

PROJECT 4 - MASCULINITIES, IDENTITIES AND RISK: TRANSITION IN THE LIVES OF MEN AS FATHERS



Becoming a father for the first time can be a life-changing experience. The Men as Fathers project seeks to find out just how life-changing it is and aims to make sense of the gap between some of the ideas about 'new' fathers and the lived reality of the fathers' lives.

Major social and cultural shifts occurring in Western countries - including economic restructuring, changes to the labour market and the impact of feminism - are changing expectations and experiences of fatherhood today. It is now much more common to think of fathers as intimate and involved as opposed to the breadwinner and disciplinarian role often associated with fathers in previous generations.

The study began in 2000 when 30 men were interviewed once before and twice within the year after the birth of their first child. 19 of these men were interviewed again in 2008. A further 16 men from South Wales were recruited in 2008 and interviewed three times over their transition to first-time fatherhood. In total, these groups provide a sample of 46 men who became fathers between the ages of 15 and 41. Revisiting the same participants over time allows us to see the continuities and changes in their accounts in the immediate and longer-term, thus building a detailed picture of fathering through time.

KEY POINTS FROM THE STUDY

- Men see being involved with their children and providing for them as important aspects of being a father. Providing is not only related to finances but also to providing opportunities for their child over both the short and longer term
- Men were often surprised at the challenges of being involved with the lives of their new babies. This included practical challenges like being out at work, finding the baby unresponsive and feeling excluded by breastfeeding
- Most men described taking on more practical care than their fathers did, but also experienced a time strain as they balanced work and being involved with their children
- The economic downturn has had an impact on some men's experience of fatherhood by introducing financial uncertainty; changing work commitments and family decision-making
- Men's experiences and memories of being fathered informed their own approaches in many and sometimes unexpected ways, not just in rejecting or following their own father's approach

SPOTLIGHT ON ANALYSIS: FATHERING ACROSS GENERATIONS

Men's prior and continuing relationships with their own fathers were influential in shaping their own desire for, or distance from, more intimate and involved practices of fathering. For example, some men who had negative memories of their father wanted to have a highly involved, loving and caring relationship with their own child to make up for what they had missed out on, whilst others were concerned that they would inevitably follow their own father's behaviour and replicate potentially damaging patterns.

On other occasions, mothers and fathers were upheld as ideal parents, with men seeking to emulate their approach. Anthony's case study (Board - Anthony: Changing Generational Patterns of Fathering) illustrates the impact of some of these issues on his own fathering behaviour.



RESEARCH TEAM

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ANTHONY: CHANGING GENERATIONAL PATTERNS OF FATHERING



Anthony was a 31 year old expectant father when first interviewed for the Men as Fathers project. He and his partner were engaged, in temporary employment which they hoped would fund their emigration when they experienced an unplanned pregnancy. The pregnancy brought about a huge life change by halting all their plans to emigrate, instead bringing about financial pressures related to settling down in the UK and providing a stable environment for the baby. Despite this uncertain start, Anthony became one of the most enthusiastic fathers in the study, articulating the enjoyment and emotional rewards the relationship with his children provided. He described having a tight-knit family that spent a lot of time together

Both Anthony and his partner had grown up without the presence of their fathers and in light of this felt it was important have an active role in his children's lives. The changing presence and absence of his represented significant life moments for illustrated in the timeline he completed fourth interview.



for Anthony to
That the
own father
Anthony is
before his

Please map on the timeline below any significant events/achievements/turning points in your life

Event:	Age:	4	10	11	17	29	29	31	34	39
Dad left home Saw dad for last time in over 18 years mum remarried										

"I saw him last in 1979 I think, didn't see him again until 1997 and then saw him afterwards in '98 and then we would speak once, twice, three times a year maybe on the phone ... but when he was there he was wonderful, he used to make up stories, take - mainly me because my sisters were too young - he used to make up stories, take us out to the beach, the cinema, he used to do all sorts of things with us which is what I try and do now ... So taking that as a benchmark yes and then taking the children out to do things with them, I try and do more because, because I would never not want to be there for my children, never, I don't want to be in a position like I was where I don't know where he is and I haven't spoke to him for years, I always want to be there. I mean I couldn't give a stuff about the rest of my family; brothers and sisters, mother, even father to that extent, as long as I've got my wife and my two children then that's all I really need, and I think they know that. We're quite a tight knit family, always telling each other how much we love (amusement) very peculiar. So it does, it's had a big affect on the way that I think about my kids 'cause I'm always thinking about me not having a father and what it was like. And my wife's father died when she was very young so she's very conscious of that fact as well, in fact Lewis's just coming up to the age that she was when her father died so um yeah it weighs heavily on both our minds and it's had an impact on the way we give what we've got to the children and give everything we can to them, emotionally and physically"