is relatively abrupt, adverse in nature, relatively large in magnitude and likely to persist" or whether the transition is "understood as a significant but transient stage in the development of marriages and families" (Lawrence et al., 2008, p41).

Generally the transition to parenthood has been associated with a decline in couples' satisfaction with their relationship, and although recent studies comparing parent couples with childless couples (Mitnick et al., 2009, Doss et al., 2009) have shown a decrease in relationship satisfaction in both circumstances, there seems to be consensus that "parent couples experienced a significantly steeper drop in satisfaction compared to nonparent couples" (Lawrence et al., 2008).

Much of the previous sociological literature examining fatherhood and parenting has been interested in feminist concerns relating to the division of domestic labour, both childcare and housework, and how this influences the gender relations of couples (Fox, 2001). The extent to which men have taken on an increasing share of domestic labour has been debated, and there is evidence that "even egalitarian couples often revert to a stereotyped division of labor with the birth of children" (Matta and Carmen, 2006, p20), and studies have shown that women continue to do the bulk of childcare and housework, what has come to be known as the "second shift", even when they work outside the home (Hochschild, 2003).

Anticipating changes to the couple relationship

During the pre-birth interview the men were specifically asked about if and how they expected their relationship with the partner to change once the baby had arrived. There was generally a consensus that this was an issue that they had thought about, although the degree to which it was discussed by the couples varied. This pattern is similar to the one found in responses to the "Becoming a Parent" questionnaire, where the majority of couples reported that they had talked frequently about the impact they expected the baby to have on their lives. Only two respondents said they had not discussed it.

Out of the sixteen pre-birth interviews only Peter did not seem to think that his relationship with his wife would change. But he also admitted that he hadn't given the subject much thought, and seemed to be almost puzzled by the possibility of a change:

> *"I haven't really thought about it. But, I don't think... I don't think it'll change. I don't see why it would change. I know the baby's there as well, but... um... I think we're both fairly independent, as well as being married. You know, happy doing, I'm certainly happy doing me own thing. Happy being on me own and that sort of stuff. So... I don't think it'll change our relationship too much, honestly, no I don't really see it changing. But, again, why would it? Would you expect it to become stronger? I don't know. Having a baby, I don't know. I don't see it changing." Peter*

On the whole this is unusual, with most men saying that they had at least thought about the impact of becoming parents on their relationship, and many also explicitly said they had discussed this issue with their partners, and others implied that they have talked to some extent more generally about parenthood and its impact on their lives, even if they have not discussed the impact on their relationship.

Whether they have talked about it or not, most of the men appeared unconcerned about the impact of the baby on their relationship because they had a faith in the strength of it.

"I think it has changed to a certain extent, I think it will change a bit further, but in a positive way. I think it was something that we both wanted to do, we very clearly made the decision that we want to do this, and it will change things, but we're, um, happy with, that's part of it... It hasn't changed that much of our interaction with each other. We were always very much, we would talk and talk about things... Obviously it will make a difference just in terms of time. And where your focus is as well, but I think again, that it won't be a negative thing. We'll both be very happy to be in that position." Conor

"We'll work our way through it and just, I think we've got a strong relationship which will hopefully come together, in times of difficulty, rather than drive a wedge between us." Nick

On the whole they seemed to be realistic about the fact that there would be changes, and challenges to becoming parents, but generally they seemed to be content to embrace this and saw such change as a positive impact on their lives together. This finding would seem to reflect previous research which suggests that "having a child together can produce a special sense of community, thereby deepening a couple's relationship, especially if the expectations are realistic and the couple is prepared for some kind of change in their intimate relationship" (Ahlborg et al., 2005) and Cowan and Cowan's assertion that "a baby's arrival is unlikely to destroy very well-functioning marriages or generate closer, more satisfying relationships between already troubled partners" (Cowan and Cowan, 1995, p415).

The couple relationship already changing

Some men talked about changes to their lives that had already taken place, either as a result of their marriage or co-habitation, or as a result of the pregnancy. Certain men talked about changed habits since they became part of a couple, such as what time they go to bed, while others talked of how they have cut back on drinking and socialising with their friends, or reduced their leisure activities. In some cases it wasn't just the men whose behaviour had changed; Tony described how his wife's attitude

towards her own family of origin had changed from the moment of their marriage, when she didn't telephone them from their honeymoon because she felt that her husband was her family now.

If behaviour and habits had not yet changed for other men, then a number of them talked about their intentions to change once the baby had arrived, in order that they could support their partner. In one case, the interviewee talked about the tensions and conflict that had already arisen during the pregnancy due to differing views about the extent to which the father's behaviour ought to have changed already.

> *"That was part of the problem, whereas I thought, ah, nothing's changed, everything's cool, I can do whatever I want, but she's, and she's right. I know she's right. I just didn't want to admit it for a while. Put up a bit of resistance, but at the end, I knew she was right, and the simple answer is I don't do it anymore." John*

There was awareness that they may need to give up some of their more 'selfish' behaviour, but on the whole these men embraced this as a positive step and they appeared to accept that this was part of the process of becoming a parent.

During the course of the interviews the respondents were not asked a direct question about their sexual relationship, any changes they had already experienced during the pregnancy, or that they expected post-birth, although they were asked about one-to-one time and what kind of impact the baby might have on their relationship. Only one man took this as an opportunity to talk about the impact on his and his partner's sex life.

> *"Well, one thing would be the sex life. That will change inevitably. You know. [takes a deep breath] I mean sex is, on an intellectual level it's, it's not in the least important, on a physical level, of course, it is. It's not ideal, I think, you know, 'specially sort of late pregnancy, and being knackered all the time. And tiredness is the enemy of sex. So there's that. But I mean life is choices. You know, and I've chosen that. Um…"*
>
> *JB: "And is that something you've discussed together as well, or is it something that in your own head you've just…?"*

INT: "Um, more the latter, but slightly the former. I mean, we do both recognize, that our sex life hasn't been as good, in pregnancy. Um, and that it will change, after the baby's born. Yeah, we can live with that." Aidan

So while the vast majority avoided any explicit reference to their sexual relationship, most did talk about the need to keep in touch with the couple as a 'base unit', viewing it as the original form from which the family is evolving. There is a strong sense that this group of men were aware of a need to work to 'maintain' their relationship as a couple, and many had a concern that the baby would not become all consuming, dominating every part of their lives.

"We don't want to have everything be totally taken over with the kid, we still want to basically, as much as we can, maybe go out for a meal, once a month, or something? So, just to acknowledge the fact that there's still the two of us and that we're not all about, all about the new arrival, So, in that sense we have talked about it so, there is a concern there, but I think, the concern is managed by making sure you do something – we would be concerned that we would just kind of disappear." Shane

There is also a pattern of seeing their approaching parenthood as the next phase in their relationship as a couple, it's something that they felt ready for, or they felt it is time for their relationship to 'evolve' and for them to broaden the focus away from themselves, and focus on something outside themselves.

"If the baby didn't come, I thought, well, were we going to continue to be the kind of people who continually go to the pub, and continually go out, because they don't have a child? And you know, there comes a time when you've done enough of that, and you need to move on to the next stage, and I just personally feel that we as a couple have arrived at that stage, and it was a healthy thing for us, I think, in our relationship, that she got pregnant… I think it's the next stage, of our kind of, evolving relationship. And I think it was, like, it was necessary. And I think it'll probably bring its own difficulties." Frank

Overall, the majority of the interviewees are realistic about the fact that their relationship with their partner is likely to change with the arrival of the baby. There is some variation on the extent to which they have discussed these changes with their partners and wives, and also a variation on how concerned they are about having the capacity to deal with such changes. However, mostly they place great confidence in their existing relationship as being strong enough, and their habits of communication established enough, to get them through the inevitable challenging times ahead.

Mutual support and mutual dependence

When it came to the post-birth interviews the men were asked about whether and how their relationship with their partner had changed since their baby had been born.

It would seem that none of the fathers who were interviewed reported any seismic shifts in their relationships with their partner, in fact, those changes which had taken place were generally subtle. Many of the fathers reported that they felt that their connection or bond with their partner had been strengthened by the experience of becoming parents, although a minority also reported that they felt that some distance had come between them and their partners since the baby's birth.

The sense of closeness was often described as stemming from the experience of mutual support and shared purpose, particularly during the most challenging early weeks or months of the babies' lives, echoing the "special sense of community" described by Ahlborg et al (2005).

> *"It's not wildly different… there's a common purpose which is great and means that certain things are almost, there's a reflex of understanding where you just know that she is pretty much thinking what you're thinking." Conor*
>
> *"It's enhanced, I guess, in terms of, obviously, we care for each other but we've got that mutual care and love for [the baby]." Nick*
>
> *"We both depend on each other a lot more now. We're a lot closer, I suppose." John*

Some fathers found it hard to articulate what the changes in their relationship with their partner were, again suggesting that changes in the relationship were subtle rather than substantial.

> *"I'd say it has changed things between us but if you were to ask me how it's changed things between us I wouldn't actually be able to say well this and this and this." Fergal*

For some fathers it seems that the baby has resulted in them and their partners feeling that their relationship has become more solidified and permanent, while for others this sense of commitment had already happened, for example when the couple got married.

> *"I think there's more recognition now and with the relationship yes, we were married and all that but now it's definitely more permanent." Alex*

> *"When we got married it changed because we felt more committed to each other, I suppose maybe having a baby has made us feel a little more committed to each other." Tony*

Many of the men tried to explain the difference in their relationship between before the baby and after the baby as being a shift from two individuals in a partnership to becoming a family unit.

> *"I suppose beforehand you're a couple and then you become a family then, you feel like more like a unit." Fergal*

> *"We would be married but it was still two individuals being together, whereas now it's kind of like the boundaries have been mixed and we're operating as a family rather than Liz and Alex." Alex*

For some the new closeness came with a narrowing of focus for the couple's relationship, where the baby became a joint project which took up the majority of the couples' focus and energy.

> *"I thought it would've changed more to tell you the truth, I think you have this insane bond now, you obviously had a bond before him but it's a ridiculous*

bond and I think you can get caught up in, I analyse it a little bit that you don't spend your entire time together talking about the baby, I mean obviously, you can see why you do and in fairness we probably spend 90 percent of our time talking about him but you try to mix it up and go back to the real life." Des

In common with some of the other men, Des seemed to feel that there was a tension between the overwhelming, and for him 'obvious', focus on the baby and a desire to also get back to 'real life', reflecting the concerns that some of the men had had pre-birth that the baby would "take over".

Couples' relationships "on hold" - temporarily

However, despite a new level of closeness in one sense, a number of the men also commented on how they felt in some other aspects of their relationship they felt more distanced from their partner. Often this was a physical or sexual distance, and sometimes it was also a sense that the level of communication between the two partners had changed. Frank summed up the issue when he talked about how his relationship with his wife had been affected since the birth of their baby.

"On one level you're closer because you've done something very special and you've come through a very special experience and you look at what has happened in your life and you know that, there is a deeper bond. But on another level then I suppose, you know, physically shall we say, d'you know what I mean, in bed together, we've only had sex once since then…I mean in the first few months we were sleeping apart every night, because one of us, night on, night off and it's only in the last few weeks we've started sleeping again together. But, in one sense we've become like a family and it's a unit and there is a huge, a very deep bond, but then I suppose as a couple, as a one to one man and woman, there isn't that same passion or friction, because as I said we're not in the same bed every night and there isn't the same time or space." Frank

Frank identified a common theme for the men, in that they seemed to be struggling to find a way to balance the new needs of their family unit and the old needs of their relationship as a couple, reflecting the tension identified by Ahlborg et al "between the partner and the parent roles" (Ahlborg et al., 2005). There is limited literature exploring the impact of parenthood on fathers' sexual relationships with their partners, although popular literature in the form of parenting guides does tackle the issue: "No one talks about this, but everyone goes through it: most couples experience a radical decline in the frequency and quality of their sex life during these early childhood years" (Cockrell et al., 2007). However the recent work of (Ahlborg et al., 2005, Ahlborg and Strandmark, 2006) suggests that the experiences of this group of men are common to other couples and that "new parents' lack of leisure time together as partners makes marital satisfaction decline" (Ahlborg and Strandmark, 2006, p163).

A number of the other fathers also reported that their sexual relationship with their partner had yet to resume, or had only recently been "resuscitated", often in a different pattern to previously.

> *"It's been like kind of slow in terms of resumption. I mean, you know, we were never, never went at it like rabbits anyway but, yeah it's probably been slow." Nick*

> *"It's certainly put a dampener on another element of our life, as I'm sure after a baby is born it does with just about everybody, but with a caesarean, it certainly does even more. Not to mention, that you're tired, you're 40 and 41, and you know [laughter], I think energy levels are way down, particularly for the female in the relationship, as well. So certainly that aspect of our relationship has... yeah...[laughs]"*
> *JB: "Kind of dwindled... or died... waiting to be resuscitated?!" [more laughter]*
> *INT: "Died!! Waiting to be resuscitated, is hopefully the way to look at it." Bill*

> *"I suppose well our sex life has changed a bit as well since ... it's completely different yeah, that's the biggest change I'd say in the relationship, is that." Des*

This would also seem to reflect previous research which showed that while the majority of couples have resumed a sexual relationship by the time their baby is six

months old, eleven per cent of couples had yet to resume (Barrett et al., 2000). The same study also found that 62% of couples had resumed their sexual activity six to eight weeks after birth, and other studies report that couples resume a sexual relationship 7 to 10 weeks after birth (Hyde et al., 1996, Ahlborg et al., 2000).

The majority of the men who discussed the issue seemed relatively pragmatic about the fact that their sexual relationship was either "on hold" or less frequent than previously, seeing it as part of the parenthood package that they signed up for, and that as long as some sort of resumption of a sex life happened in the near future, they understood that the demands of a new baby are often a barrier to a couple's sexual relationship.

> *"Sex is less of a priority. Um, but that's fine. You know. Um, sex is, it's just sex like… we went into it with our eyes open." Aidan*

> *"We kind of both accepted well, that's just the way it's gonna have to be for a little while… a baby is going to disrupt certain elements of your life and that's one area." Frank*

Ahlborg et al's study also found that "new parents hoped that the parental role would be somewhat reduced in relation to the role of intimate partnership, when the child became older" (Ahlborg and Strandmark, 2006, p166).

One father found that his experience of being present at the birth and witnessing his wife giving birth temporarily changed how he viewed her sexually, and he felt this was part of the reason that it took a while for their sexual relationship to get back on course.

> *"It has taken a while yeah, in fairness, for her physically I think. It's a lot to take on board and in fairness, for me as well in my head I found it quite strange… I suppose it's, well, cos I was in for the birth… I wasn't expecting to see all this and then, and even during it the midwife was telling me to do this and that and so I was down there a lot of the time and up there and then, and I suppose afterwards it probably took me a little while, not like this long, but it took me a while to get my head around that she could be sexual being again if that makes sense… She wasn't ready in any way, so the reality is it was more*

about her physically and getting her head around it than me getting over the things I saw. " Des

A number of the men also reported that they had been able to talk about their sex life (or lack of sex life) with their partners, and often to laugh about it together, and this was part of their way of dealing with the situation.

"We'd always laugh about it. I think the key thing is just laughing about it, I just laugh and have a bit of joke round with her and she'll be honest and say "oh, I'm still a bit sore" you know "ah gee, yeah, of course"... try and keep a sense of humour about it all because if you get too stressed it only makes things worse I think." Nick

"From the very beginning, like, we'd laugh about it going 'Jesus, I wonder will we ever have sex again?' [laughter] you know, 'wouldn't that be great?'." Des

Again, the importance of communication between the couple as a way of adjusting to the new demands of parenthood was also found in Ahlborg et al's study (2006).

There was also an awareness that perhaps the sexual relationship and the wider intimate relationship between the couple would not improve without some sort of proactive effort on the part of the father and his partner.

"Things like this don't always just happen of their own accord, you do have to make an effort and it's the area in your life that sometimes people feel that you shouldn't have to make an effort, if it doesn't happen spontaneously well then it's not the real thing... don't forget about it and don't just assume that it's going to just right itself, there might be a bit of preparation or effort involved." Des

"We've been making an effort in fairness over the last month to try and make sure we sit down and talk and sit down and have dinner and sit down and, so it's not just all about the baby, but it's, socially it's very tough like, we've been out, together we've only been out twice in six months." Peter

There was also an acknowledgement that while the non-existent sex life might not be an issue now, it could become an issue in the future, particularly if it was symptomatic of a wider issue of distance in the relationship.

> *"It's just something we're going to have to work on, and you know, the baby is still sleeping in the room because he's being breastfed, and so certainly I think until the baby's fully weaned, and you know, and then it's something that we, we'll have to make sure that we're spending time together as a couple. And so that the relationship doesn't, um, fall apart, which you hear does happen, not un-often, after a baby is born." Bill*

> *"I think it's so important that you don't forget who you were before you got married or so, before you had a child because that's what brought to where you are now and by abandoning it or kind of dismissing it or not, or not focusing on it in any way, it can just slip away and years can pass and you can slip into these things very gradually." Des*

Some of those men who did not talk directly about changes in their sexual relationship often talked about the changes in their intimate lives and communication with their partners. Similar to couples in a previous study (Ahlborg and Strandmark, 2006), the men sometimes mourned the lack of time available to them as a couple, and several seemed to feel that they were getting to a stage where they wanted to do something to tackle the situation.

> *"The lack of together time on our own between myself and Clare, I mean that expression "quality time", I now actually understand what that expression means, and we do still, like, I think, many couples of course, go 'what the hell did we do with our time before?'." Eoin*

> *"Privacy for ourselves is very difficult to get. And the other point is… before we had a lot of things to talk to each other about, ourselves, or our history or, you know, our goals or our aims, or what we are bothered with at the moment, and*

I think that's gone now [laughing slightly] 90 per cent, at the moment, you know, it's everything that's connected to the baby." Philip

"In one way we're a little bit less close. He's got in the way a little bit, just a little bit, you have to be careful, you know? … spend some time together to get back to each other [yeah] whereas we haven't been, you know, and that's fine for a while that's fine for now… but we both can feel it that you know a lot of stuff is going to him and directed to, attention is directed at him and all the rest of the time we're kind of in, I don't know, operational mode or, where we're doing practical things and doing chores and tasks, both of us, all the time and you know the emotional connection isn't as there, isn't as strong as it was before. It's still there, of course, it's just a little bit below the surface." Robert

A number of the men also reported that it had become their habit to sleep in a separate room to their partner for much of the time, as part of their way of dividing up the labour of the 'night shift' with the baby, or so that the fathers would have a reasonable night sleep prior to a working day.

"We still in fairness rarely sleep in the same bed, just because, one of us tries to sleep properly and then you've you know if one of you sleeps properly it's much easier to cope with him." Peter

"During work we slept apart, myself and Anne slept apart. And [the baby] was in with her at night. And I at least got six hours sleep for working in the morning… At the weekend I had [the baby], then Anne could sleep on her own, just get time away. I suppose we were conscious, I was conscious, of trying to give her physical separation." Michael

"Whoever was on night would sleep in our own bedroom – [the baby] was in the cot – and whoever was doing the feed, whereas the other person would go into the other room, the spare room and sleep the whole night through. So basically, we would just take turns from day one and we still do it." Frank

Although this physical separateness might prove a fair division of labour, it may contribute to the sense of distance between some of the men and their partners. A sense of fairness, however, does seem to be an important factor in keeping disputes to a minimum, as a couple of the fathers reported that there had been tensions between themselves and their partners when the women felt that the men were getting more "time off" than them.

> *"She's probably a little upset that I've a, she thinks I've had loads of holidays this year [ok]. Just with friends, you know the um trip with America was work, it wasn't a holiday as such [baby noises], but I was away. And I've had a couple of trips away to England… she thinks that I've [baby noise] had lots of holidays and she hasn't had a holiday, so that's caused a bit of tension." Peter*

> *"Any arguments are about football now that I think about it, eh and, and I can understand her point of view you know she's, she's the full day with him and you know she likes a break in the evening, so if I play a match I'm not home til 8 o'clock or something and then he's nearly gone to bed at that stage so it's, it's trying to find a happy medium between me getting out to do things eh the odd time and her having a break as well." Des*

New adaptation

A minority of couples seem to have been able to keep more of a balance between the focus on the baby and also a focus on their relationship as a couple, and even sometimes time as individuals.

> *"We do make time for ourselves and we make sure that we get time on our own." Tony*

> *"I've been very conscious of like making sure that Judy gets some time to herself so I'll always kind of say 'listen Judy I'll stay here you go off go on, you know go out for a walk, go over and see your friend'… we've made sure that*

we're still doing a few bits and pieces as well just on our own as a couple exactly, dinner a couple of times, you know, things like that." Shane

All of the men admitted that there had been times of tension and arguments during the first few months of the babies' lives, but mostly they described them as momentary flare ups.

"It's not easy on the relationship, at that stage, you start to get really tired and get on each other's nerves and you're always arguing and you know, 'you get up', 'no, you get up' but that sort of stuff… we fought a lot because it's just, you're just knackered. But it's got better since then." Peter

"We don't argue a lot but it is easier to argue, it's easier to argue, it is easier to get on each other's nerves, because it's a much tougher life… it's hard work." John

"There's no question that sometimes there's stress and rows and cracks and you know in terms of having a baby and all that that entails, in terms of the amount of effort and time and how dramatically it changes your lifestyle – it definitely puts strain on a relationship at times." Eoin

It seems that the couples have generally worked hard to recognise these "cross words" as related to the situation rather than to any fundamental flaws in the relationship, and there were several accounts of one partner apologising to the other, and a general sense that the couples were cutting each other some slack, and that once things 'settle down' then the couples would go back to 'normal'.

"Definitely has put a stress on it but at the same time you need to kind of realise that it's just the stress of the situation and you need to kind of go, if you are starting to be a bit snippy or whatever like that you need to go 'listen I'm sorry, it's just tiredness' or 'it's not you'." Fergal

"We did have the cross words between each other, but we didn't, I never do it anyway. I never let it continue. I always talk it, talk a thing through and resolve it." Michael

"Sometimes like we would be short with each other but, we didn't have any major fight at all [hmm] throughout this period cos although there were reasons that for, for we, we would fight in the past now it's like, ok, it's lack of sleep and all that, and we can see how hard each other is trying." Alex

"We had one or two tense moments… you know lack of sleep, crying [baby], you're overtired and maybe, all those things and then we're sort of questioning ourselves are we doing, are we doing it right… I made sure if I did say something that in the light of day I'd think, hang on that and quickly retract and apologise." Nick

Perhaps this willingness to make compromises stems from the "increased sense of meaningfulness, which results from becoming parents" and "overrides the reduction in satisfaction" with the couple's relationship (Ahlborg et al., 2005, p167).

Occasionally different approaches to childcare could cause tension.

"She's deeply into this Gina Ford[13] person which I don't disagree with but I think that with any book like that, my feeling is that you have to say we're not talking about a machine here, we're not talking an animal and they have a personality… we all have a routine but you need to be a bit flexible so we had a bit of a, that has been a bit of an issue." Tom

"The disputes have really arisen from Sylvia trying to tell me exactly how to do it, and put on the diaper that way, and when I've lost it and snapped at her, because I'm like, 'I do this three times a day, what the hell are you telling me how to do it for?' And that's, you know, those have been the minor disagreements that we've had." Bill

Clearly these findings would seem to be similar to those of Lawrence et al (2008) who suggest that there is "marked heterogeneity in how couples negotiate the transition to parenthood" (Lawrence et al., 2008, p49).

[13] Gina Ford is the author of the best-selling parenting guides in the "Contented Little Baby" series.

A number of the men also expressed how their view of their partner had changed since seeing them as a mother for the first time, suggesting that "mutual respect and regard" and "supporting and encouraging one another as parents facilitated the adjustment" to parenthood (Ahlborg and Strandmark, 2006, p168).

> *"Huge, huge, huge, huge more admiration for her. She had, she had been through a really, really tough time, she's come through it, and, she's done an amazing job." Michael*

> *"The admiration for how she handled the whole pregnancy and how she takes care of [the baby] and the effort she puts into it and I really respect all of that… the way she tackles everything, I knew that before but, it's much more evident now, cos I'm kind of more connected to it… I'd say it's changed from that point of view, I'd have much more admiration for her capabilities." Shane*

> *"She's a better mum than perhaps I had imagined she would be."*
> *JB: "In what way?"*
> *"Well she's incredibly , she engages with him to an amazing level …she talks to him constantly even if he's sitting over there and she's over there doing something and she'll be saying "well, now I'm going to do this and I'm going to do that"… she seems very, very sort of engaged with him which I thought, I kept half expecting her to be a bit more withdrawn, a bit more kind of, you know, less than a mummy." Tom*

Perhaps this new perception of their partner helps the fathers to cope with the changes to their couple relationship, given that previous studies have suggested that "one aspect of the couple or family relationship may be maintained at the expense of another aspect" (Lawrence et al., 2008, p49).

Domestic responsibilities

One area that did not seem to cause conflict was one that has previously been cited as a frequent cause of conflict among new parents; the extent to which men took responsibility for housework. Lupton and Barclay found for some couples in their study "the negotiation of domestic labour and childcare became conflictual and distressing for both partners" (Lupton and Barclay, 1997, p126).

Of all the areas addressed in the "Becoming a Parent" questionnaire, the question relating to whether couples had discussed their share of the domestic chores changing got the lowest positive response, with 50.3% say they had not discussed this issue. The questionnaire also found that 76.2% of men expected their share of chores to increase once the baby arrived, and only 1.2% expected to be doing less. This may suggest that this sample of men are aware that the demands of caring for a baby will result in both the creation of more domestic work, and also that they do not expect the burden to be shouldered by their partners.

The evidence from both the pre-birth and post-birth interviews suggested that many of the men were already involved in many of the domestic chores. In some cases this had been the pattern of their relationship from early on, while in other cases, the men had stepped up their involvement as pregnancy took more of their partner's energy.

> *"I think we've got a pretty good balance at the minute. Without even having planned it, or discussed it, we never sat down and said 'you do this, I'll do that', we just kind of, I can't rest with a dirty kitchen, with just plates all over the place, and pots, and I just couldn't sit down and watch television, I'd have to get up and clean it." John (pre-birth interview)*

> *"I tend to do the lion's share of cooking. Washing and stuff like that...now that she's sort of laid up at the moment, you know, it's, there's even more stuff for me to do around the house. But, I'm not too bothered actually." Jim (pre-birth interview)*

"I think I've become more actively involved in house work. Um, there are some things that I'm not allowed do, I'm not allowed to do the laundry, and I'm not complaining about that [laughing]…I try and help out more as regards to doing the shopping and getting food, and Hazel does a lot of the cooking because you know, she likes to do it." Andrew (pre birth interview)

"I've also maintained the role of being the cleaner in the house, the main kind of like shopper… I was the person and I'm even more so." Alex (post-birth interview)

"I would've in the past been a bit of a clean freak and even to the point of OCD[14], I think, where everything has to be in its place and everything tidy and all that, I would, the kitchen I'm still a bit like that, I've given up because it's impossible because every day is just constant and you try to do something and five minutes later he's screaming and you have to stop. I think you have to accept the house is a kip and there's always stuff everywhere." Peter (post-birth interview)

"I would've always done the, probably quite, definitely 50;50 anyway on the cleaning, if not I'd say I'd actually do more… I don't mind hoovering and cleaning and washing dishes and that kind of stuff, Ciara always, generally does the cooking because she's a better cook than me." Robert (post-birth interview)

These accounts would seem to suggest that like some of Lupton and Barclay's couples "if the male partner was already competent and had been undertaking these tasks before the arrival of the child, the couple appeared to have fewer episodes of conflict" ((Lupton and Barclay, 1997, p127). What differs in this study is that there was much less variation than found in Lupton and Barclay's study, which may be attributable to the intervening years resulting in an increase in the extent to which men take on domestic responsibilities. The difference could also be attributed to the

[14] Obsessive Compulsive Disorder

fact that many of the men in this study had spent at least a decade of their adulthood living in a situation where they were responsible for their own housework, and had formed the habits of cooking and cleaning for themselves, often prior to establishing their relationships.

In Esther Dermott's study of fatherhood she reports that the fathers saw housework and childcare as "separate entities" and housework was "rarely mentioned by these men as constituting part of the childcare role" (Dermott, 2008, p53). In the current study the line between housework and fatherhood seems to be more blurred, in that many of the men seem to view housework as "family duties" and also as a way of supporting their partner's role, by reducing their workload:

> *"In terms of the tasks that need to be done, whether it's cleaning of the house, cooking, changing nappies, bathing, I think we'll get into, we will get into a routine… She's been working all day, to give her a rest and to take over some family duties, putting child to bed, a bath, cooking dinner. So that's how I see my role." Nick, (pre-birth interview)*

> *"When I come home in the evenings, I do the bottles, I sterilize the bottles and fill the bottles, the night before… I do whatever I can, whenever I can. And let Anne off for an evening, and give her a break, and she goes to the cinema with her sister." Michael*

In a small number of cases men said that their share of domestic chores had decreased, but they generally attributed this to the fact that their partner was at home for more time than them, whereas previously they were both out at work, and they felt that they still made a significant contribution to housework.

> *"I'm certainly doing all the cooking, and there's certainly more work with the baby around, and so it's, I think it's more for both of us. I mean, to be fair, I probably do 35 per cent of the work, maybe 40 per cent of the work, and Sylvia probably 60 per cent of the housework." Bill*

"I suppose Clodagh's at home now so she do, cos before she would've been at work and would've come home and in fairness I would probably have done most of the stuff. I was on the cooking and I don't mind doing ironing so and she would've done other things, so it would've been quite 50:50. And now I suppose she does a lot more if she's at home, like she has washes on." Des

"I think it has changed. Miriam does more of the shopping now and she's doing all of the clothes washing... as I said like, I do a lot of the washing up and the bins, well, I think it's not that much work, we do try to share the cleaning of the house." Philip

The fact that men seemed to be involved in the housework was also reflected in the "Becoming a Parent" questionnaire which found that 26% of men did most of the cooking, while 30% of couples shared cooking equally. When it came to grocery shopping 53% shared this chore equally, and 42% said they shared cleaning equally.

However this finding would appear to contradict the findings of a recent study by the ESRI (Economic and Social Research Institute) into the gender distribution of caring, housework and employment, which suggested that "the distribution of paid and unpaid work continues to vary substantially between men and women in Ireland" although "an increase in dual-earner couples has led to a somewhat more equal gender division of unpaid labour" (McGinnity et al., 2008, pxi). The same study also found that "parenthood brings a reallocation of time for both men and women, resulting in a more traditional division of labour" (ibid, pxi).

This apparent discrepancy could be caused by a number of factors. It is undoubtedly true that the men who volunteered to take part in this study were self selecting and it is possible that the sample was skewed towards a particular type of man who was likely to have a fairly egalitarian approach to domestic labour. However, the broader questionnaire group also seemed to show that men were more involved in domestic labour than might be suggested by the ESRI report. It is also possible that the men interviewed may be overestimating their involvement, and as their partners were not interviewed there is no way of verifying this. However, when you have men describing

themselves as unable to "rest with a dirty kitchen" and with terms like "clean freak", this would incline me towards the belief that their self assessments are fairly accurate! Another possibility is that the men were making a particular effort to be supportive during the early months of parenthood, and whether this commitment continued into the following years is unknown. However, given that most of the women expected to return to some sort of paid work it seems likely that the men would continue to contribute to domestic labour in the future. It is also of interest to note that in the "Becoming a Parent" questionnaire only 27% of women expected their share of domestic chores to increase, suggesting that there is an expectation from many women that their partners will make a significant contribution to the housework.

Refocusing social life towards family

A number of the men felt that in the early months of their baby's life they had put their social relationships with their partner and with their friends 'on hold', but as time was passing they wanted to try and restart that aspect of their lives. A number of couples had already made some sort of agreement or arrangement to allow each of them time "off", pursuing individual activities, and negotiating for a night away, and others had found a way to spend time together as a couple without the baby.

> *"You don't really care about it for the first while and you're really not too bothered about it you know, we're getting to the stage now five months in where you get the odd inkling and go I wouldn't mind actually going out." Des*

> *"Going out with Ciara, I think it's, for some reason it's like a switch that's been switched off for now but I definitely want to switch it on we both do, get out and just whatever, go for a walk or anything at all, go to a pub, go for a meal." Robert*

> *"Just last Friday, which was my farewell drinks for work, and I cashed in all my brownie points to have Friday evening and Saturday morning off and I went out on the lash." Alex*

"We're still trying to arrange this, I think, that we have one day each… So like Miriam's got a day thing at the moment where she goes to pilates and then maybe meets her girls, and I go for an evening's sailing. And then we normally try to arrange that we've got one day for both of us when we can get a babysitter. That's not happened yet, but I think it's on the cards." Philip

Others had yet to reach this stage, but aspired to it.

"What we've basically both agreed is that one week in a month, at the very least, each of us will have a weekend that we can do something on our own if we so wish, which seems to me, once the baby has stopped breastfeeding and it gets a bit easier." Bill

Many of the men report that they did not miss the opportunity to go out socialising, preferring to spend their free time at home with their partners and babies. A number also expressed some relief at having an excuse to opt out of the pressure to go out at weekends, feeling that they have moved on from that stage of their lives.

"I'm not as interested in going out as I used to be. And um, what I actually enjoy, if I'm doing anything is just to, sort of, sit down with him and chat… I've been out a couple of nights, but I always want to get back." Jim

"Now the invitation might or might not come and I just don't have any interest… I'd much rather just go home and just play with her and cook, cook the dinner and maybe have a half glass of wine." Nick

Early on, some couples seem to have integrated their baby into their social lives, while others seemed to have gone into a state of hibernation, hardly venturing out.

"We actually started going out pretty early, I think about a week after [the baby] was born we were sitting in a restaurant having a meal, [the baby] sitting there

happy as Larry. I think it's good to start doing that early, get used to being out different places." Fergal

"Right from the word go we took him to places, like he was five days old and we went to an engagement party which was, just put him in a corner and he was the star of the show." Tom

The attraction of going out and drinking was less appealing when faced with the reality of having to deal with a baby the next day – babies and hangovers don't mix.

"I'm less inclined to drink, because, if you drink you have a hangover, and the last thing you want is a hangover with a baby [laughs]. So I'm not willing to put myself through that." Michael

Some men expressed a mild regret that they could no longer be spontaneous, and that they missed the freedom and flexibility of their pre-baby lives. But they generally felt that the rewards of their new life more than outweighed the sacrifice of a few nights out, and that this sacrifice was part of the 'deal' of fatherhood and perhaps implicit in this, also part of the deal they make with their partners.

"You don't get as much freedom, of course you don't, but it's what you signed up for. Of course you're gonna miss, I'm seeing my friends still going out and getting twisted but they're spending a fortune doing it as well. I haven't got the fortune to spend at the moment. So, yeah, the odd time I get jealous of them but they've admitted that the odd time they get jealous of me." Tony

"My social life's over, but it's not that bad. I feared it a bit more than I should've, I thought like my social life has slowed right down, but it doesn't really bother me as much as I thought it would… it's like it's not important any more, I don't care, I don't really care! You've got to realize, going out with the lads – they're not having a great time anyway [laughs]. A lot of them think they are but they're not. When you step away for a little while you realize you're not missing much." John

"I miss aspects of the social life and the freedom, it's like I can't just say, or you know, I can't just receive a call now saying like "oh you wanna come out tonight cos such and such is going out" and I was like "yeah great" – I can't do that, or go off for a weekend, go away somewhere, all of that, we can't do that and I do miss this flexibility that I had. But it wasn't an accident having children, it was a very conscious decision so I very much accepted that fact that I'm voluntarily stepping into becoming a father with all that means in terms of responsibilities." Alex

Conclusion

Throughout this section examining the changes to the couples' relationships there seems to be a pattern for the majority of the couples that the arrival of the baby sees an initial phase of total focus on the baby and the baby's needs and routines, to the exclusion of the needs of the couple. After this initial period, coinciding with time when the men were interviewed for the second time (between four and six months after birth), this intense focus on the baby seemed to begin to reduce, as though the fathers' gaze begins to broaden and they start to look at their other significant relationship with their partner, and there is a sense that, once again, the priorities are realigning, not along the old lines, but along new lines, where the baby has been integrated into their world, but there is a desire that they do not completely dominate it, and the challenge for the future is to find a balance between these sometimes competing needs. "Having a baby brings with it not only a new identity as parent, but a rearrangement of parents' investment in their other roles – son/daughter, partner, lover, worker, friend" (Cowan and Cowan, 1995, p413).

In terms of what this chapter tells us about the distribution of childcare and domestic work (Doucet 2006; Dermott, 2008; Featherstone, 2009), it is clear that these fathers regard household chores such as cooking, cleaning and shopping as connected with providing care for their babies, and providing support for their partners. There is very little evidence of an expectation that the arrival of the baby leads to a more traditional division of domestic chores. Again what seems to be significant is the amount of time

available to the fathers to carry out housework, and that their contribution is limited more by the amount of time that they spend at home than by an unwillingness to contribute.

The realignment of the couple into the family unit also seems to emphasise the way in which the structure of the family is not one of dyadic relationships, between father and mother, father and child, mother and child for example, but a more triadic structure between father, mother and child, where each relationship is connected with the other relationships within the family unit, and sometimes the roles are difficult to disentangle. This draws attention to the importance of the context of the fathers' embeddedness in relationships with their partners, as well as with their child (Lewis and Lamb, 2007; Smart, 2007; Featherstone, 2009).

The themes of availability of time and way in which fathering roles overlap are both explored further in the next and final findings chapter, which explores the impact of fatherhood on the men's relationship to their employment.

Chapter Nine: Employment and Fatherhood

There has been extensive examination of the impact of work and the workplace on men's role as fathers (Russell and Hwang, 2004) in previous literature, particularly social policies such as parental leave or paternity leave (Hobson, 2002, Haas and Hwang, 1995, Seward et al., 2006), and on men as breadwinners, from those who have examined how breadwinning is conceptualised (Warren, 2007, Gerson, 1993) to those who have attempted to dissect the extent to which breadwinning is a "key component" (Dermott, 2008) of fatherhood or whether in fact "earning is not caring" (Dermott, 2008, p41). The literature has also paid close attention to issues of work-family conflict (Connell, 2005b) and the apparent struggle to find a balance between these two major elements of adult life for fathers is often attributed to contemporary expectations of men's contribution to fatherhood where money is not enough. Previous study has also found that fathers "lamented about not having enough time with their children, they strategized about how to make time to be with their children, and most importantly, they repeatedly emphasized the value of spending time with their children" (Daly and Dienhart, 1998, p111).

In Ireland too there has been significantly more attention paid to the competing demands of work and family life than to many other aspects of parenting. The ESRI (Economic and Social Research Institute) has published reports examining the gender inequalities in time use when it comes to caring and employment (McGinnity et al., 2008), while the Irish Congress of Trade Unions has argued for introducing statutory paternity leave to "provide fathers with the infrastructure so that they can participate in family life" (Dunne et al., 2009, p1) and the Crisis Pregnancy Agency recently produced a report calling for workplaces to be more "child friendly" (Redmond et al., 2006, p10). Despite these arguments the situation in Ireland remains one where "working arrangements are still not sufficiently flexible to enable parents to fulfil their dual working and caring roles and work-life balance policies are often limited both in terms of organisational availability and take-up, especially for fathers" (Drew and Daverth, 2007).

In terms of state policies to reconcile work and family life, Ireland, despite committing to "introduce family-friendly policies and facilitate women to enter and remain in the labour force" (Hodgins et al., 2007, p60) remains one of the few countries in Europe without a statutory right to paternity leave, although recent legislation does allow fathers the right "for paid time off to attend two ante-natal classes" (Hodgins et al., 2007, p 60).

Meanwhile, when it comes to the role that breadwinning plays in fathers' lives, Dermott (2008) clearly identifies that there appears to be contradictory data about whether or not men's attitudes towards breadwinning have changed and "no sooner does one study assert the demise of the breadwinner father than another emerges to claim that its death has been much exaggerated" (Dermott, 2008, p35).

Given this background of research, this chapter will look at "the meaning of providing financially for children" (Dermott, 2008, p42) for the group of men interviewed for this study, the themes that emerged from their descriptions of their relationship with their employment and also how their working life intersects with their family life.

Most of the interviewees worked in managerial or professional roles, including law, finance, engineering and IT, while a minority worked in white or blue collar jobs, including an electrician, a printer, an administrator, an equipment technician and a library assistant.

Changes to working patterns – moving towards "family friendly"?

At the time of the pre-birth interview, all but one of the men were in full time employment. The exception was Conor who had taken voluntary redundancy several months previously and was actively seeking work (by the time of the second interview six months later his search had been successful and he had started a new job).

One theme that emerged for a number of the men was that they had made changes to their working lives already, prior to the birth of their baby, with some moving jobs to

take on more "family friendly" roles, while others had negotiated with employers to work from home more, or not have obligations in the evenings.

> *"I've actually gone in-house, because I wasn't enjoying private practice, because I didn't think it was going to be family friendly." Jim*

A number of men also commented on the benefits of working in the public sector, which they viewed as providing better benefits and conditions, with more flexible work hours, more holidays and often more paternity leave. Others reported becoming more risk averse, preferring job security and stability in their jobs and a few moved jobs because of this.

> *"I made a decision to, to join the [public sector], in order to help out a work life balance…also for job security, as well. It's vitally important and working in the [public sector] is a lot more security than a private consultancy. So that's really why I chose it….there was more leave, in the job, so I guess that was another factor." Michael*

Jim and Michael's decisions reflect a consciousness among some of the men that they were operating in an environment of "greedy institutions" (Coser, 1974), where workplaces demand exclusive and undivided attention, and that this workplace culture thus potentially acts as a barrier to their involvement as a father. Their decision to move into a work role which would provide them with more controllable lifestyle has parallels in previous studies. For example, a 2005 US study of medical students' choice of speciality chose found that "both women and men increasingly chose specialties with controllable lifestyles" (Dorsey et al., 2005, p793), with a higher proportion of men than women opting for "controllable lifestyle specialties". The authors ascribe this preference to increasing demands for a "balanced lifestyle".

For those without the option to choose a "controllable" profession, the evidence of previous studies has found that men adopt various strategies to maximise the family friendliness of their work. Daly and Dienhart (Daly and Dienhart, 1998) report that men in their study used whatever flexible arrangements were in place to negotiate

with their workplace, or they evaluated the demands of work in a different way. "They spoke about taking pause to determine whether they must sacrifice family time to handle the situation. Several men mentioned they found this strategy revealed false urgency in many situations previously thought of as imperative... [these fathers] had to be diligent in standing guard against the invasive forces of work" (Daly and Dienhart, 1998, p116).

Not all the men in this research followed the pattern of seeking out security in their work. For example, Conor had recently taken voluntary redundancy and his impending fatherhood did not prevent him from leaving his job, despite a secure alternative being available. He felt confident he could find a better alternative job, and one more suited to his family commitments, and this outweighed the risk of being unemployed.

> *"I did consider just going with the secure option, under these circumstances, but I didn't feel I had to. It didn't kind of convince me one way or the other, and I thought I'd do better in terms of location and in terms of just the job itself." Conor*

A number of the men worked shift patterns and appeared to have less control over how their working time was structured, but were more likely to have longer chunks of time at home, which may have compensated in some way for the longer shifts.

> *"It's swings and roundabouts. It's very anti-social for the time I work, cause you've 12 hours there and I work nights as well, so be going to work at seven o'clock at night, til seven o'clock in the morning, so it's kind of anti-social like that. But then the rest of the time you're free, you know, you have three days off in a row, four days off in a row." Fergal*

Clearly, the majority of these men had thought about how having a baby was going to impact on their working life, and some had made significant changes in anticipation of the baby's arrival, in an attempt to prepare as best they could for minimising the pressures of trying to balance work and family life. This contrasts with previous

findings from a qualitative study of fathers, which found that "just a small minority have made major changes that enable them to be more involved in family life" (Hatten et al., 2002, pvii).

In a previous study of parents working in various organisations in Ireland Drew and Daverth found that 30% of fathers and 66% of mothers had "modified their working time arrangements" (Drew and Daverth, 2007, p71), with 90% of mothers and 83% of fathers reducing their time in work. The same study also found that the vast majority of parents wanted to spend more time with their children (81% of fathers, 69% of mothers), suggesting that the comments of the fathers in this study would seem to reflect a wider trend.

Although it is clear that the men in this study are not adopting a "female model" (Featherstone, 2009, p95) of working part-time or significantly reducing their working hours, the evidence would seem to suggest that unlike the fathers in Dermott's study (2008) many of them were planning to make some alterations to their work structure. Whether these intentions translated into action will be addressed later in this section.

The role of ambition and the meaning of work for fathers

During the pre-birth interviews a number of the interviewees described themselves as very ambitious and several of them would be regarded as 'high achievers' and as having high status jobs. Among this group, some appeared to feel that they had proved themselves already, and they faced a challenge in maintaining their previous level of commitment to their work, which they saw as important as part of continuing to perform well in the eyes of their employers, peers, or subordinates, or even in their own self assessment.

> *"I am ambitious, but, I know what I'm doing.... I just have to live up to my [laughs], live up to my reputation." Tom*

"I'm quite a self motivated person, and self driven, and it's probably fighting with myself more, at times, is going to be harder thing, than anyone actually beating me up for not doing something work-wise." Eoin

This expectation of being 'self-driven' seems to tie in with the workplace cultural expectations of which have seen the normalisation of the long hours culture, a concept resulting from "workload pressure, company expectations, peer-group pressure and ambition" (Rutherford, 2001, p260). According to Lewis et al (Lewis et al., 2008) 42% of fathers in Ireland work more than 46 hours per week, compared with a Europe average of 35.7%, and only fathers in the United Kingdom (43.5%) and Spain (43.4%) are reported as working more than Irish fathers. A high number of Irish fathers also expected to work at weekends and in the evenings, with 46.2% of fathers frequently working at weekends, 32.1% frequently working evenings or nights. Again, only fathers in the United Kingdom work more (50% weekends, 36.9% nights) while the European average for weekend work is 36.2% and evening or night work 27.2%.

Other men talked about wanting to progress in their careers, but did not talk about it in terms of ambition, but more in terms of maximising earning capacity, and several were studying or planned to study for further qualifications, as a way of making progress in the future.

"I've a relatively relaxed job, and I want to keep it that way, and I don't want to be climbing the career ladder just for the sake of it. I want to earn enough." Aidan

Aidan's attitude towards work would seem to suggest that, in common with other men who were interviewed, he is more of an "instrumental worker for whom employment is simply a means to an economic end" (Dermott, 2008, p36). By keeping his job "relaxed" Aidan seems to be able to come some way towards reconciling his work life with his family life.

The importance of earning – dual breadwinners

This brings us onto the topic of breadwinning, and the role that breadwinning played in this group's account of fatherhood. Firstly, many of the interviewees talked about needing both their own and their partners' incomes, even if their partner or wife was planning to return to work part time once their maternity leave was over.

> *"We've got a big mortgage, so we'd struggle a bit just on my wage, no, we'd struggle a lot, actually, if we lost her wage. So, it wouldn't really be feasible." John*

> *"That's my biggest concern, that financially, we'd find it a struggle if she packed in work completely." Peter*

A small number mentioned discussing the possibility of becoming stay-at-home dads, which may imply an equal earning capacity, but ultimately they either felt that it financially wasn't viable, or that their partner was more enthusiastic about staying at home with the baby than they were, suggesting similar attitudes to a previous study which found that generally speaking fathers want to work, and "very few wish to reduce their hours or stop work altogether" (Hatten et al., 2002, p73).

> *"We did think about for a while whether I would go part time, because Liz is the main income earner, whether I would go part-time, or whether I would give it up altogether, but we decided that we'll keep it as it is…. It would have been grand. But financially, we couldn't afford it." Alex*

> *"We did discuss it briefly in terms of, me kind of staying at home to mind the baby, but, I think, whereas Rachel would really like to do it, it's not something that necessarily appeals." Conor*

Although there was some variation in the couple's work roles, Alex is the only one who refers to his partner as being the main earner, and several refer to their partners as not needing to work for financial reasons. It would appear that for the vast majority of these men, being the main breadwinner, or at least equal breadwinner remains the dominant pattern, but also for the majority there seemed to be no question of them being the sole breadwinner at this stage. This would lend credence to the argument

that "providing money to support family life can no longer be described as the preserve of the male parent" (Dermott, 2008, p30).

Concerns about balancing work and family life

Prior to the birth, the extent to which the men had concerns about balancing work and family lives seemed to vary greatly. Some clearly saw their work as intrinsically bound up with who they are, they talked about how much they had already achieved in their careers, and seemed to have concerns about how much they would be able to compartmentalise work, so that it would not intrude on their 'family time'.

> *"I guess that's probably my biggest concern. And I would say also probably Judy's biggest concern, is how do I manage my time?" Shane*

By contrast, those who had a more instrumental approach to work, or those who seemed to find their work rewarding, did not seem as concerned that there would be a conflict between the demands made of them by their work and their commitment to time with their family.

> *"I'm determined to be successful, but within reason. I don't have any desire to have my family or have Hazel suffer as a result of me being lost in my career. And I think definitely I'll always put Hazel and the family first." Andrew*

Without exception, this group of men had thought about the impact that having a baby would have on their working lives. As previously discussed, some of them had changed their work in anticipation of this, moving to more 'family friendly' roles or organisations. Those men who appeared to be the more ambitious or high-achieving also seemed to be the ones who had the most concerns about balancing out the demands of their work with the demands of their family. By comparison, those who were more relaxed about their career progression, or who viewed their work as primarily providing them with money and security, seemed to be more able to compartmentalise their work and had fewer dilemmas about where their priorities lay.

Crucially, in these pre-birth interviews none of the fathers seemed to see their role as breadwinners as a key component of their fathering role.

Paternity leave and back to work

Moving onto the post-birth interviews, the remainder of this chapter addresses the extent to which the new fathers' experience of combining work and family life coincided with their plans and expectations.

In terms of paternity leave, most of the interviewees were given between 2-5 days by their employers but had planned to add to that by using their holiday entitlement. One said his employer did not officially give any paternity leave, but his manager 'winked at me' and gave him three extra days off. There was a broad range in the amount of time that the men planned to take off work when the baby arrived, from one week to four weeks.

According to the "Becoming a Parent" questionnaire, 68% of men were given some paternity leave by their workplace, despite there being no statutory entitlement to paternity leave in Ireland. Close to 35% of the questionnaire respondents were given three days off, 27% were given five days off, and 15% were given ten days off. Irrespective of the paternity leave given to them by their workplace, 62.2% of men said they were planning to take more than seven days off when the baby was born and 30.5% said they were planning to take 4-7 days.

There was consensus among the interviewees that paternity leave was of vital importance to them, and they tried to maximise the time they got to spend at home with their new baby and supporting their partner or wife.

> *"It's a major milestone in someone's life, and they need to just be able to put things aside while they focus on this milestone and also focus on making sure that their partner is comfortable and that everything is okay." Andrew*

"I feel really annoyed with not having rights once the child is born, legally, to take time off. I mean if I was in a company that really didn't want to give it to me, they wouldn't have to." Tony

All the interviewees felt that men should be entitled to paternity leave by legislation, in the same way that women are entitled to maternity leave, although they did acknowledge that there had been some progress made in this direction by drawing a contrast with their fathers' generation, as Peter describes a conversation he had with his father-in-law:

"[He] went to the hospital and saw the baby and then went back to work. [laughter] That's what you did!" Peter

The importance of paternity leave to this group of fathers would seem to tally with the fathers in Dermott's study (2008), where "the majority placed a great significance on the initial period and viewed the days and weeks immediately after a child's birth as an important time to be at home" (p105).

In the event of the baby's arrival, the amount of time fathers took off work varied widely, from those who had only a few days before returning to work, to Conor, who was unemployed at the time of birth and so had two months at home with his partner and child. Of the nineteen men, six had fewer than two weeks off work when their baby was born, seven had two weeks off and six had three weeks or more off work, including two who had four weeks at home.

A number of men also chose to stagger their time off, particularly if there were grandparents staying in the family home for a number of weeks to provide back up and support to the mother. A few men also took holidays when their child was two or three months old, and reported on this as a significant time of bonding or connecting with their child.

Some men report finding the transition back to work and the "normal" routine fairly straightforward, particularly if they were busy in work.

"I found getting back into work fine… I was straight back into the firing line and I didn't really get a chance to catch my breath when I came back… So I was back into the old routine, from day one [laughing] unfortunately." Jim

However, others found it harder to slip back into their old role, sometimes as a result of feeling tired and drained of energy, leaving them struggling to focus. For others it was the sense that they were missing out on what was going on at home that proved a distraction.

"I didn't care about work for a while, I was just more concerned with getting to work and getting home again … I remember going out somewhere and I just had this feeling like I'd forgotten something, you know, and then you're going "what have I forgotten?" and then you go "oh Jesus, yeah [the baby's] at home", [laughter] … you had that, such intense time where you were always with her, basically 24 hours a day, and then you have to go back to work and you feel, you have this feeling of unease about you." Fergal

"It was difficult, difficult to be thinking that she was doing things now which I wasn't able to see, which I was missing." Conor

"It was very hard to go back to work, it was harder to go back to work when I came home from the holiday than it was when I went back after the baby was born… the second time we were on holiday he really, he was loving the attention he was getting from me, you know, and I was sad when that ended." John

"I had a few weeks with, I was really sleep deprived and even kind of like hallucinating at night, not knowing whether things happened while I was awake or dreamt of. It was difficult but I managed… my performance did slow down but then when things did go better, like, I caught up." Alex

"The first few days in the meetings just going, you know, you're away with the fairies thinking about nappies." Des

"The primary problem in the first couple of months, was simple sleep deprivation, where I had to be very, very careful, in negotiations or when I was really looking at financial numbers, to make sure that I wasn't making mistakes. And that was the primary thing. And then I guess you also have to watch, how you're reacting to other people, because when you're tired you get short tempered." Bill

A number of the men seem to find it possible to rationalize their sense of separation anxiety by reminding themselves that the babies are being cared for by their partners and are in "good hands".

"You kind of realise that you can't be with her twenty-four hours a day and wherever she is, she's in good hands and if she needs you, someone's gonna call you, so you're okay. There's definitely a separation anxiety thing though." Fergal

On the whole, the men who had two weeks or more off work seemed satisfied with the amount of time that they had spent at home. Some even felt relieved to get back to work, seeing it as an escape from the pressures at home, while others felt that spending longer at home would make the adjustment back to work harder.

"In fairness, I was happy to go back to work." Peter (after three weeks at home)

"I think it's the sooner you kind of get into the rhythm the better you know… I mean, life has to go on, you know, you can't stand still forever." Donal

"I think the longer you leave it, like if I'd taken a month off I'd imagine I would have found it very difficult to click back into work." Des

There is a sense with some of these comments that the men feel they have little choice about getting back into work, and that they have to just bite the bullet and get on with it, even if for some, they felt torn about leaving their partners with the burden of the baby all day.

"I suppose in a way it was like escaping really, back to, back to work. But also, the amount of guilt that I felt was unbelievable, I couldn't get over that. That I

was leaving Anne on her own with the child. And I, and there was nothing I could do about it and it really affected me during that period." Michael (after three weeks at home)

"I was leaving for work that day… she was having a really hard time of it, and she was crying. And I was leaving for work, and it was, I arrived in at work, a bit out of my mind, you know. Um, so, it was really upsetting actually." Aidan (after four days at home)

Many of the men were conscious of how difficult some of their partners had found full days at home with the baby, and adopted various strategies to try and support them, whether phoning frequently during the day, or being ready to step in to provide a break once they got home.

"My phone calls home went up through the roof, you know, checking how things were, and phoning on the hour, every hour… I think she found it a lot harder, I know she had, she finds it quite hard with [the baby] on her own at times, and she's had to use her friends for support." Jim

"I'd phone every now and then yeah just to even, like at the start when she wasn't out, just even to, for conversation for her "how are you, do you want me to pick up anything?" It's amazing a two minute phone call can make a, a huge difference in her day." Tony

"When Sinead's been quite stressed it's quite nice not to be there five days a week because she'd get very worked up, around lunch time just in case he woke up… so actually not being there means, when you come home in the evening you can actually deal with the state that she's in without having been through it yourself… she'd be like 'ah god I've been at this all day!' it's like 'well don't worry I'm home now I'll take care of it' and very often he'll go down quite quickly - must be because I'm not as wound up about the whole day as she is." Tom

Handling the pressure of balancing the demands of work with the demands of a tired and frustrated partner was an issue that cropped up for a number of the fathers.

> *"When I come in from work she, she'd be dying to talk to me cos she's had nobody to talk to all day except him – she spends half the day on the bloody phone so I don't know what she's talking about. But she's dying to talk and I'm, I'm just dying to chill out cos I'm knackered after a day at work." Peter*

> *"It was hard cos you'd go to work and Clodagh would see that nearly as going out to play, as if you're having great craic or something and then when you come home then it would nearly be like 'Jesus Christ, help me!' you know, and then you'd be back full-on, so the day was just really, really long." Des*

> *"Sometimes… she'd be dying for me to come home, just literally hanging on to get a break and whatever and get on and do other things and so every five minutes that you're later than you'd hoped to be is a big deal… that's not good but the reality is you're stuck in the middle because you've work pressures and things that sometimes just are urgent… the more you try and explain the detail behind why this particular thing is urgent… it's very hard to make any sensible counterargument that says this is more important than your son, which I mean Clare has never thrown at me like but, Clare may have been hinting along the lines of that a bit, so it definitely causes tension." Eoin*

It would seem that, in contrast to the men in Dermott's study (2008) for whom the primary focus of paternity leave was for them to establish their relationship with their child, the men interviewed for this study were also focused on the fact that paternity leave also provided them with an opportunity to provide support to their partner. This illustrates the way in which, for this group of men, their role as a father was entwined with their role as a partner.

Tom was the only man who reported that his neither his attitude towards work nor his working practices have changed in any major way, which came as something of a surprise to him:

"I haven't really changed, I still work quite hard, quite late... I haven't found myself sitting at my desk thinking any differently about life ... I thought it might have an earth shattering effect... but I don't, I don't, I haven't really changed my view about that." Tom

Like Aidan in the pre-birth interview, Frank said that he had never felt that he was particularly ambitious or serious about work in the first place, and post-birth he reported that having a baby had reinforced his view. A number of other men also reported that they see work as a means to an end, and don't seem to regard it as an intrinsically important thing.

"If anything it has just kind of reinforced, yeah, I mean there are important things and work is, I mean it's in there, but it's not the most important thing." Frank

"I know I'm working for a reason, but I know that family life is very important so, I try not to do any overtime if I can possibly, because I'd rather have the time than the money in my pocket, time with my child than the money in my pocket." Tony

"It doesn't matter, really. At the end of the day there is more important things. When you're in work you get obsessed with it, it consumes you, and then other days you realize that's not important." John

"I am somewhere where I am enjoying it, you know it wouldn't be my number one choice necessarily but, it's a choice that I'm happy with." Alex

In contrast to Dermott's findings (2008) that her research participants "did not come across as instrumental in their labour market engagement" (p37), clearly some of the men in this study saw their jobs primarily as a means to a financial end, and seemed to take an "instrumental attitude" (Dermott, 2008, p37) towards their work. However, although work's primary meaning is financial, it does not appear that breadwinning is

a key component of fatherhood. In fact, what these men seem to be saying is that fatherhood is much more important than work, suggesting that for those for whom work is financially rewarding but not otherwise meaningful, it is fatherhood that provides meaning to their lives.

Other men feel that their attitude towards work has shifted more fundamentally, and that they have developed a more ambivalent attitude towards work – they see it as more important in one way and less important in another.

> *"I think there's a shift in how you think about everything and I suppose it's just work, well work is a big part of your life… obviously you'd be very selfish in the past, but you think about yourself the whole time, the job is for you for furthering your career and even when you get married and stuff it's obviously to help out, you work together to get to this certain place you want to be but it's still quite self orientated, but then when baby comes along it does change your, your aspect on the whole thing." Des*

> *"It puts a different emphasis on work in a way, in one respect it sort of makes work more important, in another way it makes it less important. It makes it more important since now I have to make sure I'm working cos I have to provide now… you feel like a sense of protection now where 'I have to make sure that I can feed you'… then in another sense it makes it less important cos you do not want work in the way, so you can actually spend time… it's about a balance and making sure that you spend time so she actually gets familiar with who you are and doesn't look at you and go 'who the hell are you?'." Shane*

Eoin was an example of one of several fathers who found work intrinsically interesting rather than instrumental, and who seemed to be in the midst of a struggle with striking this balance between the importance of his work and the importance of spending time with his child:

> *"It's been very hard, it's been hard. I haven't been able to make the changes as much as I would have liked… it causes tension to be honest as well and it's*

a very common problem, I guess, the problem is compounded by the commute that we have... it's the balance between the provider thing... and trying to make the best possible development in that direction, while equally not doing it at the expense of not being there." Eoin

Like many of the other fathers Eoin adjusted his working practices, spending fewer nights away from home on business, and tried to make sure that he was home in time to spend some time with the baby before going to bed, but at the time of the interview was looking at moving within his organisation to a role that would allow him a better balance between work and family life. Given that many of the interviewees worked in jobs that they did find intrinsically interesting, this struggle to find a balance between work and family life was not unusual.

There is an echo here of Daly and Dienhart's (1998) findings that "for men and women who wish to move into and sustain fully involved parenting, there is a need to change the way that they think about structure and time, especially as dictated by external institutions, so that they can be responsive to the multiple demands of their children and the home" (Daly and Dienhart, 1998, p121).

Strategies for resisting the demands of work

As outlined in the pre-birth interviews, a number of other fathers had also changed their jobs or their working practices to facilitate the type of family environment they wanted for their children, in line with the plans they had made prior to the baby's arrival, suggesting that they had been able to put into practice what they had theorised about in the pre-birth interview.

"That's why I decided to stay in-house. I still have a lot more flexibility and it means I'm not going to be working late into the night, it means I can be around in the evening and my weekends are my own." Jim

"I have to change my work, in the area that I'm in at the moment, which I don't want to, I really, really don't, really truly, I love it, I like what I'm working in. But, for the sake of my family and the sake of our future, and certainly, I want my, our kids, it's a lovely small village that Anne is from, and it's a small little school, and stuff like that, and I'm from the country myself, so, it seems just such a natural thing for [the baby] to grow up in the country. So um, that's basically, as far as priorities are concerned, my work is changing, to meet my family now." Michael

"I leave work early so I would go home you know some days I'd work from home some days I'd work from home in the afternoons." Shane

"Beforehand I think I was easily, convinced, you know, to put in those long extra hours to get something ready, or to get, I don't know, a new project… So I don't do that much overtime any more… I have to make a decision I think, if I want to be home, and see her before she is in bed, I've got to leave at a certain time, at the moment, I like to do so." Philip

Some of the fathers found that their work places were surprisingly supportive of their new circumstances, and the demands on their time and energy that the new baby made, while others felt that they have not been given much leeway, which suggests support for the idea that "workplace culture can have a great effect on fathers' ability to meet both their home and work commitments" (Hatten et al., 2002, p73). Despite this, as Russell and Hwang (2004) point out, to date there has been very little research that "examines the potential impact that workplace support for fatherhood" (p478) can have on the quality of parenting.

"I work with three other fellas all of which have families and youngish families, so they've been through it quite recently as well, so they've been great… a few of the days I went 'look I've to go home I got no sleep last night like, there's no point in me even going to this if I'm not here' you know and they go 'oh yeah go on head off'." Des

"My boss, she doesn't have children herself but she's about my own age and she just, her attitude was 'Look Frank, if you have to come in late or go home early don't even, just go, don't even, you don't have to ask me'." Frank

"The problem a little bit here is my boss is 60 and while being very 'ah, brilliant, babies, ah, Jesus, you've to enjoy this time period' blah, blah, blah… he has no idea, [no] issues working til 8 o'clock but expects all the senior management to be there you know late as well." Eoin

"I asked my manager about working from home and he wasn't keen on the idea at all, even though my role, there's no need for me to be at the office most of the time." Robert

It seems that the extent to which the demands of work "invade" family life is more dependent on the individual attitudes of the colleagues working directly with the fathers than on the culture of the workplace, and for those fathers unlucky enough to work in "greedy organisations" (Coser, 1974) attempts to balance work and family life are more of a challenge.

Work = more important *and* less important?

Interestingly, a number of fathers seem to have begun to question the value of their work to the wider world, or to have questioned, possibly for the first time, whether a different kind of career would be more amenable to their role as fathers.

"I even got to the stage of going, god, what would he think of me doing this job? I think of stupid things like my dad was a chef and I used to like telling people that my dad was a chef, dunno why but cos I think people were intrigued by the fact that he was a chef, you know, suddenly I was analysing my job from the kid's perspective." Des

"It's certainly made me think about it a lot more, you know, you do ask yourself, what really is important, and what I've been doing for the past 15 years, what impact does it actually have, you know? I guess it would be different if I was out there, looking for the cure for cancer…. I've thought about it, would I prefer… [to] have a job where, you certainly, you have a job, you work, you're probably doing something in some ways that would be more rewarding than typical business and at the same time, I would certainly would have a lot more time to spend with my child when they're playing sports, when they're giving that piano concert, or you know, whatever interests they may have. Where in my current role I can't always promise that I'll be there… you begin to ask yourself those things, and two years ago I certainly would not have been asking myself those things." Bill

Several of the fathers refer to the fact that having the baby has made them much more risk averse in the choice that they make career-wise, and for some this was compounded by the changing economic environment (these interviews took place in the latter part of 2008 when the recession was just beginning to have an impact on employment). For the small number who became the sole breadwinner, this played a significant part in their expanded sense of financial responsibility and resulting caution in relation to job decisions. For others, whose partners planned to return to work, they still felt that they were the ones primarily responsible for the financial stability of the family unit.

"I was never the sole breadwinner for the family. And I am now… you can almost be more aggressive in your own career, because if you piss somebody off, if you walk away, it doesn't really matter. You know you'll probably be able to find a job fairly quickly, and even if it's in six months or a year, you've got a wife who is earning a good salary. And now I find myself probably being more conservative in work, and maybe not taking the chances that I would have done previously. So actually, you asked me earlier how it's impacting my work, and that's probably just hit me now, that's probably the largest impact that it's had on my work, that it's made me more conservative in what I do at work,

because there's so much more dependent upon my shoulders than there would have been in the past." Bill

"I recognise the importance of work not just from the perspective of, obviously I've got to do it, put in how many hours a week so I may as well enjoy it, which I do, but the importance that, you know I need to, there's certain standards of living certain, food on table, that kind of thing. So there's, there's obviously that element but it's not, I don't see that in a negative light. I wouldn't see that in a negative light, as I said it's just another aspect that previously if I was a single bloke and I lost my job, fine, I'd go travelling for six months." Nick

"The whole world's changed so… [the current work organisation] is probably a reasonably safe place to be at the moment so, yeah but even if [there were] more favoured economics … I'd, would be more, certainly be more careful." Donal

"Like in the past for example I would leave a more permanent job to try something that sounded interesting, whereas now I would go more for the, you know the money and the stability … The conditions have changed you know it's not as easy to hop around from job to job." Alex

It would appear that becoming a father served to position employment and earning in a different way for these men, often leading them to question the meaning of their work in a way that they would not have done previously and perhaps challenging some of their previous assumptions about "the potential significance of employment for personal identity" (Dermott, 2008, p41). At the same time, some men seem to adopt a more conservative, risk-averse stance, becoming more reluctant to change their jobs as they feel their new responsibilities mean that stability and security are more important. However, unlike the men in Lupton and Barclay's study (1997) they do not see themselves as "very much *the* provider" (p96) (my emphasis). Rather they want to balance their career development with their commitment to family life.

Mothers and their return to employment

One issue that was frequently raised by the men in the post-birth interviews was their feelings about their partners' return to work. Financial considerations appeared to play a significant role when it came to the mothers' plans for returning to work. The majority of employed women respondents in the "Becoming a Parent" questionnaire (81.5%) said they planned to return to work after their maternity leave. In the interviewee sample the majority of women were planning to go back to work, and the most common reason given for this decision was a financial one, although other factors such as the women's interest in continuing to work outside the home were also salient.

> *"If we could financially survive, without her going back she probably would, so she has to go back financially." John*

> *"We need to move on so you know, we'll be buying a house and we'll have our mortgage, this would require two regular incomes." Alex*

> *"In one sense she didn't want to but we don't have any choice economically." Donal*

A minority of the men reported how they had made decisions about their own careers and financial situations in order to free their partners from the financial pressure to return to work, or to make part-time working for the women more financially viable.

> *"It would all depend on our financial situation, at the moment like we have my brother living with us and that helps us financially." Fergal*

> *"She said she'd be happier going back part time and I said well, and this was one of the things about… me taking this job rather than the other jobs, was that it enabled us to make that decision relatively easily and say well financially that will still definitely work." Conor*

"It looks like we're going to be moving to [different country] and it, part of the reason for that will be that Clare will not go back to work." Eoin

However, a number of fathers also reported that their partners actively wanted to return to some sort of work outside the home.

"She's this drive, this feeling that she has that she needs to be more engaged with people of her own age and engaged in different activities than childcare, in order that she can be a good mother." Tom

"In some ways I think she'd, she'd love to stay at home but I think in other ways I think she'd go bananas." Des

"She wouldn't be the type of person that would be just a housewife, and at the age... of 26 just leave her job, that's it, and never go back. She was never going to be like that anyway, she was always going to work." John

The issue of whether or not women return to work after having a baby has been hotly debated in the media, which positions the debate as a "war" between stay-at-home mothers and working mothers (Womack, 2006, Cavendish, 2010), and the ideology of "intensive mothering" (Hays, 1996) has received attention from the sociology community (Arendell, 2000, Douglas and Michaels, 2004, Dillaway and Pare, 2008). While the complexities involved in women's choice (or lack of choice) has been widely addressed in previous literature (Hakim, 2002, Milner, 2010, Lewis and Campbell, 2007), it is harder to find evidence of what attitude their partners have to their work.

According to Lupton and Schmied "gender difference still remains, however, in that the 'good mother' is expected to privilege her children's needs above her own and to spend more time with them to a far greater extent than is the 'good father', who still tends to be placed in the 'supporting parent' role" (Lupton and Schmied, 2002, p97). They found that in their mid-1990s study of 25 Australian couples becoming parents for the first time, several of the fathers were reluctant for their partners to work, either because they held to the ideology of a good mother being a stay-at-home mother, or

because they did not want to "relinquish their notion of themselves as 'providers' for their families" (Lupton and Schmied, 2002, p106).

In both the Australian study and Walzer's 1997 study of American couples found that the mothers they interviewed expressed guilt and shame about going back to work: "was it 'selfish' to work if their financial situation was not dire? Was it okay to enjoy being away from their babies?" (Walzer, 1997, p225). In contrast to these previous findings, the men mostly seemed to be supportive of their partners' decisions in relation to whether to return to employment or not, perhaps suggesting that this pattern of a woman's return to work has become the new norm, as can be deduced from Nick's reaction when his wife decided not to return to the workplace. Nick reported that he had been surprised that she had felt "guilty" about that:

> *"She won't be going back to work, she has no desire to go back, and it's funny because she feels a bit, almost guilty about that. I said 'gees what you feeling guilty about?' and she said 'well, it's just almost like, it's so common for mothers to go back to work now'... and I said 'well, yeah, not something to feel guilty about though', you know? It was an interesting, I was really surprised at that, I mean say again 30 years ago it would almost be your, all those mothers who did go back to work would have felt guilty about it." Nick*

This is strongly suggestive of the shifting cultural and structural changes influencing women's decisions in relation to work and family, and the way in which both men and women can be on the receiving end of competing discourses about what makes "good" parents.

In contrast to Nick, Tom seemed to be struggling slightly with his wife's desire to work outside the home, and this reflects a number of men who seem to have had some debate with themselves (and sometimes with their partners) about what the appropriate role for their partners should be.

> *"One of the opinions, strong opinions, that I have is that I feel that, rightly or wrongly, that society puts a lot of pressure on women to feel like they need to*

work in order that they are a worthy contributor to society and that being at home with kids isn't considered to be necessarily, isn't as highly rated as perhaps it should be. But perhaps I've changed that opinion a bit in the sense that Sinead seems to be the sort of person who, she says to me 'I'll be a better mum if I can do something else for part of the time'." Tom

"This is probably something where my opinion has kind of changed and I think Rachel's set her own opinion she, she'd been shocked by the thought that she could happily [stay at home full time] and I would, would never have thought that would be something that I would think, well yeah, that seems like a reasonable thing to do. Whereas I do, it seems perfectly reasonable to me if that's what she wants to do. I would worry that she'd be bored because it's a different set of challenges and I think she'd miss it, as a social thing and I think she'd miss as well the mental challenge... I also don't want to push her one way or the other because it's more important that she's happy about it really, than really anything else, with the exception of whether [the baby's] happy." Conor

Interestingly a number of the interviewees asked me whether this was an issue that other men in the study had faced, in relation to their partners and the decision about whether they should return to work, and they commented that they would like to know how other couples had dealt with it. This may suggest that the men and their partners who felt they had the financial freedom to make a choice, still felt that there was a dilemma involved in the decision about whether women should work or not, possibly connected with the discourse around the ideology of the "good mother" (Johnston and Swanson, 2006). However the prevailing idea of a happy mum equals a happy baby seemed to be the biggest influence on their choice, perhaps providing some support for Hakim's notion that in the case of this group of women "preferences are the primary determinant of fertility and employment decisions" (Hakim, 2003, p349).

Conclusions

When it comes to the theoretical implications of this data on new fathers' relationship to employment it is clear that the meaning that the men give to their work and breadwinning changes during the process of becoming a father. Although it would seem that prior to their babies' birth this group of men did not place a great emphasis on their role as a financial provider for the family, I would suggest that a more ambivalent attitude began to emerge, once the reality of the responsibility for a child sunk in, and the additional potential responsibility for providing for their partners as well. This finding is similar to that of Lupton and Barclay (1997) who found that "men often tend to approach their work lives differently once they have become fathers and feel themselves responsible for supporting their children and sometimes their partners" (Lupton and Barclay, 1997, p150). However, the men in the same research also "considered their paid work to be extremely integral to their identity as fathers" (Lupton and Schmied, 2002, p99). The men interviewed for this study do not seem to regard breadwinning as "integral" to their fathering, however, their attitudes and experiences lend support to Dermott's argument that "caring about someone may at times mean caring for them through providing financial assistance" (Dermott, 2008, p26), whether that "someone" is a partner or a child.

One of the key findings of this chapter is the importance the men place on spending time away from work, and not allowing the demands of work to invade their family time. They place great value on the opportunities to get to know their baby and support their partner that their paternity leave provided them with. It is striking that many of the men spend several hours a day caring for their child, giving them the opportunity to deepen their knowledge of their baby and give their partners a break from their full-time mothering. Once again, this adds to our understanding of how contemporary fathering is interwoven with providing nurturance to both their child *and* to their partner.

It is also clear that this chapter provides evidence of the influence of structural forces on fathering. Balancing the demands of the "greedy organisation" of many workplaces *and* the demands of (what could be seen as) the greedy family, proves a challenging task for these fathers. Their sense of losing out on time with their child when they return to work and the extent to which their work limits their ability to support their partner is clear. I would suggest that this loss stems from the patriarchal structures

that continue to position men first as workers and as fathers secondarily, and tentatively suggest that in some cases these fathers are suffering from a patriarchal "deficit". This stands in contrast to the idea of a patriarchal dividend which see men as benefiting from the subordination of women, and acknowledges how many men continue to be excluded from aspects of parenting. I view the structural barriers which prevent men from taking a truly equal role in parenting their children as resulting in a loss to fathers, their partners and their children. It is striking that the majority of the men in this study seem committed to responding to the multiple demands of their work and their home and determined to strike a balance between the two.

Chapter Ten: Moving towards 'gender symmetry'?

In this thesis I have argued that the evidence of this study points to more changes in the conduct of fathering than changes in the culture of fatherhood. I have demonstrated the way in which the caring roles of father and partner are inextricably linked together and sometimes difficult to differentiate. In addition I have shown how the structural influences of employment and culturally dominant essentialist ideas about gender continue to place men in an ambiguous position, and how the men in this study seek to reconcile the tensions between their role as fathers, partners and workers. I argue that despite these social and institutional barriers, which I tentatively label as creating a 'patriarchal deficit', this group of men invest time and emotion into building a complex and meaningful relationship with their infants.

In this final chapter I explore these arguments further, identifying three core concepts that arise from the study; understanding the apparent asynchrony between culture and conduct; exploring the connections between care, time and emotion; and theorising on the implications for these findings for gender relations.

Cultures of fatherhood – popular culture, social structure and personal values

In examining the discrepancy between culture and conduct previous literature carries an assumption that the culture of fatherhood has changed, and thus that contemporary fathers are expected to behave differently to previous generations of fathers.

In order to further explore ideas about the culture of fatherhood, and the extent to which it has changed, it is valuable to clarify what is meant by "culture". This exercise makes it clear that culture can have multiple meanings. One definition of culture is popular culture and the way in which fathers are represented in the media, in advertising, as well as in parenting magazines and advice literature. Discourse analysis work done to explore the culture of fatherhood in this context illustrates how fathers are positioned as "part-time, secondary, less competent parents with fewer

parenting responsibilities and greater breadwinning responsibilities than mothers" (Wall and Arnold, 2007, p511). Kaufman's (Kaufman, 1999) analysis of American television advertisments concludes that fathers may be portrayed as "involved family men" and yet their position as the less knowledgable and competent parent means that they "need not know how to cook or clean or care for a sick child" (p456). This marginalisation of father's involvement is echoed in Sunderland's (Sunderland, 2000) analysis of parenting advice texts, and her finding that fathers are positioned as a "bumbling assistant" or mother's helper, rather than as sharing co-parent.

The evidence of these analyses of popular culture points to the notion that while lip service is paid to the idea of shared parenting – the discussion is frequently of 'parenting' and not of 'mothering' – closer examination finds that it is "mothers' voices who dominate the text" (Wall and Arnold, 2007, p515). Others (Wall and Arnold, 2007, Singley and Hynes, 2005, Sunderland, 2000, Sunderland, 2006) have also argued that the extent of the cultural transformation of fatherhood has been exaggerated, and that social expectations and cultural assumptions "have a long way to go before they can be said to support fully involved fathering" (Wall and Arnold, 2007, p523). This suggests that in actuality the model of the involved father is not supported in popular culture.

Wall and Arnold's (2007) examination of media representations of fatherhood illustrate another key idea, that fathers' involvement is a matter of choice rather than of expectation. Implicit in this is the assumption that it is mothers that take on the major responsibility of caring for children. Clearly, there is a tension here between how mothers and fathers are often represented in popular culture and the cultural model of "new" fatherhood, which sees men as emotionally responsive to their children, as engaged in direct care and play, as accessible and available to their children and as taking responsibility for their children's care and resources (Pleck and Masciadrelli, 2004).

Wall and Arnold (2007) also find that the cultural expectation of women as primary caregivers is connected with gender imbalance in the family and in the workplace.

> *"Fathers are positioned as part-time or secondary parents whose parental responsibilities fit around their employment responsibilities. They are presented predominantly as workers first and parents second, and their involvement in day-to-day caregiving tasks or emotional care, while admirable when it occurs, is not necessarily expected, nor is it considered essential." (Wall and Arnold, 2007, p522).*

This finding highlights an alternate view of the culture of fatherhood, one that is embedded in the culture of the workplace and institutions and the culture of social policy, a view of culture that might more traditionally be called social structure. Workplace culture and social policy intersect with one another when it comes to paternity and parental leave, and the extent to which men's entitlement to time off work is supported and promoted by the law. As this thesis has shown, in Ireland this state support of fathers' time away from employment is practically non-existent. The challenges of reconciling the demands of parenthood and employment have traditionally been seen as an issue for women, as increasing numbers of women moved into the labour market. This has resulted in women receiving some support and protection in the form of maternity leave and benefits, and anti-discriminatory legislation which, in theory at least, protects their jobs. And yet in the case of Ireland the lack of statutory paternity leave means that fathers do not benefit from the same level of support from the state as women do.

In addition to the lack of state support for fathers' involvement, the way in which most workplaces are structured continues to assume that workers have few or no family responsibilities and the "greedy workplace" demands that employees prioritise their work over and above their family responsibilities. Women have struggled with these issues as their roles as mothers and as workers come into conflict (Hochschild, 2003). As women have moved out of the home and into the labour market, they have continued to carry the bulk of the domestic burden, resulting in them experiencing Hochschild's (2003) "second shift". Studies repeatedly suggest that whilst men's domestic responsibilities have increased, women still carry the majority of the burden (McGinnity and Russell, 2008). In addition, institutions, such as hospitals, public health clinics and schools, continue to have policies which position women as the primary caregiver and men on the periphery of parenting. Again, this has been

illustrated in this thesis by the way that men reported being excluded from these environments during their partners' pregnancy and post-natal experience.

When it comes to the evidence provided by this study, it would seem that fathers occupy a conflicted space when it comes to cultural expectations. Fathers are on the receiving end of very mixed messages about their role. On the one hand they feel that they are "not part of it" or "invisible" and the way their role as a father is sometimes marginalised by the culture of institutions seems to confirm this, such as when they are ignored by the healthcare professionals and hospital policies they come into contact with. Yet they see themselves as "fifty per cent of what's happened" and part of a "joint project" and seem perplexed that their role so often remains unacknowledged.

At the same time many of the fathers continue to see their partners as the primary parent and themselves as occupying a "secondary role", and women's physical experience of pregnancy and birth acts to reinforce this viewpoint. In terms of the structural influences on fathers' involvement with their infants, the lack of statutory paternity leave and the priority given to women in the form of leave from work clearly results in an imbalance in the amount of time men are able to spend with their children in the early months of their lives. This would seem to support the argument that the environment in which fathering takes place is still influenced by a structurally limited view of the extent to which fathers should and can be involved with their children.

Another alternative view of culture is that it is the personal "values, norms and beliefs" (La Rossa, 1988, p451) that constitute culture and thus influence behaviour and conduct. It is when this aspect of "internal" culture is explored that it is possible to see how a transformation has taken place. In terms of what men expect of themselves, rather than what is expected of them by others (whether partners, workplaces or society), this thesis points to the internal expectation and aspiration that being a father means providing care and prioritising family.

Despite the structural and institutional exclusion, when it comes to the attitudes that this group of fathers have towards their role as fathers, we also see a much more complex and nuanced model of fatherhood, one which includes the emotional, engaged, accessible and responsible aspects, but also includes "being a provider", providing discipline and moral guidance, and an educator's role. This suggests that rather than rejecting the "old" culture of fatherhood, these men are incorporating what they see as the beneficial parts of "traditional" fatherhood and adding these elements to the newer model of paternal involvement (Pleck and Masciadrelli, 2004). So it appears that their 'internal' culture of fatherhood has shifted to a more multifaceted model with a blending of the old breadwinner role with the new nurturer role.

This internal personal culture of fatherhood is illuminated by the comparison the fathers make with their perception of their own fathers, as "shirt and tie man" or unapproachable or as working the whole time. Their own aspirations for the relationship they want to build with their infants are based much more on communication and emotion and the importance of being there, "involved at every single stage", their desire to be supportive and to have a very close relationship with their child.

The discussion of the fathers' approach to fatherhood in comparison to their own experience of being fathered made it clear that there is not a simplistic rejection of the "old" way of fathering, but what emerges is a picture of fatherhood evolving, taking on some of the positive attributes of previous generations' fathering but also adding new aspects to enhance contemporary fathering into a more complex role and set of relationships.

These sentiments imply that there has indeed been a cultural shift in how these fathers view their role compared with their own fathers, but that there are occasions when this 'internal' culture is at odds with the "external" culture in which they are operating, which gives much more ambiguous messages about what is expected of fatherhood.

I argue that it is vital to acknowledge the multifaceted nature of culture when researching contemporary fatherhood. It is important to distinguish between the external culture of work organisations and social policy, with its persistent gendered

roles, and the internal personal culture of values beliefs and aspirations. This makes it possible to illuminate the tensions between how men view their role as new fathers and the environment in which they are fathering, and how theses tensions can manifest as an asynchrony between culture and conduct. The men in this study want to have a meaningful and hands on role as fathers but the lack of support in the form of social and employment policies (such as paid paternity leave or inclusive hospital policies) create barriers to fulfilling this aspiration.

Fatherhood conduct – care, time and emotion

In turning to the behaviour of these men when it comes to childcare and domestic responsibilities, once again the evidence suggests that this group of fathers are in fact closely involved in the practical care of their babies, and that they also play a significant part in taking on other domestic responsibilities. In other words their conduct or behaviour – what they actually do – has changed dramatically when compared to their own fathers.

The picture of parenting described by the fathers in this study is one where they are intimately connected with their child's care, from feeding and changing to "night on-night off" duties. Despite the fact that almost all the fathers in this study are working full-time (and those that are not full-time are combining work with study), they often follow a pattern of providing two or three hours of care for their child at the beginning or end of the working day. Taking on this care serves a dual purpose of providing respite for their partners from the demands of full-time mothering *and* providing a route to knowledge of their babies. This is an excellent example of the way in which the role of being a father and the role of being a partner are entwined with one another.

The centrality of caring – for both the babies and the partners – is a key finding of this study. The focus of their attention during the pregnancy and labour is the women, and only once the baby has arrived does their gaze seem to shift and broaden out to include the new arrival. The relationship between fathering and mothering illustrated

by the study is the way in which a key component of fathering is providing support to the mother, both practical and emotional.

In addition, the study illustrates the way in which the couple transition from a dyadic relationship with one another to a triadic family unit, where each relationship is connected with the other relationships within the family, emphasising the reciprocity and collaboration of the couples' relationships and how this feeds into their relationships with their child. There is a progression from the supportive spousal relationship of the pregnancy to providing respite care for the mother. In caring for their baby they are also caring for their partner.

Among this sample there is very little evidence of maternal gatekeeping acting as a barrier to the fathers' involvement with their babies, and much more evidence of the women "moving over and creating space for men" (Doucet, 2006, p232). This is despite the fact that many of the men tend to see the quality of the baby's relationship with their partner as more intense or bonded. They seem to have an understanding of this as an inevitable result of both the embodied relationship between the mother and child which results from gestation, birth and breastfeeding, as well as the time the mothers spend with their babies, but also perhaps as a temporary situation. As the infant develops and becomes more separate from the mother the intensity of their relationship will diminish and fathers will be afforded a greater role in the development of the growing child.

The descriptions that the men give of their care of the babies, and also the time that they spend in sole charge of them, would seem to imply that the women feel secure in their mothering identity, happy to share the care and the resultant bonding between father and child, and relaxed and confident enough about the parenting standards of their partners to hand over responsibility for the baby.

Connected with providing care is the importance of time. Dermott (2008) identified five different ways in which fathers could invest their time into parenting; direct practical care of children, domestic chores, spending family time together, being physically present and available, and intensive time when children are the fathers' primary focus. She argues that for the men in her study these different types of time held different significance, and that while some childcare tasks were "merely listed,

others were imbued with a deep significance for the fathering role" (Dermott, 2008, p62). Dermott concludes that "caring about" was more important than "caring for" and that the route to developing the strong parent-child relationship her sample aspired to have was through demonstrating their emotional openness to their child through intensive time – activities such as reading, talking, listening or playing together. "It was not the routine, transferable work of childcare that mattered nor the total amount of time spent with children that counted in these fathers' version of good fatherhood" (Dermott, 2008, p62).

In contrast, the fathers in this study placed emphasis on maximising the amount of caring time they spent with their baby, and saw the investment of time in caring for and interacting with their child as crucial in building the meaningful relationship they wanted to have. This is clear from the numerous references to the importance of 'being there' and the value placed by the men on their paternity leave as an important time both for establishing a new relationship with their babies *and* for enabling them to provide support to their partners.

This also fits with Lamb's (2007) notion of the "crucial" day-to-day nurturing activities including "bathing, soothing hurts and anxieties, bedtime rituals, comforting in the middle of the night, and the reassurance and security of snuggling in the morning" (p19) which serve to promote the child's trust and confidence in parents and to deepen child-parent attachments.

In addition paternity leave provided the opportunity to start to adjust to the new dynamics of their family practices and relationships. The fact that a number of the fathers had changed their working practices in order to facilitate more time at home also pointed to a shift in emphasis towards the family.

The demands made on fathers by "greedy" work environments also provide evidence for the challenges men face in balancing the needs of their family and their work. The structural and institutional barriers placed between men and their role as fathers are clear in the expectations of men as workers, and this is one aspect of what I call the "patriarchal deficit", which sees men lose out on their family time and involvement due to the hegemonic expectations of men as workers within patriarchal structures. This is a key difference to the treatment of mothers, where their maternal role is allowed to

dominate and is facilitated by policies such as maternity leave. I argue that women receive a "maternal dividend" as a result of their position as mothers first and workers second, although I am also clear that women pay a price for this in terms of career progression, pay and discrimination. Clearly women often suffer negative consequences in their working life as a result of their maternal role (or even their potential to become a mother), but in Ireland (and most other European countries) they are also supported to spend time away from paid employment during the first year of their child's life.

Many of the men found their attitude towards work changed as a result of becoming a father. There was evidence of ambivalence towards work, as the men worried about their attempts to balance their commitment to their career with their commitment to their family. This conflict was also clear in the way in which many of the men saw work as more important on one level, in that it provided financially for the family, but less important on another level, in that it ate into the time they could spend with their babies. Going to work after paternity leave (no matter how short) meant a reduction in time spent with their baby and their partner, and a reduction in ongoing intimacy. For the first time work-life balance assumes a new meaning for these fathers and resulted in a conflict between their traditional role as breadwinners and that of their role as the new caring father.

Alongside the focus on care and time comes the expression of emotion. The strength of emotion that they express when it comes to talking about their feelings for their baby, the love, the powerful bond, the way in which the permanence of the relationship is "overwhelming" and "unconditional" – this language suggests something of the transformative potential of a caring relationship. By becoming carers men generated an intimate relationship with all its intense emotional consequences.

I argue that another clue to this potential for transformation is the way in which many of the men talk about the way in which they feel they have been newly sensitised to the world, "softened", more compassionate and more "in touch". This observation links in with one of the other questions raised in the literature about how emotion and care are connected. Caring for the baby created knowledge of another individual which in turn created a new level of intimacy and a new level of emotional connection.

This intimacy and connection in turn creates a motivation to care, thus producing a virtuous circle of self perpetuating care and emotion. There is ample evidence in this study of the way in which this group of men were "revisioning masculine care" (Doucet, 2006, p237), partly by the way in which they provided care for their babies, as well as care for their partners, and also from the way in which they talked about their relationship with their child.

It seems that the care that this group of men provided for their families (partners and babies) not only proved a source of new emotional experiences, but also led them to see the world in a different way. This manifested itself in a new set of priorities, away from social life with friends and towards investing in family connections, both with the immediate family and with extended family. In addition it also resulted in a relinquishment of some of the control over day-to-day activities, a loss of freedom and spontaneity, but this change was accepted, because the rewards of being a father are "brilliant", "wonderful", and "fantastic".

In conjunction with this realignment of priorities, the men's experience of their new nurturing role and the development of an intimate relationship with their children resulted in them emerging with emotions and attitudes usually associated with mothers. The effects of their nurturing role resulted in a feminisation of the men's orientation to care. To an extent we see the emergence of the responsible – perhaps even guilty – father, and the tension between their roles as worker and carer also seem to have echoes of an experience of parenthood more often associated with mothers.

Implications for gender relations – patriarchal deficit vs matriarchal dividend?

Given that the structural and institutional supports in Ireland are available to mothers only, it is simply not a feasible option for the majority of couples to both be at home full-time for the first few months of their babies' lives given the lack of policy and financial support for fathers to take substantial time off work as well as mothers, or to reduce their working hours during the first few months of their children's lives.

Despite this structural constraint on parents, the level of involvement of these fathers does seem to suggest a move towards a more symmetrical model of parenting. This gives support to Doucet's idea that gender difference can co-exist with equality, and "what should be emphasized is gender *symmetry* rather than gender equality" (Doucet, 2006, p233, italics in original). In defining gender symmetry Doucet articulates her belief that gender difference can co-exist with equality, but that difference between genders is problematic (and should be challenged) when it leads to disadvantage. Given the disadvantage that men face via the demands of work and breadwinning and their partner's access to maternity leave, it is difficult to see how the majority of these men could be any more involved in parenting.

Just as women have been disadvantaged by their gender in the sphere of employment and men have benefited from the patriarchal dividend which results in a "male work norm" (Doucet, 2006, p234), it seems that men's gender proves a disadvantage as they attempt to move into the sphere of the family and take up a more equal/balanced/symmetrical/fair share of care. Women's primacy as carers has become enshrined in social policy and structures, arguably giving them a maternal advantage or matriarchal dividend, even if it is one that results from the patriarchal structure of society.

Whether the apparent moves towards more gender symmetry provide a possible route to "back door equality" is harder to ascertain. Although it is true that none of the fathers described themselves as personally or politically committed to a gender equality agenda, and many of them seemed to hold quite essentialist views on the nature of gender, with the mother "the prime person", many of them also seem to take for granted their level of involvement in child care and domestic responsibilities as "fifty-fifty". Whether this results in men experiencing the "second shift" (Hochschild, 2003) of a double burden of work and family responsibilities remains to be seen. However, it could point to a more egalitarian model of relationships among this cohort of couples, where both men and women expect both individuals to have a more balanced share of domestic responsibilities and perhaps in tandem with this a more balanced responsibility for working and earning. These expectations appear to be self-generated and derived from the fathers' sense of fairness and desire for intimate involvement, rather than influenced by the expressed expectations of their partners.

The study points to the fact that the men place a great emphasis on prioritising their support for their partners, which again points to the value that they place on their relationship with their partner. It is also of note that the men in this study seem to regard their approach to fatherhood and partnership as unremarkable and unexceptional and there seems to be a taken for granted assumption that this is the way to conduct oneself.

At the same time these men seem to be experiencing a tension between their role as nurturer and their role as a worker. This tension has echoes of the issues women have struggled with for decades as they attempt to balance the demands of working life with family life. I argue that it is possible that this reflects the way in which men are starting to move over into the domestic sphere, in a similar way in which women have moved over into the employment sphere.

Part of the difficulty that women faced in moving into paid employment was that the working world was structured in a way that assumes workers have few or no domestic responsibilities. Now that men are starting to move into the domestic sphere they are facing similar structures and assumptions, which create barriers to their involvement in parenting.

This idea ties in with the notion that just as in a general sense men have benefitted from a patriarchal dividend from the overall subordination of women by patriarchy, they are also in a position where they are disadvantaged because of the same patriarchal societal structures which exclude them from family time and involvement, resulting in a patriarchal deficit.

Recommendations

Research recommendations

This is clearly a small scale study with a mainly middle-class group of men. Larger scale studies with a more socially and economically diverse group of men would test

the hypothesis that fathers' behaviour has changed when compared to their own fathers. Such studies would also provide the opportunity to identify different and varied types of fathering behaviour as well as exploring further the beliefs, values and aspirations of fathers from different social groups.

Further investigation of the tensions between internal and external cultures would strengthen the hypothesis that "culture" has multiple meanings which need to be scrutinised and untangled. Analysis of the policies of institutions and organisations (such as governments, hospitals, workplaces) to establish what assumptions are made about men's role as fathers, would explore the ambiguous and sometimes contradictory nature of the messages men receive.

Research in workplace environments to establish attitudes towards paternity leave and levels of support for flexible working conditions could provide support for the introduction of statutory paternity leave and comparative research examining international models of paternity and parental entitlements would provide evidence for those models of family policy which provide the most support for fathers' involvement.

This study followed fathers for the first six months of their babies' lives, and further research should follow fathers over a longer period to investigate whether the patterns established in the first few months continue and how they change with time. Clearly time spent with children is likely to be greatest when children are younger and more in need of care and supervision. I would speculate that over time patterns of care could be impacted by events such as the mothers' return to employment, the introduction of paid childcare or the arrival of subsequent children. Whether or not mothers return to employment after their babies' birth (as the majority of the women in this study planned to) and whether they remain in employment after the birth of subsequent babies also needs to be investigated to establish the impact of women's work outside the home on child care and domestic responsibilities. Other life course events such as children starting schooling could also lead to shifts in patterns of care and responsibility.

Further longitudinal research would also establish whether the increased emotionality and sensitisation described by these fathers in the early months of their parenting

remain consistent and what impact this has on aspects of their lives such as work, family and social interaction.

In addition, research into how women view their partners' role would illuminate the aspect of the father-partner-carer and would explore the extent to which women feel supported by their partners and the impact that this has on their relationship as a couple and their relationship with their baby. It is possible to speculate that it is those couples who are satisfied in their relationship prior to the pregnancy and birth that are more likely to act as mutual supporters in their transition to parenthood. A study which included couples with less satisfactory or secure relationships would illuminate the extent to which the transition to parenthood acts as an opportunity to strengthen or weaken these relationships and how best to support couples facing these challenges.

Further research on a randomly chosen sample of fathers is required to test the hypothesis of a "patriarchal deficit", to explore the extent to which men continue to benefit from a patriarchal dividend, and how they are likely to experience the perpetuation of the patriarchal deficit. Such a strategy would also explore the relationship between men's lives in the private/home sphere and the public/work sphere, to explore and identify in further detail what are the structural barriers to men taking up a more symmetrical role as fathers, and to suggest how these barriers might be removed or overcome.

Policy recommendations

The evidence of this study provides a clear argument for supporting the introduction of paid paternity leave for fathers in Ireland, given the value placed on time off expressed by this group of fathers. At the very least fathers should be entitled to paid time off work to attend the birth of their children, perhaps two or three days "birth leave", to complement the paid time off work they are entitled to for attending two antenatal classes. In the current economic environment the introduction of paid paternity leave seems unlikely, but as a minimum entitlement fathers should be entitled to two weeks paternity leave, to bring Ireland in line with the UK (where there

are proposals to increase fathers' entitlements). In addition fathers should be entitled paid time off work to attend their child's six week health check.

This study also suggests that hospital policies on fathers' access to their partners and babies after the birth should be reviewed and made more father-friendly. In addition training should be provided to healthcare professionals to raise awareness of the impact of pregnancy, labour and birth on fathers, and the benefits of inclusive approaches to both parents and babies.

Many of the interviewees identified the key benefit of taking part in the study was the opportunity to talk about their experiences. The hospitals and public health system, which provides ante-natal classes and baby clinics, could provide opportunities for fathers' groups, for men to meet and talk to one another. An on-line discussion board could also provide support and information for fathers.

Conclusion

One of the key aims of this study was to attempt to contextualise the experiences of fathers, paying close attention to the wider social structures in which they operate as fathers, and also attention to the relationships they have with people and institutions. This is the reason that the interviews explored such a broad range of topics, including their views on work, on their relationship with their partner, their relationship with their extended family and their friends. It also attempted to draw attention to the way in which there are elements of the experience of fatherhood that are dictated by factors beyond the control of the individual, such as the provision of paternity leave or the policies of hospitals. These factors also include the competing agendas of different cultural expectations, which mean that fathers can often find themselves positioned in an ambivalent place.

This thesis has drawn on the 'tangled strands' of various theoretical approaches to fatherhood within sociology. In addition it has paid close attention to the multiple factors which influence contemporary fatherhood, the many of the different 'tangled strands' (Lewis and Lamb, 2007) of personal relationships (partners or families of

origin, social networks), social policy (paternity leave), culture (internal attitudes and beliefs as well as external cultures in work organisations and healthcare settings). In addition it has explored factors such as economics (the relationship to work for the fathers and the imperative to work for their partners), history (the legacy of their own parents), biology (the timing of parenthood) and motivation (their aspirations for their relationship with their child) and has built a nuanced picture of the complexities of contemporary fatherhood.

The key to making sense of these different aspects of fatherhood is the focus on fathers' behaviour and conduct, as well as their beliefs and attitudes, a focus which serves to unlock these complexities and illuminate the way in which all these factors are inextricably related to one another. The imperative on fatherhood researchers is to be mindful of the way in which fathers are connected and embedded within family practices and relationships, competing masculinities, gender roles and the wider structures of society and to continue to move away from over-simplified and flat sociological accounts of fatherhood.

I conclude that the culture of work and social policy continues to expect men to be workers first and carers second (if at all) and the assumptions of popular culture reflect and perpetuate these expectations. In contrast men expect themselves to play a significant role as carers, a role that requires an investment of time away from employment. For the majority of men the resource of time is limited, as a result they experience a conflict between their roles as carers and their roles as workers. This experience of conflicting roles is one more closely associated with women's experiences, suggesting that men are moving towards a more balanced share of caring responsibilities. Crucially the men in this study also reap the emotional rewards of their investment in caring for their babies and their partners. This provides hope that they will be more aware of the cost of their paternal dividend, that the loss that results from the dividend is their exclusion from their family role – or in other words the patriarchal deficit.

Overall this study is optimistic about the potential for men's capacity to care for their children and their partners, and for this care to provide support to increasing gender symmetry. Despite the social and institutional barriers that contribute to men losing

out on the time and opportunity to build relationships with their children, this group of fathers is working hard to tackle the tensions between their roles as fathers and partners and their role as workers. This study inspires a vision of a world where the structural barriers that constrain men and women in their prescribed gender roles have been broken down, and the resulting opportunities for men to take on both the joys and the burdens of parenting create the possibility of increasing gender symmetry for all.

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Appendix 1: Leaflet and information sheet

Leaflet (A5 size, double sided, both shown here)

The 'Becoming A Parent' Study - information for parents

Becoming A Parent – a study of first time dads and mums.

In your last antenatal class you will be asked to take part in a study, looking at the experience of becoming a parent for the first time.

Expectant mums and dads will be asked to fill in a questionnaire, which should take about ten minutes to complete. Then the men will be asked if they would be willing to be interviewed, at a later date, to talk about their experience of becoming a father in more detail.

The findings collected through the questionnaires and the interviews will be summarised and will help to provide an overall picture of what it is like to become a dad for the first time in Ireland.

Thanks for your time.

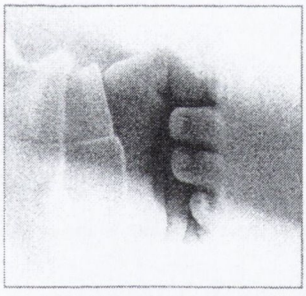
This study is funded by the Irish Research Council for the Humanities and Social Sciences and has the support of the (name of) Hospital and Trinity College Dublin.

Information sheet

Trinity College Dublin

Becoming a parent

A study of new fathers in Ireland



Why is this study important?

For many generations the role of fathers in their children's lives was thought to be solely that of the 'good provider', and their role in shaping their children's development was not really appreciated or understood. In recent years a growing body of research has shown that fathers play many significant roles in their children's lives – as companions, carers, role models, teachers – to name just a few. Nowadays, even though mothers tend to be the primary care givers in many families, fathers have become more involved with their children on many different levels.

However, there has been very little research into what new fathers actually think about becoming a parent and what it is like for them on a day-to-day basis and there has been virtually no research into what it is like to be a new father in today's Ireland.

This study begins the job of filling that gap in our knowledge. Knowing more about the reality of becoming a dad will result in increased awareness among policy makers, the public and those who work directly with families, of the pleasures and the challenges that fathers face. Better understanding of fathers' views and experiences will help to provide the basis for better support of parents and their children.

By talking directly with men who are becoming fathers for the first time, this study aims to look at how couples adapt to parenthood, and to give fathers a voice about their role as parents in their day to day lives.

This study is funded by the Irish Research Council for the Humanities and Social Sciences and has been approved by the (name of) Hospital and Trinity College Dublin.

Trinity College Dublin

Jemimah Bailey
Level 2
5 College Green
Dublin 2
Ireland

Phone: 085 846 4856
E-mail: baileyja@tcd.ie

Appendix 2: Male "Becoming a Parent" Questionnaire

Becoming A Parent

Fathers' Questionnaire

- a study of first time dads and mums -

This questionnaire is part of a study looking at the experiences and views of people who are becoming parents for the first time. The aim of the questionnaire is to find out what views parents have on caring for their baby, what kind of issues expectant parents talk about, and how having their first baby changes day-to-day life for couples. It should take about 10 minutes to complete.

- **Please complete this questionnaire, and return it, with your partner's questionnaire, in the envelope provided.**
- **Please let the researcher know if you need any assistance.**
- **Your participation is entirely voluntary.**
- **All the information provided will remain confidential and will not be traceable back to you.**

This study is funded by the Irish Research Council for the Humanities and Social Sciences and has the support of the (name of) Hospital and Trinity College Dublin.

♂Ref:

PART ONE – BACKGROUND INFORMATION

1. Your age

___ years

2. Your marital status

Married ☐
Living together ☐
Other ☐ _____ *(please describe)*

3. Where do you live?

Dublin ☐
Outside Dublin ☐

4. When did you finish your education?

Primary school ☐
Secondary school ☐
Third level (diploma/degree) ☐
Postgraduate ☐

5. Employment status

Employed full-time ☐
Employed part-time ☐
Self employed ☐
Unemployed ☐
Student ☐
Looking after home ☐
Other ☐ _____ *(please describe)*

6. Please describe your current occupation: (for example: teacher, retail assistant, plumber, administrator etc)

_____

7. Your ethnicity

White ☐
Black ☐
Asian ☐
Other ☐ _____ *(please describe)*

8. What is your nationality?

_____

9. How many weeks pregnant is your partner?

2

♂Ref:

PART TWO – BECOMING A PARENT

SECTION ONE: PREPARING

1a) How much have you talked with your partner about how having a baby is going to change your lives?

Not at all ☐
Once a month ☐
Once a week ☐
Most days ☐

SECTION TWO: SLEEPING

2a) Have you talked with your partner about where the baby will sleep at night, for the first few months?

Yes ☐
No ☐

2b) When the baby first comes home do you plan for the baby to sleep:

In his/her own bedroom ☐ *If you have ticked this box please go on to Section Three: Feeding*
We haven't decided yet ☐ *If you have ticked this box please go on to Section Three: Feeding*
In your bedroom in a cot/basket ☐
In your bedroom in your bed ☐

2c) If you plan for the baby to sleep in your bedroom, how long do you think this will be for?

_____ weeks/months/years Don't know ☐

SECTION THREE: FEEDING

3a) Have you talked with your partner about how the baby will be fed?

Yes ☐
No ☐

3b) Does your partner plan to:

Formula feed ☐
Breastfeed ☐
Mix breast and formula feeding ☐
She is undecided ☐
I'm not sure ☐

3c) Have you ever bottle fed a baby?

Yes ☐
No ☐

3d) Have you seen a woman from your circle of family and friends breastfeeding her baby, in the past five years y?

Yes ☐
No ☐

3e) Have you seen a woman you don't know breastfeeding her baby in public, in the past five years?

Yes ☐
No ☐

SECTION FOUR: BABY CARE

4a) How often do you plan to do the following activities during the first few months? (tick once for each activity)

	Every day	Two/three times per week	Once per week	Not sure	Never
Changing nappies	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Feeding the baby	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Winding the baby	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Cuddling the baby	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Playing with the baby	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Dressing the baby	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Bathing the baby	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Taking the baby for a walk	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Putting the baby to bed at night	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Soothing the baby when he/she wakes in the night	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

4b) Who do you think will get up in the night with the baby during the first few months? (*tick one box only*)

Me ☐
My partner ☐
Both of us ☐
Take it in turns ☐
Not sure ☐
Other ☐ _____ (*please give details*)

SECTION FIVE: INFORMATION AND SUPPORT

5a) Have you read any books or articles on caring for babies?

Yes ☐
No ☐ *If 'no' please go to question 5c*

5b) If yes, how did you find out about them? (for example, recommended by friend/doctor, bookshop, etc).

_____

5c) Who would you say is the most useful person to talk to about having a baby, not including your partner? (for example, mother, brother, friends, friends with children)

_____

♂Ref:

SECTION SIX: WORKING LIFE

6a) Does your workplace give you any paternity leave?

Yes ☐
No ☐
Don't know ☐ *If 'no' or 'don't know' please go to question 6c*

6b) If yes, how much time can you take off when the baby is first born?

_____

6c) How much time are you planning to take off when the baby is born in total? (including paternity leave if applicable, as well as holiday/unpaid leave etc)

None ☐
1-3 days ☐
4-7 days ☐
More than 7 days (*please say how long*) _____

6d) What changes are you planning to make to your working life as a result of having a baby? (please tick one box)

None ☐
Reducing working hours ☐
Increasing working hours ☐
Working part-time ☐
Other ☐ _____ (please give details)

6e) If your partner is currently in paid employment, does she plan to go back to work after the baby is born?

Yes ☐
She hasn't decided yet ☐
Not sure ☐
No ☐ *if 'no' please go to Section Seven: Social Life*

6f) If your partner plans to return to work, have arrangements been made for the baby to be looked after?

Yes ☐
Not sure ☐
No ☐*If 'no'please go to Section Seven: Social Life*

6h) If yes, what arrangements have been made for having the baby minded?

Cared for by relative ☐
Cared for by childminder ☐
Cared for in a nursery/crèche ☐
Cared for by nanny in our own home ☐
Share care between us as a couple ☐

6i) If you can, please estimate the cost per month of your childcare:

_____

5

SECTION SEVEN: SOCIAL LIFE

7a) Have you talked with your partner about how your social life (both going out together and on your own) may change once the baby is born?

Yes ☐
No ☐

7b) How soon after the baby's birth do you hope to get out socially as a couple (without the baby)?

Within a week ☐
Within a fortnight ☐
Within a month ☐
Other _____ (*please describe*)

7c) How soon after the birth do you hope to get out socially on your own?

Within a week ☐
Within a fortnight ☐
Within a month ☐
Other _____ (*please describe*)

7d) How soon after the birth do you think your partner will go out socially on her own?

Within a week ☐
Within a fortnight ☐
Within a month ☐
Other _____ (*please describe*)

SECTION EIGHT: HOUSEHOLD CHORES

8a) Currently, who would you say does most of the cooking?

Me ☐
Partner ☐
Equal share ☐

8b) Currently, who would you say does most of grocery shopping?

Me ☐
Partner ☐
Equal share ☐

8c) Currently, who would you say does most of the laundry in your household?

Me ☐
Partner ☐
Equal share ☐

8d) Currently, who would you say does most of the cleaning, vacuuming, etc?

Me ☐
Partner ☐
Equal share ☐

♂Ref:

8e) Have you discussed with your partner whether your household chores will change once the baby is born?

Yes ☐
No ☐

8f) Once the baby is born, do you expect your share of household chores (not including caring for the baby) to be:

More ☐
Less ☐
Same ☐

8g) Do you currently employ anyone to help with the housework?

Yes ☐
No ☐

8h) Do you plan to get any paid help with the housework once the baby is born?

Yes ☐
No ☐
Undecided ☐

You have reached the end of the Part Two of this questionnaire, please go on to the final section on the next page.

♂Ref:

PART THREE – YOUR VIEWS ON FEEDING

This section of the questionnaire is designed to find out about your views on feeding babies. It is a questionnaire that has been used in other research projects in the UK and United States.

For each of the following statements, please indicate how much you agree or disagree by circling the number that most closely corresponds to your opinion.

		strong disagreement	disagreement	neutral	agreement	strong agreement
1	The nutritional benefits of breast milk last only until the baby is weaned from breast milk.	1	2	3	4	5
2	Formula feeding is more convenient than breastfeeding.	1	2	3	4	5
3	Breastfeeding increases mother-infant bonding.	1	2	3	4	5
4	Breast milk is lacking in iron.	1	2	3	4	5
5	Formula fed babies are more likely to be overfed than breastfed babies.	1	2	3	4	5
6	Formula feeding is the better choice if a mother plans to work outside the home.	1	2	3	4	5
7	Mothers who formula feed miss one of the great joys of motherhood.	1	2	3	4	5
8	Women should not breastfeed in public places such as restaurants.	1	2	3	4	5
9	Babies fed breast milk are healthier than babies who are fed formula.	1	2	3	4	5
10	Breastfed babies are more likely to be overfed than formula fed babies.	1	2	3	4	5
11	Fathers feel left out if a mother breastfeeds.	1	2	3	4	5
12	Breast milk is the ideal food for babies.	1	2	3	4	5
13	Breast milk is more easily digested than formula.	1	2	3	4	5
14	Formula is as healthy for an infant as breast milk.	1	2	3	4	5
15	Breastfeeding is more convenient than formula feeding.	1	2	3	4	5
16	Breast milk is less expensive than formula.	1	2	3	4	5
17	A mother who occasionally drinks alcohol should not breast-feed her baby.	1	2	3	4	5

Thank you very much for taking the time to complete this questionnaire.
Please see the following page if you would like to take part in the next stage of the project.

8

♂Ref:

Becoming a father – what is it really like?

Would you like to take part in the next stage of this project?

I am looking for men willing to be interviewed about the experience of becoming a father for the first time. There will be two interviews, one before the baby is born, and one three or four months after the birth. Each interview will take about an hour and will take place at a time and location convenient to you.

The information you will give will be confidential and you are free to withdraw from the project at any time. If you would like to discuss the project further, please feel free to email or talk to the researcher, Jemimah Bailey (BA, MSc), baileyja@tcd.ie or 085 846 4856.

If you would like to take part in the interviews please fill in the contact details below:

I would like to take part in the interview stage of the project, please contact me to arrange. ☐

First name: _____

Surname: _____

Telephone: _____ mobile/home/work

Email: _____

Address: _____

Partner's name: _____

Baby's due date: _____

How would you prefer to be contacted?

Phone ☐

Email ☐

Letter ☐

9

Appendix 3: Female "Becoming a Parent" Questionnaire

Becoming A Parent

Mothers' Questionnaire

- a study of first time dads and mums -

This questionnaire is part of a study looking at the experiences and views of people who are becoming parents for the first time. The aim of the questionnaire is to find out what views parents have on caring for their baby, what kind of issues expectant parents talk about, and how having their first baby changes day-to-day life for couples. It should take about 10 minutes to complete.

- **Please complete this questionnaire, and return it, with your partner's questionnaire, in the envelope provided.**
- **Please let the researcher know if you need any assistance.**
- **Your participation is entirely voluntary.**
- **All the information provided will remain confidential and will not be traceable back to you.**

This study is funded by the Irish Research Council for the Humanities and Social Sciences and has the support of the (name of) Hospital and Trinity College Dublin.

♂Ref:

PART ONE – BACKGROUND INFORMATION

1. Your age

___ years

2. Your marital status

Married ☐
Living together ☐
Other ☐ _____ *(please describe)*

3. Where do you live?

Dublin ☐
Outside Dublin ☐

4. When did you finish your education?

Primary school ☐
Secondary school ☐
Third level (diploma/degree) ☐
Postgraduate ☐

5. Employment status

Employed full-time ☐
Employed part-time ☐
Self employed ☐
Unemployed ☐
Student ☐
Looking after home ☐
Other ☐ _____ *(please describe)*

6. Please describe your current occupation: (for example: teacher, retail assistant, plumber, administrator etc)

_____

7. Your ethnicity

White ☐
Black ☐
Asian ☐
Other ☐ _____ *(please describe)*

8. What is your nationality?

_____

9. How many weeks pregnant are you?

2

♂Ref:

PART TWO – BECOMING A PARENT

SECTION ONE: PREPARING

1a) How much have you talked with your partner about how having a baby is going to change your lives?

Not at all ☐
Once a month ☐
Once a week ☐
Most days ☐

SECTION TWO: SLEEPING

2a) Have you talked with your partner about where the baby will sleep at night, for the first few weeks?

Yes ☐
No ☐

2b) When the baby first comes home do you plan for the baby to sleep:

In his/her own bedroom ☐ *If you have ticked this box please go on to Section Three: Feeding*
We haven't decided yet ☐ *If you have ticked this box please go on to Section Three: Feeding*
In your bedroom in a cot/basket ☐
In your bedroom in your bed ☐

2c) If you plan for the baby to sleep in your bedroom, how long do you think this will be for?

_____ weeks/months/years Don't know ☐

SECTION THREE: FEEDING

3a) Have you talked with your partner about how the baby will be fed for the first few months?

Yes ☐
No ☐

3b) Do you plan to:

Formula feed ☐
Breastfeed ☐
Mix breast and formula feeding ☐
I haven't decided ☐

3c) Have you ever bottle fed a baby?

Yes ☐
No ☐

3d) Have you seen a woman from your circle of family and friends breastfeeding her baby, in the past five years?

Yes ☐
No ☐

3e) Have you seen a woman you don't know breastfeeding her baby in public, in the past five years?

Yes ☐
No ☐

SECTION FOUR: BABY CARE

4a) How often do you think your partner will do the following activities during the first few months? (tick once for each activity)

	Every day	Two/three times per week	Once per week	Not sure	Never
Changing nappies	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Feeding the baby	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Winding the baby	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Cuddling the baby	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Playing with the baby	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Dressing the baby	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Bathing the baby	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Taking the baby for a walk	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Putting the baby to bed at night	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Soothing the baby when he/she wakes in the night	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

4b) Who do you think will get up in the night with the baby during the first few weeks? (*tick one box only*)

Me ☐
My partner ☐
Both of us ☐
Take it in turns ☐
Not sure ☐
Other ☐ _____ (*please give details*)

SECTION FIVE: INFORMATION AND SUPPORT

5a) Have you read any books or articles on caring for babies?

Yes ☐
No ☐ *If 'no' please go to question 5c*

5b) If yes, how did you find out about them? (for example, recommended by friend/doctor, bookshop, etc).

_____

5c) Who would you say is the most useful person to talk to about having a baby, not including your partner? (for example, mother, friends, sister etc)

_____

♂Ref:

SECTION SIX: WORKING LIFE

6a) Does your partner's workplace give him any paternity leave?

Yes ☐
No ☐
Don't know ☐ *If 'no' or 'don't know' please go to question 6c*

6b) If yes, how much time can he take off when the baby is first born?

_____

6c) How much time is your partner planning to take off when the baby is born in total? (including paternity leave if applicable, as well as holiday/unpaid leave etc)

None ☐
1-3 days ☐
4-7 days ☐
More than 7 days (*please say how long*) _____

6d) What changes is your partner planning to make to his working life as a result of having a baby? (tick one box)

None ☐
Reducing working hours ☐
Increasing working hours ☐
Working part-time ☐
Other ☐ _____ (please give details)

6e) If you are currently in paid employment, do you plan to go back to work after the baby is born?

Yes ☐
I haven't decided yet ☐
No ☐ *if 'no' please go to Section Seven: Social Life*

6f) How many weeks maternity leave are you planning to take?

_____ weeks
(Under current law women are entitled to take 26 weeks paid maternity leave, and an additional 16 weeks unpaid maternity leave.)

6g) If you plan to return to work, have arrangements been made for the baby to be looked after?

Yes ☐
No ☐ *If 'no' please go to Section Seven: Social Life*

6h) If yes, what arrangements have been made for having the baby minded?

Cared for by relative ☐
Cared for by childminder ☐
Cared for in a nursery/crèche ☐
Cared for by nanny in our own home ☐
Share care between us as a couple ☐

6i) If you can, please estimate the cost per month of your childcare: _____

♂Ref:

SECTION SEVEN: SOCIAL LIFE

7a) Have you talked with your partner about how your social life (both going out together and on your own) may change once the baby is born?

Yes ☐
No ☐

7b) How soon after the baby's birth do you hope to get out socially as a couple (without the baby)?

Within a week ☐
Within a fortnight ☐
Within a month ☐
Other _____ *(please describe)*

7c) How soon after the birth do you hope to get out socially on your own?

Within a week ☐
Within a fortnight ☐
Within a month ☐
Other _____ *(please describe)*

7d) How soon after the birth do you think your partner will go out socially on his own?

Within a week ☐
Within a fortnight ☐
Within a month ☐
Other _____ *(please describe)*

SECTION EIGHT: HOUSEHOLD CHORES

8a) Currently, who would you say does most of the cooking?

Me ☐
Partner ☐
Equal share ☐

8b) Currently, who would you say does most of grocery shopping?

Me ☐
Partner ☐
Equal share ☐

8c) Currently, who would you say does most of the laundry in your household?

Me ☐
Partner ☐
Equal share ☐

8d) Currently, who would you say does most of the cleaning, vacuuming, etc?

Me ☐
Partner ☐
Equal share ☐

6

♂Ref:

8e) Have you discussed with your partner whether your household chores will change once the baby is born?

Yes ☐
No ☐

8f) Once the baby is born, do you expect your share of household chores (not including caring for the baby) to be:

More ☐
Less ☐
Same ☐

8g) Do you currently employ anyone to help with the housework?

Yes ☐
No ☐

8h) Do you plan to get any paid help with the housework once the baby is born?

Yes ☐
No ☐
Undecided ☐

You have reached the end of the Part Two of this questionnaire, please go on to the final section on the next page.

♂Ref:

PART THREE – YOUR VIEWS ON FEEDING

This section of the questionnaire is designed to find out about your views on feeding babies. It is a questionnaire that has been used in other research projects in the UK and United States.

For each of the following statements, please indicate how much you agree or disagree by circling the number that most closely corresponds to your opinion.

		strong disagreement	disagreement	neutral	agreement	strong agreement
1	The nutritional benefits of breast milk last only until the baby is weaned from breast milk.	1	2	3	4	5
2	Formula feeding is more convenient than breastfeeding.	1	2	3	4	5
3	Breastfeeding increases mother-infant bonding.	1	2	3	4	5
4	Breast milk is lacking in iron.	1	2	3	4	5
5	Formula fed babies are more likely to be overfed than breastfed babies.	1	2	3	4	5
6	Formula feeding is the better choice if a mother plans to work outside the home.	1	2	3	4	5
7	Mothers who formula feed miss one of the great joys of motherhood.	1	2	3	4	5
8	Women should not breastfeed in public places such as restaurants.	1	2	3	4	5
9	Babies fed breast milk are healthier than babies who are fed formula.	1	2	3	4	5
10	Breastfed babies are more likely to be overfed than formula fed babies.	1	2	3	4	5
11	Fathers feel left out if a mother breastfeeds.	1	2	3	4	5
12	Breast milk is the ideal food for babies.	1	2	3	4	5
13	Breast milk is more easily digested than formula.	1	2	3	4	5
14	Formula is as healthy for an infant as breast milk.	1	2	3	4	5
15	Breastfeeding is more convenient than formula feeding.	1	2	3	4	5
16	Breast milk is less expensive than formula.	1	2	3	4	5
17	A mother who occasionally drinks alcohol should not breast-feed her baby.	1	2	3	4	5

You have now completed this questionnaire.
Thank you very much for your time.

8

Appendix 4: Interview Guides

Interview Guide: Pre-birth

Background
Can you tell me a little bit about yourself – what work you do, where you're from, where you live?
What about your own family background? Brothers/sisters/parents? Local or not?

Partner and parenthood
Can you tell me a little bit about yourself and your partner? How you met and go together?
How much have you talked with your partner about becoming parents?
What kind of things do you talk about?
Have you always wanted to have a family?
When did you first discuss it with your partner?

Pregnancy
How did you find out about the pregnancy?
How have you found the pregnancy?
Did you go along to scans/doctors appointments?
Anything you've found unexpected/difficult?
Anything you've particularly enjoyed about it?

Baby practicalities
What kind of activities would you like to be involved in?
What kind of activities would you not like to be involved in?
Who do you think you will get the most support from?
Views on feeding/sleeping arrangements?

Views and opinions on parenting
How do you feel about becoming a dad?
Has that changed from before the pregnancy?
What do you think is the most important role a dad plays? With babies? With older children?
What kind of things make a "good dad" or a "bad dad"?
Do you have any role models for how you think you'd like to be as a parent?
How do you feel about the way the healthcare system treats dads? Hospital appointments? Dealing with healthcare professionals?

Work/family balance
What kind of thoughts do you have about combining work and family life?

Changes
How do you think your relationship with your partner may/may not change?
Do you have any concerns about how you will adapt to becoming parents?
Housework? Social life? Couple time?

Follow up and research involvement
Are you happy to be interviewed after the baby is born, at three/four months old?
How would you like to be contacted?
Would you like to let me know when the baby is born?
What made you volunteer to take part in the research?
How have you found doing this interview?

Thank you.

Interview Guide: Post-birth

Labour and birth
How did the birth go?
How did you feel you coped during the labour/birth?
How did it compare to your expectations?
Did you feel prepared for it?

Return home
How were the first few weeks?
Sleeping?
How did the feeding go?
Routines?
Practical care?

Work
How much paternity leave?
Would you have preferred more?
How did you find going back to work?
How supportive is/was your workplace?
How has your attitude towards work changed (if at all)?

Relationships
How have your family been involved? How has that been? Have your relationships with your parents changed?
How do you feel your relationship with your partner has been affected?
How do you feel your relationship with the baby has developed?
Where do you look for support? Friends/social circle? Family?

Fatherhood
How do you view your role as a dad now?
Has there been anything unexpected about it so far?
What has been the hardest thing about becoming a dad?
What has been the best thing about becoming a dad?
What advice would you give to another man about to become a dad?

Reflection
How have you found taking part in the research?
Thanks and small gift.

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Appendix 5: Consent Form

The "Becoming a Parent" Study - Interview Consent Form

I understand that the purpose of this study is to explore what it is like to become a father for the first time. It is hoped that the knowledge gained from this study will help to support men becoming fathers for the first time.

I understand that I will answer a few personal questions and be interviewed by the researcher, Jemimah Bailey. The first interview before the baby's birth will take approximately an hour and will be recorded. I also understand that I will be contacted for a second interview 12-16 weeks after my baby is born, and this interview will also be recorded.

I understand that all identifying information will be kept confidential. The recorded interviews will be transcribed by Jemimah Bailey, and only she and her supervisor, Dr Evelyn Mahon, will have access to the recordings, which will be kept securely. My name will not be used in written reports or presentations of the study findings and a false name will appear with any quotes used from the interviews.

I understand that my participation in this study is entirely voluntary, and I am free to withdraw at any time, even in the middle of an interview. I can ask to have the recording turned off at any time during the interview. I understand that I may have copy of the transcribed interview if I wish and I may make amendments to my comments at this stage.

If I have further questions about the research or if I wish to obtain a summary of the results of the research, I may contact Jemimah Bailey.

I have read this consent form completely and have decided that I will participate in this study. I will be given a copy of this consent form.

Participant signature: Date:

Researcher: Date:

Jemimah Bailey
School of Social Work and Social Policy, Trinity College, Dublin2
Mobile: 01 896 3244 Email: baileyja@tcd.ie

This study is funded by the Irish Research Council for Humanities and Social Science and has the support of the (name of) Hospital and Trinity College Dublin

Appendix 6: Planning a Family analysis grid

	INTERVIEWEE[15]	QUOTES	COMMENTS/OBSERVATIONS
1	Jim, 35 Non Irish lawyer	I think it was a natural progression from the, the wedding. Um, after the wedding, you know it was always going to be our intention once we settled down after the wedding that, er, [wife] would stop using the pill and that we would start trying for a family. There was always a discussion about it. Um, we're both from reasonably big families. Um, I'm a family of four boys, and [wife] is two boys two girls. So, we're both from four [right] there are three siblings, so it, it, is just a natural part of, you know it was always my intention that, you know, no matter who I settled down with, that I'd start a family. So, you know, my idea from then to now, it's you know, it's always been the same	Natural progression Was discussed Decision to try Reference to own family as pattern to follow?
2	Fergal, 32 Irish IT	Well, we weren't using contraception. So I said, you know, this is a possibility it could happen [yeah], so I'm fine with it happening [yeah] just make sure you are. I kind of said that I was, like we weren't using contraception, I brought the issue up and said, you know it's, I'm happy at this stage of my life to have a child. Make sure you know that you are [yeah]. And she was so... I'm kind of saying that at my stage of my life, I'm like more than happy like, I've gone out and had my, my wild times and I've done all that when I was younger. So it won't be, be like any shock to my life. I said, make sure that you're prepared, I mean like, I said to her, at your age I wouldn't have been prepared. I kind of did, like, know I'd like them at some stage. Kind of like, once I reached about thirty I kind of realised then I'd be ready to have children. Then, various things... I'm very happy with [partner] as well, very happy, very much in love. The two of us are very good for each other.	Passive decision Discussed ? Told her he was okay with it, if it happened. Stage of life okay. Rare mention of love for wife/partner
3	Peter 32 Non Irish IT	We never really talked about it, it just, I know she's, she's thirty three going on thirty four, she wanted to, you know, there's obviously the health risks, the older you get, the harder it gets [sure], so she wanted to try and have two kids before she's forty, like. [mm] It's,	Not discussed. Quite passive: SHE wanted....

[15] All names have been changed to preserve anonymity

		we were trying for about six months I suppose, but, I never, I'm very easy going about the whole thing It just came up. Erm, I suppose in fairness, most of my friends have got babies nowadays, so it's, it's not, it's the norm isn't it? [Wife] started with the, um, what is it... you can get kits where you test your ovulation [oh yeah], or your, you know, the best time of the month to get pregnant. And all that sort of stuff [sure]. And she was using them, so we were trying at the right times	Age The norm – natural progression? Decision made/actively trying
4	Conor 33 Irish Marketing	We talked about it very generally I think, even, I think in very general terms before we were even engaged, and then I think, um, after that kind of more seriously, and then we were discussing what we'd do after we were married, and then, we had kind of, kind of, a lot of discussions about it kind of late last year and then early this year. Just to kind of clarify exactly when, and then we, we kind of made the decision, um, and it happened fairly quickly (JB: Had you always <u>wanted</u> to have a family with somebody?) Yeah. I'd, I think so, I think I was unsure exactly about when. And I don't know if this is a male thing or not, but I, I kind of you know, um had not really in my head decided when would be appropriate, but I had always kind of, that's the way I'd always seen things going. I think, we did actually want to be married before, we wouldn't be, we're both Catholic, and I don't think we'd be devote, I think we'd probably be technically lapsed, um, but, er, I think, in terms of kind of stages, we saw that as kind of a, I don't know, kind of a, a commitment, or a kind of stepping stone saying well this is the path we're on and that's kind of one of the midway steps to that [mm]. To having a family. We're hoping to have kind of a couple of children, we're not going to put an exact number on it [mm], but um, I think, if, we felt that in terms of time, if we <u>wanted</u> to have more than kind of one, um, or even two possibly then, we would need to kind of start around then, just to allow for a reasonable spacing We'd kind of settled as well in terms of where we were living, we kind of bought the house back in, two, 2002 We felt kind of, secure enough as well in terms of career as well...I think we were both kind of comfortable enough that we're in a position to provide	Discussed at various stages of relationship Progression – after marriage, house, security. Quite carefully planned? Always assumed that he would have kids. Made decision – actively trying.

5	Michael 35 Irish Engineer	We wouldn't have talked all along, I suppose, these things, they're a sort of natural progression in relationships and stuff like that, so it's not the first thing you talk about [no!] [laughter]. But I suppose over the, since we got married, yeah, I suppose, er, we're married, er we're married four years. So since we got married, um, I suppose there has been a, er, a natural progression in the marriage alright. I suppose in the last few years that we were thinking we might go for it, you know. the timing was spot on, I think. I suppose as you, as you go through life, you always presume, you always presume that it's something that's going to happen, you always, certainly [wife] comes from a four, a family of four, a four child family, I come from a four child family. Used to the backing of siblings and that, and, and the love that our parents gave us, so we, you know, I suppose, just, seems like a natural progression to go with that.	Presumed he would have kids. Reference to own family as model and inspiration. Discussed, particularly since marriage. Regarded as natural progression, following marriage. Active decision?
6	Tony 33 Irish Printer	We had only just started talking about it. And, we thought we might have a few problems, but, one day she came home and said, I'm pregnant [laughs] We're both at the age now, we're both 33 now, we don't want to leave it to 40. You know, we don't want to leave it too late either. (JB: Had you always known that you'd want to have a family at some stage in your life?) Not really. Being honest. We kind of, tend to take it as things come. And we've kind of, maybe when I was about 20, if somebody had've said to me, I'd have said 'no'. Er, but over time, you change. And priorities change. We'd discussed it a little bit, then maybe over the last year we kind of gotten to get our heads around it, and decide, and ask each other the questions, you know, do we want to have a family? [mm] And I suppose getting married was one progression, we were of the opinion that we wouldn't have children before we got married, so we got married and then we discussed that, and then all of a sudden we kind of said we don't want to leave it too long [mm], so then when we talked about trying, we got lucky, again. But no, sorry, is a short answer to your question. We kind of, er, it's something we grew into. We've been going out since we were 20. And it's not something we'd be saying at 20 [sure]. Or 25, or even 28. This wasn't even discussed. You know. Once you turn 30, somethings change and certain people's ideas	Just started to discuss. Awareness of age. NOT always wanted. Change over time. Marriage as progression towards family. Actively trying. Attitude changing over time.

		in life change, maybe. [yeah]. So, maybe after that. But not until that. We honestly didn't expect it to happen so quick.	
7	John 26 Irish Electrician	We'd always wanted to have kids. But it was, it wasn't a planned pregnancy [small laugh]. [right] But, um, it was something we talked about, but ideally maybe wouldn't have done for maybe another three or four years.	Knew he wanted to have kids. Pregnancy not planned. Ideally would have left a few more years.
8	Aidan 34 Irish Librarian/ studying	No we didn't discuss it very much early on. I mean, I would have just known really, or assumed, I don't know which, that she would have wanted children, you know? I mean, she's, er, I guess that kind of person, if that makes sense. [mm] Um, and, I would never have said no, because I, I've seen how, when men become fathers it sort of, I guess, a switch sort of gets flicked in their heads and they get into it, you know. So you can be saying, ah, I don't want to be a father, and then when it actually happens you can be like, 'oh wow, this is amazing', you know. [mm] Um, so, yeah, it, it [lets out breath] I guess once we got married, yeah. Um, I can't remember now, er, what, discussion there would have been between us. But, yeah, it would have been a, just a natural thing. But er, I mean we didn't start trying until last year, um, cos we just didn't have the, the money [Wife's] periods had been sort of irregular, so, she was always taking pregnancy tests and I can't imagine what it's like for, for women who have real problems getting pregnant, it must be a real head wrecker, cause I mean, even for [wife], and sort of, er, by reflection me, it was, it was, er, a bit stressful [mm]. And that was only three months. You know? That we were trying.	Not discussed early on. Assumption that wife wanted children. Not opposed to it. Men can get into it when it happens to them. Marriage as step towards it. Actively trying.
9	Alex 35 Education administrator Non Irish	I was actually feeling that I was getting a bit of pressure at some point. (JB: Ddid you always know that you wanted to have children, or is it something that's...) No. Not necessarily. [mm] Um, I, er, I wouldn't have been surprised either way. [mm] I, I just thought I met the right person, for that, if I hadn't met [wife], or, you know, I wouldn't have taken that decision. At the time, but maybe, you know, turning 40, or, plus, maybe then I would have thought, well, now is the time to do it.	Actively trying. Felt pressure. Not always assumed.
10	Nick 36 Non Irish Finance	I think it is something that I, coz I've known I've always wanted it, and I think relatively early on we would have discussed it, perhaps even before we got together. So I was, I was, if it wasn't stated, I knew that [wife] did want to have children. [sure] And there was never really any, er, doubt, that we'd try for	Always wanted. Discussed early on. No doubt they would try for children.

		children at some stage. [yeah] Once we, er, once we got married and er, there would always be a...you know, it was going to be, I mean [wife], now she's 32, so it was going to be sooner rather than later. We had been trying for a little while and we, were on the verge of, you know, she had gone to a doctor just to have certain tests.	Marriage as step towards family. Actively trying.
11	Frank 35 Irish Librarian	[Wife] wasn't, we weren't using contraception for quite a while, but it wasn't something we ever really spoke about and when it happened it was a huge shock [really?]. Yeah, both of us. But in a great way, you know what I mean [yeah, yeah]. And I mean to be honest I had started to think, you know, well, I'm 35 now and [wife] is thirty... three, [laughs] you know what I mean like, I can't remember this! But um, d'you know what I mean, you can't wait forever. [exactly] Do you know what I mean? And I think when we came back from Holland, part of the reason was, you know to start settling down a bit like, you know what I mean, bought a house, we got jobs and everything, closer to home. I think so, yeah. I think definitely [yeah]. I mean, as kind of we moved into our thirties, it kind of came up, and it hadn't happened, and we weren't trying, like consciously, but as I say, we weren't using contraception. We became a bit more lax around using, you know what I mean, and then a couple of years ago we just kind of stopped, not a real conscious decision, but we kind of stopped using. (JB: Did you talk about it at all, or...?) INT: Not really, no, no. [yeah] It was a very gradual, how would you say.... You know, every now and then she would kind of say, "should we not be thinking about that?" and I would kind of go, "no" [laughs], you know what I mean?! In that, say, I didn't really like condoms, you know what I mean [no, sure]. And I could understand that she didn't really want to be on the pill. And my attitude was, if a baby comes, well then, [that's okay], that's it, great, [yeah]. D'you know what I mean? Let's go for it. And to be honest, just the last year or so, I started to think, well, are we ever going to really do this, or... And I was actually surprised that she nearly kind of said, well if it doesn't happen, well, you know, that's fine. I was kind of surprised that her attitude was "well, if it doesn't happen, maybe we have to accept that [right] and we're not going to kind of get hung up on it". And I was, I thought yeah, I agree with what you're saying, but then one part of me thought, oh, well maybe I'm	Not actively trying. Unconsciously? Passive decision? Awareness of age. Stepping stones to family, house, job. Gradual relaxation around contraception. Subconscious assumption. Prospect of not being father unexpected idea.

		not going to be ever a father. And that was a bit, that's not what you expect! I suppose it's a bit blasé to assume that you're going to be a parent, but [sure] I suppose everyone nearly does, I think, d'you know [yeah, yeah].	
12	Donal 33 Irish Communications	To be honest, it's not something I've ever, I always assumed I would. I never gave it any, it certainly hasn't been a burning issue for me or anything. It's, it's also important to me to find the right person to have; children were presumably part of that, well, great. But it was never the other way round, if you know what I mean. It came up actually, yeah, it came up I suppose, um, sooner than... Both of us had been in, you know, long term relationships before, and um, both of us, well, [partner] is a little bit older than me, um as well, so there is a sort of physiological time clock and all that [mm]. So it probably came up quicker than it would have in previous relationships. Um, but that's maybe somewhat typical of being in your mid-thirties, I suppose, when you get together. Um, and, but it was never a particular problem, because, it was, the rest of it looked good, d'you know what I mean? [mm] So it really wasn't a problem in any shape or form, for me, anyway. [yeah] I think [partner] was probably more, um, it was more of an issue for her, I think, I think probably purely physiologically, because she's a little bit older and you know, it was a narrowing window [sure] I suppose, of opoportunity. Well, the decision I suppose to, to use that horrible expression, trying for a child, trying for a baby, um, was, sort of a, it was a stopping using contraception, and just see what happens, I suppose, leave things, leave nature to take it's course, so to speak. Um, so there was no particular, at least on my part [laughing] um, particular effort put into it [mm]. It just happened. Um, as it so happened, it was three weeks after we got engaged that um, we found out, which was, I suppose, with the benefit of hindsight was kind of nice [yeah]. But um... (JB: But you'd made a kind of conscious decision to stop using contraception?) INT: We had, and um, er, you know, while we hadn't made a conscious decision to try for a baby, we had made a conscious decision to stop stopping trying to have a baby, if you see what I mean! Um, so it was um, but I think both of us would concede now that it was probably nice that we were engaged before hand but, you know I don't think it would have made any great difference in the long run, but I suppose that is, it sort of reassuring really.	Assumed he would be parent. But not a burning issue – right partner more imp. Awareness of age as a factor (particularly for woman) Discussion implied. Actively trying, but unwilling to label it such. Engaged before hand – stepping stone.

13	Andrew 39 Irish IT	Yeah, I think so. I, I do enjoy kids. I'm the youngest of my family. Um, and the rest have kids at this point. I've always, you know, I enjoy spending time with them, um, but er, you know, at the same time, when they start crying I'm happy to hand them back. Um, so yeah, it is certainly something that I always wanted. We discussed, and we, we, it was something that we both wanted, and it was something that we were trying for. Um, and er, it was, yeah, a mutual goal, a mutal want, a mutual need.	Always wanted. Reference to own family. Discussed. Actively trying. Mutual goal.
14	Shane 36 Irish IT	We decided to go buy a house, and that was, once we had the house we were like, okay, we've kind of, that excuse is gone now, so let's, let's look at this. So that was when we made the decision to try and see if we could have kids. [yeah] So ah, we had a, we had a first attempt maybe about two years ago, and that ended in a miscarriage [right]. So that was quite difficult to go through. You know, coz you kind of wait so long (JB:did you always personally feel that you wanted to have a family yourself, or is it something that you came to later on?) INT: Yeah. I don't know. Um... Like, it would have been very, it wouldn't have been a sort of desire, necessarily. But I wouldn't have been against the idea. D'you know what I mean? So it wouldn't have been a strong, necessarily, desire to kind of, let's go and have a kid kind of thing. I wouldn't have been pushing the fact [mm]. But, at the same time, saying that. It would have been, something that I always probably, because we always talked about it a little bit [mm] in a very sort of like, kind of, relaxed kind of a way [mm]. we wouldn't consider bringing a kid up, like in Manhatten [yeah], or you know, or in a, in a city without, in an apartment, kind of thing. So we had kind of felt like, maybe there are selfish reasons, but it was more of a case of, er, we felt like we had to do it when we were ready, d'you know what I mean? We just basically, we just wanted to really I guess, just have a house, somewhere we felt we could raise a kid So we kind of thought about it a lot, d'you know what I mean, we talked about it quite a bit. So we didn't just dive into it after, you know, kind of made sure that, yeah, this is, you know, this is what we want to do	Made decision, actively trying. Not always wanted, but not against idea. Always discussed. Thought about it quite a lot. Made plans. House in place, conditions right. Ready to do it.
15	Eion 39 Irish Government agency	Certainly not from day one, [laughs] but er, we probably talked about that, er, about a year before we got married. Probably a little bit before we decided to get engaged. So we were probably, well actually, we were probably engaged only for six, seven months, we just decided, well, like you know, at this stage in life there's no point in hanging around here. If you're	Discussed during relationship. Always assumed and wanted children. More difficult to

		going to do it, do it. What we, we would have talked about, er, options of, you know, personal interest in having children, relatively early, I suppose, because again, you know, probably one year into us being a couple, but considering we knew each other before that for so long, it's like, not so surprising that you would, talk about it pretty early on, like. I suppose I probably always assumed that I would have. Um, although never, I think like a lot of men, to be honest [laughing], never exactly could picture when that was going to happen. And how it was going to happen, like. So no, it was something I always wanted, like. [mm] Um, at some point. Um, and, that some point tended to get pushed later and later and later, and then you know, so now, is definitely the time, and I don't want to be messing around any later, like, so. [yeah] A sixty year old pushing a pram, is not what I want to do. We'd decided not long after we came back from honeymoon really, we were going to start, going to start trying for a baby straight away. And we're kind of blessed I think, really, in that it was probably within about two months, um, so it certainly wasn't a surprise	imagine when and how. Awareness of age. Decided/actively trying, post marriage..
16	Tom 35 Non Irish Engineer	Oh yeah, yeah. Well, yes. I always wanted a family [yeah]. Er, I'd say [wife] took a little bit of time to, a little bit of convincing, I suppose. [uh huh] She's a bit younger than me, she's two years younger than me, so maybe, three or four years ago she felt it wasn't quite time, and maybe I thought it was. Um, but er, yeah, we always, she, we always knew we'd have a family. We decided, er, about a month before, maybe if we got pregnant now, we'd be moving back at Christmas, it would be born in May, so, that would be about right. But any earlier than that, would be a bit annoying, having to move when you're pregnant. Right, well now's the time to start then [laughs]. We'd made, we'd made a decision, and so everything slotted into place really, very quickly.	Always wanted. Discussion implied. Woman less sure. Actively trying/ made decision.