THE FATHER-INFANT RELATIONSHIP

BECOMING CONNECTED

by

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SUPERVISORY COMMITTEE APPROVAL

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to describe and provide a theoretical analysis of 14 first-time fathers' experiences in developing a relationship with their infants during the infants' first 2 months of life. With the use of tape-recorded, semistructured interviews, fathers described perceptions of their fathering selves, their infants, their father-infant relationships, and their wives' support. These data were analyzed using the constant comparative method. The three major categories that were operative in the initial development of the father-infant relationship were (a) making a commitment, (b) becoming connected, and (c) making room for the baby.

Commitment is defined as fathers' willingness to invest in and take responsibility for nurturing the relationship with their infants despite parenting difficulties and other life pressures. The first seeds of commitment were planted when fathers expressed feelings of readiness and desire to have a baby. However, the reality of commitment took hold at different time points for fathers.

Becoming connected was the basic psychological process, a process that began with the father's intense, euphoric emotions at birth, that is, if there were no complications associated with the birth experience. Because of the close mother-infant bond and breast-feeding, fathers felt connected to their infants at a distance during the first 5 weeks. The turning point in the relationship took place when
fathers perceived their 2-month-old infants as more responsive, predictable, and familiar. These perceptions of their infants fueled the development of a closer connection of the father to the infant.

Making room for baby consisted of fathers making changes and/or adjustments in their lives to make psychological and physical room for their infants. Fathers made adjustments in their work and social/personal time and in relationships with their wives and within themselves.

The contextual factors that influenced the development of the father-infant relationship were the relationship that the men in this study had with their own fathers and the informational and emotional support they received from their wives. With an increased understanding of the father-infant relationship, nurses can provide humanistic, thoughtful care to assist fathers in developing this significant relationship.
Dedicated to my loving parents
who taught me that one can succeed
if one believes in oneself and to accomplish
one’s goals one must meet life’s challenges head-on

and

to Gregory Anderson, my deceased brother,
whose love of learning and sensitivity toward
others will always be remembered.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

As of the 1970s, more mothers were working outside the home; fathers were making their appearances in prenatal classes, labor and delivery rooms, and well-baby clinics; and nurse researchers were becoming more interested in studying fathers and their infants. Although studies of fathering have become more prevalent in the last decade, there is a noticeable lack of research that describes fathers' perceptions of their father-infant relationship. The goal of this study was to gain a better understanding of the initial development of the father-infant relationship, from the fathers' perspective, during the infants' first 2 months of life.

Nursing Problem and Rationale for the Study

Nurses are in a position to support an important dimension of an infant's nurturing environment—the father-infant relationship. Brazelton, a well-known pediatrician, suggested that if health care professionals train cadres of people to support the parent-infant relationship, the health care professional must have a clear understanding of the ingredients of the attachment relationship (cited in Klaus & Kennell, 1982). Still unknown are how the fathers' perceptions of their
fathering self, their infants, their father-infant relationship, and their spousal
support in their fathering relationship influence the initial development of the
father-infant relationship and what concepts are operative in this relationship. If
nurses do not fully understand the father-infant relationship, how can they promote
it? Nurses have an important role to play in promoting parent-infant relationships
because sound parent-infant relationships positively influence the development of
the child’s sense of self, as well as the quality of the child’s future relationships
(Klaus & Kennell, 1982). However, it is evident that the theoretical and practical
knowledge needed to understand and promote fully the development of the father-
infant relationship escapes nurses.

To date, most researchers have focused on the competency and nurturing
ability of fathers, the similarities and differences between mothers and fathers in
their behavior towards their infants, and the degree to which mothers and fathers
resemble each other in their parental activities (Lewis, 1986; Parke, Grossman, &
Tinsley, 1981; Power & Parke, 1983; Rendina & Dickerscheid, 1976). Although
this research has been helpful, it has not helped nurses to understand fully the
father-infant relationship. Parke (1978) suggested that how fathers perceive and
comprehend their parenting role, their fathering relationship, and their infants will
influence the nature of the father-infant relationship; however, these cognitive
perceptions have not yet been researched. Furthermore, this may be one of the
reasons why assessment of the parent-infant relationship focuses mainly on the
mother in community health settings. Specific guidelines for assessing the mother-
infant relationship are available, but a research-based assessment guide is not.

Friedman (1992) suggested that "parenthood is the only major role for which little preparation is given, and difficulties in role transition adversely affect the quality of the marital and the parent-infant relationships" (p. 61). Some of the difficulties experienced in role transition include the husband's lack of competence, confidence, and preparation in parenting; feelings of neglect and jealousy of the baby; disruption and diminishment of social and sexual life; feelings of tiredness due to caring for the infant; and little time for other children and the marital relationship (Anderson & Anderson, 1985; Bronstein & Cowan, 1988; Friedman, 1992). McBride (1989) suggested that the lack of preparation in developing skills to become a nurturing parent results in undue stress in fathers and limits fathers in their ability to become involved in their roles and relationships with their children.

Researchers are debunking the myth that mothering is instinctual and that mothers are biologically predisposed to respond to their infants in a nurturing way. It is believed that fathers can be as sensitive and nurturing to their infants as mothers (Parke & Sawin, 1976). Nevertheless, during a fatherhood project, fathers expressed dissatisfaction with their ability to establish meaningful relationships with their children, and some fathers reported that they would like to have a closer relationship with their children than they had experienced with their own fathers. Others felt inadequate and unprepared for the father-infant relationship and wished they were as adept as their wives in establishing relationships with their infants (Levant, 1988).
Nurses are in an ideal position to facilitate the development of a paternal relationship by teaching fathers about their roles and relationships with their infants in prenatal classes, during the postpartum period, and in community settings. However, presently, much of the teaching and program material is aimed at the mother. In prenatal classes, fathers are primarily taught about how they can be supportive to their wives during labor and delivery. During the postpartum period, confronted with the reality of a new baby to care for, fathers may be highly motivated to acquire the knowledge and skills that would aid them in the development of their new roles and relationships. Unfortunately, there are very few programs in place in health care settings to assist fathers in developing their fathering relationship. With greater insight and understanding of the father-infant relationship, nurses may be better able to anticipate and meet the fathers' needs while fathers attempt to develop a relationship with their infants.

Nurses are in the field of health promotion. Rogers (1990) stated that "the purpose of nurses is to promote health and well-being for all persons wherever they are" (p. 6). The nature of nursing should emphasize human beings and healthy relationships and ways of nurturing human, healthy relationships within society. Human beings are actualized through interpersonal relationships—relationships that are built on respect and caring. Nurses should reflect the practice of promoting healthy relationships within a family system. More specifically, the community health nurse is in a good position to work with families in an ongoing way, extending over many years as families face one
transition after another in their developmental cycle. The community health nurse may not make home visits when families are in a stable condition but will enter when families face new transitions such as the birth of a baby. The parents need to accommodate and develop new roles and relationships and form a bond with their infants. A deeper understanding of the father-infant relationship would lead to more humanistic, thoughtful, sensitive nursing care and promote the development of sound parent-infant relationships.

**Theoretical Problem and Rationale for the Study**

Since the 1970s, researchers have been increasingly interested in studying fathers. From the literature review, it is evident that researchers have placed emphasis on objective descriptions of father and infant behaviors in relation to the attachment relationship. For example, most researchers have used quantitative, objective measures to identify fathers' attitudes toward their fathering role and the amount of time a father spends with an infant in direct caretaking, play, and interaction. An example of such a measure is the Ainsworth’s Strange Situation scale that quantifies the infant’s reaction when a father leaves his infant with a stranger (Belsky, Gilstrap, & Rovine, 1984; Kotelchuck, 1976; Lamb, 1977a). If the infant protested the departure of the father, the infant was said to be attached. Attachment has been conceptualized as a dependent or outcome variable, rather than as a process that develops over time. In addition, the focus has been primarily on how the infant attaches to the father, not how the father develops a
relationship with the infant.

Furthermore, little attention has been paid to cognitive factors related to the development of the father-infant relationship such as fathers' perceptions about their fathering self, their father-infant relationship, their infants, and their spousal support. The cognitive element of relationships, which includes the human ability to feel, think, and perceive and to be able to think of the other person as well as oneself, is very influential in the development of a relationship (Lewis, 1987). Although specific behaviors such as establishing eye contact during a feeding situation and playing with the infant do influence and play a role in the development of the father-infant relationship, researchers need to pay attention to paternal cognitive perceptions. How fathers develop relationships with their infants depends upon the fathers' cognitive perceptions of their own behavior and their infants and the expectations that the fathers have for themselves and their families. In order to support the aforementioned assumption, various fathers' perceptions and interpretations of an infant's cry will be described. Some fathers may perceive and interpret the infant's cry as the infant's attempt to communicate, or the infant's stubbornness and assertion of power, or a reprimand. In addition, how fathers view themselves as fathers will influence how they respond to the infant's cry. For instance, a father who feels incompetent and unsure of how to settle a crying baby may believe that by promptly attending to the infant's cry he will spoil the infant. Such paternal perceptions of the fathering self and of the infant influence both the father's initiation of and response to infant behavior; more importantly,
they provide a broader basis for understanding the father-infant relationship (Pedersen, 1980a). Lewis (1987) argued that “the cognitive element of relationships is understudied; in fact it is rarely considered in social development in general and the attachment relationship literature in particular” (p. 423). A qualitative approach using verbal reports that capture the father’s cognitive perceptions of his own behavior would help one to view the world through the informant’s eyes rather than imposing one’s perceptions upon the observed behavior. What is missing from the studies of fathering is the fathers’ perceptions and beliefs that accompany or undergird the fathers’ behavior (Pedersen, 1980b).

There has been little research, to date, on how fathers perceive their spouse’s support in the development of the father-infant relationship. The emphasis has been on how the father could support the mother to maintain an effective relationship with the infant. Understanding the nature of this supportive or nonsupportive spousal environment may give theorists an understanding of some factors that may influence the development of the father-infant relationship.

Another way to broaden the present understanding of the parent-infant relationship is to focus on the father because attachment theory is primarily based on studies of the mother-infant relationship. In fact, some influential psychoanalysts have believed that fathers play a minor role in the child’s first 3 years of life, except as an authority figure and a support to mothers. For example, according to Freud, the role of the father is peripheral during the infancy period. The father’s role was understood only in terms of the Oedipal complex. Children
were thought to identify with their fathers when they became 3 to 5 years of age. Bowlby (1969) continued to focus on the mother-child relationship because he was concerned with the effect on the child of separation from the mother. He noted that infants had a repertoire of signalling behaviors consisting of smiling, crying, sucking, and clinging that served to initiate or maintain proximity so that they would be well cared for. Ainsworth and Bell (1970) enlarged on Bowlby's theory in developing a typology of infant-to-mother attachment behaviors that would aid in the measurement of attachment as an outcome behavior. However, there is a move away from focusing on this type of attachment and only describing attachment as an outcome behavior to conceptualizing attachment in terms of a reciprocal, developmental process (Peterson & Rollins, 1987). The fact remains, however, that theoretical development regarding the attachment relationship has primarily focused on the mother and infant. In addition, few studies have paid much attention to how mothers or fathers perceive this relationship.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to describe and provide a theoretical analysis of fathers' experiences in developing a relationship with their firstborn infants during the infant's first 2 months of life.

**Research Questions**

The following research questions were developed initially to guide the research:
1. What are first-time fathers' perceptions of their father-infant relationship, their fathering self, and their infant and spousal support?

2. How do fathers' perceptions of their father-infant relationship, their fathering self, their infant, and their spousal support influence the initial development of the father-infant relationship?

**Definition of Perception**

For the purpose of this study, perception was defined as the act of "sensing, interpreting and comprehending. It is a highly personal and internal act" (Pace & Boren, 1973, p. 49). Specifically, the father's thoughts, feelings, beliefs, and expectations related to the infant, the father-infant relationship, the fathering self, and the spousal support in the initial development of the father-infant relationship were addressed in the study.
CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Researchers have focused primarily on the mother-infant relationship; however, during the last decade, more attention has been paid to the father-infant relationship. More and more studies have demonstrated the distinctive, important role fathers play in forming a relationship with their infants. This review of literature addressed only the literature that is pertinent to the development of a father-infant relationship and situational factors that may affect this particular relationship. The purpose of this review was to identify the extent of knowledge in the area of study, to develop a rationale for this study by pointing out the major theoretical and methodological limitations of previous studies, and to identify the gaps in knowledge. Furthermore, this process of literature review indicated the complexity and various facets of the father-infant relationship, as well as my view of knowledge developed to date. The literature is reviewed in terms of (a) the father-infant relationship in the newborn period, (b) the father-infant relationship during the 1st year of life, and (c) the social support and parent-infant relationship.
Father-Infant Relationship
in the Newborn Period

Fathers' development of a keen interest in and intense absorption and preoccupation with their newborns is a phenomenon that has been described as engrossment by Greenberg and Morris (1974). From their analysis of data collected during in-depth interviews of 30 first-time fathers, these researchers described the characteristics of engrossment as (a) visual awareness of the newborn in which the fathers perceive their infants as beautiful or attractive; (b) tactile awareness of the newborn in which the fathers find it extremely pleasurable to touch, pick up, or play with their newborns; (c) awareness of the distinct characteristics of their newborns to the point of stating that they can distinguish their infants from others or describe their infants' characteristics in detail; (d) perceived awareness of their infants to be perfect, even though they are uncoordinated and awkward in their movements; (e) a strong attraction to their infants and an extreme elation surrounding the birth of their infants; and (f) an increased awareness of sense of self-esteem.

In the past decade, researchers have suggested that birth attendance and extended father-infant contact in the postpartum period have positive effects on later parent-infant interaction and father involvement. In one study, fathers who held their infants within 1 hour of birth were found to exhibit more nonverbal communication when their infants were 1 month old compared to fathers who had not had early contact. The fathers' perceptions and attitudes toward their infants, however, did not differ significantly in these two groups of fathers (Jones, 1981).
Palkovitz (1982) corroborated the above findings to some extent. He found that fathers who had spent more time with their newborns in the hospital demonstrated greater overall infant involvement and social play with their infants later. However, other studies have not supported the hypothesis that fathers have increased interaction or display attachment behaviors toward their infants following early or extended contact during the birth or early postpartum period (Pannabecker, Emde, & Austin, 1982; Toney, 1983).

Researchers have not only examined the effect of extended father-infant contact on father-infant interaction but have explored how the infant contributes to this interaction by examining such variables as infant state, physical attractiveness, and temperament. Although Keller, Hildebrandt, and Richards (1985) found that the infant's characteristics did not affect the father-infant interaction, they did find that the extended contact fathers engaged in greater amounts of interaction and infant care taking responsibilities and had higher self-esteem scores at 6 weeks postpartum. Conversely, the research findings of Jones and Lenz (1986) supported the hypothesis that infant state is an important predictor of affection, touch, and comforting behaviors displayed by fathers during an interaction with their newborns. In addition, fathers who perceived themselves as competent were found to be more likely to stimulate their newborns by talking to and touching them than fathers with lower competence scores. These researchers pointed out the importance of the reciprocal nature of the father-newborn relationship and the need to gain a better understanding of the interplay of parental and infant behavior and
characteristics.

A survey of 244 volunteers from the lay public supported the thinking that it is essential that fathers attend the birth of their babies and that if this did not occur the father-infant relationship could be placed in jeopardy. The subjects believed that birth compensatory behaviors should be implemented as soon as possible to overcome the detrimental effects of the father’s absence at the birth (Palkovitz, 1985). Nevertheless, a caveat was issued by Palkovitz to child birth educators saying that early father-infant postpartum contact “can be a fulfilling, but neither necessary nor sufficient experience” (p. 45).

Summary and Critique

Research on father-infant bonding has been strongly influenced by studies of mother-infant bonding. Similar to researchers of mother-infant studies, investigators studying fathers hypothesized that early contact with the newborn would most likely assist with the development of an affectional father-infant relationship. This hypothesis is open to criticism, as it is highly unlikely that such a simplistic relationship is sufficient to explain the development of the father-infant relationship. The father-infant relationship is much more complex than is supposed in the assumptions underlying these studies. Further, in many of these studies data were not collected on important variables such as fathers’ motives for attending the birth, marital satisfaction, wives’ support for father involvement, fathers’ perception of the paternal role, their relationship with their infants, and infant behaviors, to name but a few (Palkovitz, 1985).
In one study, researchers observed that fathers could be as sensitive and nurturant to their newborns as mothers but that they engaged in less caretaking (Parke & Sawin, 1976). In another study, researchers found that fathers were just as competent as mothers in paying attention to infants’ distress cues during feeding. If the infant displayed distress in the feeding situation, the fathers were comparable to the mothers in adjusting their behavior by discontinuing the feeding momentarily, checking on the infant, or vocalizing to the infant. In addition, mothers and fathers were very similar in the amount of milk the infants consumed when they were fed by them. Also, mothers and fathers demonstrated the same sensitivity towards a videotaped crying and happy infant. They displayed identical physiological response patterns with increases in skin conductance and diastolic blood pressure. Emotional responses were in the same direction; however, women were more elaborate in their descriptions. Consequently, the researchers concluded that these findings contradicted the notion that women were biologically predisposed to respond in a nurturant way (Frodi, Lamb, Leavitt, & Donovan, 1978).

Contrary to the belief that mothering is instinctual it is thought that parenting skills are acquired “on the job” by both mothers and fathers. However, because mothers are more involved with caretaking it may be that they become more in tune with and sensitive to their infants’ needs and characteristics. As a result, fathers may defer the care to the mother and thereby become less confident
in their parenting abilities and less involved with their infants (Lamb, 1976).

In one study, when competence and performance in parenting were examined in terms of similarities and differences between mothers and fathers in artificially structured laboratory settings, fathers functioned similarly to mothers, but this was not so in the home environment. In a longitudinal study of 72 families in a naturalistic setting, fathers were observed to be much less involved with their infants compared to mothers. Mothers engaged in more responsive, stimulating, and affectionate interaction, whereas fathers spent significantly more time reading and watching television (Belsky et al., 1984). Other studies of different cultures add to the robustness of these findings. In a descriptive, comparative study of the early interactions of mothers and fathers in the United States and West Germany, researchers found that mothers in both cultures displayed more affectionate and stimulating behaviors such as vocalizing and touching than fathers (Parke et al., 1981). In another longitudinal study in Sweden, researchers observed that Swedish mothers from both traditional and nontraditional families also were more interactive than fathers with their 8- and 16-month-old infants (Lamb, Frodi, Frodi, & Hwang, 1982).

Many studies have indicated that fathers' interaction with children centers around play activities, whereas maternal interaction centers around caretaking activities such as feeding, bathing, and changing clothes and diapers (Clarke-Stewart, 1978; Kotelchuck, 1976; Lamb & Lamb, 1976; Lewis, 1986; Rendina & Dickerscheid, 1976). In one study, the fathers' play style was observed to be
different from that of the mothers'. Fathers tended to play more physical rough-and-tumble games, whereas mothers played more conventional games such as peek-a-boo and patty cake. Fathers held their babies more to play with them, and mothers primarily held infants for caretaking purposes. Children of 8 months of age seemed to prefer their fathers over their mothers in a play situation (Lamb, 1976). To some extent, Clarke-Stewart's study was similar to those of Lamb: Children were observed to enjoy and cooperate more with their fathers during a play session. Clarke-Stewart (1978) stated that it is misleading and inaccurate to say that the children preferred their fathers over their mothers; that is, they were merely responding to the father's unique, engaging style of play.

The mother's play was observed to be less physical and arousing. Mothers tended to be more verbal and didactic and used play for educational purposes (Clarke-Stewart, 1978; Lewis, 1986). In addition, Power and Parke (1983) found that mothers were more responsive to their infants' cues of interest during videotaped play sessions of mothers and fathers with 24 infants. Mothers paid close attention to their infants' gazing behaviors, whereas fathers engaged their infants in a new toy when their infants were looking at another toy. Also, fathers tended to engage in physical play when their infants became disinterested, but mothers showed or gave their infants a new toy when disinterest emerged. Lewis (1986) further noted that mothers' play was more private in comparison to that of fathers'. Fathers tended to entertain their children with mothers in close proximity.
Kotelchuck (1976) observed the responses of 6-, 9-, 12-, 18-, and 21-month-old infants to brief separations from their mothers, their fathers, and strangers in an unfamiliar playroom. Children 12 months and younger protested the departure of their mothers and fathers but not that of a stranger. Kotelchuck concluded that these children were attached to both of their parents. In addition, these infants did not show a preference for either parent. However, children 12 months and older showed a preference for their mothers by displaying a stronger reaction to the departure of their mothers from the playroom. Some researchers believed that Kotelchuck’s view of attachment was narrow as it was limited to separation protest.

In a longitudinal study conducted in a naturalistic home environment, Lamb (1977a) expanded the measure of attachment by including separation protest, reunion greetings, and attachment and affiliative behaviors. Twenty infants (10 males and 10 females) were observed in their homes when the infants were 7, 8, 12, and 13 months of age. Their affiliative behaviors, consisting of smiling, vocalizing, looking, laughing, and offering or sharing a toy, were recorded each time the behavior occurred in relation to either the mother, the father, or a visitor. The attachment behaviors recorded were proximity, approaches, touches, requests to be picked up, reaches, and fusses. The findings indicated that the infants were equally attached to both parents in the 1st year of life. Because of these finding, Lamb (1977b) embarked on another longitudinal study, which included many of the children from the first study. He observed these children during the 2nd year of
their life. Surprisingly, the children showed significant preferences for their fathers over their mothers in terms of both affiliative and attachment behaviors. Boys displayed strong attachment to their fathers; however, fathers paid special attention to their male children. With the females, the attachment behaviors were much less predictable because some preferred their mothers, some their fathers, and some neither parent. In the laboratory setting, however, girls interacted more with both parents and the parents reciprocated by interacting more with them (Lamb, 1977b). Lamb ignored the effect that a parent’s style of interaction can have on a child as he only addressed how the child interacted with the parent, not vice versa.

A study of Swedish families resulted in findings that contradicted Lamb’s previous findings. Children, in their 2nd year of life, showed clear-cut preferences for their mothers in the display of their attachment behaviors. However, the researchers found that even though Swedish men may be more involved in caretaking they do not engage in more play with their infants than their American counterparts (Lamb, Frodi, Hwang, & Frodi 1983).

Summary and Critique

As suggested by Pedersen (1980a), many of the reported studies share common limitations: “Long on variables and short on subjects” (p. 147). In addition, much of the research to date has used the quantitative approach utilizing a variety of statistical tests. A better understanding of the process and concepts that describe and explain the fathering relationship is needed. Often, the behaviors of
fathers have been understood by making comparisons with those of mothers. Although this approach provides some understanding of the father's behaviors with the developing infant, it does not illuminate the psychological processes and concepts that fully describe father-infant attachment. Primarily, researchers have examined father-infant attachment in terms of an outcome behavior rather than describing the father-infant attachment as a process that evolves over time.

One should question if the concepts of affiliation and attachment behaviors are capturing the essence of how infants attach to their fathers. Infant affiliative behaviors such as smiling and vocalizing are observed not only with attachment figures but with friendly people who are not attached to the baby (Lamb, 1980). Moreover, the theories of attachment developed by Bowlby (1969) with its further expansion by Ainsworth and Bell (1970) were primarily developed by studying the mother-infant relationship.

Every researcher has used the same measurement of the attachment relationship whether the subject under investigation was an infant or a toddler. As the infant matures, it would seem that there would be developmental changes in their affiliative and attachment behaviors necessitating different measures of them. Attachment should be conceptualized as a developmental process and, as such, would demand longitudinal study.

Attachment has been described as the infant responds by crying when the mother leaves the room. Because of the developmental level of the infant, some researchers suggest that attachment does not occur until the second half of the 1st
year. Possibly, these researchers have been measuring how well the infant responds to a stressful situation or how effectively the infant detaches from the parent rather than the infant’s ability to attach to the parent.

Another criticism is that researchers have not considered the reciprocal interaction that occurs between a father and his infant. The focus has been primarily on infant behavior. The question arises, “What do parents do to encourage particular infant behavior?” In addition, many researchers have focused on how much time each parent spends with the infant. It has been concluded that fathers do not spend as much time interacting with their infants as mothers. Possibly, the focus of study should not be the quantity of time but rather the character and quality of the relationship. Fathers bring different experiences to their children, particularly in their styles of play, which provide enriching experiences for their children.

Because many of the studies were conducted in a controlled, laboratory setting, the external validity of these studies is questionable. Children were placed in an unfamiliar playroom in a laboratory and then exposed to brief separations from their mothers, fathers, and strangers. In regard to these studies, Bronfenbrenner (cited in Pedersen, 1980b) stated that it is a “science of strange behavior of children in strange situations with strange adults for the briefest possible moment” (p. 17). Furthermore, most studies have focused on how infants develop an attachment relationship with their parents and not on how parents attach to their infants.
Social Support and the Parent-Infant Relationship

Many researchers have studied the father in providing support to the mother during childbirth, in facilitating development of the mother-infant relationship, and in assisting the mother in her parenting role. Comparatively little research has been undertaken of support that the mother provides to the father in the development of the father-infant relationship or in his parenting role. Spousal support is important for parenting, and fathers are dependent upon their wives for multifarious reasons. Fathers do not have extensive exposure to paternal role models and have little opportunity to prepare for caregiving activities necessary for raising children. The level of the father’s participation may be due to the extent to which mothers allow fathers to participate in infant care. Because the father’s role is changing and is less well-defined, mothers can help fathers define and crystallize their role and relationship with their children through spousal support (Parke & Tinsley, 1987).

Researchers have used a wide variety of definitions of social support in their studies; however, there seems to be some consensus about the general domain of social support. Four functions of support outlined by House (1981) are as follows: (a) emotional concern, (b) instrumental aid, (c) informational, and (d) appraisal. He emphatically stated that what people perceive as supportive is far more important than what a person actually receives. He says, “No matter how much your spouse or supervisor feels or acts supportive toward you, there will be little effect on you unless you, in fact, perceive them as supportive” (p. 27).
Therefore, it was advantageous to ask fathers in this study about their perceptions of support from their wives within the context of the father-infant relationship.

Wills (1985) came up with another definition of support by considering the resources provided through interpersonal relationships. These resources included (a) esteem support, (b) informational support, (c) instrumental support, and (d) social companionship. In comparing House's (1981) and Will's definitions, Will's conception of esteem support seems to be very similar to House's conception of emotional support; that is, emotional support encompasses the provision of esteem, trust, love, empathy, concern, and listening. However, House does not include social companionship as a function of support. Wills acknowledged, however, that if people pursue companionship and activities with others they are more likely to have access to instrumental and esteem resources of support. Consequently, there appears to be a weakness in Will's definition because of the probability of intercorrelations occurring among the resources of social companionship and instrumental and esteem resources.

Much of the literature and research suggests that social support buffers or ameliorates the negative impact of stressors that parents face during their transition to parenthood (Cronenwett & Kunst-Wilson, 1981; Unger & Powell, 1980). Furthermore, there is substantial evidence that parental stress adversely affects parental sensitivity and the quality of parent-child relationships. In a study examining the relationship of social support to mothers' attitudes and maternal-infant interactive behaviors with premature and full-term infants, Crnic,
Greenberg, Robinson, and Ragozin (1984) found that support had a significant effect on the mothers' relationship with their infants and parenting attitudes. Mothers with greater social support reported more positive parenting attitudes and more positive interactions with their children. In a similar study, Crockenberg (1981) found that the best predictor of a sound mother-infant attachment, particularly with irritable infants, was the amount of support provided by family and community agencies. Other researchers have come up with similar findings; however, they specifically found that fathers who participated in a variety of infant caretaking activities positively and indirectly influenced the quality of stimulation that their 6-month-old infants received through providing opportunities for mothers to rest, giving them a chance to regain their energy (Parks, Lenz, & Jenkins, 1992). However, in one study of 23 mothers, researchers found no positive relationship between social support and mothers' attitudes toward their infants (Tietzen & Bradley, 1985). There are many definitions of social support, and there appears to be a lack of conceptual agreement about this concept; therefore, researchers suggested a further development of social support measures.

Fathering (like mothering) successfully depends upon a supportive environment. From their research findings, Cronenwett and Kunst-Wilson (1981) suggested that spouses and nurses should recognize the father's need for support while he attempts to cope with the tasks of parenting. In a later study, Cronenwett (1985) found that the father's access to emotional and instrumental support positively influenced his satisfaction with parenting and infant care. These findings
are consistent with those found in a study of adolescent mothers and their partners. The degree of paternal involvement and engagement with the infant was significantly found to be related to the availability of social support (Lamb & Elster, 1985).

In a study in which the influence of social support and stress on expectant mothers’ and fathers’ health was explored, the support that husbands received from their wives was found to be the most significant variable in regard to understanding the effect of social support and stress on the expectant fathers’ health. Wives provided the most interpersonal support to their husbands. Although the wives depended upon their husbands for support, they relied upon a larger number of people for support. The researcher concluded that women are socialized to value and depend upon others and that, while men are reticent to self-disclose to others, they do seek intimacy and are self-disclosing mainly within their partner relationship (Brown, 1986).

**Summary and Critique**

Summing up this body of literature, it is apparent that no researcher has exclusively studied how mothers provide support for fathers. Most of the research and theoretical work has focused on how fathers support mothers during parenting and how fathers facilitate the development of the mother-infant relationship.

Because social support is defined in many different ways, it has been measured differently in most of the studies and has not been clearly operationalized. In addition, the instruments measuring social support usually have
not been tested for reliability and validity (Weinert & Brandt, 1987).

Researchers need to move beyond exploring the use of external support and explore how the family meets the family’s needs within the family system during the transition to parenting. In particular, fathers’ perceptions of support for parenting and developing a relationship with their young infants must be understood because they are not only providers but also recipients of support.
CHAPTER III

METHODS

The purpose of this study was to describe and provide a theoretical analysis of first-time fathers’ experiences in developing a relationship with their 2-month-old infants. Because little is known regarding fathers’ perceptions of their father-infant relationship, their fathering selves, and their infants, a qualitative approach that is exploratory, open, and theory-suspended was used. This method allowed fathers to describe and interpret the father-infant relationship and, in turn, helped the researcher uncover new insights and understanding of the father-infant relationship from the father’s perspective. The descriptive approach was necessary to discover concepts and their relationships, as opposed to trying to confirm or verify the existence of specific concepts and their relationship with regard to the father-infant relationship.

In this chapter, the methods used in the study based on the qualitative approach using the grounded theory method and rationale for this method and approach are discussed. The methods of sampling, data collection, and data analysis are presented, followed by a discussion of the criteria for judging the rigor of this study, and a discussion of its ethical considerations.
Rationale for Qualitative Approach

In keeping with the inductive method, the qualitative approach was the method of choice for this study for many reasons. When no theory exists, or researchers are relatively in "uncharted waters," or researchers wish to examine a problem using a fresh perspective, or researchers suspect a gender bias, the use of a qualitative approach has been strongly suggested (Field & Morse, 1985; Miles & Huberman, 1984; Stern, 1980). From the review of literature, it was evident that studies of the father-infant relationship have used theories based on studies of the mother-infant relationship. Consequently, the understanding of paternal behavior has been obscured by applying and operationalizing concepts originally intended to understand and explain the mother-infant relationship. The use of the same concepts and criteria formulated to study mother's behavior when researchers need to understand the father's experience from his perspective is questionable. Backett (1987) suggested that "too often the behavior and views of men and husbands have been ignored, inferred, or developed from women's accounts" (p. 75). McGreal (1981) issued a caveat warning researchers that they may be blind to critical, salient aspects of the father-infant relationship that are unique and different from mothers. However, supplanting or "mimicking" mother-infant research paradigms while studying fathers can be useful to some extent.

The research question should dictate the method. A way to get at fathers' perceptions about their father-infant relationship is to ask fathers directly about them. It is not enough to have people respond to questionnaires in order to study
their perceptions about a certain topic. What is critical, from the perspective of
the qualitative paradigm, is to have informants talk about what they perceive is
happening, not necessarily what the researcher thinks is happening. If the
researchers wish to gain an understanding of the informant's perceptions, they must
see the world as it is seen and interpreted by the informant. As stated previously,
the researcher should not predetermine the informant's reality through their
assumptions; informants should be the authors of their own experiences.

This study of the father-infant relationship is highly process oriented; that
is, the focus is on the development of the relationship between father and infant,
how the father thinks and feels about the process, and the nature of interactions
that occur between father and infant. The qualitative approach "is highly
appropriate in studying process because depicting process requires detailed
description, . . . process is fluid and dynamic; and participants' perceptions are a
key process consideration" (Patton, 1990, p. 95). In-depth interviewing is a
predominant mode of data collection in qualitative research. This technique can
best capture the dynamic nature of the developing relationship between father and
infant.

**Grounded Theory**

**Theoretical Perspective**

Since grounded theory has its roots in the theoretical underpinnings of
symbolic interactionism, the implications of using this theoretical perspective are
discussed.
From the perspective of symbolic interactionism human beings tend to act on the basis of how they believe other people behave toward them; and their self-perceptions and feelings tend to be mediated by how they think others see and feel about them. (Van Manen, 1990, p. 186)

In adopting the symbolic interactionist's approach, a researcher would study the "relationships between how we see ourselves (self definition), how we see others (interpersonal perceptions) and how we think others see us" (Van Manen, 1990, p. 187). These assumptions suggest that the researcher should focus on the meaning of experiences in everyday life as people interact in the world with self and others.

The researcher would observe participants in the natural setting rather than in a laboratory setting. Blumer (1969) emphasized this point by stating, "For symbolic interactionism the nature of the empirical social world is to be discovered, to be dug out by a direct careful and probing examination of that world" (p. 48). In order to gain an understanding of experiences from the informant's perspective, procedures such as participant observation, interviewing, and data sources such as diaries and life histories may be used.

Symbolic interactionists support the notion that human actions are covert and overt and that it is of utmost relevance to "get inside" the person's head to discover the covert actions. It is not enough to have people respond to questionnaires in order to study their perceptions about a certain topic. Instead, researchers must focus on "understanding the manner in which people come to define actual situations, how they develop and use perspectives, change perspectives, role take, problem solve, converse with self, and decide on a line of
action" (Charon, 1979, p. 178). Blumer (1969) remarked that so much emphasis has been placed on being objective that the researcher tends to see things from the position of a detached outside observer. Therefore, if the researcher wishes to gain an understanding of the informant's perspective, she or he must see the world as it is seen and interpreted by the informant.

**Purpose**

The purpose of grounded theory goes beyond that of merely describing what happens in situations. The goal is to develop an explanatory theory by delineating the concepts central to the phenomenon and then developing the relationships among the concepts in order to explain the reality of the individuals under study (Chenitz & Swanson, 1986; Strauss, 1987; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Although the ultimate goal of this method is to generate formal theory in which researchers explore several different types of substantive areas "without relating the resulting theory back to anyone particular substantive area" (Glaser, 1978, p. 145), the goal of this study was to generate substantive theory regarding the initial development of a father-infant relationship with only first-time fathers and not with different types of fathers in different settings or situations.

**The Sample**

**Size of Sample and Nature of Sampling**

The grounded theory method does not dictate that the number of informants that are necessary to participate in this type of study should be predetermined.
Instead, the method of theoretical sampling is used to assist in the determination of sample size. Sample size and sampling are dependent upon the saturation of the categories, the analysis of the incoming data, and the emerging theory (Knafl & Howard, 1984). Glaser (1978) suggested that sampling decisions be continually made during the entire study and that different choices of events, people or sites or around theoretically specified events are chosen. Due to time constraints, limited budget, and advice of my supervisory committee, it was decided that first-time fathers would be studied. Therefore, the major goal of theoretical sampling in this study was to assure that the full range and interrelationships of the categories relevant to first-time fathers' initial development of a father-infant relationship would be discovered.

Morse (1989) advocated the use of purposeful sampling: Informants who are articulate and willing to participate in the interviews and who have the ability to reflect on their experiences are purposefully chosen for the study. She issued a caveat to researchers: If volunteers are poor informants, drop them from the study because they are a waste of the researcher's time and resources. In addition, Morse suggested that "poor data buries the significant data, making the process of analysis difficult" (p. 115). In this study, the 14 fathers who volunteered remained a part of this study because they were reflective, interested, and able to discuss their thoughts and feelings openly and candidly.
Recruitment of Informants

Informants were recruited in several ways. I recruited some fathers by seeking approval from the board of health of one metropolitan city to approach fathers who were attending its prenatal classes and well-baby clinics or who were present during nurses' home visits to determine if they would be interested in participating in the study. Those fathers who indicated such interest to the community health nurse were given an introductory letter by them (see Appendix A). Then I telephoned these fathers to explain the study in more depth. Other fathers were recruited through placing advertisements in midwives' offices, through word of mouth by colleagues, and through the "snowball effect" (see Appendix B). More specifically, 4 fathers were recruited by community health nurses, 6 fathers by colleagues, 2 fathers by midwives, and 2 fathers through the snowball effect. I did not know any of these fathers personally.

Selection Criteria

Fathers who met the following criteria were included in the study: (a) English-speaking, (b) married to or living common-in-law with the mother, (c) present in the household, (d) first-time fathers, (e) residing within a 20-mile radius of the city in which the study was conducted, (f) intending to stay in the city area for 9 months following the birth of the baby, and (g) had infants who were healthy with no evident congenital anomalies.
Characteristics of Informants

The convenience sample was comprised of 14 fathers selected on the basis of the selection criteria and their willingness to participate in the study. The characteristics of the informants were as follows.

**Age.** The age of the fathers ranged from 28 to 44 years. More specifically, the fathers' ages were 2 fathers at 28 years old, 1 father at 29 years old, 2 fathers at 30 years old, 1 father at 32 years old, 2 fathers at 33 years old, 1 father at 34 years old, 1 father at 36 years old, 2 fathers at 37 years old, 1 father at 41 years old, and 1 father at 44 years old. Their spouses' ages ranged from 27 to 40 years.

**Education.** The majority of fathers were university-educated except for 2 fathers: 1 father had a college degree and the other had 1 year of college. Eleven wives were university-educated; the remaining 3 wives had a high school education.

**Occupation.** Fathers held various positions: (a) professorial, (b) teaching, and (c) management. More specifically, 2 fathers were professors, 2 were school teachers, 5 were in management, 1 was a journalist, 3 were engineers, and 1 was a bartender and artist. At the time of the interview mothers were the primary caretaker of the infants and were not employed. However, 2 mothers were pursuing university degrees.

**Family income.** The range of income was as follows: (a) 8 families earned more than $60,000, (b) 2 families earned from $50,000 to $59,000, (c) 1
family earned from $40,000 to $49,000, (d) 2 families earned from $20,000 to $29,000, and (e) 1 family earned less than $20,000.

**Country of birth.** Twelve fathers were born in Canada; 1 father was born in Yugoslavia; and 1 father was born in England.

**Infants’ characteristics.** All infants were healthy with no evidence of congenital anomalies.

**Birth weight.** Infants’ birth weights ranged from 6 pounds, 4 ounces to 9 pounds, 5 ounces.

**Gender.** Nine infants were females, and 5 infants were males.

**Knowledge of infant’s sex before birth.** Eleven fathers were unaware of their infant’s sex prior to birth, and 3 fathers knew what the infants’ sex was prenatally.

**Data Collection Methods**

**Pilot Study**

Before commencement of the study, interviews were conducted with a first-time father and a father who had two children to assess the feasibility of the study, the suitability of the open-ended questions, and the fathers’ ease and openness in responding to a female researcher. Fathers did not seem to find it difficult to talk about their innermost thoughts and feelings about their experiences as fathers. In reviewing the transcripts and the open-ended questionnaire, the supervisory committee requested additional probing questions and less direct questions in two instances. The committee decided that fathers with more than one child should not
be included in this study; therefore, this father’s interview data were discarded. However, the first-time father became a part of the study because the minor adjustments in the interview did not compromise the data collection.

The Interviews

Interview Setting and Duration of Interview

After the father had signed the consent form (see ethical considerations to follow), a tape-recorded interview was conducted in the privacy of the father’s home or in a mutually agreed upon suitable place. Each father was interviewed on one occasion. Ten fathers were interviewed in their homes; 3 were interviewed in the researcher’s office at the university; and 1 was interviewed in the father’s office during business hours. Most of the interviews occurred in the evening after the father had completed an 8- to 10-hour work day. On occasion, it was obvious that some fathers were fatigued; however, they eagerly talked at great length about their experiences as fathers. Interviews lasted from 1½ to 2½ hours. Two interviews for the pilot study occurred in September 1990, and 13 interviews occurred over a 9-month span commencing in April 1991, with completion on November 27, 1991.

Interview Format

Because it was important to elicit fathers’ innermost thoughts and feelings about their relationships with their infants, I attempted to create an atmosphere of trust, authenticity, openness, and sensitivity. In order to build rapport and trust,
the interview commenced with some social "chit-chat" that centered around topics such as the events of the day, their work, my studies and background, and so on. At the beginning of each interview, it was emphasized that the father could decline to answer any question and that the interviews were not a test situation in which right or wrong answers were being sought. In using this approach, it was hoped that fathers would not give what they thought were socially desirable answers.

Three general areas of interest guided the interviews: (a) the father's perceptions of his infant, (b) his relationship with his infant, and (c) his fathering self. The interviews were opened with the least threatening general topic. For example, the general area of discussion moved from the baby to the father-infant relationship to the father himself. Once the general topic areas were covered, fathers were given an opportunity during the latter part of the interview to introduce topics that they believed were important (see Appendix C). As fathers' stories unfolded and themes emerged, I followed through on these particular themes with subsequent fathers. For instance, in the initial interviews with the first 7 fathers, they talked about their relationship with their own fathers; therefore, the remaining 7 fathers in the study were encouraged to discuss this topic. May (1989) suggested that later interviews may become more focused so that the researcher could follow new leads, themes, or emerging categories.

Good interviewing skills using open-ended questions that allowed fathers to express their perceptions in their own terms were considered to be essential. In addition, detailed elaborate probes and supportive feedback statements were used to
encourage fathers to talk in-depth about their experiences. An example of an elaboration probe that was used was as follows: "Tell me more about what you just said," whereas a detailed probe was "What is it like? How do you feel about it?" An example of a feedback statement was "Yes, I understand what you are saying."

Once the interview was completed, the demographic questionnaire was completed (see Appendix D). Chenitz and Swanson (1986) suggested that demographic information is best obtained at the end of the interview. It is believed that once the relationship has been established fathers feel more at ease in answering questions about their income level, age, or anything else that they may find intrusive.

Because full concentration was necessary while interviewing, note-taking was avoided during the interview and permission to use the tape recorder was requested of the participants. Patton (1980) suggested that the researcher ask permission to use a recorder after clearly saying why tape-recording is necessary. In seeking permission, the fathers were told, "I would like to tape-record our interview since it is important that I not miss anything that you say. I know I will miss a lot if I take notes. I would like to tape-record if that is all right with you." All fathers were willing to be tape-recorded. Immediately following each interview, notes were made describing the atmosphere of the visit, the duration of the visit, the father's affect, and my impression of the father-researcher relationship. Tapes were transcribed by a typist experienced in transcribing
interviews in qualitative research.

**Atmosphere of the Interviews**

Working with families and interviewing in a family home setting has been a part of my community health nursing experience. This familiarity assisted me in feeling comfortable in this setting and topic area. However, some apprehension and anxiety about interviewing men were experienced because the literature suggests that men have difficulty in talking about their innermost thoughts and feelings, particularly to strangers. Time and time again, this assumption proved to be incorrect. To my delight and admiration, the fathers came across as sensitive, gentle, and vulnerable men who openly and candidly discussed their innermost thoughts and feelings about their developing relationships with their infants. Following the termination of their interviews, 2 fathers revealed that they had not discussed these topics with anyone except their wives, and they were pleased that someone was taking an interest in their experiences. One father admitted that he was a private person but said that he was willing to share his thoughts and feelings to the best of his ability because he wanted to assist in developing research in this area. Two fathers revealed that they preferred female over male friends because they found it was much easier to discuss ideas with women than men. It was apparent that the fathers needed an opportunity to talk about the feelings of pleasure, surprise, doubt, and fear they were experiencing in their new roles as fathers.
**Data Reduction and Analysis**

**The Creative Process**

It was overwhelming to face approximately 840 pages of transcriptions piled high on my desk; however, I was cognizant of the laborious task ahead of me. Although I was cognitively blocked in the beginning stage of data reduction, I realized the importance of not delaying the creative process. I read the transcriptions several times and developed many codes. Then I questioned how I was going to make sense of these codes. In some way, it was like putting a 2,000-piece jigsaw puzzle together. One begins to solve a puzzle by grouping similar colors of the puzzle pieces together in much the same way similar pieces of data are clumped together. Once the similar pieces are grouped, the next task is to determine how the pieces fit together in order to view the total picture.

The process of making sense of the data was slow and arduous, and at times there was a feeling of frustration and exhaustion. When my thoughts were blocked, I had to remove myself from the intense, concentrated focus of the analysis and allow my ideas to incubate. When I could not think any more, I would take extended walks with my dog or engage in a task that did not require any contemplation. Although I was not consciously thinking of the data, ideas were constantly percolating in my head. Moustakas (1990) suggested that during the process of incubation

the researcher is no longer absorbed in the topic in any direct way or alert to things, situations, events, or people that will contribute to an understanding of the phenomenon. Nevertheless, growth is taking place. (p. 28)
An analogy can be made to the commonly experienced situation of trying to remember someone’s name. The more one tries to remember the name, the more the name eludes one. As soon as one is absorbed in doing something else, the name comes into one’s consciousness. This process was similar to what I experienced during the creative phase. When I was relaxed and in a receptive state of mind, without undue concentration, the insights or flashes of intuition transpired; but it is not to say that many hours were spent mulling over and reflecting upon the data.

A major breakthrough and the most rewarding experience occurred during the process of synthesis. At this point, I was familiar with the data and the theoretical codes and categories were labelled. Now the challenge was to put the categories into a meaningful whole. While sitting at my desk, enveloped in the warmth of the sun, I had an immediate flash of insight. Instantly, I could see the patterns and connections among the theoretical categories; I quickly drew the model. Finally, I had come to the end of the analytic phase of the project. Using the creative process, I have solved the research puzzle.

The Analytic Process

The comparative method developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967), and further developed by Strauss and Corbin (1990), was used to describe the analytic process of the study and to analyze the study data. For the most part, data collection and analysis were undertaken simultaneously throughout the first half of the project in order to identify emergent commonalities, patterns, and differences
in the fathers’ responses. Due to the secretary’s workload, it was impossible for her to return the remaining 7 transcribed interviews to me in time so that I could review and compare the interviews before proceeding with the next interview. However, I had a sense of the emerging concepts, the fathers’ concerns, and specific areas that they wanted to explore further. For instance, in the interviews conducted during the earlier part of the data collection, fathers suggested that their desire to have children and their relationship with their own fathers had some bearing on how they would develop a relationship with their infants. Therefore, in subsequent interviews, these themes were discussed with the remaining 7 fathers.

A matrix was developed to assist in summarizing and comparing the voluminous amount of data that were collected related to the father-infant interaction. For example, fathers’ responses were compared by type of father-infant interaction, the father’s ability to read infant’s cues, the infant’s ability to engage in interaction, and the father’s general feelings toward the infant. In each cell of the matrix, a brief summary of the substantive codes was inserted to serve as a beginning point of analysis. This organization of the substantive codes assisted in the identification of major categories, classification of fathers according to these categories, and comparison of fathers’ different perceptions.

The process of handling and analyzing data was divided into two stages: (a) developing categories and (b) linking categories. These two stages were not two discrete processes, and they did not occur in a linear fashion. I moved back and forth between the two processes in a fluid and flexible way. Development of
the categories was an analytic process in which codes were identified and
developed by identifying differences, similarities, and relationships among events
and incidents described in the data. Subsequently, several codes were grouped
together at a more abstract level to form a category (see Figure 1). The final
analytic task was to define the properties and dimensions of the categories (Strauss
& Corbin, 1990). Linking the categories was done by establishing relationships
among the categories, which aided in the development of theoretical categories
(Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Definitions of Terms

Substantive Code

The exact words of the informants are used to form a substantive code.

Theoretical Code

Substantive codes are moved to a higher level of abstraction by placing a
conceptual label on discrete events, situations, happenings, and other instances of
phenomena—which is reflective of the substance of the substantive codes.

Theoretical Category

Theoretical codes are grouped together under a higher order and renamed to
form a more abstract concept.
Figure 1. Levels of Theory Development.
Core Category

A core category is "the central phenomenon around which all the other categories are integrated" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 116).

Developing Categories

First, large chunks of substantive data were color coded according to five topic areas: (a) perceptions of the infant, (b) perceptions of the fathering self, (c) perceptions of the father-infant relationship, (d) perceptions of spousal support, and (e) changes within the father-infant relationship over the first 2 months.

All transcripts were read again comparing the data line-by-line, paragraph-by-paragraph, incident-by-incident. At this time, initial codes were developed identifying which pieces of data were similar, dissimilar, or a part of something else and then determining which codes seemed to make sense. Some codes were described by using the exact words of the participants--better known as substantive codes, whereas other codes were developed at a higher level of abstraction—better known as theoretical codes. Approximately 35 substantive and theoretical codes were induced from the data at this time. Examples of some of these codes were identification, baby's characteristics, commitment, father's qualities, rewards and costs of the relationship, time, and so on. In order to assist in comparing the codes across 14 participants, the codes were entered into the computer using the Ethnograph program. Each coded data set was placed in a colored file folder. These data sets were compared across participants in order to identify the dimensions and properties of a code by using the coding families developed by
Glaser (1978). For example, the 6c's (causes, contexts, contingencies, consequences, covariances, and conditions), process, degree, dimension, strategy, and the interactive family of codes were primarily used. Once the properties of a specific code were identified, the code was renamed, or subsumed under another code, or retained as is. Movement from the development of substantive codes to theoretical codes is illustrated in the table.

When examining the entire set of interviews related to the theoretical code of familiarity, I asked the following questions: What is happening here? What is similar or dissimilar? What are the properties? What are the dimensions of these properties? Once the theoretical code of familiarity was formulated, I posed questions to ascertain how this code fits into the context of the father-infant relationship. Questions were asked if the concept of familiarity was a condition, context, consequence, or a part of a process, strategy, or dimension of the father-infant relationship. Following the development of all categories, I reviewed the literature to ascertain if there was any existing theory to assist in the understanding of the concept of familiarity. Levinger suggested that for adults to develop a close relationship with adults, they must view the person as familiar and predictable (cited in Perlman & Duck, 1987). Concurrently, in this study, other theoretical codes of predictability and responsiveness were developed. As infants became more familiar, predictable, and responsive to fathers, this fathering relationship grew. Once all the categories and the process of “becoming connected” were developed, it was easier to determine where this process and theoretical category
**Development of Substantive Codes to Theoretical Codes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Substantive codes</th>
<th>Properties</th>
<th>Theoretical code</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>He’s long. Has lots of hair on his head, unlike his father. Blue eyes like most of his family. Big feet like his grandmother. (03)</td>
<td>Infant’s characteristics were compared to family members. The characteristics were compared on a dimension from similar to dissimilar. The characteristics were positive in nature.</td>
<td>Familiarity is the theoretical code. Identification with family members promotes a familiarity of the infant, a component that is conducive to the development of the father-infant relationship.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

She looks like my wife, just with the light-colored hair right now and blue eyes. I tried comparing ears to see if her ears look like mine, but I think she is more like her mother. (08)

fit into the whole schema.

**Linking Categories**

Once the theoretical codes and their relationships were determined, it was important to establish the relationship of each category with other categories, thus developing theoretical links between the categories. Eventually, this process leads to the development of theory and the identification of a basic social or psychological process or core variable (Chenitz & Swanson, 1986). Once the relationship between the theoretical codes became apparent, three major theoretical
categories were determined which subsumed all the theoretical codes. The three major theoretical categories that were operative in the initial development of the father-infant relationship were (a) making a commitment, (b) becoming connected, and (c) making room for the baby. Again, I used the 6c's and the dimension and strategy codes to assist in the development of the three major categories. For instance, when examining the major category of commitment, some questions were asked such as the following: Is the desire to have children, as expressed by fathers, a condition or context to commitment? Can I divide commitment into different types or dimensions? What are the different types of rewards gained within the context of the father-infant relationship? Do the perceived rewards influence the developing relationship between father and infant? If so, how?

Generally, I moved from the development of substantive codes, to theoretical codes, to the relationship among the codes. All of this assisted in the development of theoretical categories and finally to the basic psychological process: the core category (see Figure 1). The basic psychological process or core category was central to the emergent theory; that is, it was related in some way to all other categories, it was frequently evident in the data, it made sense, and it had explanatory power. Questions that were asked to determine the core category were the following: What is the main theme or story? Is this category central to the other categories? How are the categories related to it (Strauss, 1987)?

The basic psychological process or core category was “becoming connected.” Process in grounded theory is defined as a change in conditions that
sets process into motion (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). In other words, the core category is a process if it has time dimensions, turning points, or stages (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). I made an effort to look for indications in the data that signified a change in conditions and then traced the corresponding interactions that fathers brought to this father-infant relationship. The process of “becoming connected” occurred over the infant’s first 2 months of life; however, there were changes in the conditions of connecting. Fathers felt connected to their infants shortly following the birth, some more than others, because of the conditions surrounding the birth. For example, complications surrounding the birth caused some fathers to be more hesitant in connecting compared to others who had not encountered any complications or significant worries during the birth event. Furthermore, during the first 5 to 6 weeks of the infant’s life, fathers felt somewhat distanced from the close mother-infant bond. The turning point or change in this fathering relationship took place when fathers perceived their infants as more responsive, predictable, and familiar to them. These perceptions of their infants fuelled the development of a closer connection with their infants.

Once the categories and connections between them were made, hypotheses were easily generated. Glaser and Strauss (1967) suggested that not only are categories generated when making comparisons of differences and similarities among the data, but it also is advantageous to generate hypotheses. Hypotheses are presented in this study so that other researchers can test, refine, or develop the major categories using different settings, types of fathers, or situational factors.
Finally, a secondary review of literature was conducted to validate my findings and to suggest new findings that resulted from this study.

The goal in using this method of grounded theory was to generate substantive theory of the initial development of the father-infant relationship that was grounded in data collected through interviews. It led to an understanding and explanation of how fathers develop a beginning relationship with their firstborn.

**Ethical Considerations**

The present study was reviewed by the University of Utah Review Committee on Human Research, and ethical clearance was obtained. In addition, ethical clearance was sought from the Edmonton Board of Health to obtain participants for this study.

During the first interview, fathers were given an explanation of the study. They were then asked to sign an informed consent form (see Appendix E). At this time, I explained the confidential nature of the interviews and informed fathers that they could withdraw from the study at any time during an interview by telling me or by canceling scheduled interviews. I sought permission from the fathers to tape-record the interviews. Then the fathers were informed that the interviews would be transcribed, that following completion of the written report the questionnaires and field notes would be destroyed, and that the audiotapes would be erased. I informed the fathers that they would be identified on the tapes, questionnaires, and typed transcripts by code name/number only. They were further informed that transcriptions of the interviews would be kept in a secure
place for a period of 5 years for possible further analysis and that, if further analysis was to be conducted, appropriate ethical clearance would be obtained. Fathers were assured that data from the interviews would be used only for educational and/or research purposes. Fathers were informed that any written documents or publications stemming from the research might contain direct quotes from the interviews but that they would be recorded in such a manner that the informant’s identity would not be disclosed.

Criteria of Rigor in Qualitative Research

Methodological rigor, as it applies specifically to the present study, is discussed using the criteria of credibility, fittingness, and auditability developed by Lincoln and Guba (1985) and elaborated by Sandelowski (1986). Credibility is the criterion used to evaluate the truth value of qualitative research. Credibility is accomplished when the researcher describes the experiences of the informants in an accurate, complete, and meticulous manner such that the informants would easily recognize the described experiences as their own. Credibility was established by asking 3 fathers to validate the emerging concepts. The fathers agreed that the thoughts and feelings expressed by other fathers were similar to their own. The fathers said that “their feelings seem to be a lot like mine”; “yes, the study, for the most part, reflected my feelings”; and “it was a fascinating study.”

Sandelowski (1986) suggested that credibility is enhanced when the researcher describes her or his own behavior and feelings, as well as the participants’ reactions toward the researcher during the interviews. Following each
interview, I made a note of the nature of my interactions with fathers by describing how we influenced each other’s behavior. By creating an atmosphere of trust, sensitivity, and authenticity, I hoped that the fathers would relate their stories in an honest and open manner that, in turn, would increase the credibility of the findings and interpretation. Within this trusting relationship, fathers were able to relate their stories in an in-depth, candid, and honest way.

Fittingness refers to the extent to which the audience, other than the participants in the present study, views the findings as meaningful and applicable in terms of their own experiences. In order to assess whether or not I had captured the human experience of the father-infant relationship, I had two experienced nurses in the field of paediatrics and obstetrics review the emergent categories in light of some of the transcripts. Also, extensive quotes from the interviews are presented in the findings so that readers can determine how well the categories fit the data. In addition, presentation of the findings at research conferences and parenting group meetings, as well as publication of the findings, will provide opportunities for obtaining feedback from colleagues and parents regarding how close I came to capturing the experiences of fathers and their infants.

Auditability refers to the ability of the researcher to outline clearly the decision trail used throughout the entire study so that another researcher can follow the logic, decisions, and progression of events. The following events, which have been proposed by Sandelowski (1986) as necessary to include in a report of the study, have been included in the dissertation: (a) review and critique of the
literature, (b) purpose of the study, (c) criteria of selection and selection of participants, (d) data management and analysis, (e) atmosphere of interviews, (f) duration of data collection, and (g) examples of data reduction or transformation.

Readers of the present study ultimately will be the judges of the extent to which auditability was accomplished.
CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

The findings are presented under three major theoretical categories related to the initial development of the father-infant relationship during the infant's first 2 months of life. The following is a brief description of each category and how the categories are related to the core category of “becoming connected.” The basic psychological process or core category of “becoming connected” is central to the emergent theory; that is, it is related in some way to all other categories and appears frequently in the data. The term “attachment” was not used to describe the father-infant relationship because this term has several meanings in the current literature and may only add confusion. Rather, the term “connectedness” was used to describe the father’s bond to his infant. Contextual factors influenced the initial development of the father-infant relationship such as spousal support and the fathers’ relationships with their own fathers are outlined. A model presents the interrelationships of these categories in diagram form (see Figure 2).

The three major theoretical categories are (a) making a commitment, (b) becoming connected, and (c) making room for the baby. Commitment is defined as fathers’ willingness to invest in and take responsibility for nurturing the relationship with their infants despite parenting difficulties and other life pressures.
Figure 2. Conceptual Model of Initial Development of the Father-Infant Relationship.
The condition to commitment is fathers' expression of a desire to have children and/or fathers' involvement in planning the pregnancy without feeling obliged or pressured into having children. The fathers were definitely saying yes to becoming a father. Commitment has two faces that occur simultaneously: (a) a sense of having to and (b) a sense of wanting to. Because of the helpless, vulnerable nature of the infant, fathers felt a sense of duty and responsibility or a sense of having to nurture, protect, and provide for their infants. At the same time, fathers wanted to know their infants and to be psychologically and physically involved in their infants' lives because of the rewards the relationship had to offer. Fathers perceived that the rewards far outweighed the costs of parenting, which, in turn, shaped and influenced the fathers' feelings of connectedness.

The second major category (connectedness) refers to fathers' expressed feelings of caring, pleasure, and protectiveness toward their infants during the infant's first 2 months of life, which, in turn, created a bond that psychologically tied father with the infant. A cluster of infant behaviors perceived as positive by the fathers exerted a positive influence on the fathers in their developing relationship with their infants. For example, a sense of caring and pleasure gradually increased as the infant became more predictable, familiar, and responsive to the father.

Becoming connected to their infants was a process that began with the fathers feeling intense, euphoric emotions at birth, that is, if there were no complications or stresses associated with the birth experience. If the father was
concerned about the mother or baby or was experiencing life stresses in general, his feelings of affection for his infant grew more slowly. During the infant's first 5 weeks of life, the father's intense, euphoric feelings at birth became more subdued. In addition, most fathers initially felt on the periphery or distanced from their relationship with their infants for multifarious reasons. The turning point in the development of the father-infant relationship occurred when the fathers perceived their infants as more responsive, predictable, and familiar. Fathers described their infants in positive terms noting that their infants were perfect in their eyes. These perceptions of their infants fuelled the development of this connection of the father to the infant. Furthermore, the fathers perceived that the relationship was beginning to take on more significance because their infants were giving specific, positive feedback through their interactions (see Figure 3).

The third major category (making room for the baby) consists of fathers making changes and/or adjustments in their lives to make psychological and physical room for their infants. Fathers made changes and/or adjustments in their work and social/personal time, in relationships with their wives and within themselves in order to be physically present in the home and emotionally and energetically available to their infants.

The contextual factor that influenced the development of the father-infant relationship was the relationship that the men in this study had with their own fathers. Fathers were striving to be more emotionally connected to their children than they were to their own fathers when they were growing up. However, 1 man
BECOMING CONNECTED

The Initial Acquaintance - During Delivery

Connecting from a Distance - First Five Weeks

Seeing the Infant as an Object

Becoming Involved in Caring for Infant

Establishing a Closer Connection - Five Weeks to 2 Months

Infant is
- responsive
- attractive
- familiar
- predictable

Figure 3. Process of Becoming Connected.
who was satisfied with his father-son relationship wanted to parent in a manner that was similar to that of his father. Another significant, contextual influence that aided fathers in the development of this initial father-infant relationship was the informational and emotional support they received from their wives.

This organizing framework represents a beginning substantive theory outlining the major theoretical categories that are operative in the initial development of the father-infant relationship (see Figure 2). The supporting data to substantiate these theoretical categories are now discussed in detail.

Making a Commitment

Desire to Have a Baby

Fathers reported that a conscious decision was made to have a baby prior to their wives becoming pregnant—a decision that reflected a form of commitment.

We thought about it for a long time because we’ve been married for quite a while. . . . It is something I’ve wanted to do badly in my life. If I wanted to do something, then I devote the energies necessary to be good at it. [03]

I’ve wanted to be a father for a long time. It’s been a goal of mine from when I was very young I wanted to be a father. I had a short period of time after I spent a lot of time with my niece and nephew, and my niece went through the terrible 2s, terribly, so that was a little stressful and I thought geez, but I got over that and wanted to be a father very dearly again. [12]

One father described the process of arriving at his decision in a methodical, linear fashion.
We've been preparing ourselves to be good parents for years and years and years and years and years. And this was a planned birth. We planned, you know, go to university, finish that, get a job teaching, start a family, and we literally followed it right to the letter of the law. [04]

Because of a common-in-law marriage and his partner's involvement in graduate studies, I father revealed that the pregnancy had been unplanned but that the confirmation of the pregnancy turned out to be a delightful surprise. He had always wanted children and viewed his baby positively, noting that his relationship with his partner was closer, and he had developed more confidence in himself and in his work as a result of the birth of his baby [06].

The Reality of the Commitment Takes Hold

Various events during the pregnancy and postbirth helped fathers realize the reality of the commitment and significance of caring for their infants. For some fathers, the reality of the commitment took hold when the baby was in utero, for others when they started assuming responsibility for infant care, for still others at the confirmation of the pregnancy, for some during the delivery, and for 1 father when the infant started responding to him.

On bringing the baby home, 1 father realized that infant care was a 24-hour-a-day job. He stated, "You can't put the baby on the shelf and say I'll be back in 3 hours." In addition, the many decisions that the fathers, as a first-time parent, made on a daily basis made them realize that the commitment was an integral part of parenting. One father described some of these decisions.
When is the first time that you take the baby for a ride in the car? How far should you go? How long should you plan on taking her out in the car? What sorts of places should you take her to? How immune are babies when they are breast-feeding? Every single one of them is a decision that has to be made that as a first-time parent I've never had to make in my life before. [02]

Another father said the commitment to his baby “quadrupled” when he felt the baby’s first kick in utero. He remarked:

I was much more responsible for making myself secure as well as making my family secure, and I’m much more responsible for providing for them. Much more responsible for long-term planning for myself and for my family. I mean those are the things that people who don’t have children don’t generally think of. [10]

For some fathers the commitment did not become a reality until the confirmation of the pregnancy or until the birth of the baby.

I was there in the delivery room. This blue baby came out, turned mauve basically, and then they oxygenated him; and all of a sudden I knew that was my baby and he’s my responsibility. Now these feelings have grown. I think I recognized that he was my baby and I had those responsibilities but it really hadn’t set hard. [14]

One father felt a strong sense of commitment when the baby started to look into his eyes and started to “track” him. When asked how this made him feel, he responded:

It makes me feel extremely responsible. Because I’m the only dad that the kid will ever have. And so if I want to go out and drink too much or something then it’s more like that’s really good buddy, but if you kill yourself, he never gets another dad. Right. And he’s going to need all the help he can get to survive in this world ’cause I know it’s taken everything I’ve got to survive, myself. [04]
Sense of Duty and Responsibility

Fathers expressed a sense of duty and responsibility in caring for their infants because of the infants' helplessness coupled with their lack of participation in deciding whether they should be brought into the world.

I think I'm responsible. I owe him things because I brought him here. I mean he had no vote. He had no say in this matter. I was the one who decided he was going to come into existence and here he is. And then I am going to raise him. [03]

In describing his relationship with his son, 1 father emphatically stated he was not totally in love with his son but “it was more of a logical thing.”

You created this birth. You are responsible for it. And even if you don’t feel emotionally attached to it, it’s yours and you just do . . . you do what you do for some of the old reasons that people did years ago. You work because you’re supposed to work. Not because you love working, right? Maybe some old values, I don’t know what it is. [04]

One father beautifully expressed the dilemma of not wanting to care for his daughter but knowing that he had to regardless of possible future circumstances.

Although she hasn’t been this way a lot, I can imagine, and have mildly experienced it, that if it’s 2 o’clock in the morning and she doesn’t want to go to sleep, you have to want to stay awake and care for her instead of just knowing that you have to stay awake and care for her. And sometimes you know, I haven’t been able to want to do it. I’ve just had to do it. And sometimes I’ve been pleased to feel within myself that I’ve actually wanted to do it . . . and other times it’s really a sacrifice. [12]

Rewards Outweigh the Costs

Fathers perceived that the rewards to be gained from the father-infant relationship far outweighed the trials and tribulations of parenting. Fathers
enthusiastically recounted the pleasures of relating to their infants and minimized
the negative aspects of parenting such as interrupted sleep, physical demands of
caring for the infant, and decreased wife-husband interaction.

A father verbalized about the importance of wanting to be a parent and how
the rewards outweigh the costs or trials of parenting.

Parenting is pretty easy if you want to do it bad enough. . . . I
think a lot of the problems are people, maybe more or less younger
people, but of any age, where they don’t want to be a parent.
They’re not willing to truly commit to the project, they still want to
be able to have some of their old life, right? They resent giving up
their social lives or something. We really believe that we don’t have
to give up that much of our social life anyway. I think I can go to
the movies with a child. We’ve already been to the movies. . . . I
don’t think it has to change your life that much, not for the negative
anyway. [03]

Another father discussed vividly how a laugh can wipe away the negative
aspects of the relationship. When asked how his baby’s laugh made him feel, he
responded:

I think I can sum it up best as having a child is interesting at best,
frustrating at worst, but the minute she lets out one of these little
“ha-ha,” you forget all about the fact that you just had baby poo up
to your eyebrows, you just ruined your $110 shirt, you’ve got to
rechange everything, and you’re constantly a half hour late. You
forget all about that. There’s that, to me right now that’s the
reward. [13]

The Rewards

The infant’s interaction. In this study, the most significant reward was
the infant’s smile and vocalization, which, in turn, led to a rich dialogue between
father and baby. The infant’s smile “told” the parents they were doing a good job
in satisfying the infant's needs. Parents need the infant's feedback to validate the appropriateness of their parenting skills (Brazelton & Cramer, 1990).

Watching her laugh. Haven't mentioned that before actually. That's something I really like, she just started to really smile a lot recently. And, ah, that's another way of telling that she likes something. I mentioned the noises, she'll make a noise, but she will also smile at something she likes. [02]

There is nothing worth more than a smile from that little face, because you know she is smiling at you sort of thing, she might not know why but she does. That makes everything . . . every minute you are awake at night, you could be half asleep and walk to her crib and when you pull the quilt back and she smiles at you, it doesn't matter how tired you are or what time of night; . . . that is the reward I get. [11]

**Sense of increased self-esteem.** Not only were the baby's interactions found to be rewarding, but these interactions increased fathers' self-esteem. One father candidly revealed how the baby's smile and laughter raised his self-esteem.

Oh, I think seeing him smile and laugh at you. As I said earlier, stare intently into my face. I know we read a lot of things into situations that are not really there, but there appears to be a sense of wonder, a sense of marvel. I suspect that's rewarding. I'm just an ordinary person really and someone should hold me with such esteem. It's happening now more than it did when he was little. And I'm sure it will continue to increase. [05]

**Sense of immortality.** For other fathers the reward was that this baby was a duplication of themselves and would give them a sense of immortality. This baby not only would be a living testimony of their existence as a couple, but this child could achieve greater accomplishments.

It's a nice feeling to think that we could pool our resources and create something that could go beyond us, not just in years but could rise to a slightly higher level, or a greater level, or have the capacity at least to do so more than my wife and I have been able to. [04]
Sense of completeness. Some fathers were beginning to realize how much the baby provided a new dimension to their lives. Looking back on their lives before the birth of their children, life seemed empty to the fathers in comparison. Having a child gave them new pleasures in relation to themselves and others.

I keep coming back to this but it’s like there’s a sense of completeness now. And it’s very difficult to describe or pinpoint that emotion. But that’s for me personally. I have a sense of completeness now. Um, ... completeness within myself. Um, I’m aware of priorities now and I think that having a child has made me a better person. [13]

I think that the baby has filled a void in our lives in terms, you know; we have a nice home and we have good jobs and things, but you like to have some family that you can have an attachment to. ... at times like Christmas or birthdays or things of that nature, I think we will appreciate her more, even more than we do right now. And now we appreciate her a lot. ... What it’s really done I think is made you appreciate friends and family a lot more that we took for granted. [07]

The child within. The baby helped some fathers find a spontaneous, fun-loving side, the child within them. It gave fathers a meaning and fulfillment in knowing that they had connected with their babies in a playful way. This is vividly captured in the words of one father: “Yeah, she brings out the silliness in you; you can be pretty silly around her and get away with it, you know, just trying to entertain her and some day she will do the same for us I am sure” [11].

Bolton (1983) pointed out that “positively attached parents will be observed willingly to subject themselves to manipulations of the child to a degree that would be thought ludicrous in an interaction between two adults” (p. 80). It is through experiencing these playful, ludicrous interactions that a child learns to develop a
sense of reliance and trust (Bowlby, 1973). One father described this playful, ludicous interaction.

I can get him laughing very easily just by looking at him and using my own voice inflection. And gross exaggeration of the facial muscles, my own facial muscles you know, not the way I would speak with you. But by grossly exaggerating my face in the smile formation and stuff I can get him going quite quickly, and he will sit there and laugh and giggle for half an hour. [04]

Fathers talked about wanting to reexperience their own childhood. Greenberg (1985), a father of two children, suggested that the very realization that fathers are moving forward into a new phase of fatherhood will simultaneously thrust them back in time to reexamine their own upbringing and childhood. He believed this is a universal experience. He said,

It is as if this is the final glimpse, a last peek into the valley of youth before we step over the mountain crest into the undeveloped wilderness of parenthood and adulthood. There is a sense of saying goodbye to our childhood as we move into this new stage of our lives. (p. 60)

A father revealed his desire to reexperience his childhood.

Having a child, you're appreciative of all these things and you are noticing them in new ways and I think you see everything in new ways with him now. You're always wondering, I wonder what I was like when I was that age. And I've always had that feeling; I wish I could remember that. It would be wonderful to have memories when you were . . . you know, or a year, or when you were a month, I think it would be great. [03]

One father talked about his ability to relive his youth by involving his child in his activities.
I get to relive my youth through the child and to me that’s the biggest bonus going and like I found my Ponce de Leon here. My fountain of youth is her. It, ah, makes me feel that much younger. So now I get to go to the soccer games; it’s like I got a reason to go to the Trapper’s now. I’ll take her to, you know, whatever. See if she likes it, and if she doesn’t like it we won’t go again. I won’t force it on her, but again I get to live my youth through her. [13]

Summary

The first seeds of the father-infant relationship were planted when fathers expressed feelings of readiness and desire to have a baby. The reality of commitment took hold at different time points for the fathers. For some fathers, the commitment became a reality when the baby was in utero, for others when responsibility of infant care was assumed, for still others at the diagnosis of pregnancy, for some during the delivery, and for 1 father when the infant started to respond to him.

Commitment has two faces that occur simultaneously: (a) a sense of having to and (b) a sense of wanting to (Brickman, 1987). For example, in this study, fathers felt a sense of duty and responsibility to care for their infants because of their infant’s helplessness, while wanting to become involved because of the many rewards that would be reaped. The fathers definitely believed that the rewards of the relationship far outweighed the costs or sacrifices that had to be made such as loss of personal freedom, lack of sleep, decreased husband-wife interaction, and time-consuming physical care of infants. The rewards perceived by the fathers appeared to shape and influence their feelings of connectedness toward their infants.
Becoming Connected

The Initial Acquaintance of Father and Infant During Delivery

Reflecting back on the birth experience, the fathers revealed how they felt about the delivery and meeting their new infants for the first time. For the most part, fathers felt “joyful,” “elated,” “protective,” “walking on air,” and “in awe” and “wonderment” toward the birth. The words of the fathers captured these intense emotions.

The intensity of emotion during the home birth and also... um, my participation in the birth I think made me feel less of a stranger to the event... It was feelings of protectiveness for both my wife and the baby right... immediately, right from the outset. [02]

I was excited in a different way, sort of a different type of excitement. It wasn’t wild excitement, it was just a very nice warm feeling came across; the whole room felt that way. [03]

I was walking on air. I don’t know that would be different from any other father.... I had absolutely no feelings other than elation. Or at least the elation was so strong that, ah, that no other feelings had room. [05]

It is very hard to describe. It was, it’s an incredibly intense thing... I want to do it again. It was incredible because it was the combination, you know... It was like waiting for Christmas for 9 months. And every day was Christmas Eve sort of thing. [06]

Amazement I guess for not having seen a live birth in humans anyway. Just—it’s wonderful. A little miracle. And, ah, I guess pride and happy to see that it’s over with, probably one of the most amazing things that I’ve ever seen or could experience. I don’t know what else to say. [08]

There’s a sense of euphoria that I don’t think you can associate it with any sort of stimulant that is available on the market.
Doesn’t come close to having a glass of wine or having a beer or having an orgasm. There isn’t anything that will, to me, compare to this—I was just stunned, I think—yeah, I start talking about it and I well up; no, it was marvelous. {13}

The events surrounding the birth are important to consider because these events influenced the father’s initial feelings towards the infant. Greenberg and Morris (1974) interviewed fathers shortly after birth about their feelings towards their newborns and, from this study, derived the concept of engrossment. Fathers had feelings of love and engrossment at the first sight of their infants, feelings Greenberg and Morris said are universal and innate in all fathers. Recently, this study was criticized by Lewis (1986). Lewis believed that the birth of an infant does not occur in a vacuum. Some fathers become totally engrossed in their infants. However, other fathers may be psychologically distant from their infants because of the events surrounding the birth that, in turn, may have a profound effect on their attitudes towards their children.

Immediate Connection

In this study, some fathers experienced an immediate bond with their infants, whereas others experienced it when they were able to make physical contact with their infants shortly after birth.

There’s times when you are with someone that’s special to you, or you feel a lot of love and emotion, but never quite that intense, where you feel so closely attached to something that’s totally new. . . . when I got to hold her, then the baby was all of a sudden a real person and, then, from then on, I think I’ve still developed the feeling in my own mind that she’s more and more of a person as time goes on. But there was a real jump at the moment when she
appeared and I got to hold her and she was suddenly something very real. [09]

Once I could hold him. Once you can feel him. He doesn't recognize you, but you can feel his heart beat; you can hear his breathing. . . . Because he was premature, we had him for about half an hour, 45 minutes, and then he had to go down and do all the checking and then—by the next day when I was holding him and that's when he started to become a lot closer. There must be something to this whole idea of bonding—physical bonding. [03]

**Hesitant Connection**

For some fathers feelings of love or engrossment did not appear at first sight of their infants, but their feelings of love gradually increased throughout the first 2 months of the infant's life.

I didn't love her right away when she first came out; I think you have to develop that, you know, she's part of you and you feel a bond with that, but the more you get to know her, hold her and handle her and see, hey maybe she is like me. . . . You know how do you love something? She's in my mind, an object, until you get to know her personality, as well. And ah, she is, you know a little living person and the more you get to know her the more you tend to love her. [08]

The circumstances surrounding the birth such as an emergency cesarean section, concerns about their wives' health, or infant complications brought forth feelings of anxiety, relief, anger, and helplessness in the fathers, which influenced the fathers' responses to their infants during their initial meeting them. They had a difficult time focusing in on their feelings for the infant because their energy had been taken up with concerns for the safety of the infant and mother. For example, I father had many stressors to deal with at the time of birth, which overshadowed his feelings towards his infant. He revealed that these circumstances hindered his
ability to get to know his infant. The commencement of a new demanding career just prior to the birth, coupled with an emergency cesarean section, culminated in pure physical exhaustion that made this father feel totally helpless, frustrated, disappointed, and angry. When asked how he felt about the birth experience, he replied:

I have nothing against my son at all, but I can't imagine how anyone could design anything that could create so much pain for one person, and have the other person stand helplessly by and just watch it. And the idea of watching my wife go through that again is just an absolutely disgusting thought for me, like to ever have to watch that again; I don't know if I ever could do it again. [04]

As he continued to talk, he realized that his feelings of love for the baby were gradually increasing. He said:

It's been literally since he started to respond to me, which is maybe less than 2 or 3 weeks or whatever, like really respond, like the smiling and stuff that I've started to think, no this—this is really part of me. This is my son. And it's real. It's not just like a pet that you buy at a pet store. [04]

As he pondered about his future relationship with his son, he commented that he wanted his relationship to grow steadily and deeply, similar to the way that his relationship with his wife grew. Using metaphorical language, he described his aspirations for this future father-son relationship.

It's something that grows from the tiniest little thing like a maple tree or an oak tree, is it? An oak tree, they use the term. If it grows like an oak tree, the same amount every year after year, you get this massive powerful tree with roots that go down five times as far as the tree is high. . . . That's what I hope will develop with my son, the same way I would pattern my wife's relationship with myself. Started as nothing. Weren't even interested in each other. And it never did have these big jumps, even when we got married.
It was just this nice gradual sloping upgrade, getting more and more deep. And that's what I hope will develop with my son. [04]

Summary

A new relationship filled with many emotions got underway for fathers and infants. The relationship commenced with an intense, immediate connection or began slowly with a desire for the feelings of love to grow.

Connecting from a Distance:
First Five Weeks

During the early days of the infant's life, the fathers expressed the importance of developing a nurturing relationship with their infants because they did not want to father from a distance. In comparison to the mother-infant relationship, fathers believed that their relationship was slower to develop and, in some ways, felt alienated and excluded from this close mother-infant bond. On the other hand, some fathers were able to accept their distance from the closeness of the mother-infant bond. Fathers suggested that their wives had a head start because of the mother-fetus bond, the intense communication and closeness associated with breast-feeding, and the significantly more time that mothers spent in caring for their infants.

Some fathers suggested that infants view their mothers differently because of the union of mother and baby in utero.

I think a difference between the way the baby views the mother and me . . . the mother is someone that the baby is directly bonded to. The babies come out of the womb, where, you know, they are basically one being and the baby is very close to the mother. Now,
whereas, I think I know, if somebody else walked into the room, the baby wouldn’t know the difference, but there may be studies of foster parents that will blow this feeling right out the window, but I think there’s a much stronger attachment between the baby and the mother off the bat than there is between the baby and the father maybe. I’m another person that’s around that she’s becoming familiar with, but I don’t think there’s the same degree of familiarity as there is with the mother. [09]

Mentally I had the same amount of time to prepare but it wasn’t that minute-to-minute feeling that something is in there. It doesn’t move around inside of me, but when she has it, he lets her know sometimes with a kick that, hey, I’m here and her mind has to go to that while mine never did. So there is that time where I think mother has had a lot more time to prepare for it, to bond. [14]

Another father believed he was making more of a contribution to the family and believed he was more in control during the infant’s first 5 weeks of life, as compared to the prenatal stage. However, he remarked that the father’s relationship with the infant still is not on an “equal footing” with the mother’s because of the time the mother spends with the infant.

Let’s say that we were a family prenatally, we were a family, ah, but I was making a very limited contribution, I felt. Um, and I mean I would have liked to make more of a contribution, but it was not possible. Then after she was born, it was like, okay, now I have more of a hand into controlling input into this family here and what this family does, so it is quite a split with my wife and I; we are on a much more even footing. I still don’t think that we’re on even footing but . . . [Prompt: In what way aren’t you on even footing?] Um, well she spends more time with the baby, and I don’t. And, ah, I know that I rely on her for a lot of things that I probably should do myself. [10]

While describing his relationship with his son, a father remarked how he initially felt on the periphery of the mother-infant relationship but that his involvement with his son was gradually increasing.
I joked about this for the first little while, his mother came first, then most of the walls in the house and the fireplace and I was like a distant fifth or sixth behind anything. But now I’m sort of moving up gradually. I think I’m ahead of the fireplace now. [Laughter] [03]

He went on to explain the reasons why a mother is more involved with the baby during the first few weeks.

I think the first few weeks, the mother, she’s very, very, very protective of him. It must be in any species—instinctually protective. She would never take him away from me but she would care for him more than I and probably just until she didn’t have to worry, maybe until the novelty almost wore off. And then we started sharing it more. So I’m doing more that way. [03]

Another father suggested that it was very difficult to spend time with his young infant when he was constantly at the breast; however, he said that he realized breast-feeding was an essential endeavor for the passage of antibodies and the establishment of a relationship between the child and the whole family. He commented that he had accepted this closeness associated with breast-feeding because “a well-fed child is a content child.” As the baby became more alert and responsive and required less sleep and food, the father commented that the father and mother were more on an equal footing. However, he realized that the mother may have an advantage over the father because of her ability to breast-feed.

I think that there is; there’s a component there that—I still think that mom has over dad in the sense that the breast-feeding is a major communicator. And not just in terms of food. It’s also in terms of tactile communication, okay? About the mouth and basic tactile communication which I don’t have, you see. [01]

Although another father was able to feed his baby a bottle, he confessed that he thought that he could not settle a fussy infant because he could not
duplicate the skin-to-skin contact or the tactile communication associated with
breast-feeding. He said:

It’s not just the case of being fed because she will take the bottle, but she
does get a great deal of comfort just from cuddling and
nuzzling up against mother’s breast. She’ll go to sleep right after
she is fed and she’s the most contented little thing with her arms
wrapped around her breast. It’s not something I can duplicate; she
just won’t settle the same way. [09]

Fathers repeatedly expressed that their wives knew their children better for
a variety of reasons. Some fathers felt a sense of abandonment, jealousy, envy,
inadequacy, or pleasure that their wives could soothe their crying, fussy infants.

Fathers openly expressed a myriad of feelings toward the developing mother-infant
relationship.

I feel a little bit abandoned myself. Because I’m used to being the
number one person and I’ve walked in and my wife literally . . .
we’ve always done this for each other, one person walks in, you just
drop everything for them, you know. And now it’s like you’re kind
of second. And you know that the way it’s supposed to be but you
still notice it. [04]

And at times I sometimes feel like the one pushed out too. Like I
can’t feed her, you know. Well, we should make an attempt that I
should get to feed her because that is a good way to bond. [08]

And I think it is very, very similar to what my wife’s relationship is
with her except I don’t have the closeness that comes with breast-
feeding, you know, which I’m a little jealous of but I’ll get over it
and my turn will come soon enough. [Prompt: When will your turn
come?] Well once, my wife gets back to school I don’t, you know.
. . . I don’t have them [breasts], so it’s going to be on to the bottle
so that’s what I mean, my turn will come. [06]

I suppose right off the bat maybe I felt a little envious that she was
able to spend this amount of time interacting with the baby and I
wasn’t, but that didn’t really last. I use the word envious not
jealous. It wasn’t a kind of intense emotion that jealousy is. It was,
I just kind of envied her for the opportunity that she had to hold the baby so close and touch it, feel it, and I didn’t get that, the opportunity. I was able to compensate for that by the fact that, when she was that young, I did more of the bathing and that provided me with an opportunity to touch her and hold her. [09]

At first, really, he didn’t respond very much in a positive way to me. But now he does and I think he knows me. I know that I’m second fiddle to mom. . . . I know that I’m not as good with the baby as my wife is. And there’s times when I’m happy that she’s around if he’s having trouble. Partly purely physical because when he’s really fussy there’s nothing better than the breast to settle him down and, of course, I can’t do that. But I think she’s also got a way with him that I don’t have. [05]

**Becoming Involved in Caring for the Infant**

One mother discontinued breast-feeding entirely; then the father became involved in feeding his infant. He felt more useful to and responsible for the infant, and he remarked that the feeding time helped him to get to know his infant.

It’s a really close time we have between the two of us. That is what I have found and it has been—because up to that time you held her and played with her, but when it was time for serious eating or something serious to do with her well, here, mom you do it. Well, as it is now, not only do you play with her and enjoy the fun times with her, but she is hungry and she is cranky and she wants to eat; you learn to respond to that also knowing that there is something at this point . . . she is hungry so you don’t just give her to someone else and say, “Okay it is your responsibility.” Now that responsibility stays with you. [11]

Another father who was in charge of supplemental feedings commented that the feeding time gave him more time to bond with the infant. Private time spent with the infant seemed to be a crucial factor in helping him to get to know his infant.
I felt that I was able to bond a little bit because I was in charge of the supplement. And that was my time with my baby rather than just playing and holding and changing and everything like this. It was like her and me, and we were the only ones in the room at that time for the first month and half. [13]

Another father commented that once he could do more things with his baby, he believed that his relationship with his infant deepened. Lewis (1986) suggested that fathers are alienated from their young infants because of their diminished practical role, and caring for infants is out of their range of experiences. Traditionally, men have expressed their love by doing things for people or taking on the instrumental role. Some fathers in this study seemed to be behaving in this way.

I want him to know that I recognize him. When he was breast-feeding and basically sleeping and wetting his diaper, I didn’t have that same connection but now I really do. I really enjoy my time with him. [14]

He further elaborated by saying:

I changed his diaper all the time but I felt there was less for me, less need for me and I don’t think I had that attachment or had that, had bonded to it but I think now that he’s older and I can, like I can do more things for him, that bonding has become stronger. [14]

**Seeing the Infant as an Object**

Another reason some fathers were not as interactive with their infants for the first few weeks seemed to be because they viewed their young infant as an object or thing. They referred to the baby as “it” or as an “object.”

You know how do you love something? She’s in my mind an object, until you get to know her personality as well. [08]
You created this birth. You’re responsible for it. And even if you don’t feel emotionally attached to it, it’s yours and you do what you do for some of the old reasons that people did what they did years ago. You work because you’re supposed to work. Not because you love to work. [04]

For some fathers, the baby was becoming like a real person.

To me, she is becoming more and more like a real person and less like what I typically would have thought a baby as being, something that you don’t really interact with all that closely. So as she develops, I’m finding that it’s possible to interact with her more and more. [09]

I’ve started to think, no this is really a part of me. This is my son. And it’s real. It’s not just like a pet that you buy at a pet store. [04]

Summary

Because of the close mother-infant bond and breast-feeding, the fathers felt on the periphery, initially, or distanced from the relationship of their wives and infants. Some fathers were able to accept the distance from the closeness of the mother-infant relationship, whereas others believed that they would be on a more equal footing when they had opportunities to perform more infant caretaking. It was clear to fathers that their relationship with their infants was different than the close mother-infant relationship. They believed that mothers had built-in mechanisms such as the mother-fetus bond and breast-feeding that facilitated the development of their relationship with the infant, whereas they had to work more intensely at developing the initial father-infant relationship.
Establishing a Closer Connection

As the first 2 months of their infants’ lives unfolded, fathers became more responsive to and psychologically involved with their infants. Their feelings of affection were growing but were more subdued compared to the intense emotions that most of the fathers had felt in the first few days of the birth of their infants.

Two fathers aptly captured the change in the intensity of their feelings.

My feelings of love towards her are growing I think as I get to know her better and I don’t think the feelings have really changed since then, but it was a remarkable thing at the time because it was such an emotional jump; there was such a lot of intense emotion all at one time when she was born. Now I feel very strongly. I’ll sometimes look at her when she’s sleeping, and it’s such a sense of wonder and joy as I look down on her. . . . She’s a very important part of my life now; she’s very special to me. [09]

Another father suggested that it would be extremely difficult to maintain the intense feelings he had experienced at the birth of his infant. He used my experience with my research project to help me understand the change in his feelings.

There is a euphoria when you achieve and you’re able to produce. . . . you can compare it to a lot of things. Perhaps when you’re done [with] this study, there’s going to be a euphoria, and this is perhaps maybe your first in-depth study; there’s going to be a tremendous feeling. You do follow-ups and subplots to it, but there isn’t this tingling sensation that makes your toenails curl. [13]

He further elaborated his feelings for his infant by saying:

If I was to maintain that goo-goo attitude all the time, you just couldn’t do it. You just couldn’t do it. Um, and I love the child now more than probably when I first saw her, I don’t know, it’s a—I think now I’m loving her as a human being versus a procreation, something that I was involved in creating. [13]
The turning point in the father-infant relationship seemed to take place when the fathers perceived their infants as more responsive, predictable, and familiar to them. Concomitantly, fathers described their infants in positive terms noting that their infants were perfect in their eyes. These perceptions of their infants fueled the development of the connection of the fathers to their infants. Furthermore, this relationship was beginning to take on more significance because infants were giving specific, positive feedback to fathers through their interactions.

**Responsiveness of the Infant**

**Infant's smile.** Fathers found the infant's smile highly attractive, fascinating, and rewarding, which, in turn, encouraged fathers to enter into a reciprocal exchange with their infants. In the fathers' descriptions of their infants' smiles, it was evident that the fathers were captivated by them.

She smiles and opens her mouth wide; it's sort of like a quiet laugh at the present time, but she's getting closer to making those sounds and obviously that's a big change. And about 6 weeks, she was starting to make vowel sounds . . . , and now you get the kind of gurgling that lasts for whole sentences with her. [Prompt: So how does that make you feel when she smiles?] Oh it's just incredible. I just melt. [02]

His smile is amazing. Like it has all kinds of variety. If you've ever read the strip "Calvin and Hobbes" and looked through some of the cartoons of Calvin, which is the cartoon figure, he can animate every last one of them. Right from the cutest little smiles to a, what he does is an open-mouth soundless laugh, like he opens his mouth just like he's laughing like crazy, and it's almost a painted version of a laugh. And yet there is no sound coming out. And every once in a while you'll hear a little guttural noise coming or something which is just from being excited. He's letting air in and out, but it's amazing. His smiles are so varied. And his facial expressions, he
can just go to town on them. Ah, so he has not just one smile; it's a number of smiles. [04]

For the fathers, the smile provoked feelings of happiness, warmth, and excitement. In addition, they believed the infant was acknowledging their presence and giving them positive feedback. They said, then, that they realized that their presence made a difference to the infant.

She has a very expressive face and when she smiles you know. [Chuckles] [Prompt: What happens?] Her face lights up. My face lights up . . . Yeah. It's like, oh you do love me. I'm not just this thing that changes you. [06]

The bond has grown. Certainly I think it's very difficult not to develop a bond when you go to her in the middle of the night or first thing in the morning and she sees you and she just has this big smile. And even though she may have been sitting in a wet diaper for a few hours or something, it's difficult not to develop that bond. [07]

She seems to look at me and she just started smiling a few days ago and it's hard to tell what causes her to smile, whether it's brought on by something pleasurable to her, but she will smile, when we are holding her and jiggling her around and she's been doing that recently so it seems she is reacting to my presence and reacting to my wife's presence. [Prompt: So how does the smile make you feel?] Oh, a warm feeling. She looks so sweet when she smiles that I associate it with her having some pleasure so for her to have a reaction of pleasure or happiness is important to me. [09]

The excitement is still there you know every time she does something new or if she acknowledges you. She smiles at you when you are smiling at her. You can't explain the joy that she gives everyone. You just have to experience it. [11]

The most rewarding things are just making him happy. I mean he smiles and my grandmother said it best, "They get their little fingers around your heart and they won't let go." And he does. [03]
He started smiling in the 5th week. And he'll make actual guttural laughing noises now easily. . . . I know when he looks at me he'll smile right away. And other people will have to earn it. [04]

**Infant’s interaction.** Not only did the infant’s smile have a powerful influence of drawing the father into the relationship, but there were additional social behaviors such as infants’ responsiveness to voices, alertness and awareness of their environment, and maintenance of eye contact that encouraged fathers to connect with their infants. Emde (1980) suggested that this awakening of sociability of infants occurs at approximately 2 months and is “apt to give pleasure and strong incentive to be with the baby; they tell us the baby is in a good mood and wants more of us” (p. 91).

When fathers were describing their infant’s behavior, they could readily portray the increased sociability of their infants compared to when their infants were a few weeks old, as well as the effect these changes had on their developing relationship.

The changes have a lot more to do with her alertness. She’s very sensitive to voices and appears to listen. Again this is just a perception. But she seems to know the difference, for example, between my voice and my wife’s voice—and other people’s. [02]

I feel so close to this baby because these little arms clutch and, ah, one of her hands will either clutch at my beard or at a shirt collar. And the other arm is sort of stretched out and around my shoulder and she tucks her head into my chin, and I just feel her go limp, and it’s just oh, gosh. It’s just amazing. [02]

For example, when he was first born, he was alert but he really didn’t make eye contact. There was no way. Now he’s intrigued with your eyes, doesn’t look at your nose or your mouth; he looks right in your eyes. And he’ll pick one—he’ll go from one eye to the other eye, because obviously he can only focus on one eye, but I
really find that intriguing. And, then, like I mentioned before, if you go out of his view now, he accepts or he knows that you still exist which is a good sign, so he will turn his head and say, “Hey where did you go?” [04]

He gives me more immediate gratification for the reasons that I have said, so—perhaps I approach him with greater expectations than I had before. Whereas I never expected him when he was very, very young, I never expected him to respond and he didn’t. [05]

I feel that I’m more engaged with her now because she is capable of more things than she was. She can focus now and she can see my face and grin at me and that sort of thing and so I feel she recognizes me and I’m pulled in and I want to play longer and do things longer. [06]

The first little while was tough because basically the baby was feeding and that was it. And when you get to hold it or do anything with it, it was mainly sleeping. And that was really tough. And now she’s awake a lot more hours and, ah, when you hold her, you can see her looking at you and listening to you. [08]

I think now she recognizes me. I didn’t have much direct physical contact with her in the first few weeks in life because she was premature and spent the first 4 or 5 days in [the] hospital and she was in an incubator then. And, then, as time went on, I got to hold her more and more, so it’s special for me to [be] able to hold her now and [have] her recognize that I’m not a stranger; I’m someone that she comfortable with and she’s seems to be sort of happy when I’m around. [09]

She knows my voice certainly. I know that because, if there are a group of say three or four or five people around, she will spend far the majority of time looking at me, whether I’m speaking or not. I think she knows my scent and she knows my voice. [10]

He’s focusing. He’s looking at things. He’s tracking. He’s becoming better coordinated with his limbs. . . . He recognizes people. He recognizes interaction where he didn’t before. [14]

I make nice little voice inflections and I tickle him a little bit or I rub him or massage him quite a bit ’cause it’s good for them. And he gets completely excited. Like he’ll kick his legs and arms and his eyes will go as big as saucers and he’ll smile like crazy and
make little noises. And that is really therapeutic for me because then I realize that, wow, that something is going on. And I'm not saying that he wouldn't do that for anybody else, but it's nice that he does it for me. [Chuckles] [04]

Attractiveness of the Infant

The image of perfection. In fathers' eyes, their infants were “perfect,” “cute,” “well-designed,” and “better than most babies.” Researchers offer several reasons why parents see their infants as images of perfection. Children realize the hopes, dreams, beauty, and successes that may not have materialized for parents. Parents have a tendency to focus on the child’s appearance, motor performance, and, eventually, school performance. If parents have not succeeded in an area they value, then it may be the child’s mission to fulfil it. Moreover, Brazelton and Cramer (1990) suggested that it is normal and helpful for parents to view their infants as the most beautiful, the best, and the smartest because it assists in the development of attachment. Because the child’s future performance offers possible rewards and gratifications, this helps parents tolerate the many frustrations and tedious demands of parenting. In addition, “Because parents see a projection of their ideal selves, the baby becomes infinitely precious to them” (p. 155). In the present study, many fathers captured the images of perfection while describing their infants.

He's a good looking baby, like he's proportionately designed well. He's, ah, he has no obvious flaws and, if you know, I've seen lots of babies that I don't think are all that great, but he's a really pretty baby. [04]
I wouldn’t want to trade him for other babies I see. Um, and I’m not sure exactly why. When I look at him he’s the way I think a baby should be, and when I look at other babies, I think, I like mine better. [05]

I think it’s a father’s eyes or a parent’s eyes. She’s quite pretty, and she has quite fine features. And I think for a little girl that’s really good. . . . We’re happy with the way she looks. [07]

As far as looks, I find it funny everybody always shows you baby pictures and says their kid’s the most beautiful in the world. For the first little while, I don’t think they are that beautiful. For the first week until they get some color and, ah, I think she’s really cute. [08]

As a parent, you always think that you have the best looking baby and everything and I have always tried to be. . . . I am not going to be like that, but to me she is a very pretty little baby. I think she is one of the cutest babies I have ever seen. [11]

I think she’s the most wonderful little person that’s come into my life. I remember when she was first born, I must have said 20 or 30 times, “Oh she’s so cute! Oh so she’s so cute!” I remember saying it over and over again. And I’ve continued to think that. [12]

One father tried to understand why he thought his baby was the image of perfection. He believed it was the influence of the media and marketing techniques that swayed his perceptions.

I think that perhaps media and various marketing techniques. . . . we’re just bombarded with images of perfection, and we get bombarded like it or not with images of perfect babies or what we’re supposed to think are perfect babies. And those perfect babies generally have nice cute smiles and nice fluffy hair and they’re not 6-pound babies; they’re 8½-pound babies, you know. Things like that. And ah, so when I saw her hair, I think that, maybe that somebody’s marketing technique just gave me a little tweak in the brain there, I went, “Yeah, this is closer to a perfect baby,” you know. [10]
Familiarity of the Infant

Identification with family members. Fathers connected with their infants by perceiving their infants’ attributes as similar to or different from their own, their wives, or other family members. Attributes were described on a similarity-difference dimension, and they were consistently positive in nature. The association of the infants’ attributes to those of a familiar person seemed to assist fathers in getting to know their infants. The infant did not seem to be a total stranger but someone the father could identify because of the similarity of the infant to someone he already knew. The “creative mix of replicated attributes of loved ones and of self” (Rubin, 1984, p. 136), the blend of family representation, assisted fathers to nourish and cherish their infants.

He’s long. Has lots of hair on his head, unlike his father. [Chuckles] Blue eyes like most of the family. Big feet, we joke, like his grandmother. [03]

His eyelashes are growing in really strongly, and both my wife and myself have very long eyelashes, so that’s showing up. He’s got his hands that I believe are literally between my hands and my wife’s hands. I have pretty big hands, and my wife, for a woman, has pretty big hands but thicker fingers, and I’m convinced that they’re between the two of us. And his feet, I have no idea about, other than he has inherited my big toes. His body is quite a bit longer than his legs. He’s like me; I’ve got a long body and short legs. [04]

She looks like my wife, just with the light colored hair right now and blue eyes. But as far as recognizing a nose: I tried comparing ears to see if her ears look like mine, but I think she is more like her mother. [08]

I saw myself as soon as she came out. I went yes, she had dark hair and dark eyes and I mean I have fairly heavy eyebrows and stuff and she had all those things and she was a big kid. [13]
He resembles his mother with the chin and we've been told that. His ears look like my grandfather and otherwise we are still trying to figure it out. Maybe he's got his mom's eyes, but when he sleeps he looks more like me. [14]

She's just a nice little size. She has a round face instead of a long face like her mother does. [12]

I identify him with me. You see, because I am dark. So I would say that you know, with me, it's not surprising that he has a full head of hair because when I was a baby I had a full head of hair as well. I think that there are certain facial features that definitely are my wife's features. We always joke about his toe because his little toe is almost identical to my wife's. [01]

**Predictability of the Infant**

Fathers were able to predict the infants' routines, their likes, and their dislikes. To some extent, fathers were developing the ability to read the infants' nonverbal cues. Responding to the infants' routines and reading the infants' cues gave fathers positive feedback that encouraged them to provide a sensitive, loving environment for their infants. Moreover, fathers learned more about themselves as nurturers and their capacity to respond appropriately to their infants, which, in turn, gave them more confidence in their parenting abilities and pride in themselves as fathers.

Fathers explained that they became more actively involved with their infants when they became more knowledgeable about their infants' likes and dislikes. One father said:

She's gotten a little bit older, and we've gotten a little more used to her, and we've sort of become a little bit more aware of what it is she likes and when she liking it. So that sort of encourages us also, whereas before, we sort of, we didn't really know exactly what she
wanted or how she wanted it done and now we know that. So we’re more actively involved in doing things with her. [07]

Another father remarked:

I found, as my baby got older, it was easier and easier to do things with her because you could tell . . . she would respond a little bit more you know as if you were doing stuff whether she liked it or not—it was just an adjustment time. [08]

Fathers repeatedly talked about how the baby was settling into a routine and how important it was for them to adhere to their routines.

The other thing that surprised me is how quickly she settles into matters of routine. For example, and really starting about a month ago, it became apparent that you had to follow a routine to get her to sleep at night . . . . And the routine is that she is on my left shoulder, the right shoulder will not do it. I must be standing, sitting will not do it, and we have to play her favorite tape of lullabies and I have to sing to her. And, um, she is out in 10 minutes. [02]

And he obviously really loves routines. He just doesn’t like it when you throw everything off. Like now he knows that he has a bath in the morning with mom and, if my wife baths him in the sink instead, he’s just not impressed with that because it’s a slightly different routine. And, he knows that, when he gets put in his bassinet on his stomach, that means pretty well, time to go to sleep, whereas before you’d put him there and I think he’d just wondered, “What on earth?”—unless he was so tired he didn’t think that. [04]

Fathers talked about their ability to predict the infant’s behavior by reading the infant’s cues. For the most part, fathers believed that they were fairly accurate; however, fathers admitted that their wives were more accurate because they spent more time caring for the infant.
When she does cry, I now know what she's crying about. I know the cry or the cry is different whether she wants to nurse or wants her diaper changed or is just getting bored and wants something else to happen to her. And about 9 times out of 10 I can tell the difference between the cries. [02]

I can distinguish by testing things out like putting a soother in front of him. If he roots or really wiggles, he wiggles his head if he's really hungry and then grabs the soother. [Prompt: Who is better at figuring it out?] Oh my wife is. I'd have to say that. Very easily. I think it's because of the time she spends at home with him. [14]

There's certain cries that it's like; this indicates that she's hungry. And it took a while to read those. She's got full-fledged wails that says, "Give me something to eat." Other ones are, "I don't want to be left alone right now. I want to be picked up." She likes to be rocked. Um, her best times are in the morning. She giggles a lot then. She has a fussy period about—8 o'clock. [13]

One father explained the reasons why he was better at reading his infant's nonverbal cues as compared to when his infant was a few weeks old.

I would say I can probably read his needs for the present time better than I would have been able to actually 2 weeks after he was born. But don't forget, at that time, his body language is much reduced. So, I mean, there is two things going in parallel. My ability to detect his body language and also his ability to emit increased amounts of body language. [01]

**Fathers' Activities of Connection**

Caretaking, playing, rocking, singing, and holding were activities carried out with the infant that produced feelings of closeness, familiarity, and responsiveness in the father. From these fathering behaviors, the relationship expanded and assisted fathers in getting in touch with the gentle, nurturing aspects of themselves and connecting emotionally to their infants. All fathers participated in a variety of caretaking, play, and comfort activities; however, some were more
involved than others.

**Caretaking.** All fathers changed diapers and baby clothes, but 2 fathers changed diapers only when the mother was busy. Each father had the opportunity to bathe their infants; however, bathing primarily remained the mother's responsibility. Because 2 fathers enjoyed the baby's bath time immensely, they shared this responsibility with the mother. For instance, the father might undress the baby, entertain the baby in the tub while the mother bathed the infant, and then dry and dress the baby; or the father would bathe the baby and the mother would clean up the mess. All mothers, except 1, were breast-feeding so fathers had limited opportunity to feed the baby. The fathers who gave their infants supplemental feedings cherished those feeding situations.

**Play.** Except for 1 father, fathers related how they talked, sang, and read stories to their children. Because of the infant's inability to speak, 1 father said he interacted through watching and touching his daughter.

If I speak to her, then I would expect a response and when I don't get a response, I mean to say this is futile. Now when I look at her, she looks back. When I touch her, she touches me back, so this is much more interactive rather than one way. Maybe the one-way communication just doesn't satisfy my need to interact with her. [10]

Virtually every father sang songs that they had composed or read nursery rhymes and stories to their children. One father remarked:

I love singing to him. He has lots of nursery rhymes and lullabies and I love to sing to him. I want him to become very aware of my voice. [04]
Some fathers made up games to entertain their children or they manipulated and presented toys to them.

I spend a lot of time making exaggerated faces at him. And smiling faces. But, generally exaggerated faces. That gets his attention. I stick my tongue out at him. And I always feel a little guilty doing that, but I try to reward him when he sticks his tongue out in order to encourage him to do it again. [05]

When we play underneath the gym, it’s sort of the matter of either moving the Big Bird or the Cookie Monster or squeezing them and making a sound or holding the mirror so she can see herself or giving her the rattle so she can shake it. [07]

[Prompt: So you say you play games and you play cave?] Yeah, it’s like I’ll huddle over her and squat down. I’ll come out and I’ll tell her you’re in the cave now, you’re safe, there is nothing to worry about. I don’t know if this is good or not, but it’s like I think it might lead to the fact that when it’s dark she has no need to be afraid of the dark because the dark’s cool. [13]

Fathers demonstrated to me how they used physical, arousing play such as bouncing their infants on their knees, moving their infant’s legs in a bicycling motion, and swinging and lifting their infants in the air.

**Comfort.** Fathers touched, stroked, massaged, rocked, and held their infants close to their bodies to comfort them. Fathers described how they were responsible for rocking their infants to sleep, soothing their crying infants by taking them for car rides or walking with them in a snugly pouch while mowing the lawn, or playing soothing music to quiet their distressed infants.

We’ve got one of these Snugly pouch things that you can carry her around. I enjoy having her in that, so she is close to me. Sometimes it keeps her more content to be cuddled up like that. She seems to be fond of body contact. It’s quite nice to have her close to my body and to feel her and touch her, and she seems to get an equal amount of enjoyment out of it. [09]
Although fathers identified the importance of cuddling their infants, some fathers said that they held their infants differently than the mothers—occasionally away from their bodies, and they gave specific reasons for doing so. Fathers said they held their infants like a football or grenade because they had more strength in their arms compared to mothers. Furthermore, they claimed that they wanted to give their infants different experiences and, specifically, that they wanted their infants to exist as separate, independent little human beings.

Instead of holding her close to your body, you hold her away and you sort of say, “Well there, you’re a little person. And you know, you don’t always exist just because I’m holding you—you’re over there.” [12]

I hold her in probably ways that aren’t that great. I think that’s good for her because I don’t want her to be held tight against the body all the time because I want her to start learning about independence. I mean, it’s a little ridiculous, a 2-month-old baby, but I think it can start that early, to let her know that, “Yeah, I’m holding you, but hey, look around. You’re safe but have some fun.” [06]

I’ve had her like a football with her head here and her arms straddled here. And then her legs on either side of my arm. That’s her favorite ’cause then I can do this with her. [Prompt: Oh you swing her?] Yeah. Well, I can still hang on to her head. I’ve got big hands and she’s a tiny girl. [13]

One father noticed that the grandfathers held his baby like a grenade. He speculated that men are taught not to get close and, therefore, are reluctant to cuddle babies. He said:
Men like my father and my wife’s father, they sort of hold him like a grenade. . . . So I find it’s very interesting to watch men around children. Men who have some sort of female feelings—they’ll nuzzle in, they’ll hold him very close. And he likes that. But I think men are taught not to do that. We sort of don’t get too close.

Possibly, men have a low tolerance for dependence, and that is the reason for creating an autonomous little human being at this very young age. However, many authors have suggested that a father gives birth to a child by helping the infant learn to establish a sense of separateness and independence from the mother. The father plays an important role, as a mediator to the outside world (Corneau, 1991; Henderson, 1982; Osherman, 1986; Von Der Heydt, 1973). Holding the child away from the father’s body may be the beginning of the process of differentiation from the mother for the infant, whereby the father puts an end to the blissful mother-infant symbiosis.

**Love Is Growing**

Fathers suggested that it was essential to develop a relationship with their infants at an early stage in the infant’s life. Moreover, fathers expressed growing feelings of love for their children, provided multifarious reasons why it was important to develop this early relationship, and suggested factors that influenced this development. Throughout the interviews, fathers used the terms love, bonding, and relationship interchangeably.
The feelings of bonding, or the love, the relationship with her have gotten much stronger, I think they have always been there but they are much stronger. As I try and give more of myself to her she is starting to give more of herself back. And I think that, just because there is more of that interaction, the bonding is, you know, it's kind of like the cement is getting dryer, harder and there's more of a relationship there. And there's much more to build off. [07]

Another father recalled when his feelings for his infant increased in intensity and he said, “The real strong attachment is around that 5-week period where, like I said, that it really struck in that core. It really grabbed a hold of me. The roots were set. He was in my blood.” [14]

Only 1 father said that his feelings for his son were based on logical reasoning such as the need to protect him because of the infant’s vulnerability. However, he revealed that he was in a transitional stage because he was moving from logical thinking to feelings based on love. Because of the stresses surrounding the birth and his new career, he suggested that these events interfered with his ability to get to know his son.

The fact that he’s my son—haven’t had enough time for that to sink in to the point that it’s an emotional bond. It’s still logical. He’s my son. But I haven’t fallen in love with him yet. Since he’s started to respond there is something growing there, but it’s not the powerful thing I have for my wife. I’m in the transitional stage where I’m beginning to love him more than just concentrate on the fact that this is done because of this reason. [04]

Fathers suggested that the time spent with their infants was a significant factor in helping them get to know their infants. In fact, some fathers felt guilty because they believed they should be spending more time with their infants. No fathers doubted the fact that their wives knew their children better because they
spent more time with them. An engaging father said:

If you're with anyone or anything for any length of time, eventually there's a bond created, you know. If you and I went out drinking every night for a month, we'd have a relationship. Um, so Cindy and I go drinking every day. It's just that she is drinking her formula and I'm having coffee. So, I think it's just out of natural occurrence that I believe that there is a relationship and a bond that is developing. [13]

Because of the infants' increased interactive abilities, fathers had opportunities to engage in more activities with them, but the type of activities in which they were able to engage in were still somewhat limited.

I find that the time that I am carrying her around maybe she seems to be a bit more aware of things, so it's an opportunity to do something with her rather than just actually me holding on to her. When she was a newborn, holding on to her she was probably asleep or just about to go to sleep or at the time like it was more for my benefit than hers. [09]

Infant stimulation through fathers' interactions was deemed to be necessary by fathers. Some fathers recounted that they offered a different type of stimulation compared to that of mothers.

I know that I can provide a certain kind of stimulation for her. I can carry her with more strength in my arms. I can swing her in certain ways that my wife can't because she can't hold her that way. I can hold her for longer periods. I'm sort of giving her that experience and saying well, "Here's something different, I know your mother probably doesn't do this with you." [12]

There are certain ways that my wife holds the baby, and it works for her and there are certain ways that I hold her and it doesn't work, but I have a different way that I hold her and she enjoys that. [Prompt: How do you hold her?] I just sit and she rests on my arm and she just sits there and she's content. My wife just looks at me and she shakes her head and she says, "I can't believe it." [11]
I try to stimulate him now any way I can. Like I'll tickle the bottom of his toes and at the same time, I'll say the words, "Tickle, tickle, tickle." And smile at him so he's getting three things, like he can see something, hear something, and feel something at the same time. [04]

I want him to become very, very aware of my voice. And lots of times when I'm reading to him, in fact, I lay him down and I don't know how much this works with a female, but I know my chest vibrates a lot when I talk 'cause of the deeper tones maybe—I'll sing really low, in a low, low voice. I know he can feel the vibrations. So just anything so that he starts to sense the difference between mom and dad. [04]

It's important to develop the relationship right now is that—you are feeding the computer with data, with information, and that may be cold and clinical but that's what I'm trying to do right now is to insure that this child, "Hi, you know, okay, move your head over here, the noise is over here." Stimulation. Um, reassurance. Comforting. It's all there. [13]

Some fathers expressed the need to be present for their infants because they did not want to miss out on the infant's daily development.

It is a time in our lives where you know I feel that those bonds are really made forever. Um—I couldn't imagine missing out on it. I would really feel ripped off if I didn't get to experience it because of her development. I think it strengthens everything you are going to do with that child, because now you know what her needs are from the very beginning and I think that is very important. [11]

And as time goes on the more responsive she is, the more I want to be there for the responses. . . . The fact that she does appear to be responsive to my voice, to my touch, to my just being near her, is really, really important to me. [02]

There's a lot of things that he does that I want to see, that I want him to know that I recognize, and that I want to interact with him. When he was breast-feeding and basically sleeping and wetting his diaper, I didn't have that same connection, but now I really do. I really, really enjoy my time with him. [14]
From a survival point of view, fathers suggested that babies were dependent and helpless and, therefore, needed fathers to fulfill their needs.

I tend to look on an awful lot of things from an evolutionary point of view or a survival point of view. I would think about why he's so helpless. And I think that the reason is that mother nature designed them to be like that so that there will be social bonds by necessity created. And we must spend a lot of time taking care of his needs, and as he gradually becomes more conscious of his surroundings he will understand that we are the ones his survival depends on. [05]

I feel very positive about the relationship. The relationship is based on love. I know that. It's based on his needs. He needs me so I feel that, I feel needed as well. [14]

Summary

The pivotal point in the father-infant relationship was when fathers responded to the smiling and vocalizing that began at approximately 6 weeks to 2 months of the infant's life. The infants contributed to the shaping of the relationship through their body language such as smiling, cooing, alertness, and eye contact in such a way that signalled their receptivity to fathers and encouraged fathers' interaction. In addition, fathers' perceptions of their infants as familiar, predictable, responsive, and attractive assisted them in this developing relationship. Fathers' activities of comfort, caretaking, and play facilitated fathers in connecting emotionally to their infants. Fathers became more connected, and a relationship filled with warmth, enjoyment, and responsiveness began to grow and develop.
Making Room for the Baby

For a father to become connected to his baby, he must make changes and/or adjustments in his life to make psychological and physical room for the infant, in other words, to accommodate the baby. Room was made in several ways by the fathers in this study. Fathers made changes and/or adjustments in their work and social/personal time, in relationships with their wives, and within themselves in order to be physically present in the home and emotionally and energetically available to their infants. Bradt (1980) suggested that children can be born into a family in which space is made for them, or a space is not available, or there is a vacuum that they are expected to fill. Busy career-oriented fathers may not make room for children and become psychologically distant from them. If a child is brought into the world solely to fill a void such as loss of a family member, overcloseness in parent-child relationships may result.

One father adamantly asserted that it was essential to make adjustments in his life to accommodate the infant, since these adjustments influenced his attachment to his infant.

Once the child is born, you have to change the way you live or the way you used to live, and accept another person into your way of life. And some changes need to occur. I mean, we're dealing with a human being with its own needs and own behavior. And these changes require refocusing in your lifestyle and the way you live. And this refocusing itself may be a positive experience or a negative experience depending on how you approach or how well you are attached to your child. And I think that if you talk about the pregnancy beforehand and the responsibilities between the two adults, it helps in both attachment and eventual focusing when the child comes into play. [01]
Time

Work

Some fathers admitted that they were becoming more resentful of pressures at work that exhausted them, leaving little energy for quality time with their infants. One father explained:

Work does make me fatigued; it does make me tired. And as a result, it's when I'm coming home, it's sort of like I'll never have enough energy to really be with the baby as opposed to just being around the baby, and somehow being in connection with the baby, um, because she seems to sense a difference when I am just holding her or really wanting to be with her. [02]

Fathers talked about using their time at work more efficiently and responsibly so they could have as much time as possible with the ones they love. One father beautifully demonstrated the change in his work patterns so he could have more free time with his family.

I think I'm a hell of a lot more efficient now than I ever was in my life when it comes to organizing my day. I still accomplish the same amount. I'm still responsible for the same amount of people. That hasn't changed. But I've become more efficient when it comes to my time and meetings with people. Like, you know, whereas I used to talk for half an hour, an hour with somebody and shoot the breeze for 10 to 15 minutes before we actually got into business. Now it's straight business because when I come home, I want to spend time with my child. I want to spend more time with my child and wife. [01]

Because of the many stresses in 1 father's life, the adjustments and changes were taking longer than he had expected; however, he was optimistic that he could meet the challenges and the outcome would be favorable. When asked how he felt about all the changes that were going on in his life, he responded:
Good. I think it will turn out for the good. It’s just that it’s—I think human beings don’t like change. And when you get enough change popping up, in a short amount of time—it starts to overload you a little bit and ah, I think it’s just a matter of an adjustment period. And when you get it all dropped on you at the same time, the adjustment period drags out longer. Rather than if I had started teaching a year previous and then the baby came and then whatever. We’ve had a lot dropped on us within 2 or 3 months. And, ah, so I am still a bit overwhelmed about everything. And I take time to process emotional things. I really don’t think I have processed the birth yet. [04]

**Personal and Social**

Fathers talked openly and honestly about the loss and change in their personal and social time; however, most fathers said that they adjusted to these changes by changing their priorities or seeking pleasurable moments at home with their family. When 1 father was discussing his feelings about changes in his lifestyle, he honestly stated:

I was ill-prepared for the intrusion on time and personal ability. I think some of that might stem from the fact that my wife and I have been living and married in excess of 11 years. Well, and during that time, we still allowed each other, as a couple, to have their own free time. Now, intrusion may sound negative, and perhaps it is because I feel guilty about that when I feel that way, but I also am aware that it’s a necessity for a child to achieve a proper upbringing; somebody has to do it. I guess you can almost look at it as, “It’s now it may sound cold, but it’s a job.” And precedence and priorities change; they get altered. Priorities change. Ah, we just can’t pick up and go to Calgary for the weekend, just can’t pick up and go out to dinner. [13]

Each father had to learn to let go of his free and easy lifestyle and learn to accept these changes. However, with the losses, fathers were able to make gains in the connections they were developing with their infants.
When I get home, I tend to cuddle the kid, maybe change a diaper, whereas before I had the child I didn’t do that. I did different things. I get my pleasure out of different things now, but I get just as much pleasure out of life now. [05]

But it’s just the odd little conflicting thing that happens every now and then where I kind of, “Oh, well no, I can’t do that, you know. Oh, do you want to go the bar for a drink after work? Well, yeah, I’d like to but no.” I’d just as soon go home, you know. [06]

Marital Relationship

Fathers revealed that their relationships with their wives were changing as they attempted to move from a dyad to a triad to incorporate the baby into their lives. The baby was becoming the center of attention in order to facilitate the relational connection with the baby.

When this little person was born, everything else I did in the past part of my life meant nothing. It sort of took a back seat. I mean, it didn’t really, but she has just become the focus of your life. [11]

You become focused towards the child’s behavior, the child’s well-being, and that increases with time. You focus more and more. I presume, eventually, it plateaus, but at the present time, there’s an increase in focusing and our conversation at home focuses around the child which is good at the present time. I don’t think it’s going to be very healthy to continue to do this when the child is 10 years old or something like that and talk only about the child. But at the present time, I think it’s very healthy. [01]

One father remarked that it took time to move from the dyad to a triad and, in some ways, he resented the baby’s intrusion on their close marital bond. He said:

We were so well-established as a couple that it’s just ridiculous. I mean, nobody talks about Gary without Marlene and vice versa. And now with the baby coming along, and it isn’t just Gary, Marlene, and Bobbie. Just because he’s there doesn’t necessarily mean that you’ve got this triad instead of the two of you. I mean
he’s there, physically there, and he’s bound to stay, but it takes time for it to work into a real team. If you can get my drift. [04]

Another father suggested that the baby may help a husband and wife become closer because they have a common bond with the infant.

Couples, they sometimes get into a bit of a block in their relationship and, ah, they’re not as open with each other, for whatever petty reason it might be, or it’s a major reason. In some ways a baby can help sort of, I don’t know if it can help actually fix those problems, but it can help get around them because you can both focus on the child and there’s love for the child and you both have it. So there just is another place for you to come together and rise above whatever the petty thing might be. So indeed it has changed the way I look at life. [12]

**Fathering Self**

The Nurturing Father

For fathers, it was important to accommodate their infants by making psychological room for them. Fathers expressed the need to love, to protect, and to be emotionally present for their infants. They viewed parenting as a partnership and the need to be supportive of their wives in the mothering role. Fathers did not focus on their role as a provider or a disciplinarian. Fathers could easily describe the qualities a father should possess, but some fathers had difficulty describing their sense of themselves as fathers. For example, when fathers were asked to describe themselves, some responded that this was a “difficult question” or they were “inexperienced” or they were “learning fathers” or a “late bloomer.” Feeling like a father took root slowly for most fathers because the roles were evolving slowly, and it seemed to be a product of time and experience. One father
said, "You know that’s a difficult question to answer because a lot of the roles may develop later on in life." [09]

When fathers were asked what qualities a father should possess, they responded:

I think he should be gentle and caring. I think he should be understanding. And this is a corny statement, but I think he should be a good provider. Same with the mother, she should be a good provider. I think a father should be forgiving to some extent, I guess, should be a good listener, an educator to some extent, not necessarily to mould somebody in your own image but to point out the pitfalls to some extent. [01]

I think that the father has to be caring for the child in other than just the traditional male way of being the provider of the material goods. You have to be the provider of warmth and comfort to the child, as well, to the baby. [02]

I think it is so important to love your son for who he is and not what he does or doesn’t do. [04]

I’ll probably sound arrogant because I think I have the qualities a father should have. A father must be flexible and adaptable. And a father must be able to foresee things from the mother’s point of view. . . . I think oral communication is really important in dealing with a child. I think it’s really important to be able to talk to the child and say they’re a good boy and that sort of thing. [05]

I think a father should be completely engaged in parenting and not off playing golf and sort of dicking around like that and leaving it all up to the mother. That’s not fair to the mother for the first thing and I don’t think it’s fair to the child because when they are this young, it’s arguable, you know, because right now I think mom’s the milk bar and dad’s the thing I play with and it’s pretty much all she needs to know, but as she gets older, I think you learn from what you see around you. So I want my daughter to see that I am home and I am cooking and doing all this stuff that I should be doing. [06]
I think now, for a young baby, the child has to be you know, secure. You have to sort of show the child a lot of love and not get overly angry or anything like that. I think when the baby is young you have to be there. I think you have to be there for the baby to get to know who you are and, ah, you know that you're there. [07]

I think being patient and understanding, ah, just trying to bond and spend time with the baby as well, and, ah, I think patience is one of the biggest things especially with the feeding at the start because that's one of the most important things and one way that you bond. [08]

I think a father should be a loving person who will always provide the child with a sense of belonging and a sense of security so the child doesn't feel insecure, unwanted, or unloved. I think a father has to be supportive of both the mother and the child. [09]

Loving I suppose is one, although I suspect that loving may be a product of the others, you know, if you are open minded and you are selfless to a point then I think people will define you as loving. . . . I don't think love is enough. Love is important. You can love your kids as much as you want, but if you are not willing to put your money where your mouth is or, as a cliché, if you are not willing to practice what you preach, I think you're doing your children an injustice. [10]

You got to be very flexible, you got to be very understanding because it is a big change for mom. You can't be selfish, not for the first while, you know, and if you are, it is going to make it very tough, if not on you, on your wife, or on your child. I've heard, it depends on a lot of people too, we're very active in our church, you know. We're Christians, and we believe that bond is a very special bond and that it is our responsibility to make sure we instill the beliefs and the right values. [11]

A father must be loving, protecting, responsible, and willing to sacrifice a reasonable amount of personal comfort or whatever to provide for the child. I would have a hard time watching a father spend his money in irresponsible ways, if he was drinking or gambling, or whatever it was and the child did without a necessity, or if the father spent an excessive amount of time away from the child and deprived the child of the necessity of love from the father. [12]
I don’t know if it is a quality or not, but they should really have the desire to be a father. Um, they should have a desire to have children versus feeling it’s a necessity. I think that’s number one. Number two, I think that they should be fully aware of the responsibilities before going in. [13]

I think they should be good listeners. I think they should think before they react and that’s something I can practice, but I think they should be approachable. I don’t think you have to rule with an iron fist. Like you can rule with finesse. I hope my kids can come and talk to me. That’s going to be really important that I work on that, and lead by good example. I think fathers should have a big role in their kid’s lives. I think they should know what their kids are doing at all times. [14]

Fathers expressed a positive view of fathering. The qualities most frequently mentioned were love, good communication skills, involvement in their infants’ lives, and provision of support to their wives in the mothering role.

**Reawakening of the father’s feminine side.** For some fathers, the birth of the child seemed to have helped them to get in touch with their feminine side or, in other words, their intense emotional feelings. It appeared fathers were becoming in touch with their emotional feelings that assisted them in becoming emotionally responsive to their infants. In other words, fathers were accommodating their infants by making “psychological room” for them.

Some fathers talked about the cultural forces that had a tendency to deter fathers from active participation in parenting and nurturing of their children. One father wanted to achieve a balance in his life in such a way as to provide for his infant sufficiently in the material sense yet not allow that to detract from providing an emotional environment for his infant. When a culture emphasizes the role of the father as a provider and someone who is valued for his career achievements,
the nurturing of children can become difficult for fathers. One father said:

As a father, I want to be a person who will share the responsibility of raising the child and doing many of the things that women have for centuries had to do or cope with alone. So I guess that would be my expectation. It's quite incomplete because I mean, again, my druthers would be to maximize the time with the child, but I recognize at the same time that that's quite impossible, um, in the sense of cutting further into my work. [02]

Another father suggested that the Western culture expects men to repress their feelings and conveys the idea that caring for infants in a nurturing way lies within the woman's domain.

There are times it was made quite clear that I was stepping into woman's domain, which was odd. And I find that all the time. I find that in the reception room at the doctor's office. Like the women are all watching me, waiting for me to do something typically male like drop him, hammer him too hard. You feel very much under the microscope, especially if you step out of the [role]. It's funny they want us to play new roles as fathers, but they don't trust you to be able to do it. [03]

He went on to say how his feelings have been repressed for many years.

I want to feel things again. I feel—I found that I feel cheated out of that. I spent maybe 30 years of my life being a little boy and then a little man and then a real man and, then, sort of a part of your heart kind of withers because you don't cry. You don't do those things. Um—I've just sort of—not cried, but just sort of, you're just so emotional that you find you just—your heart tightens up. And it's nice. It's nice, like it's not bad. [03]

Some fathers talked about how their infants helped them to come in contact with their emotional feelings. The following excerpts graphically capture the ability of some fathers to discuss the reawakening of their feminine side.
What I really didn’t anticipate was the depth of feeling that you get from the closeness with the baby. [Prompt: Can you talk about that feeling?] Well there are times when it virtually brings tears to my eyes. I mean it’s just really very emotional, I mean, it’s, ah, and ah, it’s when she smiles I literally just melt. I just want to hold her and not put her down. [02]

It’s just intensified life, it sounds corny, that’s not true, the sun’s a little warmer with a baby in your life. The birds sing a little prettier. You get emotional—I’m really excited about the gaining—regaining, sort of contact with the spirit and I’m not thinking religious, I’m not very spiritual that way, it’s neat to feel intense about things. Um, passion. Um, life right now is full of intense passions with me. And very, very much fun that way. I get up every day and I just want to live life and that’s part of it. I think having a child is your hedge against mortality. [03]

**The Protective Father**

Another way fathers made “psychological room” for their infants was that they expressed a great need to protect their infants. Over and over fathers talked about the baby’s vulnerability and helplessness and their need to protect the baby from harm. These protective feelings experienced by fathers assisted them in developing a connection with their infants at a very early age. Worth (1988) suggested that “from this tremendous vulnerability develops an openness to a deeper connection, a readiness for the special relationship between parent and child, grounded once the baby is seen as a person” (p. 113). The following quotes portray the fathers’ feelings of protectiveness.

For the first days, I was with the baby all the time. I went with him with the nurses to make sure they didn’t give him Enfalac. And I asked them, before they did anything to the baby, they had to pass it through me, that was the law in that hospital. And it was just because I don’t want them just doing whatever. You know, I said, if you can’t explain it to me, you don’t do it to my son. “Oh well
this is this and this is this.” And I said, well if you can’t put it in English you’re certainly not going to do it to my son. And it wasn’t to be rude; it’s just that he’s defenseless and I’m the guy that’s going to help him out. [04]

I’m very, very protective of him because he’s so vulnerable. I mean anybody could come in here and hurt him. Even if you left him alone he wouldn’t last long. And so it’s a really powerful sensation. I don’t know if that’s the logic portion coming through or not or the feelings starting to show. [04]

I think I’m going through kind of a protective thing right now where I don’t, I get a little nervous when people that I don’t know come up and sort of, oh, you know, it’s a baby. [06]

I think there’s a real love for her. Ah, a real feeling of wanting to protect her. And, ah, keep her safe. [07]

You feel closeness. You want to protect her, you realize how helpless she really is. That, ah, unlike animals, you know, a new animal can survive on its own pretty much so; a baby is absolutely helpless and you feel the need to protect her. [08]

I am not protective to the point that I don’t want anybody else to hold her or that I don’t want anybody else to have anything to do with her but protective to the point that what we are doing is right for her. [11]

I think it’s the same responsibility that any parent, I would expect most parents, to think. That you have to look after this little person. That this person cannot fulfill their own needs. [12]

There’s very much a dependency of Cindy on her mother and father for life. If we weren’t there, she’d die. . . . I will insure that this child has food and a place for warmth and everything like this, and as will, her mother. So I guess this is the relationship. Demand and supply. We are the suppliers and she is the demand. [13]

Summary

Fathers felt a strong need to protect their infants and to mediate between the child and the outer world. This was poignantly portrayed in the account of the
father intervening on behalf of his infant with the nurses in order that no harm would be done to his son. Fathers viewed themselves as the bridge to the outside world. Stolte (1990) explained this behavior by saying that "that makes sense when we consider that the newly born child is more of a separate entity for the father and so he sees its vulnerability in a more objective way" (p. 78) than the mother.

Factors Influencing the Development of the Father-Infant Relationship

Father-Father Relationship:
Distant Father

For the most part, fathers described their relationships with their own fathers as distant, detached, or problematic. Mothers played the leading role in their families as the emotional switchboard. The son went to his mother when he wanted to discuss intimate problems or to have "heart-to-heart" talks. Their fathers expressed their love for them by way of being a provider of material goods or a teacher and playmate of specific activities. As a result, the fathers in the study thought that problems existed in their father-son relationships because they did not know their fathers as real people, only as providers or doers and teachers of specific activities. An unanswered question about this relationship is: What did their own fathers think and feel about life issues, in general, or their relationships with their sons or their own wives for that matter? Equally importantly, their fathers did not know them intimately because sons shared the emotional side of their lives primarily with their mothers. Although the fathers' father-son
relationships had shortcomings, 5 fathers in this study emphatically stated that they loved their fathers.

The following excerpts taken from the interviews and the demographic questionnaires demonstrate a conflictual relationship of the fathers in the study with their own fathers during their teenage years.

When I was a teenager, I just despised my father, but I've since sort of mellowed to him. He doesn't really listen to what I have to say. I don't know. Men of that generation are strange. [Prompt: What do you mean strange?] They don't listen to things. And he's always right. It doesn't matter what comes up in conversation. His opinion is the correct one and that irritates me because I will go out of my way sometimes to hear what someone else has to say and he doesn't do it. And I mean, no doubt, that's probably why I do that because I don't want to be like that. [06]

When asked if his father was involved with him during his teenage years, he responded:

No. No. I don't know whether I was the son that he wanted actually cause I didn't give a shit about playing hockey and that sort of stuff. I was quite happy just to look at books and draw pictures, and I don't think he was prepared for that. I think he was prepared for sort of, you know, a boy sort of thing. [Prompt: So what you are saying then.] [Pause] I think I scare him a little bit actually. [Prompt: In what way?] Well, just sort of say things that he won't agree with and he can't figure out why I think like that. "Where are you getting these ideas" is his response. . . . I've since mellowed to him a lot and sort of that's my dad . . . . I do love my dad, but he's problematic. [06]

Possibly, what was left unsaid was that his father had a fear of his son becoming a homosexual because he was not interested in "macho" type sports, and it is believed that real men play aggressive sports and do not engage in artistic work.

Corneau (1991), a Jungian analyst, suggested that "masculinity is defined in
negative terms: it is not to cry, not to listen to yourself, not to speak of your feelings, not to look too feminine” (p. 24). He claimed that men are forbidden to express their emotions through their body or heart, that is, if they want to be considered a real man by other men or their fathers.

The following description of his father-son relationship with his own father was written on the demographic questionnaire by 1 father:

- uncomfortable, not close
- some resentment on my part
- he was detached during my teenage years. [05]

One father was afraid that his son was going to grow to hate him because he did not have a close relationship with his own father.

I don't want him to feel about me the way I feel about my dad because that's not good. And that scares me a little bit. I always ask my wife, “Do you think he knows me?” or “Do you think he knows it’s me?” Even though I have my own feelings on it, she has to basically say, oh yeah, he knows. What else can she say? But I'm always a little insecure that he's going to grow up and hate me. Even though there's no reason for that to happen. That's the way I feel about my dad because I was thrown out of the home when I was 17 and told you were going to fail at everything and you never do. And I've become very aggressive and dogmatic in proving everybody wrong. But at the same time it leaves you with some scars. And I don't want my son to go through that. [04]

Although 1 father had had a conflictual relationship with his father as a teenager, he remarked that his relationship was much closer since his marriage and the birth of his daughter.

I think it was wonderful when I was a child. We grew apart during the teen years which I don’t think is atypical. He thought I was irresponsible during my teens and my earlier 20s because I was too busy having fun. I was going to university and I was having fun. Then I got engaged; things changed. We started to converge a lot
more and, after I got married, even more so. And now that I have a
baby at home, even more so, because he sees himself in me now, I
think, 30 years ago. [10]

The fathers in this study viewed their fathers as providers and teachers—not
as a person who displayed his emotions, or a person with whom they could
converse with in an intense, emotional way, or share intimate problems.

I think my father was not a very emotional person. He wasn't a
person who said that he loved you or wasn't a person that was
outwardly very emotional. You knew that he did but he never said
it. I think he probably got to enjoy me more as he got older than
when he was younger. He was a farmer and he worked hard and
didn't have a lot of time for kids, and I think that as he got older he
maybe valued children a little bit more. [07]

He wasn't the kind of man that was active in sports or anything, so
it's not like we played a lot of ball together, but he gave a lot of
time to me when I was a kid. He'd do carpentry work with me and
he'd set me up with my own carpentry tools and I was quite a young
kid downstairs. I think even though we probably don't talk about,
you know, the intimate parts of life that much, I still feel very close
to him and think he was quite close to us when we were kids. [09]

We had fun cutting the grass; we had fun playing soccer. We had
fun flying kites. We had fun going for drives. Ah, I used to go to
work with him sometimes when I was a kid and we would have fun
that way. Um, if I had problems at school, I went to see my
mother. If I had problems with relationships I went to see my
mother. My father isn't, and he still isn't, he hasn't changed, but he
never was one that liked dealing with human problems. He didn't
mind dealing with ah, you know, inanimate problems; he didn't
mind that at all. He is very much a workaholic. . . . He's very
aggressive, very ambitious. [10]

There were things that I wanted to ask him and he wasn't there.
And I sort of felt at that point I felt something was missing, but that
was a passing thing. I mean, he was always there, and I can't say
anything bad about our relationship. . . . There were certain things
that I would go to my mom to talk about more than dad. She'd
listen more than dad would but that was certain things. She knew
things about me that she knew before my dad even knew and my
dad probably would never even understand things like that. [11]

I was raised properly. But it was very old-fashioned. Dad was the
bacon winner. Mom boiled the bacon. I never really had any sort
of heart-to-heart conversations with my father. I can have in-depth
conversations with my mother now, but I can’t remember having
any when I was 16 when I really needed perhaps more guidance.
My dad was a great supporter of “You need a ride to the ball
game?” He was there, oh yeah. He’d haul all the kids to the game.
He’d watch, he’d play sports and everything like this, and he tried to
help me with that. [13]

If there was ever a problem, I went to mom. Everybody went to
mom. Dad was not to be consulted about, “was not,” but we chose
not to I think because he really didn’t cope that well with it, mostly
because of the way he was raised. My dad was the disciplinarian in
the family but my mom was the, oh, I lost the word now. Um, not
subtle, but she had finesse. She was the parent with finesse. She
drove the family. My father provided for the family. [14]

Two fathers had experienced the death of their fathers, and it was apparent
that they wanted to explore some unresolved issues with their fathers or to have
spent more time with them before their death.

My father’s dead. So I don’t have an opportunity to resolve with
him some situations I recall from my childhood and I need to resolve
them. My father was a good father and he loved me and he cared
for me and he protected me. I was in no way abused or suffered in
any way, but there were parts of our relationship that needed to be
resolved. . . . I wasn’t close to my father. He wasn’t able to
encourage my development greatly because he was a laborer, he was
a plumber, and he could fix anything, I hate fixing things. Ah, so
that was difficult. I was more of a artistic person.
[12]

We got along very well, him dying earlier in my life and . . . it’s
funny I always wish I would have had the opportunity because when
you’re a teenager you don’t want to hang around your parents. So
as a child it was really good, got to do a lot of things with my
friends and he did things with his wife. And I regret that now. Ah,
I think he was a great father, you know; I was never abused and he was strict and gave me a good upbringing. [08]

**I Want to Parent Differently Than My Father**

Fathers in this study were raised by a traditional father and a mother who was the emotional “switchboard” in the family. Most fathers were striving to be more emotionally connected to their children, more than they had experienced in their own childhood.

With the breakdown of patriarchal values that has resulted in a large part from the feminist movement, more and more men are aware of their being emotional cripples. More and more of them are refusing to stifle their sensitivity [and to become emotionally involved with their children]. (Corneau, 1991, p. 25)

While commenting on the importance of their relationships with their children, some fathers remarked:

I believe that, by accepting him and by smiling at him, right from when he was born that it develops the closeness that will, one day, lead to a deeper communication, where he can use words and verbalize. Without establishing that from the beginning, then there’s distance, right? You know, so I don’t ever want him to remember a time when dad wasn’t kind of close. You know, that kind of thing, with the physical touching and, ah, helping with changing his diapers and stuff, so that I’ve always been a part of him. [04]

She does appear to be responsive to my voice, to my touch, to my just being near her—is really, really important to me. And, again, whether it has anything to do with it or not I haven’t the faintest idea, but her contentedness then becomes very important to me. And one of the reasons why it’s so important to me is my own family background is of a very dysfunctional family. And I want very badly not to have a dysfunctional family and to give the child a lot of affection. [02]
I think it’s much important that he grows up in an environment . . . because I think he needs to have confidence. He needs to know people care for him. I mean, and I don’t mean, you can’t just say “Oh I love you Scott” when he’s 5 years old. You’ve got to prove that to him. He’s got to know that. He’s got to know that he can come to you on the worst day of his life. He can come to you and you’re going to be there for him. And you’re not going to crap on him. And that’s happened to me in my life. And I don’t want to be critical of my parents but I think everybody does this, you think, “Oh boy, I’m gonna learn from that.” And you may find yourself doing the very same thing which will be a shock. [03]

One father wanted to adopt a more gentle, nontraditional role than that ascribed to men in the past. He explained:

Men are busy filling male roles that have been ascribed to them and they’re afraid to question them or bend them a little. A lot of men are. A lot of men aren’t. And I’m drawn or attracted to men who aren’t. I was raised a lot more by my mother than my father. And throughout my life I’ve related to women more than men. If I listed 10 friends, 7 of them would be women. Maybe it’s easier to admit that I want to feel things. [03]

My father was very determined that his way was the only way. I don’t think I’m going to be like that. I hope to be a consultant for my children. I want their interaction. [14]

In attempting to understand his relationship with his father, 1 father discussed his father’s life experiences because he did not want to appear critical of their relationship. He realized the sacrifices his father had made in order to provide for his family.

People my age have not had to go through what our parents went through. I mean like I couldn’t vision myself being 17 years old, riding a motorbike with no lights, through England, and having German Messerschmidts firing at you. I have no ability to vision that. He was injured in the war. He lived through a depression. I have no concept of going down by the railroad tracks to gather coal so that you’ve got heat. You know, you’ve got cardboard inside your shoes because you’ve worn the soles off. I can’t grasp that.
So in all fairness to my father and to other parents of that generation. [13]

When he was asked how his relationship with his daughter would be different than his relationship with his father, he responded:

I've probably changed Susan more in the first 3 months than perhaps my dad did for all three children. . . . I hope this isn't perceived that my dad and I had a bad relationship or anything like that. It's like I very much love my father. My father was probably more supportive towards my upbringing than the average father of that time and so that's perhaps, maybe I have an opportunity to become a more, I don't know if it's better, I like to think it is, able to communicate with my child or do things for my child and know the importance of that over and above maybe perhaps some other father of my age. [13]

For some parents, after they have had their own children, they become more understanding of the sacrifices their parents have made and become more tolerant and forgiving and less apt to blame others (Swigart, 1991).

**I Want to Parent Like My Father**

One husband said that he wanted his wife to be responsible for the affective tasks in the family or, in other words, wear the “emotional hat” while he would be the provider. His father had been allowed to come home and escape the demands of parenting; therefore, he felt entitled to the same privileges. His father did not have to deal with emotional issues in the family, and he felt inadequate in expressing his emotional feelings to his infant. Corneau (1991) suggested that sons of that generation have not seen their fathers or a majority of other males in society express their inner feelings. Furthermore, Corneau claimed that if men are called on to deal with emotional issues they feel they do not have the skills. One
father said:

I'm forced to wear different hats. I have to wear a certain hat at work. I wear a certain hat in social settings. And I have to wear different hats at home, whereas before I had probably only two or three. [Prompt: What are the two or three?] Oh, handyman, breadwinner and gardener. And now it's increased to housekeeper, for example, and emotional support person, social worker sometimes. . . . So now I'm a social worker and, ah therapist, I don't know. And I'm not good at that. But I'm expected to be good at it. And it creates internal stress because I'm expected to do things that I know that I'm not good at. [10]

Wife's Support

Wives primarily were perceived as giving informational and emotional support to fathers which aided them in the development of their initial father-infant relationship. Following their maternity leaves, all but 1 mother planned to return to work. It was necessary, therefore, that fathers would become involved with infant caretaking because their busy career wives did not want to raise their children on their own. Women can be gatekeepers in that they, unwittingly, keep their children at a distance from their fathers because they believe that the nurturing of children lies within the woman's domain (Brazelton & Cramer, 1990; Swigart, 1991). For example, mothers may accuse fathers of being too clumsy, too rough, absent minded, incompetent, or totally unsafe when caring for children. However, in the present study, fathers did not perceive any such negativity or gatekeeping on the part of their wives.
**Informational Support**

Wives assisted their husbands in getting to know their infants through giving advice and guidance in the general area of infant care and through sharing information about daily events and progress of the infant’s development while fathers worked outside the home. One father’s response was typical of what fathers had to say about this daily sharing of events.

She keeps me very updated on any tiny little thing that he’s done throughout the day that’s new. Or about how he’s been during the day, whether he’s been fussy all day or whether he’s been alert, whether he made a lot of noises, different noises . . . so I always try to keep as up-to-date as possible about anything that he may be doing that’s changing because they change so rapidly, right? [04]

Because the mothers spent more time with their infants and were more knowledgeable about infant growth and development, they were cast as teachers and role models for fathers. A father pointed out that his wife’s willingness to share the child and to teach him about the infant’s body language was useful in getting to know his baby at an early age.

She helped me in the sense because I think she was the first one to point out certain body languages and say, "Look it. See. Look what he’s trying to tell you.” So if the mother is willing to share some of the cues, if you will, some of the behavior cues that they use to identify the needs of the children, when they’re bringing them up with their husbands or, it would be much easier I think for the husbands to recognize these cues and then look for new ones or identify new ones. [01]

He further elaborated that in traditional marriages such as that of his parents fathers had a difficult time in getting to know their children because of the mother’s gatekeeping and father’s reluctance to become involved.
My father had two children. And so, it was quite an interesting situation to see him hold the grandson and me coaching him how to hold him. But my mother was absolutely amazed that he was doing this because, when I was born, he never did it. And he never did it because my mom would never let him. [Laughs] Okay, so it takes two to tangle, so I think in the old days, in traditional marriages, I think there was a combination about reluctance on the part of the husband to help and reluctance on the part of the mother to give up the mother's role and share their experience with the husband. [01]

Another father explained how comfortable it was to learn about his baby from his wife.

She can explain things as to why a baby does something. And it's fascinating. And it's much nicer to have her teach me than read it out of a book. You learn it much better when you're taught it, so she's like a textbook in a way. But then she teaches me in a way, see I'm very comfortable with her, I don't feel emasculated, it's not a sign of weakness or vulnerability to be a goofy father. [03]

Fathers were impressed that their wives were a fountain of knowledge.

In terms of helping me to get to know the baby, she always can answer my questions about when he should start to be on solid food, or when he should start to smile, or when to expect this and that. Or when he's doing something, she can give me some background information. She's pretty knowledgeable. So in terms of pure knowledge, she's helped me. She's taught me certain things. Like, when the first time I bathed the kid, she's there to help out. The teaching, the source of knowledge and then the fact that she sort of, I wouldn't say pushes me, she promotes my interaction. [05]

She understands the needs of the baby better, and she helps me understand what those needs might be or how I deal with those needs. Due to the fact that she's with the baby until she goes back to work, 24 hours a day, she can tell me things about the baby that I can then expect or then deal with, maybe better or just even begin to see the beginnings of some pattern or some development. [07]

Although I father wanted to remain more aloof and less involved than other fathers, his wife pressured him to become more actively involved.
I mean I really rely on my wife for a lot of things, and sometimes I rely on her to do the things and she turns around and forces me to do them myself, and I think that’s better for me. I don’t like it at the time. I’m being forced to care about things I don’t care about sometimes, but after you do it a couple of times, you do care about it. I mean, I care that the baby has a dry diaper of course, I care that she gets washed, and I care that she is happy. I care that she’s occupied and amused and all those things and I’m not saying that I wouldn’t care if Brenda wasn’t around, but I am learning way faster by having her around. [10]

Other fathers also learned by watching how their wives interacted and cared for their infants.

I do watch the way she manipulates him. But I’m just as good at it as she is. I remember one time I was holding and patting him on his back and she says, “Well you are holding—well.” I used to throw him about half way over my shoulder right? And she said, “Well that’s too high up,” so I adjusted that and he was a little happier. [04]

And then I gave him a bath and she was there and so yeah, a role model. Ah, she is a conscious role model. She’s also been an unconscious role model. I watch how she deals with the child, and I pick up some things from that. [05]

**Emotional Support**

Husbands reported that their wives gave them emotional support by encouraging them to become involved with their infants that, in turn, gave them confidence in their nurturing abilities and raised their self-esteem. Furthermore, the fathers perceived their wives as trusting them with the infants and not viewing them as incompetent or unsafe while caring for them.

She’s very good at making people feel confident in themselves. So I don’t feel like I am messing up. I feel confident around the baby. [03]
I don’t think that she has ever been nervous about me, but I think over the first few weeks she became more settled. And she hasn’t seen herself as having the need . . . but the first couple of weeks maybe she went out of her way to show me things and, “Here, take the baby,” sort of thing. [05]

Like you’re doing a good job and that feels pretty good. [06]

I would say probably the majority of mothers tend to try and get the fathers involved as much as possible, and I think that that’s probably good. I mean I certainly have an interest in the baby, but I think just the encouragement is also quite good. [07]

She’s always very receptive to me taking her. I’ve never felt that I was unwelcome to take the baby or hold the baby. I think that’s important because if I felt that she didn’t want me to have the baby then I think I would react to that quite quickly. It would really cut down on the desire to hold her, but I’ve never felt that I’ve been unwelcome to take her, hold her, or do anything with her. [09]

She encourages me to do things with Angie and supports me when I do them, whether they be right or wrong. She doesn’t breathe down my neck. She says, “You’ll learn there’s an easier way to do it.” [11]

I think Sue has been very supportive in me establishing a relationship with Lori. So she says, “Why don’t you take her, say hello to her, see her and things.” [12]

She encourages me. She tells me I am a good father. There’s never been a time where I haven’t felt that I should be afraid to do something. [14]

**Summary**

Women have a powerful influence in the development of the father-infant relationship either through encouraging or discouraging a father’s involvement with the child. When mothers were willing to share the infant with the father, gave information to the father about the infant’s care and development, and encouraged
the father to become involved in the fathering role, fathers were more likely to develop an emotional relationship when the infant was young.
CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This dissertation was an exploratory, descriptive study of 14 first-time fathers' experiences as they developed a beginning relationship with their infants over a 2-month period. In this final chapter, a discussion of the findings, the limitations and recommendations for further study, the implications for nursing practice, and the summary of the study are presented. Prior to the discussion, a secondary review of literature was conducted to validate my findings and to suggest new findings that came out of the present study.

Commitment

According to Brickman's (1987) theory of commitment, commitment has two faces that occur simultaneously: (a) "sense of having to" and (b) "sense of wanting to." He further stated that commitment contains three elements: (a) a positive element, (b) a negative element, and (c) a relationship between the two. The negative element is primarily persisting in enacting a behavior despite the sacrifices and costs one encounters while resisting temptation to quit. In contrast, the positive element of commitment is enthusiastically enacting a behavior without ambivalence about the costs or sacrifices because the behavior itself is meaningful and pleasurable. "Persistence in commitment reflects the call of duty; enthusiasm
goes beyond the call of duty” (p. 10).

In the present study, fathers initially felt a sense of duty and responsibility to involve themselves in their infants' lives because the infant was perceived as vulnerable and helpless. The helpless appearance of the infant is appealing to parents, and it entices them to come to the aid of their children. Lorenz coined the helpless appearance of the newborn as “babyness.” The appearance of the infant is described in the following way: a disproportionate large head, large eyes, protruding forehead, round puffy cheeks, and a round short body with short legs (Bolton, 1983; Emde, 1980; Fullard & Reiling, 1976). Because of the helpless, vulnerable appearance of the infant, fathers in the present study felt compelled to protect and nurture their infants. As the infant became more interactive and responsive, fathers remarked that the relationship was becoming more pleasurable and reciprocal.

What is important to examine is the nature of the relationship between the “sense of having to” or sense of duty and the “sense of wanting to” because the nature of this connection determined the nature of commitment and, in turn, influenced the relationship between the father and infant. LaRossa and LaRossa (1981) suggested that, if commitments are perceived as primarily obligatory or solely based on a sense of duty and responsibility, parent-child relationships would take on a character that is much different than that based on enjoyment and pleasure. Relationships based on obligations were characterized by LaRossa and LaRossa as follows: Parents would not pay much attention to their children;
parents would experience a lack of enjoyment while interacting with their children or they would perform routinized activities in order to involve other activities or people. Furthermore, parents would not have to be emotionally present while interacting with their children, only physically present. Brickman (1987) would agree with LaRossa and LaRossa's notion of obligatory relationships because he states that, when the positive element of commitment dominates the behavior, then the activity or relationship is more intrinsically motivating or pleasurable. However, if the negative element dominates the behavior, then the activity or relationship becomes more like drudgery or work.

Overall, in the present study, the rewards gained in the relationship seemed to outweigh the costs or sacrifices that fathers made such as loss of personal freedom, lack of sleep, decreased husband-wife interaction, and time-consuming physical care of infants. However, there were times when fathers felt that they had to care for their infants when they would rather be doing something else, but these feelings were not predominant. The theory of commitment developed by Brickman (1987) was useful in conceptualizing the commitment of the fathers in the present study because many components of commitment were discussed by them.

In the present study, the desire to have a baby and the feelings of readiness expressed by the fathers seemed to be a precursor to the commitment phase of the father-infant relationship. Brickman (1987) suggested that, if people perceive they have a range of choices and control over these choices in any given situation, they
will have a higher level of commitment than those who do not. In a study of 20 first-time fathers, 9 fathers who were not emotionally involved in their wives' pregnancy were labelled as observers or bystanders of the pregnancy by the researcher (May, 1982a). Two of these fathers were extremely detached from the pregnancy because their wives had conceived without their husbands' agreement or had conceived by chance. These fathers did not desire the children from this conception. They remained emotionally distant from the entire pregnancy experience. It was apparent that these fathers had little commitment to the developing fetus or mother. The mother had to seek emotional support from others during her pregnancy. It would have been worthwhile to have done a follow-up study of these fathers to ascertain what type of relationship they had developed with their infants.

In the present study, all pregnancies had been planned except one. While studying the transition to parenthood, Feldman (1987) observed an overburdened group of parents who were extremely strained while caring for their young infants. Although the parents were meeting the demands of parenting, they showed little affect, zest, spirit, or playfulness while doing so. When the researcher examined the self-reports from the prenatal period, she discovered the best predictor of a lack of strain experienced by fathers was involvement in planning the pregnancy. Planfulness by fathers may indicate that fathers are psychologically ready to raise children and to share their wives' attention with their infants. Also, it could suggest that fathers are satisfied with their careers because they are in a financial
position to provide for their infants. Fathers in the present study were in well-established careers and, for the most part, were in the middle to higher income bracket—with the exception of 1 father who had not planned to have children at this time.

Although the pregnancy had been unplanned, this father had always wanted children. Because of the many rewards associated with caring and relating to his infant, this father successfully met the initial challenges of parenting. It may be that fathers can be resilient and adapt positively to unexpected pregnancies, if they view the situation as rewarding. The desire to have children and/or to plan a pregnancy without a feeling of obligation to have children may promote a more successful transition to parenthood and commitment to the father-infant relationship. Antonucci and Mikus (1988) suggested that many “unplanned parents” make good parents and successfully meet the challenges of parenting because they have a “positive possible self-image” as parents. In a qualitative study of factors that contribute to fathers’ readiness to have children, May (1982b) concluded the following: (a) They intend to have the children; (b) they are in a stable couple relationship and are relatively financially secure; and (c) they sense a closure to the child-free life. These studies lend support to the significance of fathers feeling ready to have children as well as of their desire to have children in order to commit to the father-infant relationship.

To date, no researcher has fully examined the concept of commitment as a crucial element in the initial development of the father-infant relationship;
however, researchers imply that commitment is a significant factor in this developing relationship. Langeveld (1987), a phenomenologist, suggested that the nature of the initial body relationship between mother and infant and father and infant is different; that is, the mother bears and gives birth to the infant, whereas the father has a less symbiotic relationship with the infant. Thus, the new father needs to accept or affirm that the child is his, whereas the mother already has the child within her body before she can accept or reject the child as a newcomer.

The father must actively make a commitment or take responsibility because he is free from the biological constraint of pregnancy; however, the mother does not have such an option. Moreover, “the father’s role is not as biologically necessary as the mother’s; by implication it is more abstract, psychological, and strongly influenced by cultural mores” (Scull, 1992, p. 4).

The reality of the commitment took hold at different time periods for fathers in the present study. Fathers felt a sense of responsibility toward protecting, nurturing, and providing for their infants when the pregnancy or birth became “really” real to them. Similarly, in a study report of 56 expectant and new fathers, Jordan (1990) described how fathers grappled with the reality of the pregnancy and the child at different times during the pregnancy and the infant’s few months of life. Commitment does not remain constant; it is a process that occurs at different times for different fathers depending upon the fathers’ circumstances. Further research is needed to fully understand the personal and situational factors that influence the differences in time periods of commitment for
fathers.

**Father as an Outsider**

In the present study, fathers believed that their relationship with their infants was slower to develop than that of the mothers' with their infants. In some way, they felt alienated and excluded from the close mother-infant bond, particularly because of breast-feeding. On the other hand, some fathers were able to accept this distance from the mother-infant bond. Fathers expressed feelings of abandonment, jealousy, envy, inadequacy, or pleasure that their wives could comfort their crying, fussy infants. Several researchers and authors have discussed the father’s feelings of exclusion during pregnancy, birth, and breast-feeding experience (Dumas, 1991; Gamble, 1991; Jordan, 1990; Jordan & Wall, 1990; Lewis, 1986; May, 1980; McGill, 1985; Reiber, 1976; Shapiro, 1987; Worth, 1988).

Jordan and Wall (1990) concluded (a) that breast-feeding interferes with the fathers’ abilities to develop a relationship with their infants, (b) that fathers feel inadequate in caring for their infants, and (c) that breast-fed infants create a distance between the mother and father. Using the grounded theory method, Gamble (1991) interviewed 14 fathers of breast-fed infants and found similar reactions to breast-feeding. However, fathers developed compensatory behaviors such as involving themselves in bathing, changing diapers, and putting the infant to sleep to increase the father-infant interaction which, in turn, promoted a closer relationship. In a phenomenological study of father’s jealousy, Dumas (1991)
concluded that if fathers are able to express their feelings of jealousy to their wives and concomitantly increase their involvement with their infants, these particular activities help to decrease their jealous feelings.

In the present study, the impetus that encouraged fathers to participate more in the care of their infants was the increased responsiveness of the infant, especially the appearance of the infant's smile. Possibly, fathers then perceived their infants as more of an interactive human being who was giving specific, positive feedback through their interactions, rather than as an object who primarily slept and breast-fed during the first few weeks of life. Some fathers did not specifically state that increased involvement in the care of their infants decreased their jealous feelings, but some commented that once they could do more things with their babies their relationship deepened. Cancian (1987) claimed that women believe that a loving relationship is based upon the free expression of emotions and feelings, whereas men suggest that a good relationship is based on doing things for people or sharing activities. Fathers, in the present study, would support Cancian's thesis that men are more instrumental in relationships, whereas women may be more expressive in relationships.

In some ways, Freud's belief that fathers play a minor role in the infant's first 3 years of life, except as a support to the mother-infant relationship, has contributed to fathers feeling like an outsider to the mother-infant relationship. Bowlby's (1969, 1973) view of the father's role is similar to that of Freud's in that mothers were portrayed by Bowlby as the most significant figure in infancy
because of his belief that they were biologically primed to respond to the infant's crying, smiling, and sucking behaviors. Given this biological programmed system, Bowlby believed that the mother and infant developed an important attachment, whereas the father played a secondary, minor role. Societal attitudes that suggest that fathers have little to offer their infants, emotionally or physically, undermine the father's desire to become involved with their infants.

Corneau (1991), a Jungian analyst, suggested that mothers enjoy a close mother-fetus bond and that this closeness remains following the birth of the infant due to their involvement in infant care. On the other hand, the father remains on the periphery of this experience. He explained that “his [the man's] sperm enters the woman from the outside, and immediately after the birth he is again pushed aside; his mate clings to the baby as her own personal possession” (p. 23). Osherman (1986) agreed that many men feel a sense of exclusion and that some fathers feel unable to become a part of this tight mother-infant bond. Yet, he reminds new fathers that one of their crucial tasks is to make a place for themselves in the family system.

**Fathers' Perceptions of the Infant**

**Responsiveness of the Infant**

When the infants were approximately 5 to 6 weeks of age, the fathers elaborated on the increased responsiveness and sociability of the infants. The infants explored the details of the fathers' faces and began to look the parents directly in the eye. When infants become more alert and look their parents in the
eye, Fogel (1984) reported that parents view their infants as more real and become more emotionally close to them. He further stated, “When someone looks long and intently in our eyes, we begin to feel a strong bond with that person—a more complete sense of knowing that person” (p. 140). The infant’s smile and eye contact were extremely important to fathers because these social behaviors had a powerful influence in drawing fathers into the relationship. In Fraiberg’s (1974) study of blind infants, mothers felt rejected by their blind infants because the infants were unable to establish eye contact and smile. These behaviors were interpreted by the mothers as an unfriendly response; consequently, the mothers were not as emotionally responsive to their infants. Mothers avoided close interaction with their infants and lacked interest and took little pleasure in their infants.

Initially, the fathers, in the study, referred to their infants as “it” or an “object.” They did not interact with their infants much during their infants’ first few weeks of life because the infants just slept and breast-fed. Robson and Moss (1970) came up with similar findings when studying the development of attachment feelings of 54 primiparous mothers toward their infants during the first 3 months of life. Robson and Moss concluded that the average mother experiences impersonal feelings and thinks of her 4-to-6-week infant as inanimate and subhuman. However, by the 2nd month, mothers were encouraged when their infants began to smile and exhibit visual fixation. In some ways, fathers are more similar to mothers than they are different in terms of this initial developing relationship.
In a qualitative study exploring the transition to parenthood during the infant's first year of life, LaRossa and LaRossa (1981) suggested that fathers have a tendency to treat their infants as things (reifications) more so than mothers. They hypothesized that mothers are more sensitive to their infants' abilities; they can more readily view their infants as interpersonally competent; and they generally enjoy their relationship with their infants more than fathers. It was unclear if, in the study, fathers viewed their infants as things throughout the infants' first year of life. Although fathers in the present study viewed their infants as objects during the first few weeks of the infants' lives, they were astute in noticing the interpersonal competence of their infants at approximately 5 weeks to 2 months of age.

LaRossa and LaRossa (1981) suggested that there are many fathers who want children, but who do not necessarily enjoy them. They commit themselves only out of a sense of responsibility rather than out of pleasures a child can bring to a family. Fathers in the present study, with the exception of 1 father whose wife was going to give up her career to raise the child, were extremely involved with their infants, sensitive to the infants' needs, and experienced many pleasures during their father-infant interactions. One father viewed his role as father as the provider and his wife's role as the nurturer. He remarked that his wife forced him to get involved with his infant. Mothers in the present study were perceived by the fathers as supporting and encouraging them to become involved in all aspects of the infant's life.
Identification

Rubin (1984) and Gottlieb (1978) described the mother’s process of identification of her infant as that in which mothers compare their infants’ features and/or characteristics to those of someone who is intimately significant in the family. Fathers, in much the same way, in the present study identified their infants. In a grounded theory study of three healthy families and grandparents, Bright (1992) expanded the concept of identification to suggest that parents and grandparents connect with their babies through acknowledging the similarities and differences between the infants’ attributes and those of family members. The attributes of the infant were always described in complimentary terms, even when the pregnancy was unplanned or when there were financial hardships or conflictual family relationships; but family members, at times, were described in derogatory terms. In the present study, not one father described grandparents, aunts, or uncles in a derogatory way. In fact, most comparisons of the infant’s attributes were made using the mother’s and father’s characteristics in a positive, complimentary fashion. If the above theories are correct, the identification process is one way through which fathers become connected to their infants.

Predictability of the Infant

In his model of close relationships of adults, Levinger suggested that the important components of continuing a relationship are accompanied by familiarity and predictability of those involved, in contrast to the novelty and ambiguity characteristic of the acquaintance or initial stage of a relationship (cited in Perlman
& Duck, 1987). The findings of the present study support the notion of familiarity and predictability as being important in the development of a relationship between infant and father. The association of the infant's attributes to a familiar person assisted the father in viewing the baby as familiar rather than as a total stranger. The predictability of the infant's behavior and routines gave fathers positive feedback about their parenting abilities, and pride in themselves as fathers, in turn, helped the relationship to flourish.

Although some fathers in the present study commented that their wives were better at reading their infant's nonverbal cues, other researchers have found that fathers are just as competent as mothers in paying attention to infant's distress cues during feeding (Parke & Sawin, 1976). Some of the fathers, in the present study, described how they could tell if the baby was bored, wet, or hungry. Some of the fathers said that the process of reading their infant's cues involved a trial-and-error method. Fathers experimented with different techniques to determine what best suited their infants—in much the same way as mothers did.

**Father-Infant Interaction**

Many studies indicate that fathers' interactions with children center around play activities, whereas maternal interactions center around caretaking activities such as feeding, bathing, and changing clothes and diapers (Clarke-Stewart, 1978; Kotelchuck, 1976; Lamb & Lamb, 1976; Lewis, 1986; Rendina & Dickerscheid, 1976). The present study supports the supposition that fathers are much more involved in play than mothers. The fact that the mothers in the present study were
at home full-time and that most of them were breast-feeding might account for, in part, the fact that the fathers reported spending less time than the mothers in the caretaking and feeding of their infants. What remains to be seen is the extent to which these fathers will become involved in the caretaking of their infants when the mothers return to work full-time and terminate breast-feeding; but it is obvious that these fathers perceived themselves as participating more in caretaking than their own fathers.

Although Parke (1981) suggested that fathers are less verbal and use touch more than mothers, the fathers’ interactions in the present study consisted of a considerable amount of singing, talking, and reading. Also, fathers engaged in an extensive amount of physical action such as bouncing infants on their knees, moving their infants’ legs in a bicycling motion, and swinging and lifting their infants. Researchers have found that fathers engage in more physically arousing games than mothers (Clarke-Stewart 1978; Lewis, 1986; Parke, 1981).

A surprising finding in the present study is that fathers held their infants differently than mothers. For instance, fathers described holding their infants occasionally at a distance from their bodies or like a football. The reason given by the fathers for doing this is that they wanted to teach their infants independence and specifically to teach them that babies exist separately from others. Rubin (1984) described a mother’s holding of her infant as enfolding the infant in her arms—replicating the fetus uterine position. In doing this, the mother is assisting the infant in adapting “from the finite uterine world to the external world of
infinite space” (p. 143), that is, until the infant develops adequately to cope with friction and gravity (p. 143). It is possible that fathers’ physically arousing play may assist infants in adapting to the increased gravity and friction outside the uterine world.

According to Mahler, Pine, and Bergman (1975), the separation-individuation process begins to occur when the infant becomes separated from the symbiotic relationship with the mother and develops his or her own sense of identity—at approximately the 4th or 5th month of life. Although many authors suggest that fathers play a crucial role in the infant’s task of separation-individuation, little is known about specific father-infant interactions that facilitate this process (Henderson, 1982; Lincoln, 1984; Von Der Heydt, 1973). It is speculated that holding the baby away from the father’s body may be the forerunner of the process of differentiation whereby the infant learns that he or she exists without being attached to someone. Osherman (1992) suggested that the father is the bridge or the beacon to the outside world in which the father reassuringly says to his child that “you can let go of mom, there’s a whole world beyond mother that is exciting and interesting and ultimately manageable” (p. 210).

**The Nurturing Father**

With regard to studying relationships, Hinde (1976) proposed that “what a person thinks about a relationship may be more important than the interactions that actually occur within that relationship” (p. 4). It stands to reason, then, that what fathers think and feel about their father-infant relationship may be more significant
than what they actually do.

Fathers in the present study expressed the need to be loving, sensitive, and emotionally involved in their infants’ lives at a very early stage. They did not emphasize the father’s role as provider or disciplinarian; however, the time-honored role of protector frequently was discussed throughout the interviews.

In a recent study, 75 fathers were asked to choose from a list of characteristics what they believed were ideal characteristics of a father. The traits of affection, love, and communication were highly rated as desirable, but the fathering characteristic of portraying a masculine image was strongly rejected (Kennedy, 1989). Similarly, fathers in the present study reported that love, good communication skills, involvement in their infant’s life, and support of their wives in the mothering role were essential to the development of the father-infant relationship. In addition, fathers were able to experience the more sensitive and expressive side of themselves in the relationship—a side that often is overshadowed by the stereotyping of men as the macho, insensitive male. It seems that the stereotype of the father as the sole provider and as an insensitive, heavy-handed disciplinarian is gradually being replaced by that of the father who is sensitive and nurturing.

Conceptualization of the father’s roles and responsibilities has evolved from that of the father as a moral teacher during the Puritan times to largely that of the breadwinner during the Industrial Revolution. Following the Second World War, the focus of the father’s role became a sex-role model—especially for sons.
Although Lamb (1986) suggested that the roles of teaching values and morals and of being the breadwinner are still important for fathers, since the mid 1970s fathers have been viewed as more nurturant and involved in the father-infant relationship. Other researchers have reported that fathers are interested in their infants and do express caring, sensitive feelings to their infants (Frodi et al., 1978; Greenberg & Morris, 1974; Parke & Sawin, 1976).

Time and time again, in the present study, the father’s sensitivity, caring, and pleasure came through when the fathers discussed their infants and evolving relationship with them. In assessing the emotional availability of the parents to their infants, Emde (1980) concluded that parents should experience affection, interest, and pleasure in their interactions. If this does not occur, oftentimes parents may be “turned off” which may result in “less exploration, and in extreme cases sadness and depression may ensue” (p. 102) in parent-child relationships.

**Father-Father Relationship**

Most of the fathers in the present study disclosed that they had had a conflictual relationship with their fathers during their teenage years. In a study of peer, mother, and father relationships with 170 high school students, researchers found that sons said their relationships with their mothers was more rewarding than those with their fathers. Although fathers were seen as helpful and cooperative with specific concrete tasks, Wright and Keple (1981) found that there was a considerable amount of conflict between father and son. McGill (1985), a researcher of male relational behavior, nicely summed up the father-son
relationship when he said,

The evidence is clear that though they share a name, most fathers and sons are only remotely related. Where there is any degree of closeness at all between fathers and sons, it is closeness born of time together, shared activities rather than shared selves. (p. 138)

Fathers, in the present study, would concur with McGill's conclusions because they viewed their fathers as teachers and playmates of specific activities—not as a person with whom they shared their intimate problems.

In the present study, mothers played the leading role in the family as the "emotional switchboard." McGill (1985) claimed that mothers are the "go-between" or the "loving link" between fathers and sons. Furthermore, he remarked that mothers define what their fathers are like to their children, absolve fathers from guilt and neglect, and elevate the father's role in the family. Comments from mothers about the father's role, as reported by McGill, give credence to McGill's assertions. For example, mothers said to their children: "He's really a very busy man," "he's works very hard to give us the things we have," "a lot of people depend upon your father," and "your father really doesn't mean what he says" (p. 147).

Although the men in the present study grew up with traditional fathers and with mothers who were the "emotional switchboard" in the family, they, with the exception of 1, wanted to be more emotionally involved with their children because they believed that their fathers had missed out on a positive experience by not being involved. To date, no research could be found, other than the results from the present study, that proposed that men who had fathers who were emotionally
uninvolved with them are motivated to develop a relationship with their infants in a manner that is different from that of their own fathers.

**Spousal Support**

The spousal support that fathers viewed as significant in helping them to develop a relationship with their infants was identified as emotional and informational support. The supportive functions described by the fathers were congruent with House's (1981) conceptualization of emotional and informational support. However, House's categories of instrumental and appraisal support were not mentioned by the fathers. This could be explained by the fact that mothers were viewed as the primary caretakers and managers of household tasks. The fathers, therefore, would not see the necessity of calling upon their wives to help them with child care or household tasks. In fact, mothers would probably seek instrumental support from their husbands. Appraisal support, the transmission of information that assists fathers in comparing their roles with others so they can evaluate their performance as fathers, was not discussed by the fathers in the present study. Cronenwett and Kunst-Wilson (1981) suggested that when people evaluate sex-related abilities they choose a member of their own sex for comparison. Because maternal and paternal roles seemed to be different in the present study, this could be the reason why fathers did not discuss appraisal support.

The mothers in the present study were perceived by the fathers as encouraging them to be involved in their infants' lives. They were not perceived
as gatekeepers. It could be that, because all mothers except 1 would be returning to work, fathers adopted a more nontraditional role. These results concur with those of Cowan and Cowan (1987). In their interviews and observations of 62 couples, they noted that when wives encouraged their husbands' involvement in child care the husbands took more responsibility for the care. Furthermore, fathers who persisted in participating in infant care, despite their feelings of inadequacy, soon felt connected to their infants and reaped many rewards—spurring them on to become further involved. In addition, fathers who were allowed to develop their own ways of handling their infants remained more involved in the care of their 18-month-old infants.

In a study of family and marital interactions, Belsky and Volling (1987) noted that maternal behavior influenced paternal behavior but that the reverse did not occur. These researchers speculated that mothers may entice fathers to become involved by talking about their infants or that fathers become involved by modelling or imitating their wives' parenting behaviors. In the present study, role modelling of the wives' behavior and sharing daily information about their infants by their wives seemed to help the fathers to become involved in the father-infant relationship and in infant care.

**Hypotheses**

The purpose of this grounded theory study was to generate beginning theoretical hypotheses about the initial development of the father-infant relationship that other researchers can test, refine, or further develop using different settings,
different types of fathers, or different situational factors. Hypotheses based on the analysis of the present study are presented below.

1. For a caring, responsive relationship to develop between father and infant, fathers must feel committed to their infants, connected to their infants, and make room for their infants in their lives.

2. The father’s desire to have children and participation in planning the pregnancy, without a feeling of obligation to have children, positively influence the father’s commitment to the father-infant relationship.

3. The feeling of commitment to their infants experienced by fathers positively influences the feeling of connectedness toward their infants, thus promoting a relationship based on caring and affection.

4. The fathers’ perceptions of their infants as being familiar, predictable, responsive, and attractive positively assist fathers in becoming connected to their infants.

5. Fathers who are willing to make changes and/or adjustments in their lives in order to make psychological room and to be physically present for their infants will feel more connected to their children.

6. Men whose fathers were uninvolved emotionally with them during their childhood experience a compensatory process that prompts them to develop a relationship with their infants that is different from the one they had with their own fathers.

7. Men who are satisfied with their past father-son relationship will
develop a relationship with their infants that is similar to the one they had with their own fathers.

8. If wives are willing to share their infants with their husbands, give information about the infants' care and development, and encourage their husbands in their fathering roles, fathers more likely will develop a caring relationship with their young infants.

**Limitations and Recommendations for Further Study**

The present study is a beginning step toward understanding the initial development of the father-infant relationship. A limitation of this study is that the results are not generalizable beyond this sample of fathers. For the most part, the fathers in the present study were well-educated, of the middle class, and older in comparison to the first-time father in the general population. Perhaps, the fathers who volunteered for the study were committed to and valued their fathering roles and relationships with their infants. Conceivably, men who experience satisfying relationships with their wives and infants would participate in research, more so than men with devastating experiences. Investigation is needed to examine the father-infant relationship in situations in which fathers feel obligated to have children or in which they are not involved in the planning of the pregnancy. In addition, researchers could use the grounded theory approach to study diverse groups of fathers in various situations such as different cultural groups, different socioeconomic groups, and fathers with twins or fathers with more than one child.
The use of different situations and diverse groups of fathers would assist in the validation and clarification of the findings of the present study.

In the present study, fathers were interviewed once, and they were asked to recall their experiences of fathering at birth and during the infant's first 2 months of life. Undoubtedly, the results of the study were affected by the fathers' abilities to recall their experiences retrospectively. A longitudinal study would be useful to examine the changes that occur in the relationship between the father and the infant in a concurrent time frame and specifically to describe the unfolding of the developing relationship. Further research is required to determine whether the categories of "making a commitment," "becoming connected," and "making room for the baby" change over time. For example, the rewards and costs of parenting perceived by the fathers may change as the child grows. Different types of rewards and costs of parenting may appear at different age levels. Furthermore, the identification of rewards and costs of parenting may provide a basis for evaluation of the ongoing development of the commitment phase of the father-infant relationship.

In the present study, fathers' perceptions of their infants as being familiar, predictable, responsive, and attractive assisted them in getting to know their infants. It would be interesting to explore whether those characteristics identified by the fathers influence the ongoing relationship of fathers and infants during later infancy and the toddler period.

Further research should be addressed in the area of "making room for the
baby" in various family forms. For example: How does the father make room for the second-, third-, or fourthborn baby and so on? How do fathers of twins, fathers of adopted children, and fathers of children with defects make room for children in their lives? Theoretical sampling among the diverse groups of fathers would give researchers a better understanding of the development of "making room" and its possible influences.

In the present study, the wives were instrumental in encouraging and supporting the development of the father-infant relationship in terms of giving their husbands informational and emotional support. A question that remains unanswered is: What do fathers find nonsupportive during the initial development of the father-infant relationship? Understanding the nature of a nonsupportive spousal environment may aid in the understanding of some factors that inhibit the development of the father-infant relationship.

Another limitation of the present study was that I focused only on the fathers' relationships with their 2-month-old infants. It would be useful to focus on the joint influence of mothering and fathering and the way in which the marital relationship influences the development of the father-infant relationship. For example, infants could disrupt the marital relationships that, in turn, could influence the parental roles that, then, could influence the development of the father-infant relationships. In addition, to what extent do mothers' perceptions of their infants influence fathers' perceptions of their infants and the developing father-infant relationship? Researchers need to examine more closely other factors
that might influence the development of the father-infant relationship. Belsky (1981) suggested that parent-infant interaction “must be examined from the perspective of the family system, and thus the marital relationship (as well as sibling relations) needs to be considered” (p. 19).

A more in-depth understanding of the father-infant relationship would be enhanced if researchers used unstructured observations to examine the behaviors of fathers and their infants and, at the same time, conducted interviews to ascertain fathers’ perceptions about their infants and their developing relationships. In other words, do the fathers’ actions toward their children speak louder than the fathers’ thoughts and feelings or vice versa?

The present study of the initial development of the father-infant relationship is only the beginning in a series of research projects that could be conducted. In his discussion of the nature of studies using the grounded theory approach, Glaser (1978) emphasized, “It makes him humble to the fact that no matter how far he goes in generating theory, it appears as merely ‘openers’ to what he sees that could lay beyond” (p. 6). This descriptive, exploratory study has raised several questions, and it is hoped that these questions will stimulate other researchers to pursue studies in the area of the father-infant relationship.

**Implications for Nursing**

Although the results of the present study should be viewed as tentative, the results have provided a deeper understanding and explanation of the beginning relationship between a father and his infant than presently exists. Nurses should
give fathers an opportunity to discuss their experiences and concerns while they attempt to develop a relationship with their infants. Fathers need to be given direction, opportunities, and support to learn how to develop a relationship with their infants just as mothers need opportunities to learn how to be mothers. Oftentimes, fathers are ignored by the health care professional during prenatal visits or during postpartum home visits.

For some fathers, in the present study, the feelings of love did not appear at first sight of their babies. Nurses should not assume that such fathers do not want to become involved with their infants or that they do not love them. Instead, nurses need to assess the conditions surrounding the birth that might influence fathers' "hesitant connection." Fathers need reassurance that, for some, the relationship may evolve more slowly.

Fathers in this study believed that their relationship, in comparison to the mother-infant relationship, was slower to develop and, in some ways, felt alienated and excluded from the close mother-infant bond and from the intense communication and closeness associated with breast-feeding. Fathers should be encouraged to express their feelings of exclusion, jealousy, envy, and inadequacy to their wives; thus, their feelings could be dealt with in an open manner.

Although breast-feeding can assist in the development of a mother-infant relationship, it is not a necessary part of it. Nurses should point out to fathers that they can develop a close relationship with their infants by rocking, playing, singing, or holding them. Generally, men feel better when they are actively doing
something with people, rather than freely expressing their emotions. Not only should mothers encourage active paternal involvement in their infants’ care, but they should encourage fathers to express their emotions to their children. In society, women are encouraged and permitted to communicate on an emotional level, whereas men are encouraged not to display their emotions.

Pruett (1987) suggested that the precarious period in the father’s attempt to develop a relationship with his baby is during the infant’s first 3 months of life. He said,

This period is sometimes known as the “fourth trimester” because the baby is so often treated and experienced as still being a part of the mother’s body. But given a chance, the baby can pull the father through this risky time in their relationship. (p. 289)

Mothers must make space for fathers in this developing relationship. If mothers act as gatekeepers, fathers may feel excluded from the mother-infant relationship, they may feel that the baby lies within their wives’ domain, and they may feel their role is solely that of being the provider of the family. Mothers, in the present study, encouraged fathers to become involved in their infants’ care by giving them informational and emotional support. Mothers may powerfully influence the development of the father-infant relationship either through inviting or excluding the father’s involvement in the father-infant relationship. It would be important for nurses to assess whether mothers function as gatekeepers or whether they play a supportive role in assisting fathers in the development of the father-infant relationship.

Nurses have opportunities to assess the father-infant relationship in a variety
of settings. From the findings, some of the areas that a nurse could assess in a family interview are the following: (a) father’s perceptions of the rewards and costs of parenting, (b) father’s sense of commitment, (c) father’s perceptions of his infant, (d) father’s ability to make room for the baby, and (e) father’s perception of spousal support. This assessment would assist nurses in the identification of the assets and liabilities in the early development of the father-infant relationship. Nurses should address the father’s concerns and issues in a proactive way, rather than in a reactive or “putting out brush fires” style of intervention.

Fathers, in the present study, demonstrated that they had the capacity and willingness to nurture their infants. They debunk the myth that men are emotionally distanced from and uninterested in developing relationships with their infants. Fathers need support as they assume this new role of fathering, which is a major transition that is not always supported in Western culture. Men do not have clear direction as to what it means to be a father or what these relationships and roles encompass. Fathers need support systems in their families, in the health care system, and in their communities that encourage and reward their involvement and relationships with their children.

**Summary of the Study**

The purpose of the present study was to describe and provide a theoretical analysis of first-time fathers’ experiences of developing a relationship with their infants during the infant’s first 2 months of life. The research questions for the study were the following: (a) What are first-time fathers’ perceptions of their
father-infant relationship, their fathering self, their infant, and their spousal support? (b) How do fathers’ perceptions of their father-infant relationship, their fathering self, their infant, and their spousal support influence the initial development of the father-infant relationship?

Tape-recorded, semistructured, in-depth interviews were conducted with 14 first-time fathers when their infants were 2 months old. The focus of the interviews was the fathers’ perceptions of their father-infant relationship, their fathering self, their infant, and their spousal support. When necessary, additional probing questions were posed to elicit a clear understanding and description of each father’s experience as he developed a beginning relationship with his infant over a 2-month period.

The constant comparative method developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and further delineated by Strauss and Corbin (1990) was used to induce theoretical categories and their relationships from the audiotaped transcripts. A conceptual model was constructed to depict the theoretical categories and their relationships. The three major categories that were operative in the initial development of the father-infant relationship were (a) making a commitment, (b) becoming connected, and (c) making room for the baby.

Commitment is defined as fathers’ willingness to invest in and take responsibility for nurturing the relationship with their infants despite parenting difficulties and other life pressures. The first seeds of commitment were planted when fathers expressed feelings of readiness and desire to have a baby. However,
the reality of commitment took hold at different time points for the fathers.

Becoming connected was the basic psychological process—a process that began with the father’s intense, euphoric emotions at birth, that is, if there were no complications associated with the birth experience. Because of the close mother-infant bond and breast-feeding, fathers felt connected to their infants at a distance during the first 5 weeks. The turning point in the relationship occurred when fathers perceived their 2-month-old infants as more responsive, predictable, and familiar. These perceptions of their infants fueled the development of a closer connection of the father to the infant.

Making room for baby consisted of fathers causing changes and/or adjustments in their lives to make psychological and physical room for their infants. Fathers made adjustments in their work and social/personal time, in relationships with their wives, and within themselves.

The contextual factor that influenced the development of the father-infant relationship was the association that the men in the present study had with their own fathers. The majority of fathers were striving to be more emotionally connected to their children than they were to their own fathers when they were growing up. Another significant, contextual factor that aided fathers in the development of this initial father-infant relationship was the informational and emotional support they received from their wives.

With an increased understanding of the father-infant relationship, nurses can provide humanistic, thoughtful care to assist fathers in developing this significant
association. Nurses should be committed to promoting healthy relationships within families, in general, and with fathers and infants, in particular.
APPENDIX A

LETTER OF INTRODUCTION
Dear

I am a graduate student in the College of Nursing at the University of Utah, and I am conducting a nursing research study. I am interested in learning more about the father’s experiences during the infant’s first 2 months of life and, in particular, how first-time fathers develop a relationship with their infants.

Your participation in this study may involve two interviews and the completion of a brief questionnaire. The interviews will be approximately 1 to 1½ hours in duration and will take place in your home or at a mutually agreed upon suitable location.

I will give you a telephone call next week to discuss the study in further detail, and give you the opportunity to ask any questions that you might have. I would greatly appreciate your participation in this study.

Sincerely,
APPENDIX B

ADVERTISEMENT
As a nurse researcher, I am interested in learning more about a first-time father’s experience in getting to know his baby during the baby’s first 2 months of life. Fathers of single babies may call Arnette Anderson, BN, MSN, at 492-2109 (during the day) and 437-7044 (during the evening) if they are interested in participating in this study or would like more information.
APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW GUIDE
This interview will take place in the father's home when the infant is approximately 2 months of age.

**Fathers' Perception of the Infant**

How would you describe your baby?

What changes have you seen in the baby since his or her birth?

**Probes**

Would you say your baby has a personality?

If so, describe your baby's personality to me?

How would you describe your baby's physical features?

How would you describe your baby's behavior?

**Fathers' Perceptions of the Father-Infant Relationship**

How would you describe your interaction with your baby?

How has your interaction changed since his or her birth?

**Probes**

Would you say you are developing a relationship with your baby?

What makes you say that?

Is it important to develop a relationship with the baby?

What is it like?

How do you feel about it?

Would you say you have any feelings toward your baby?
If so, would you describe them to me?

Are there any changes in your feelings since the baby’s birth?

Can you describe them to me?

When did you feel some attachment or affection toward the baby?

What things have helped you to get to know your baby?

What things have hindered you in getting to know your baby?

**Fathers’ Perceptions of Their Fathering Selves**

What is it like being a father of a new baby?

How would you describe yourself as a father?

What kind of qualities should a father have?

What kind of activities do you like to do with your baby?

**Probes**

When, where, and how do you do these activities?

What are your thoughts and feelings in regard to these activities?

How confident do you feel taking care of your baby?

What do you feel confident in doing?

What is most rewarding (pleasurable) about being a father?

What is least rewarding (pleasurable) about being a father?

What did you anticipate it would be like to be a father?

What is it really like?

Were your expectations met? Not met?
Have you changed since the birth of the baby?
If so, in what way?
Has the baby changed your life in any way?
If so, what do you think about it?
How do you feel about it?

**Perceptions of Spousal Support**

How does your wife fit into all of this?

How do you think your wife helps you in getting to know your baby?

How would your wife describe you as a father?

Before terminating the interview, the researcher will ask the father if there are any topics, issues, or questions that he thinks are important to discuss.
APPENDIX D

DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE
1. Date of birth:
   Father: ________________
   Mother: ________________

2. Present occupation of father:

3. Present occupation of mother:

4. Highest academic level—father:
   Special training:

5. Highest academic level—mother:
   Special training:

6. Total yearly income in 1990:
   Less than $20,000  __________
   $20,000-$29,999  __________
   $30,000-$39,999  __________
   $40,000-$49,999  __________
   $50,000-$59,999  __________
   More than $60,000  __________

7. Country of birth:
   Father: ________________
   Mother: ________________
8. Briefly describe your marital relationship.

9. Was this pregnancy planned or unplanned?

10. Briefly describe your relationship with your father.

Birth Information

1. Date of birth: __________

2. Weight at birth: __________

3. Sex of Infant: __________

4. Did you know the infant's sex prior to the birth?
APPENDIX E

INFORMED CONSENT
You are invited to participate in a study designed to learn more about a father’s experience in getting to know his baby during the baby’s first 2 months of life. With greater insight and understanding of the father-infant relationship, this study will benefit other fathers since nurses may better anticipate the fathers’ needs while they develop a relationship with their infants.

Your participation in this study will involve two tape-recorded interviews in your home or at a mutually suitable location. Each interview will last 1 to 1½ hours and will focus on your experience as a father in getting to know your infant. If necessary, a follow-up telephone call by the researcher will be made to clarify points that may have been unclear during the first interview. A short demographic questionnaire will be filled out.

There are no perceived risks or direct costs associated with your participation in this study. There will be no remuneration for your participation. The researcher has the right to terminate your participation in this study if there are warrantable circumstances.

Any information obtained in this study will not be associated with your name in any way. You will be identified on the tapes, questionnaire, field notes, and typed transcripts by code name/number only. Audiotapes will be erased, and the demographic questionnaire and field notes will be destroyed following the completion of the report. Transcripts will be kept in a secure place for a period of 5 years. Any written documents, publications, or presentations stemming from the research may use direct quotes from the interviews; however, your anonymity will be assured.

You may call the nurse researcher, Arnette Anderson, at 437-7044 to ask any questions that may arise from your involvement in this study; such questions will be answered to your satisfaction.
Participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to answer any questions, and you may withdraw from the study at anytime without penalty. A copy of the consent form will be given to you.

I hereby agree to voluntarily participate in the above-named study.

_____________________  ____________  ____________
Participant                Date                Witness

Using language that is understandable and appropriate, I have discussed this study and items listed above with the participant.

_____________________  ____________
Investigator                Date


