

1-1-2001

## The social construction of fatherhood

Helen Le Gresley  
*Edith Cowan University*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://ro.ecu.edu.au/theses>



Part of the [Sociology Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Le Gresley, H. (2001). *The social construction of fatherhood*. Edith Cowan University. Retrieved from <https://ro.ecu.edu.au/theses/1020>

This Thesis is posted at Research Online.  
<https://ro.ecu.edu.au/theses/1020>

# Edith Cowan University

## Copyright Warning

You may print or download ONE copy of this document for the purpose of your own research or study.

The University does not authorize you to copy, communicate or otherwise make available electronically to any other person any copyright material contained on this site.

You are reminded of the following:

- Copyright owners are entitled to take legal action against persons who infringe their copyright.
- A reproduction of material that is protected by copyright may be a copyright infringement. Where the reproduction of such material is done without attribution of authorship, with false attribution of authorship or the authorship is treated in a derogatory manner, this may be a breach of the author's moral rights contained in Part IX of the Copyright Act 1968 (Cth).
- Courts have the power to impose a wide range of civil and criminal sanctions for infringement of copyright, infringement of moral rights and other offences under the Copyright Act 1968 (Cth). Higher penalties may apply, and higher damages may be awarded, for offences and infringements involving the conversion of material into digital or electronic form.

Running head: SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF FATHERHOOD

EDITH COWAN UNIVERSITY  
LIBRARY

The Social Construction of Fatherhood

Helen Le Gresley

A Masters Project Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the

Requirements for the Award of

Master of Psychology

At the Faculty of Community Services, Health and Science,

Edith Cowan University, Joondalup.

Date of Submission: 22<sup>nd</sup> January 2001

## USE OF THESIS

The Use of Thesis statement is not included in this version of the thesis.

### Abstract

The present research sought to explore the lived experience of fatherhood guided by a social constructionist perspective and Bronfenbrenner's ecological framework (1977, 1989), by collaborating with seven Western Australian fathers on a series of multiple case conversational interviews. To ensure that the data generated from the interviews was manageable and the aims and objectives of the research could be effectively facilitated by the researcher, only those fathers belonging to a specific cohort, that is, fathers in an intact heterosexual, defacto or marital relationship, were sampled. The interviews were transcribed and a qualitative thematic analysis was conducted on the data. The multiple case conversational interview methodology, coupled with the use of critical participants and a running diary to allow reflection on the procedure and analysis, ensured that the research process and outcomes were auditable and rigorous. The fathers identified two core discourses, which influenced their meaning making; the traditional and new father worldviews. Most of the fathers adopted both discourses simultaneously. However, only two of the fathers seemed aware of the contradictory nature of the discourses. Furthermore, the implicit and explicit sources of the discourses, and their systemic position, with which fathers engaged in order to make meaning were identified. These included, the family (micro level), media (exo level), friends (micro/meso level), political movements (macro level), the workforce (exo level), family services (exo level), religion (exo/macro level), education system (meso/exo level), health system (meso/exo level), macro economic change (macro level), and social norms (macro level). Therefore the current research suggests that a father's sense of self is informed by a variety of discourses, at times contradictory, that are conveyed by sources at a variety of systemic levels. This is in contrast to past literature, which has assumed that 'variables' affecting the role of a

father or a father's identity are distinct and/or located within the familial confines. The current research suggests that the discourses are communicated both directly to the father in addition to being mediated through structures at various systemic levels. The benefits of using the multiple case conversational interview methodology within a social constructionist ecological systems framework was that it facilitated the in-depth exploration of the fathers interpretation of their experiences and allowed the individual fathers stories to be brought into conversation with each other to construct a shared sense of the reality of fatherhood. It is expected that this research will be used to inform future research, policy and practice in family services by encouraging the perception of the fatherhood experience as diverse where fathers are viewed as being influenced by a variety of discourses, at times contradictory, at numerous systemic levels, rather than as variables that can be uniformly reified and categorised. Future research may involve a more systematic attempt to theorise the interrelations of systemic levels and illustrate how the discourses at the various levels are developed, disseminated and stabilised within a system. In addition, future research may also consider the use of group interviews to truly facilitate the co-construction of a story about fatherhood and the use of a more diverse sample of fathers other than those in intact, heterosexual, defacto or marital relationships with the mother of their child/ren.

*DECLARATION*

*I certify that this thesis does not, to the best of my knowledge and belief:*

- i. Incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any institution of higher education;*
- ii. Contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text; or*
- iii. Contain any defamatory material.*

*Candidate's signature:*

*Date:* 5/2/01

### Acknowledgements

The seven fathers who participated for their time, honesty and trust.

Dr Neil Drew for his patience, wisdom, time and guidance.

Dr Christopher Sonn for his sound advice.

My family.

Monique Keel and Jo O Donnell for their support.

## Table of Contents

|   |    |
|---|----|
| Abstract  | 2  |
| Declaration   | 4  |
| Acknowledgments   | 5  |
| Introduction  | 7  |
| Literature Review   |    |
| Overview of contemporary traditional research on fatherhood                             | 9  |
| A social constructionist account of fatherhood  | 13 |
| Social constructionism within an ecological framework                                   | 18 |
| The role of discourses in an ecological social constructionist<br>account of fatherhood | 22 |
| Research aims and objectives  | 23 |
| Method  |    |
| Research Framework  | 23 |
| Research Design   | 26 |
| Participants  | 27 |
| Procedure   | 29 |
| Results   |    |
| Discourses  | 34 |
| Father as a social identity   | 43 |
| Sources of, and levels at which, discourses are conveyed                                | 46 |
| Summary of results  | 56 |
| Discussion  | 56 |
| References  | 66 |
| Appendices  | 73 |

### The Social Construction of Fatherhood

During the last 10 years of this century men's health, including mental health, has been under closer scrutiny. This has resulted in the emergence of men's groups, men's self help books, and national conferences focusing on men's health and well-being. As part of this scrutiny, the role of men as fathers has also become an area attracting considerable attention from academia, the media, moviemakers and popular magazines and books (Bozett & Hanson, 1991; White, 1994; La Rossa, 1988; Lewis, 1986; Lupton & Barclay, 1996).

Within these forums, fathers are more and more represented as being "new" fathers. New fathers are men who are "there" for their children, rather than the distant, disciplinarian, breadwinner father of the past who believed that "children should be seen but not heard" and that parenting was the sole occupation of the mother. The new father is presented as one who spends time with his children as an active role model, believes in egalitarianism, communicates openly with his partner and his children and is able to express his emotions.

It has been argued that such a father is becoming a reality due to important political/economic movements such as the rise of feminism and the rise of consumerism. These movements are part of what Parke (1996) stated as the economic and ideological changes in our society that are redefining what it is to be a father, because "whether for reasons of personal fulfilment or economic necessity, more women today work outside of the home than ever before" (Parke, 1996, p. 2).

The increase in women working outside of the home, encouraged by the empowerment brought on by feminism, has facilitated the changing role of fathers in the familial sense. Such change has seen the reorganisation of the household economy and household expectations of the division of labour within the home (La Rossa, 1997;

Seward, 1991) and has therefore influenced the “ dominant cultural script that tells men what society expects of them” (Mintz, 1998, p. 22).

For some fathers this movement has been emasculating and confusing. As argued by White (1994) the primary social definition of masculinity, and thus fatherhood, is one, which is closely connected to the ability to sustain work and employment in order to provide for partners and children. The findings from her research indicated that while the fathers expressed a desire to be more involved in their children’s lives both psychologically and physically, the fathers still generally enacted the traditional masculine role. This mainly entailed providing the household with an income and leaving the majority of the childrearing to their partner, because to not do so would challenge their masculinity.

Thus, while the social representation of fatherhood has been recast to include the new father archetype, the reality of fatherhood today may simultaneously continue to be embedded in the traditional personification. It would be of interest then to ask fathers how they perceive their role as a father and who and/or what messages inform this perception of themselves as fathers, as the seemingly contradictory messages seem to come from many different sources simultaneously.

While such questions may seem obvious, little research has asked fathers in a meaningful way, about the messages that they are receiving in regards to fathering and how these messages inform their notion of themselves. These messages, in the form of linguistic and visual discourses, have been identified as playing an integral role in constituting understandings of reality and subjectivity (Lupton & Barclay, 1997). Yet the majority of recent research remains committed to a causal, deterministic approach to studying fatherhood with the aim of creating “better” fathers, with little consideration of the socially constructed discourses that inform fathers about appropriate ways to think

about and discuss their fathering. The following section will provide an overview of such traditional contemporary research.

### Literature Review

#### Overview of contemporary traditional research on fatherhood

The role of the father during pregnancy, birth and child rearing was largely ignored by researchers until the early 1980s, as clinical studies until then had largely focused on the female experience<sup>1</sup> (Beail, 1982; Parke, 1996; Lupton & Barclay, 1997; La Rossa, 1986). It is now, however, more common practice for psychological perspectives regarding fatherhood to consider pregnancy, birth and child rearing as being relevant to men.

Research into men's involvement in pregnancy and childbirth asserts that fathers participate in pregnancy and childbirth in a number of ways, not only providing comfort and support to their wives but also redefining for themselves who they are and what it means to be a father (Parke, 1996). This redefinition is in part, Parke argued (1996), influenced by the financial worries of bringing a child into the world, their partners changing sexual patterns, feelings of readiness for fatherhood, helping older children redefine their roles with the impending birth of a sibling and the fathers presence during the childbirth.

More commonly, research focused on child rearing and men has explored the determinates of a father's involvement in their child/ren's life. Lewis, Newson and Newson (1982) focused on father's involvement in the day-to-day care of their child/ren. The level of a father's involvement, as measured using scales and inventories completed by both the father and their partner, was found to be intercorrelated with the age of the child, gender, social class, and family size. The findings suggested that father

---

<sup>1</sup> Not surprising since it was not until 1974 that the American college of Obstetricians and Gynecologists endorsed the father's presence during labour (Parke, 1996).

participation is “higher in middle class than in working class families, is greater for girls than for boys, and is higher in the case of small families” (Lewis et al., 1982, p. 179).

Similar research conducted by Lamb (1987) concluded that there were four factors that were crucial to understanding variations in paternal involvement. The first factor cited was motivation, that is, the extent to which a father wanted to be involved, which Lamb (1987) stated was influenced by both media hype about the “new father” and the women’s movement. The second factor was the level of skills and self confidence the father possessed, where Lamb (1987) asserted that fathers were more likely to be actively involved if they felt confident that they possessed the necessary skills needed to look after a child. The third and fourth factors that Lamb (1987) argued influenced paternal involvement were the level of support the father received within the family from their partner and institutional practices such as paternity leave and flexible work hours.

Other contemporary research concerning fatherhood has addressed domains other than paternal involvement and includes the influence of the role of motherhood on the role of fatherhood (Williams, 1993); the role of fathers as disciplinarians, authoritarians (Young, 1993), and male mothers (Russel & Flannery, 1996; Dye, 1996); the interpersonal interactions between mothers and fathers after the birth of a child (Dye, 1996; Flood, 1993); the influence of fathers on their children’s role socialisation and intellectual development (Parke, 1996); young peoples attitudes toward fatherhood (Moss, 1995); the life phases of father - son interaction (Yablonsky, 1990; West, 1994); the father -daughter relationship (Sharpe, 1994); and personal issues regarding the changes in men’s identities after becoming a father (Lamb, Pleck & Levine, 1987; and Dye, 1996).

More recent research on fatherhood has also actively sought to embrace a broader notion of the experience of fatherhood by sampling “non traditional” fathers. This includes non-residential fathers (Garfinkel, Mc Lanahan & Hanson, 1998); single fathers (Berry, 1981; Rosenthal & Keshet, 1981; Barker, 1994; Popenoe, 1999); divorced fathers (Barker, 1994; Arendell, 1995); teenage fathers (Pennetti, 1988; Kiselica & Sturner, 1993; Allen & Doherty, 1996); and homosexual fathers (Mc Leod, Crawford & Zechmeister, 1999; Violi, 2000)<sup>2</sup>.

While much of the research cited above appears diverse, the focus is actually similar, as most contemporary studies of fatherhood, regardless of the type of sample employed, tend to examine the personal and family relationship domains of the fatherhood experience and employ frameworks consistent with logical positivism. Therefore, the aim of the research has often been to discover and measure a single static reality of fatherhood through an “objective” process of hypotheses testing or observation (Burgess-Limerick & Burgess - Limerick, 1998). Such research is indicative of expert or professional discourses emerging from such fields as medicine, psychology and sociology, as well as those evident in popular forums, such as parenthood magazines and popular books on fatherhood, and are translated into prescriptions for how men should understand and practice fatherhood (Lupton & Barclay, 1997).

---

<sup>2</sup> As the fathers sampled in the current research belong only to the cohort of fathers in an intact, heterosexual defacto or marital relationship, the rationale for which is discussed in the methodology section, research pertaining distinctly to non-residential fathers, single fathers, divorced fathers, teenage fathers, and homosexual fathers will not be examined at length.

This “expert” research, it has been argued, has tended to view fatherhood as a “simple variety of mothering” or complementary to mothering, with little attempt to develop new theoretical and methodological paradigms to explore the ontology of men’s experience of fatherhood” (Lupton & Barclay, 1997, p. 47). Consequently, the weight of authority carried by “expert” knowledge means that they play an integral role in shaping our contemporary notions of what fatherhood is and how it should be conducted (Lupton & Barclay, 1997), where fathers and mothers transfer decision making to a host of experts as their scientific discourse is viewed as legitimate and real (La Rossa, 1997).

There are however a few instances in which “expert” human science literature explores the social, political, historical domains, or “macro” domains, that may influence the role of the father or a father’s identity. These include the influence of the men’s movement (Flood, 1993); the influence of feminism (May & Strikverda, 1992; Ehrenreich, 1995); the role of the world wars (Flood, 1993), the influence of popular media (Aronowitz, 1992), and the impact of culture (Seward, 1991) on a father’s identity. These too, however, present and interpret the relationship between a father’s identity and the macro domains of interest as a “cause and effect” static relationship between two measurable and independent variables. As Lupton and Barclay (1997) stated:

When culture is recognised as an influence in the experience of fatherhood it is portrayed as an outside influence, shaped predominantly by social structures such as the family, education, ethnicity, economic and workplace issues...there is no exploration of... the cultural construction of fatherhood (p. 51).

Therefore although macro domains are addressed in the literature, the adoption of a positivist framework often impedes the ability to view the relationship between a

father's notion of his identity and macro domains of interest such as a family policy and political movements, as a complex and dynamic interaction where people and minds are embedded in history, culture and community (Sampson, 1996).

#### A social constructionist account of fatherhood

Recent literature suggests that a social constructionist framework be used to explore fatherhood so that the dynamic realities of fatherhood can be placed within the respective political, historical and cultural milieu (Aronowitz, 1995; Ehrenreich, 1995; Lupton & Barclay, 1997; White, 1994). A social constructionist inquiry would also allow the development of a diffuse, evolving and iterative analysis of fatherhood, whereby the notion of fatherhood would be viewed as a social artefact that is created and constantly transformed by the socially, historically and politically situated interchanges among people. These interchanges then develop into a normative standard by which fathers describe, explain or otherwise account for their world (Gergen, 1985).

Such an inquiry therefore, challenges the "grand narratives supported by the weight of numbers, tradition and cognition" (Doan, 1997, p. 130) and rather listens to multiple stories based on a persons lived experience that are embedded in history, culture and community (Sampson, 1996). These stories can then be used to inform and ground future family related policies and practice, which to date are overwhelmingly based on "expert knowledge" rather than domains relevant to a father's lived experience (Russel & Flannery, 1996). Thus, as Mintz (1988) states, such research is an attempt at "shattering the assumption that gender roles are natural, ahistorical and unchanging, and revealing that gender roles are cultural and ideological constructs..." (p. 4).

Contemporary research that has adopted a social constructionist perspective for exploring fathers lived experience therefore, has tended to embed this research in the examination of dominant discourses that may inform the father's stories. These

discourses enable fathers to make meaning, as they are “a set of descriptive and referential terms which portray beliefs, actions and events in a specific way” so as to “enable people to construct versions of the world for specific social purposes and in specific social settings” (Wooffitt, 1993, p. 292/294).

It has been argued that the discourses, that inform a man’s notion of himself as a father, are varied and may include, those that surround masculinity (White, 1994; Saco, 1998; West, 1996); gender roles (Mintz, 1998); the notion of the “new father” (Silverstein & Auerbach, 1999; Lupton & Barclay, 1996; La Rossa, 1997), and the perpetuation of discourses surrounding the traditional father (Lupton & Barclay, 1997; La Rossa, 1986; Saco, 1998; Hall, 1994). The sources of these discourses are varied and include “expert” literature and advice, popular books, various forms of media, and discourses within the family. These cultural sources will now be looked at briefly in turn.

### Expert Literature

As previously discussed, expert discourses rarely move beyond the mother-infant-father triad and tend to be “clinical” or “distant” in their approach to fatherhood, with the end result being that fatherhood is pathologised as a distinct measurable “variable” (Lupton & Barclay, 1997).

Further, a recent emerging trend in expert literature is the new view of fatherhood that Seward (1991) believes is in part a response to the extreme imbalance of earlier research into parenting that focused on the mother - child bond. This research portrays an androgynous view whereby the new father is presented as a clinical entity that assumes a parallel role with mothers, with the ability to participate in a full range of parenting activities (Seward, 1991).

This expert discourse, which essentialises the role of the father, has asserted that biological sex differences construct gender differences in parenting; a father must be ensconced in a nuclear family if he is to parent responsibly; and that male role models are vital in creating healthy gender identities in children (Silverstein & Auerbach, 1999). This essentialist discourse has been criticised for oversimplifying empirical research regarding fatherhood (Silverstein & Auerbach, 1999), and for pressuring fathers to conform to a new expert script about what a “good father” entails, when it has been argued that there has never actually been a liveable single, unitary family role for men, due to the profound variation in each socio-economic, historical, ethnic and religious construction of the world (Mintz, 1998).

Furthermore, it has been argued that this notion of the “new” essential father, perpetuated by middle class “experts” and establishments run by middle class “experts”, has only created an ideological shift rather than a shift in conduct (La Rossa, 1988). It is asserted that this is because while fathers have sought to become “more involved” and caring, they are still receiving and acting on “traditional” messages to do with masculinity and fatherhood in other facets of their lives (La Rossa, 1988; La Rossa, 1997; West, 1987; White, 1994; Saco, 1998; Hall, 1994).

### Popular Books

Popular books are another possible source of discourses that men draw upon to create a fatherhood narrative. Popular books of this genre in Australia include “The Father Lode” (Dye, 1998), “Manhood: A book about setting men free” (Biddulph, 1994) and “Fathers, sons and lovers” (West, 1996), among others. As Lupton & Barclay (1997) argue, books such as these focus on the relationships between adult men and their own fathers; men’s alleged inability to get ‘in touch’ with their feelings; argue against the ‘feminised’ model of fathering; and tend to view women as the ‘Other’.

For example, Dye (1998) comments "...dads not only negotiate for time (with their children) but negotiate with their partner about the way they do things. Many mums, it seems, feel a women's way is the right way. A dad's way is the wrong way" (p. 88). While Biddulph (1994) states that "boys who do not get active fathering - either by their own father or someone else who is willing to step in - will never get their lives to work" (p. 94).

Lupton and Barclay (1997) in their critique of the discourses that they believe these books perpetuate, conclude that the solution offered within the majority of these books are superficial and based on the premise that if men begin to stand up to women, and reveal ones feelings, then most problems in their lives as men and fathers will be solved.

### Media

#### Newspaper

Lupton and Barclay (1997) contend that in Australian newspapers discourses regarding both the "absent father" and the reproduction of the notion that women and men have different styles of parenting are prevalent. It has been argued that absent fathers, either physically and/or emotionally absent, are portrayed as contributing to the emotional, psychological and physical "hardship" of their children (Lupton & Barclay, 1997). In particular Lupton and Barclay (1997) asserted that the discourse of the absent father is often expressed in the news coverage of criminals, particularly mass murderers, where it has been argued that the criminals had an emotionally distant and/or physically abusive father and this contributed significantly to their committing a crime.

Lupton and Barclay (1997) also discuss the tendency of news print media to convey the notion of distinct styles of parenting based on gender, where articles point to a fathers "natural inclination" to think and behave a particular way in regards to

parenting. This discourse was also represented in La Rossa's (1998) overview of newspapers and magazines which suggested that these mediums aggressively promote fathers and mothers parenting styles as unique and as such "fathers should be recognised as important players in the child rearing game and as genuine contributors to their children's well being, and that being a good parent depends on getting a sound parenthood education" (p. 124).

### Television

It has been suggested that mainstream television representations of fictional fathers have tended to cohere around two main archetypes. There is the 'father as authoritative but wise and caring breadwinner', a mainstay of American television comedy and drama in the 1950s and early 1960s and normally portrayed as middle class father. Alternatively there is the "new" or androgynous father archetype where the character takes their role very seriously and often "take on" characteristics normally associated with motherhood (Lupton & Barclay, 1997; Bozett & Hanson, 1991).

Particularly in Australian soap operas, both father's and mothers tend to be portrayed as espousing middle class suburban values and decency. Family crises are generally solved through rational discussion among family members, with the parents offering wise guidance (Crofts, 1995 cited in Lupton & Barclay, 1997). Lupton & Barclay asserted "in this idealised, nostalgic scenario, the social changes that have taken place over the past few decades, including the feminist movement, may never have happened..." (p. 66).

### Interwoven discourses

In Australia, one of the most comprehensive fatherhood research projects adopting a social constructionist framework is that of Lupton and Barclay (1997).

Through a series of interviews Lupton and Barclay (1997) asked fathers about their experience and extracted from these interviews the dominant discourses that emerged in the men's accounts. These were diverse and included: fatherhood as logical step, a natural/ part of adult masculinity; fatherhood as a revelation, an opening up to an intense feeling; fatherhood as overwhelming; fatherhood as an enterprise, something that needs to be worked at, requiring continued devotion and time; fatherhood as a major responsibility; father as a protector; father as a provider; fatherhood as demanding, a source of stress and strain; "good" fatherhood as close involvement with one's child and being there; fatherhood as a source of fulfilment, joy and wellspring of love; and fatherhood as an opportunity for intimacy with another (the child).

Lupton and Barclay (1997) concluded that all of the fathers who participated in the research drew on most of these discourses at some point during the interviews, although some of the discourses were more dominant in their lives at different points than others and most were evident simultaneously. The discourses, it was argued, were articulated by the fathers as "a means of making sense of their experience as presenting themselves as fathers" (Lupton & Barclay, 1997, p. 143). It was concluded that the fathers stories represented a complex intertwining of acculturation and personal biography, where there was an interplay between the fathers personal biography, the nature of their paid work, their infants behaviours and disposition, the availability of outside support, with broader socio - cultural trends, such as the dominant discourses regarding what makes a "good" father and mother (Lupton & Barclay, 1997).

#### Social Constructionism within an ecological framework

While the studies cited above do begin to explore the socially navigated notion of fatherhood, there is also a need for a social constructionist inquiry to focus on the discourses involved in the construction of a father's reality at the systemic level. As

demonstrated by the research presented here and elsewhere, social constructionist research in the past has tended to focus on the social construction of discourses at the macro level, such as political or economic discourses, and their unidirectional effects on micro-level settings such as a father's identity or family dynamics (White, 1994; Mintz, 1998; Saco, 1998). Furthermore, it has been argued that very few authors adopting a social constructionist framework, such as Lupton and Barclay (1997), have attempted to systematically consider the nature of discourses within a systemic framework (Micheal, 1997).

The consideration of an ecological systems framework would facilitate the understanding of the complex relationship between people and their environment rather than examining the characteristics of either in isolation or within a unidirectional relationship (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). As Bronfenbrenner (1989) argued characteristics of the person are often defined "without any reference to the environment, and are presumed to have the same meaning irrespective of the culture, class or setting in which they are observed, or in which the person lives" (p. 202). Therefore, an ecological systems approach allows the description of how an individual is shaping and is being shaped by the context in which they are located at that point in time, an understanding known as the "process – person – context model" (Bronfenbrenner, 1989).

Bronfenbrenner (1989) later extended the "process – person – context" model to include the dimension of time, and this was labelled the chronosystem model. Research conducted using this model takes into account "constancy and change, not only in the person, but also in the environment" (p. 201) and pays particular attention to developmental changes triggered by life events and experiences, such as fatherhood. Research designs within a chronosystem model can be either short term or long term. A short-term design collects data both before and after a particular life experience for the

same group of participants, while long-term chronosystem designs permit the examination of the cumulative effects of number of transitions over the lifetime. The current research, once again due to time restrictions imposed by the research being undertaken as part of a coursework degree, will only consider the qualitative perceptions of men after the life transition of fatherhood.

The systemic approach to viewing human development conceives the ecological environment as a nested arrangement of structures, each contained within the next. Bronfenbrenner proposed four such levels: the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem and the macro system, with the definitions of the micro – and macrosystem being extended by Bronfenbrenner (1989).

1. To “highlight the potential importance for development of the personal characteristics of significant others in the immediate environment” (p. 227), Bronfenbrenner (1989) added to the original definition of the microsystem to: “A microsystem is a pattern of activities, roles, and interpersonal relations experienced by developing persons in a given face to face setting with particular physical and material features, and containing other persons with distinctive characteristics of temperament, personality, and systems of belief” (p. 227).
2. The Mesosystem comprises the interrelations among major settings containing the person at a particular point in their life. Thus for a father, the mesosystem, may encompass interactions among family, work, and his peer group. A mesosystem is a system of microsystems (Bronfenbrenner, 1977).
3. An Exosystem embraces other special formal and informal structures that do not directly contain the individual but rather influence or encompass the immediate settings in which that person is found (Novak & Berkeley, 1984), and thereby influence, limit or even determine what goes on in the immediate settings. These

structures include the major societal institutions such as the world of work, the mass media, government agencies, and the local community (Bronfenbrenner, 1977).

4. “The macrosystem consists of the overarching pattern of micro, meso, exosystems characteristic of a given culture, sub culture, or other broader social context, with particular reference to the developmentally – instigative belief systems, resources, hazards, life styles, opportunity structures, life course options, and patterns of social interchange that are imbedded in each of these systems. The macrosystem may be thought of as a societal blueprint for a particular culture, subculture, or other broader social context” (Bronfenbrenner, 1989, p. 228). Macrosystems are “carriers of information and ideology that endow meaning and motivation to particular agencies, social networks, roles, activities and their interrelations” (Novak & Berkeley, 1984, p. 246).

Therefore, by mapping the fatherhood experience in terms of the discourses articulated by the fathers, and where the fathers believe these discourses emerge, both in terms of the source and the systemic position, we can begin to gain an understanding of the “complex interweaving of economic and cultural forces in the social construction of fatherhood” and how fatherhood is a socially constructed “product of peoples collective imaginations” (La Rossa, 1998, p.14). Thus such an approach would add clarity to recent social constructionist accounts of fatherhood, which have tended to acknowledge the various discourses from different sources that inform fatherhood, but have not considered the interconnectedness or enmeshed nature of these discourses within a systemic framework, and how this interconnectedness relate to a fathers evolving notion of themselves.

This is not to discount the role of a micro-system analysis, as the extensive research previously cited that investigates the micro-social domains, such as family

relationship and personal issues, by which fathers come to explain their notion of fatherhood are imperative to a systemic review of the experience of being a father. In addition, an over-emphasis on discourse and the sources of these discourses, may descend into “discourse determinism”. Such an over emphasis would also discount the important role of previous research such as White’s (1994) which described the importance of masculinity in the construction of a father’s identity, and West’s (1996) research that looked at Australian father’s relationships with their own fathers and how this effected their own fathering experience.

Rather, to allow a holistic systemic analysis it is important that social constructionist inquiries give due regard to the social construction of cultural and political domains relevant to the fatherhood experience and then consider the interconnectedness of the domains at each systemic level.

#### The role of discourses in a ecological social constructionist account of fatherhood

By viewing the experience of fatherhood as socially constructed by the interaction of discourses conveyed at the different systemic levels one can move away from conceptualising fatherhood as a static reality as maintained by expert discourse and start to appreciate diversity and evolution in the meaning and experience of fathering (Gee, 1996).

It is essential, as part of this framework to consider how fathers negotiate these discourses, conveyed simultaneously at different systemic levels, in order to make meaning and gain a sense of their position as a father. Researchers should therefore focus on the variations of meaning that people encounter through interaction with their social world. Such a focus would allow researchers to consider that discourses “differ with the kinds of institutions and social practices in which they take shape, and with the positions of those who speak and those whom they address” (Mac Donnell, 1986, p. 1).

Thus the discourses described in the previous sections, such as the expert and media discourse, may be interpreted differently by fathers depending on the social, political and historical situation in which both the discourse and the father have evolved.

Through interacting and interpreting discourses, the fathers are engaging in meaning making. They are negotiating these discourses, conveyed at different systemic levels, and deciding which they should draw upon, which they should reject, and which should be deemed the most appropriate for their construction of themselves as father.

### Research Aims and Objectives

Given that there has been little consideration of the discourses, within a systemic framework, that a father believes informs his notion of fatherhood, this research project intends to:

1. Explore how fathers describe and interpret their lived experiences of fatherhood, by considering the core discourses that the fathers identify as influencing their meaning making.
2. Identify the implicit and explicit sources of the discourses, and their systemic position, with which fathers engage in order to make meaning,
3. Provide a holistic interpretation of the lived experience of fathers, whereby an interpretation will be offered in regards to the construction of fatherhood in the late 1990s.

## Method

### Research Framework

As discussed in the introduction of this paper, expert discourses about fatherhood from psychological, sociological, and the family health and welfare literature have taken a largely individualistic approach to representing fathers and have tended to “pathologise fatherhood” (Lupton & Barclay, 1992, p. 60), whereby fathers are

positioned as having “effects” upon their children. Accordingly, as this research is concerned with the socially constructed reality of what it means to be a father it is an imperative of the research that stories are collected that are based on a father’s lived experience and allow fathers to speak in their own voice, and express their own perceptions and experience, rather than collect data on a “domain of expert knowledge” (Doan, 1997, p.130).

It is also an imperative of the research that the researcher’s role be one of a learner, whereby the researcher and participant can together facilitate a co-operative, collaborative, reflexive relationship, where the researcher learns from the participant in order to present, rather than represent, what has been learned from the participant. Thus the researcher and participant are co-constructing and negotiating a shared “knowledge” about fatherhood (Burgess- Limerick & Burgess- Limerick, 1998).

Such a framework allows fathers to explore and interpret their own lives using their own words, rather than imposing an expert discourse on them. This exploration will be jointly undertaken by the formal and critical participants and the researcher whereby all parties seek to co-construct a reality that is grounded in the father’s experiences. Thus, the value of the research is in part determined by the notion of joint learning and collaboration whereby the fathers play a key role in the research alongside the researcher and the other participants.

To empower such an interactive, discursive and dynamic relationship between participant and the research and to explore in-depth the socially negotiated reality that is fatherhood, a qualitative framework that is guided by interpretivism, collaborative research and multiple case research was used. Each of these approaches will now be briefly discussed in turn.

### Interpretivism

Interpretivism is an approach to qualitative data analysis where the particular focus is on the individual's perspectives and interpretations of their world (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Interpretivists are interested in capturing the essence of a person's account of their world and view this account as a collection of symbols expressing layers of meaning, where the goal of theorising is to provide understanding of the direct "lived experience" from these symbols, instead of abstract generalisations (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992, p. 19).

Interpretivists consider that the provision of the lived experience is "novel, emergent and is filled with multiple, often conflicting meanings and interpretations...the interpretivist attempts to capture the core of these meanings and contradictions" (Denzin, 1978, p. 18). Such an interpretative framework can be employed collaboratively with both the researcher and participants, both formal and collegial or peer, taking an active role in understanding and negotiating a shared understanding of the lived experience (Burgess - Limerick, 1995).

These meanings can also be identified and interpreted by considering the discourses that are available at a certain moment in time that enables people to construct the ways that they can think about, talk about, or respond to certain domains of interest (Lupton & Barclay, 1997). Thus interpretivists also consider the role of discourse in capturing the meanings and contradictions of a lived experience.

### Collaborative research

One of the central tenets of the current research is for the researcher to enter into an active meaning making relationship with the participants, whereby the participants in a sense become co-researchers, as they are co-creating knowledge about the domain of fatherhood. Hence, the researcher aims to move away from methodologies or

procedures that privilege the researchers voice while silencing or discrediting the participants' voices (Burgess - Limerick, 1998). Instead a cooperative, collaborative relationship between researcher and participant is fostered which "facilitates mutual learning processes" as the production of knowledge is shared (Burgess - Limerick, 1998, p. 121). In the current research this collaboration is facilitated through the use of multiple case conversational interviews, discussed in the following sections.

### Multiple case research

Multiple case research is a method that brings individual cases into conversation with each other, through the researcher, to construct shared realities out of individual perspectives (Burgess - Limerick & Burgess - Limerick, 1998). Therefore, the multiple case method is both idiographic and nomothetic in that it seeks both an understanding of the individual as an individual and an understanding of the theoretical constructs that are relevant between individuals (Rosenwald, 1988 cited in Burgess - Limerick & Burgess - Limerick, 1998).

### Research Design

Multiple case conversational interviews were used to gain access to each fathers' interpretation of their personal experiences (Burgess - Limerick & Burgess - Limerick, 1998), and thus the discourses, and systemic interconnectedness of these discourses, by which fathers come to explain their reality of fatherhood. Pilot interviews were not conducted due to the iterative and recursive nature of multiple case conversational interviews and the positioning of the researcher as learner.

Conversational interviews follow a recursive model of questioning, where formal interview schedules are dispensed with and the "ordering of questions relies on the social interaction" between the researcher and the participant to elicit information (Minichiello, Aroni, Timewell & Alexander, 1990, p. 92). Thus, each individual and

situation produces a unique agenda “which allows the researcher to ground the research in the experience of the participants, and make space for multiple, temporary, and potentially contradictory truths” (Burgess - Limerick, 1995, website).

Each interaction between the researcher and participant is undertaken as a partnership with the endeavour of negotiating and co-constructing knowledge (Burgess - Limerick, 1998). However, while there is a focus on the development of a non-hierarchical relationship, ultimately, as the interview is for the interests of the researcher, it is a conversation directed by the researcher whereby the informant reflects on domains relevant to the issue or problem under investigation (Minichiello, et al., 1990).

### Participants

The participants in the conversational interviews were seven fathers living in Western Australia. This sample size is considered to be typical size for multiple case research as it allows each participant to be considered as a particular case whilst also allowing the capacity to compare between cases (Burgess - Limerick & Burgess - Limerick, 1998); and it is normally the stage at which data saturation is reached (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Five of the fathers were from various areas in metropolitan Perth, whilst the other two fathers were from a regional city in Western Australia.

The fathers ranged in age from 26 to 55 years. The occupations of the fathers were also diverse and ranged from a contemporary musician to an owner of an auto-mechanical workshop. In addition, three of the fathers were university educated. One of the fathers was a full time “stay at home” dad (by choice), one was a part time “stay at home” father (due to unavailability of his form of employment) and during the course of the research one father changed from part time “stay at home” father to a full time worker. The number and gender of the father’s children comprised of one seven-month

year old girl; one eight year old girl; one six year old boy; one four year old boy; two teenage children (one boy and one girl) and one primary school aged boy; two boys under the age of eight; and three teenage boys.

In order for the father's individual stories to be brought into conversation with each other to negotiate a shared reality of fatherhood, maximally different fathers within a specific cohort, that of fathers who are in an intact heterosexual de-facto or marital relationship with the mother of their biological child/ren, were sampled. Only those fathers in an intact, heterosexual defacto or marital relationship, were sampled to ensure that the data generated from the interviews was manageable so that the aims and objectives of the research could be effectively facilitated by the researcher within the constraints of a research project of this magnitude. The implications for fathers in different family structures will be discussed as possibilities for future research.

It was hoped that by intentionally sampling maximally different fathers within the cohort, the conventional view that men, masculinity and fatherhood are a reified property or attribute will be challenged and a notion of a dynamic, varied reality of fatherhood influenced by many domains at different systemic levels, may be presented to a certain extent (Connell, 1993). However, it is acknowledged that the selected cohort will present one reality of fatherhood that is likely to be quite different from fathers who are not in intact heterosexual, defacto or marital relationships.

Both purposive and theoretical sampling was undertaken whereby the participants, who met the stated criteria, were purposively chosen "on the basis of the issues raised in previous interviews and the need to satisfy important gaps in the emerging theory" (Burgess - Limerick, 1995, website; see also Patton, 1987; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The sample was therefore an integral part of creating research outcomes, which are grounded in the participants stories (Burgess -

Limerick, 1995) and this can be seen through the diversity of ages, occupations, education levels, number and gender of children of the fathers who participated. The fathers were purposively selected, based on theoretical needs, through liaison with established networks, including the researchers, the researcher's colleagues and those of the participants.

In addition to the formal participants who participated in the interviews there were also critical participants such as the research supervisor and the researcher's and supervisor's colleagues who aided in critiquing and negotiating understanding both the content, the proposed theory and the method (Burgess - Limerick, 1995). These critical participants who collaborated on issues to do with the content were either academics or researchers and all were fathers themselves. Other critical participants involved in discussions regarding the theory and method were researchers and interested in the experience of fatherhood (Burgess – Limerick, 1995). Thus, the critical participants were an integral aspect of maintaining rigor through credibility and auditability in the research process and outcomes.

### Procedure

Each participant collaborated in three conversational interviews which permitted the exploration of multiple and contradictory truths and facilitated movement beyond the initial story told by participants to explain their experiences (Wiersma, 1988 cited in Burgess - Limerick & Burgess - Limerick, 1998). As the social constructed reality created during these interviews was dynamic and temporal, repeated collaboration with participants also facilitated a co-reflection on the stories told previously by them and other participants to help negotiate a shared meaning and inform the consequent analysis.

The interviews were conducted in a suitable venue agreed upon by both the researcher and participant. The interviews were conducted over a period of 5 months, with approximately 6 - 10 weeks between interviews. The procedure for the series of interviews, while being adaptive to the needs of both the participants and the interviewer, followed a similar procedure to that outlined by Burgess - Limerick (1995). Accordingly, contact was initially made with the participants either via the telephone or in one instance face to face. During the initial meeting, prior to the first interview, the researcher introduced herself and the research and informed the participants about the need to tape record the interview. Confirmation that the participant was willing to be tape-recorded was gained as part of the informed consent.

The informed consent also included an explicit agreement about shared expectations due to the collaborative nature of the participant - researcher relationship. This agreement was reached, through the discussion of questions outlined in Appendix A, and a commitment to this agreement was a component of the informed consent (see Appendix B). As part of this agreement and the informed consent, the purpose of conversational interviews as collaborative endeavors was also discussed with the participants. This was deemed necessary as, based on a prevalent stereotype of research, the participants may have expected that the researcher had a fixed agenda and would want to ask all of the questions (Burgess - Limerick, 1995).

The participants were also made aware that to facilitate a meaningful and recursive analysis of the interviews the researcher would be discussing the content of the interviews with other participants and colleagues (Strauss, 1989). It was made clear to participants, through the informed consent and associated conversation, that no identifying information would be made available as part of this content and rather it was framed generally based on the researchers reflections and interpretations.

Before the initial, and consequent, interviews, an unstructured list of prompts that contained both general and participant specific information was prepared based on information gained from the initial meeting between the participants and researcher. In the initial interview these prompts were used only after the researcher asked the participant to speak broadly about their experience of being a father and what they believe may have contributed to their notions of fatherhood. There was no set order in which these prompts were directed to the participants, rather the participants were asked to speak broadly about their experience and if necessary these prompts were used if the researcher needed clarification about a specific issue or if the conversation needed to be stimulated (Burgess - Limerick, 1995). (See Appendix C for the list of both the general and specific prompts used with all participants in Interview One).

In subsequent interviews, the prompts were constructed based on the previous interview and interviews with other participants. Once again these lists contained both general and participant specific prompts, were only used if needed, and were developed dependent on the stories of the participants, rather than on the sole agenda of the researcher (Burgess - Limerick, 1995). To ensure that the conversations were grounded in the participants experiences, a running diary was maintained throughout the research which described the researchers substantive interests, philosophical stance, personal experiences, priorities and values, historically as well as in relation to particular sections of the research and particular participants (Burgess - Limerick & Burgess - Limerick, 1998; Sandelowski, 1986). In addition to the diary, validation about the conclusions drawn from the data was sought from the participants themselves at each interview as the researcher seeks ongoing clarification and meaning. (See Appendix D for a list of the general prompts available to use with all participants in interview 2 and the prompts for each participant).

In the concluding interview, the purpose was to move to collaborative theorising (Burgess- Limerick, 1995), whereby the researcher explained the theory about the shared construction of fathers that had developed from bringing the fathers stories into conversation with one another. In addition there was ongoing analysis from the collaborative reflection on issues raised over the course of the interviews from the participants themselves, from the entire group of participating fathers, and the critical reflection from the critical participants (Strauss, 1989). The participants were then asked to reflect on this theory and how well it “fitted” with their reality of fatherhood and how they would change, extend or support the theory (Burgess – Limerick, 1995). (See Appendix E for a list of the prompts that were available to be used with all participants).

The researcher conducted all the interviews herself in order to maximise consistency in interview technique and to help maintain rapport with the participants. All names of interview participants were given codes and the tapes were erased once transcripts and notes had been made. All identifying information about the participants was also erased.

## Results

The twenty-one interviews, three per participant, were taped and transcribed. The transcripts from all interviews were coded according to the qualitative data analysis strategies outlined by Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Miles and Huberman (1994), based on a grounded theoretical analysis of qualitative data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The analysis included the researcher immersing herself in the text, discussing and writing about the information elicited from the interviews in the form of memos and ongoing critical and formal participant feedback, and finally, categorising themes that emerge

from the interviews. The themes that emerged in the initial interviews influenced themes emerging in consequent interviews.

To maintain auditability in the analytical process, the researcher documented each step of the process in a running diary which recorded such issues as changes in design and associated thoughts, identified the researchers biases when reading the transcripts of the interviews as well as the use of an independent person to check the data, codes and methodology in order to verify consistency (Miles & Huberman, 1994). In addition to the running diary, the data display charts indicating the actual placement of data into categories and the way different elements of the data were linked together were negotiated and co-constructed with the interview participants and the critical participants (Sandalowski, 1986).

The meaning of the discourses that fathers use to construct their reality, both language and social practices, that emerged from identified domains at each systemic level were analysed, rather than the amount of times a certain discourse was contained in the text. Acknowledging this as the salient part of the analysis is considered important as it has been argued that the meanings that fathers acquire from the many discourses and representations of fatherhood are “integral to the constitution and reproduction of meanings and knowledge’s about fathers and fatherhood” (Lupton & Barclay, 1992, p. 5). (For a description of the analytic procedure, refer to Appendix F).

The analysis was ongoing from the time of the first interview as the researcher reflected on the reality that was being co-created during the interviews through immersion in the initial transcripts of individual transcripts (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Burgess – Limerick, 1995) and also from collaboration with the critical participants (Burgess – Limerick, 1995; Strauss, 1989). Therefore ongoing analysis occurred as the

researcher went back to participants with these reflections and then collaboratively clarified, changed and verified the emerging theory regarding fatherhood.

In order to address the research questions proposed and present how the fathers described and interpreted their lived experiences, firstly, the core discourses that the fathers identified as influencing their meaning making will be presented. Secondly, the sources of the discourses, and their systemic position, with which fathers engage in order to make meaning will also be considered. Finally, a holistic interpretation of the lived experience of the seven fathers will be presented whereby an interpretation will be offered in regards to the construction of fatherhood in the late 1990s.

Discourses

The fathers discussed two core discourses by which they made sense of their fatherhood; these were those representing the traditional and new father worldviews. Table 1 contains the traditional and new fatherhood discourses and themes within these discourses that emerged when the fathers discussed their sense of themselves as fathers.

Table1:

Discourses conveyed within traditional and new fatherhood worldviews of fatherhood.

| Traditional                                     | New                              |
|---|----------------------------------|
| Father as provider                              | Father as open communicator      |
| Father as disciplinarian                        | Father as egalitarian            |
| Father as head of house                         | Father as active role model      |
| Father as protector                             | Father as in touch with emotions |
| Father as support                               | Father as “Mr Mum”               |
| Father as unemotional                           |                                  |
| Mother as natural expert                        |                                  |
| Mother dominant in early stages of child’s life |                                  |
| Mother as primary carer                         |                                  |
| Family as nuclear                               |                                  |
| Family as one income family                     |                                  |

### Traditional father

The father's discussion of discourses or stories that conveyed 'traditional' messages featured strongly in the interviews. These traditional messages clustered around the expected fathers role, the expected mothers role, and the families expected role within a traditional worldview. The particular messages that were identified as representing this pressure to be a traditional father included: fathers as provider; fathers as disciplinarian; father as head of house; father as protector; father as support to partner; and father as unemotional figure.

Firstly, some fathers perceived that it was their role to financially provide for their family.

It made sense that I would be the one that provided for her and the only way I was going to be able to do that was to be able to finish my degree...I should have been providing for her rather than have other people do it

I just thought it was a natural instinct, really, I can't just be a X<sup>3</sup> and live on a X wage, when I've got a wife and kid on the way and we are supposed to live somewhere

This was further explicated by a one-time stay at home father who, while enjoying the opportunity to be at home for a period of time, also felt stigmatised by not fulfilling the traditional provider role.

I enjoyed staying at home with the kids and partly it also satisfies a need based on some guilt of having spent many years when I was away and not around ...but I guess the point is that I felt a bit conscious and a bit of a stigma about not being the provider. I think there were times when I found that a bit emasculating...(and that stemmed from)<sup>4</sup> oh it's a side of expectation, pressure, consciousness of traditional expectations of men

Some of the father's interviewed also felt that they were expected to be tough with their children and as such be the one to physically or verbally discipline their children if needed.

---

<sup>3</sup> The symbol X will be used when the quote contains identifying information such as the fathers name or occupation or the names of his partner and children.

I take that role ...to be strong with them and not them get away with sort of stuff, and just really pulling them up and saying “don’t you speak to your mother like that”

One father however, was not particularly comfortable with the role of disciplinarian but adopted this role as it was expected by his partner.

When it comes to discipline it’s always left to me...if she’s being naughty it’s sort of expected that I’ll go and sort it out...sometimes I’d rather it was the other way around and I could go and comfort her when she needs a pat on the back rather than having to go and scold her all the time

The fathers also discussed the traditional notion of the father as the head of the house and who controlled family resources and decisions. For one father this discourse was conveyed by religion and was an expectation he was comfortable with;

I mean Adam was created first and Eve was created and what was the reason for the woman being made, to be a mate for the male, so yes, I mean if you go right back to the beginning then there’s been that from the word go, that men work and provide...at the end of the day I suppose I’d say I’m the boss

Another traditional discourse articulated by the fathers included the perception that it was important for them to protect their children from the negative aspects of the outside world and thus to “keep them in the nest”. Such a notion places the father as the protector.

It feels satisfying that the birds are still in the nest, you know I know where they around that they are safe...I suppose it’s always been a protective factor

The outside influence when he starts going to school and stuff, which has to happen because you’ve got to integrate into society, but hopefully by that stage, by the time he gets to 6 he’ll ...hopefully stay away from the thugs

Furthermore, fathers felt that they should be a support for their partners, to “be there” if their partner needed assistance but without the expectation that they take a dominant role in looking after the children:

I think my role in it (*pregnancy and birth*) was more of a supportive role. You know X’s going through it all, she’s the one with the baby in her stomach, she’s going to have to deal with it and look after it, it’s up to you to be there for her...to be honest we can’t do a hell of a lot, so you just have to do the right

---

<sup>4</sup> Italics will be used to denote the interviewers comments and/or to aid in the clarity of the quote.

thing and be there and help out where you can, but I don't remember ever getting any specific messages about what I should or shouldn't do as a father, it was just a supportive thing...there wasn't really much focus on the dads after the birth had occurred...except to be there and be supportive

*(So there's more of a push for fathers to be involved)* ...yes, because my wife needs the help

There was also the articulation of the traditional expectation that fathers should not show any emotions around the children.

I suppose it's a man thing isn't it. I don't know. I suppose you're not used to that, either not showing your feelings or doing things around the round the house as opposed to talking about things...I know she gets upset when I don't show my feeling with her, so she obviously put forward those feelings that you talk about things...whereas I would say don't worry about it, lets get on with something else

Even when some of the fathers were encouraged to do so by their partners they felt they could not because of their upbringing which had dictated emotional dialogue as "not masculine":

I find it very hard to open my feelings and emotions with men...you know how women feel more, I feel at least they are more encouraged to feel more than men do

The fathers also conveyed traditional notions in regard to a mother's role. That is, some of the fathers felt that a mother was a natural expert, dominant in the early years of a child life and the primary carer of children. Moreover, mothers as natural experts was a discourse that all fathers subscribed to at some point in their interviews.

If a baby in a room starts crying the guy just gets all wriggly and wants to leave the room, whereas a woman will just go to the baby, it seems a natural thing... I think it's the natural bonding thing I think they bonded straight away...whereas with guys it takes a bit longer and I always felt that it would

I noticed X straight away she was in love with X...it seems like a mother love is different from a fathers love ...I would see how X was completely in love...I think it was those 9 months carrying inside them ...so already when the baby is born there is that bond straight way with the mother, when for a man I need to build that up after he was born

Being a biological mum would have to be natural...I don't think I should be the primary parent in those initial months because it's not my body that's changing

Following from this expectation that mothers assume a natural role upon the birth of their child, the fathers also conveyed it was natural that she be the dominant figure in the early years of their child's life.

I think they're more attached to their mums, probably because they see their mum more, because dads are at work more

You read those books as well the books say that's the mothers role (*looking after the children when they are young*) and then as the kids, especially as the boys get older into when they're 6 or 7 the fathers start to take a big role and that's why I'm really starting to try and kick in now

Furthermore, some fathers felt that mothers are also expected to be the primary carers of children and the family, giving up a full time career if necessary.

It just seems to me that if a woman chooses to have a profession it seems to be, that it is still incumbent on the mother, if she decides to work that she's the one that organises child care and drops the kids off and picks them up and still be expected to perform the housework and stuff

I think women tend to do that – they really hold the family together...cos if my wife gets sick or something then we all tend to go to pieces ...so yeah I think women tend to do that – like they really hold the family together

Finally, fathers articulated traditional discourses such as the appropriateness of a nuclear family unit and the need for fulltime parental childcare. The need for a nuclear family unit continues to be entrenched in the father's belief about fatherhood, along with the notion that a nuclear family is paramount if parents are to raise a "normal, functional child":

In my opinion I think a kid needs two role models ...I think if they can at all possible they should have the father figure and the mother figure...I think it's definitely something that can effect their (*the child's*) behaviour, like not having a father figure around the house might, mean they might just run amuck a bit more, or not having the mother figure around the house might mean that they might become really insensitive

I think without the family unit you have breakdown in society. It is the family unit that has created the society that we live in today. Where you have the breakdown of the family unit is where you have the society going off track

I think it's really rough on kids who grow up without a family unit. I think it's more dominant today with women – it's something that's accepted in society today. They might have children from several different fathers and to me, ...what about the kids as they grow up?

The whole family structure is really struggling at the moment. You know you've got breakdowns, you've got marriages that don't last...In the whole of society some things are really warped...how can we hold the family unit together...I think you've got to take time out and say, hey, look we need to make sure our marriage is still good

One of the unmarried fathers felt the pressure of these discourses:

I mean I have had it all the time, you know, people ask me whether I'm married. We've nearly got a X year old X and we're not married. They give you funny looks...you'd prefer to do away with people frowning upon you for not taking that role, doing what they consider to be the right thing

Along similar lines, a few fathers subscribed to the traditional notion that rejects dual family incomes and that, to create a 'normal childhood', one parent should be home at all times caring for their child/ren.

I mean what's the point of having kids if your just going to pop them off like that you know (*to child care every day*), what's more important, the second income or having kids...so if you're going to take on a career, especially a different type of career, if you've got kids they've definitely got to come into it...otherwise just don't have them, adopt them out to someone who will bring them up properly

It (*2 parent working*) can be extremely damaging, people striving for material gain and with both parents working, something has got to be forfeited and you usually find it is the children. The whole family structure suffers there. No I don't see it as being very good at all actually

X has a friend that has a little kid as well. Again she's not with the father. He's six and when he was a little kid, probably 2, he'd go to day care I think 5 days a week. And there was a little kid there that was being dropped off at seven in the morning and picked up at 7 at night 5 days a week because both parents worked. That to me is criminal

In summary, a traditional discourse on fatherhood was evident and clearly influential in the participant's constructions of themselves as fathers. At the same time an often contradictory discourse of new fatherhood also permeated the fathers accounts and this is described below.

### New father

The father's discussion of discourses or stories that conveyed 'new' fatherhood messages also featured in the interviews. These new messages clustered around the expected fathers role and included discourses that conveyed fathers as open communicators, egalitarian, active role models, in touch with their emotions, and at times "Mr Mum". Thus, most of the fathers articulated both the new and traditional discourses during the three interviews, even though, as previously stated, the two discourses seem to be contradictory. This contradiction was evident both within the father's accounts and between the different father's accounts of themselves as fathers. The incongruity of discourses that permeated the father's stories will be discussed further when considering the fathers construction of themselves as a social identity.

Firstly, in contradiction to the traditional father discourse of "father as unemotional", the fathers articulated the importance of being able to actively engage in open communication with their children where they take the time to listen to their children and give guidance if needed.

We've tried to encourage an interactive relationship. I've never believed in the old maxim that children should be seen and not heard. I've always encouraged the boys to have their own opinion

I would never have chosen to discuss my intentions (*sexually*) with my Dad...the underlying gratifying thing (*about his son discussing it with him*) was that I suppose because I never had that kind of closeness with my own father and it was something that I guess I always wanted to have with a child of mine and it sort of came off

Open communication was also viewed as the preferable response when discipline was needed, rather than a physical alternative:

I just think communication. Like just settle down and listen to me...I just get better results out of trying to communicate (*rather than slapping*)

But in terms of consciously devising a way of discipline I suppose yes trying to reason with them and trying to explain and taking the time to explain to them why they shouldn't do certain things or why they shouldn't have certain things ...so I remember taking a bit more time with them

Fathers also spoke of the desire to promote egalitarianism in their household whereby they communicated to their children the need for both genders to contribute to a relationship, the housework, financially, and emotionally on an equal basis. This is contrary to the traditional discourse that most of the fathers simultaneously conveyed during the interviews, that a mother is a natural expert when it comes to parenting.

I think there's a lot more to being a father than providing financially...I'm not too proud to pick up the broom and sweep the place up, yet I've been into homes where I've seen men rousing on their wives for not sweeping up or cleaning up... The male has been placed as the breadwinner...to me that is rubbish I do not tolerate it

Nowadays, I think home duties are a lot more on an even par. People sort of tend to share responsibilities inside the family a lot more, between a husband or wife or whatever, I think males are a lot more inclined to do that sort of thing now

I wouldn't want my boys not to be able to fend for themselves, that's another sort of, not a conscious push, perhaps it has been a conscious push in a way because I can see the traditional roles can be quite a disadvantage for both genders and doesn't facilitate connectedness either ...so I suppose it's a bit like egalitarianism

I don't see men as head of house I don't see my wife as the head of the house We all work together...I do think women have got an equal role, are just as smart as men are...probably more resilient than men are in a way

Some of the fathers also reported that it was important for them to be active role models in their children's life, despite the simultaneous articulation of the need to be the provider. For most of the fathers this active role revolved around something they were comfortable with, such as sport.

I think that's all part of the bonding and probably playing football – we tend to play football heaps – like you know it's football, or cricket, or – and a lot of my time on the weekend is trying to devote time to that sort of going out in the backyard and kicking a footy or maybe even flying a kite

I keep him exposed to a lot of different things and with the taking the kids out to activities and sort of stuff I've taken him out to do the fishing, not a lot, but when we go away, like we do go away a bit and take 2 or 3 days off type of thing and we take him with us

One father chose this closeness over the increasing expectation to put in longer hours at work.

Now days people rarely leave work on the dot, so their family life may suffer. I guess it's a choice. I mean if I felt that if I continued to work at that intensity and I started seeing that I was forgetting about X, I would scale back, because it's too important. I wouldn't want to miss out

For some of the fathers it was also important that they were able to express their emotions with their children and therefore promote to their children that emotional expression from fathers is acceptable, even though other fathers had previously articulated that "being emotional" made them uncomfortable:

I suppose I still see the great need for emphasis on boys being comfortable with expressing themselves, especially emotionally I think the traditional role tended to create emotional isolation where the father was the provider, the one that would more often have to be away from home from dawn 'til dusk and mums would be home with the kids

I think it's important (for boys to cry), if you look at what experts say and stuff when someone dies. You need to go through a grieving process and yes I think it's important that you can express your emotions and not bottle things up inside...it's important, so yes, I certainly try and teach them to express their feelings

Finally, the fathers also conveyed a notion that if a father adopts the aforementioned characteristics, that is, they communicate, they believe in being egalitarian, are active role models and express their emotions, then they are in some way equivalent to being a mother, or a 'Mr Mom'. This perception was demonstrated by some of the father's use of the term "Mr. Mom" a term originally stemming from an American film released in the early 1980s. The father in the film takes on roles traditionally perceived as being carried out by mothers, such as dropping children off at school and cooking dinner, when his marriage disintegrates and his wife leaves the

family. Some fathers in the interviews subscribed to this discourse:

I guess because they're a lot more males in society now that are spending time with their kids...I assume it would have happened 40 year ago – but you didn't really hear of it...from what I gathered it just didn't happen, there were no Mr. Moms type thing. The Mr. Mom type thing situation is still being looked on as the new age sensitive man type thing

I thought there were a few Dads there that day (*at the gym group*) but I don't know whether they had taken the day off to go or whether they are a Mr. Mum – I don't know

He (my son) goes Thursday and Friday (to child care) but instead of making it too traumatic for him on a Thursday he only goes from about 8.45am to 12.30 or so. So I'm Mr Mom in the afternoon, which is great I enjoy it

### Father as a social identity

How does a father then, drawing on both the traditional and new discourses, construct a notion of who they are as a father? In the interviews, this concept was more widely discussed in last interview as fathers had an opportunity for their thoughts and interpretations of their experience to evolve.

Fathers discussed their construction of a social identity in terms of engaging with both new and traditional discourses. From the interviews it became apparent, to the interviewer, that most fathers adopted the two distinct discourses simultaneously. Thus, for most fathers there was felt pressure to be both a “traditional” and/or “new” father. The fathers stated that the traditional discourses continue to be prominent in a father's construction of their social identity as a father due to the discourses historical roots and entrenchment in all facets of culture.

(*It's strong*) because how far does this tradition go back? That the man works and the woman stays at home, it goes back a long, long way, maybe in 20 years it might be a total role reversal and we'll all think that's the norm, but at the moment we don't think it's the norm

What I call the traditional thing...where suddenly you are married and you have kids...responsibility of being responsible for the family in terms of money, the house, the car and everything...I mean it's like your role is so defined for you (*by society*)...the painting is already painted, they (*traditional fathers*) have so

many years, they see it's time for another kid and the house will be paid, so it's almost like before they live their life they already know how it's going to be. I think a lot of these traditional mindsets are entrenched as I would call them, are very well entrenched. You would think we would have woken up by now. I don't know why do we do it? Why do we still give pink fluffy toys to girls and trucks to boys...that's where it happens, it happens from day one...I think it's some deep seated ignorance, to me I think it's a hang up from 1000's of years, it's collective unconscious

Probably in certain societies you'd see it as the father would like to do it (*be a new father*) but no way, they would see him as rather feminine if he attempted to carry out the roles that have in the past been treated as purely for the females

The same fathers also felt that there was simultaneously a perceived pressure to become a new type of father, due to the emerging 'new father' discourses from various sources.

Like even from birth where the father used to be like out in the of the birthing room...and like sitting in the waiting room to now like the fathers got to be in there and going to all the classes and learning all that, so I think the whole trend in society right from the time of birth you seem to get the picture that, fathers should be involved...now it's like get them in...the trend is to involve fathers from day one

The more people like that (*new fathers*) that you hear about the more acceptable it is, so that probably where the pressure comes from if the guys are feeling pressure when they get home from work and it's now go and spend time with your kids, feels that kind of pressure ...there are a lot more guys around now spending time with their kids

I think the social norm is quite pervasive at all levels ...I would have just picked up that fathers are supposed to be loyal and dedicated and involved...just kind of standard principles and values...picked up through social contact

The fathers therefore seemed to be able to sense that there were expectations both to continue to be a traditional father in addition to acquiring characteristics of new fatherhood. This creates a tension between the traditional and new conceptions of fatherhood because, rather than there being a dichotomous adoption where fathers were either one or the other, most fathers were a complex and often contradictory combination of the two. This tension however was not articulated by most of the fathers because, while often adopting the two distinct discourses simultaneously, most did not

seem to be consciously aware that they were doing this. This apparent paradox will be discussed shortly.

For one father, who was aware of the competing discourses and their role in his developing a sense of himself as a father, it was a difficult struggle against the established traditional discourses in favour of the more appealing new father discourses.

Like there isn't a set established new fatherhood way or training, it's a new thing, so I guess the information you get is periodical and they are often conflicting or confusing, so it still leaves you with having to decide ultimately at the end of the day, which way to go. It's not clear... I guess that it's because there aren't many years of experience of fathers being housebound

I guess the new is not as established as the traditional ways of doing things, and also there aren't really many sources to sort of teach you or show you what a new age father should be, so it was like pioneer work because a lot of time you're there on your own trying to figure it out yourself, or if you do find stuff it is in new age books or articles or whatever

I see there is a minority, a small minority of people who are starting to try and look for new ways to bring up kids, but it's a minority and within that minority is the struggle of knowing exactly what to do, what's the right thing to do... because there isn't strong knowledge's or passed on knowledge's, support from a long past to be able to say, oh yes, if you give up the old fashioned way of bringing up you know here's the new way, but there isn't someone who can confidently tell you this

What was also apparent, to the interviewer, and at times the participants, was that the fathers were engaging in active meaning making with the distinct discourses being conveyed. That is, they were using the messages, although in tension with one another, to form their personal fatherhood story or construction of themselves as fathers.

You become a father, but you then start to refer and reflect in your own parenting. I guess it's when you then suddenly are confronted with the opportunity of that responsibility yourself that it suddenly starts to take on a different realm ..I mean while I think a lot of these things are socially manipulated through our own you know, what's out there in culture and a lot of that just sort of happens subconsciously

I don't think any one is one thing or another, it's intermingling in a whole range of factors. I mean I sort of know that there have been a few different influences in my life and things have changed considerably from one thing to another, depending on what's happening

When you pass on knowledge without your own wanting to know or having the real experience then that is passed on knowledge from some sacred book or something. That is not knowledge. That's borrowed knowledge that's crap. It's fiction, it's not reality

When it comes down to it, you really have to sort of trust yourself, you've got to trust your intuition ultimately, if you don't know...you're in trouble if you can't trust yourself

I just think I'm like a sponge, just sort of soak up and draw on bits and pieces. Siphon what I think is good and chuck out the crap

As stated previously, while this active meaning making was apparent for some of the fathers, while for others it seemed an unconscious process that was difficult for them to articulate.

I feel that there should be a bit more of an absolute 'this is why it happened', but it's hard to pinpoint why things happened or why they didn't happen. You can't always define what you are thinking

I mentioned last time it was harder for me to identify myself with the father role, like okay now I'm a father - what does that mean to me?

#### Sources of, and levels at which, discourses are conveyed

As proposed by research question two, it was also the intention of the research to extrapolate the sources of the messages that father's were using to construct this sense of self and consider the systemic location of the source. As stated earlier the little research that has been conducted into what informs the lived experience of fathers rarely considers how sources of information are located at different levels of the fathers system. In addition, there has been little consideration that the different sources at the various levels inform one another through a process of discourse interplay and mediation.

The articulation of particular sources of discourses was difficult for most of the fathers to do on a conscious level. That is, most found it difficult to "tap" into where these messages were conveyed, and as such they tended to focus on the easily accessible sources such as family, friends and the media. A discussion regarding the possible

reason for this will be proposed in the discussion.

### Family

A discussion of aspects of family featured prominently in most fathers' descriptions of themselves as fathers. Four of the fathers in particular described their "strained" relationship with their own fathers and the role it played in shaping how they viewed their own fathering. In addition, most fathers reflected on the role of families in conveying strong messages about who they should be as fathers and also their own impact in shaping their children's worldview.

Fathers whose relationship was strained with their own father tended to categorise their fathers as being traditional and/or instilling traditional gender roles within the family:

I talked about my own past, how my parents did things and whatever and so my father tended to be working all the time and wasn't around, where I probably felt that I missed out there, so therefore it's probably my with my own children I have to be careful that I don't do the same sort of thing

My fathering was kind of the antithesis of what I believed fathering to be...I never felt that he was all that interested in me to the extent that I can't recall him showing any interest in what I was doing particularly...and so nothing I really modeled my own fathering on

Like my father was at work like a traditional father, my mother was a housewife. My father would go out and earn the money...so I don't remember much of him because he was always at work and when he came home he would never speak to me ...he would just start pushing and belting us

"If you ask me do you love your father? I mean, of course I would say yes, but good God, my father!! It's like you know, I don't know this guy he's a stranger to me.

I left feeling depleted from my own experience of being fathered and so internally I suppose I was rejecting what I had experienced...I think looking back now I would say it was because my own father and his fathering didn't give me any confidence. I suppose it was part of feeling depleted from my own experience of being fathered from a father who was not there in more ways than one

The fathers also highlighted the socialisation role that their family, in particular

their fathers, had played in regards to “modeling” a particular way of fathering. Some fathers perceived that their notion of fatherhood was informed by what was modeled in their own family, despite that many fathers had stated that their relationship with their own father had been strained. For other fathers their notion of fathering was defined by an absolute rejection of their own fathers’ or families’ behaviour.

Coming from a very traditional type background where the dad was always the provider and the career person and the mum was always the stay at home, and I suppose being the first in my family line for hundred of years to not be a farmer was something else too...(also) if you’re not too happy with what you’ve experienced in terms of your own fathering, either you make a conscious effort to change it or you just live in denial and invariably replicate what was done to you. And that was certainly my experience because I had an emotionally distant grandfather and father, I mean I never connected and then it’s the enlightenment and the benefit of education...you then have the knowledge to empower

Here I am faced by the same situation that my parents did and I do recognise the mistakes that they made, I mean I’d have to be a fool not to think that now this is my chance for me to get something right

My knowledge or understanding of what fatherhood meant is just examples of what I’d experienced in my life, which I guess was my father, being a father to us and the way he was a father in a traditional way. You know, where he was going out as a man, going out working all day, and my mother was a housewife and she was the one who looked after the kids

Well, we have a social structure in society itself that we live by. Some people may gain from the likes of churches, welfare groups or whatever it maybe, but I probably gathered most of mine from family life...(like) portrayal of correct discipline for children well then again that comes in with the way people have been brought up. If they’ve had a rough upbringing they’re going to carry on the same with there own children aren’t they?

I think I’ve learnt from their mistakes more than anything, more than the things they did right. It was blatantly obvious what they did wrong, so I guess I just try and turn that around and say well that was wrong and I can see how it affected this person...and I don’t want that happening in my little family unit

Finally, one father mourned the perceived loss of family due to changes in society and relationships:

Sense of family and being together, which are things you need for everyday life, the everyday relationship to other people to be able to establish a healthy relationship with yourself and with people around you. Those things are so basic and yet because I think they were so simple with the advance of sorts of

knowledge and industrialization it's just lost all those wisdoms and you know now we have everything but we don't know how to relate to each other

### Networks of significant others

Outside of their family some fathers perceived that the discourses were also conveyed during interactions with their friends and local community, sources both found within the meso-systemic level of a fathers system. From friends, the fathers either used friends' experiences to inform his own fathering or searched for friends whose philosophical perspective on fatherhood and/or life reinforced their own.

Because I mean I've looked at friends of ours, who their boys are sort of like 20 now and you sort of ...and when I see how they're raised their boys and there has been heavy involvement ...they've turned out boys that have quite stable lives

I guess friends and colleagues share the same kind of philosophical perspective that further acts as a reinforcement (*to be a new father*)

Everyone that I know that's had kids are the same ...and a couple of other guys who have had kids and they say the same thing (*about the children crying*) they just laugh and said it would be like that for the first year

I think they (friends) just tell you their experiences and say Johnny's done this or Billy's done that and that what we did as opposed to tell you outright that you should do this or do that, and we are the same we say oh we try this and we try that and this works and often they would have tried the same thing too and it just didn't work, or it does work

In addition fathers were also attuned to the messages conveyed in their immediate community or meso system:

I just watch the local news or whatever so (I think you learn from) just your local community I think where you go shopping and where the kind of people that you hang out with and talk to and what they say

Well they are values not important solely to me...I think to the local community they are important. All these values, I mean we are all community minded people

### Media

Another source that featured dominantly in the father's discussions regarding the sources of particular discourses was the media. The media is located at the exo- system of our ecological system, but as with all structures, the medias discourses are mediated

through various systemic levels. Thus the media has, as articulated in the fathers following stories, an ability to influence, limit and/or determine what occurs in the immediate setting of the father's family and interactions with the father friends and local community.

Some fathers felt that the media acted as an informant to their fathering in the areas of discipline, knowledge of child abuse in the community, stable families and dealing with child hood use of alcohol.

Seeing it on TV – the debate about smacking has just been going on for years and years you know...I just thought well you get people who think it's right and people who think it's wrong and the moment it's not resolving itself at all

Every time a child gets in there (hospital) for bruises they sort of think it's child abuse...but there's a lot of discussion on it and that there's been so many recent articles in the newspaper recently about smacking, whether it should be allowed to whether it shouldn't be allowed

I guess there's implied pressure coming from the community in general when I see things on TV and that kind of thing and it's sort of implied that this is the way you should be ...promote the stable family relationship

I mean I read an article in the paper where they say you should give your child alcohol – let them experience alcohol so they can learn to drink it in a controlled way

Fathers were also conscious of a systemic relationship between the media and the formation of their own ideals, their family and the power of the media to promote particular ideals.

I suppose subtle cues through media TV particularly I guess. You know you watch various serials, soaps, and movies and you kind of analyse things when things are happening between fathers and their children and so forth and you start picking up on what people do

The media ... you think they generalise and all that, you sort of think if it's on TV and that's how they are then it must be how everybody is...but I think a lot of the time it's sugared up for the media. I'm not sure whether you are getting a true version of what it is actually like

So really what you are seeing is there aren't many TV shows where there are realistic average families on TV, because if they were they kind of wouldn't be interesting. I mean realistic, I don't mean perfect, but realistic normal

families.... there's this show on called 7<sup>th</sup> Heaven ... oh it's so squeaky clean and sugar coated and stuff but it would be nice to actually be like that to be that happening and together

New age fathers exist more on TV than you see in reality

I think the media they're only going to tell you what they think you need to know or what they would like you to know. That goes for many things, what's printed – they don't worry too much about facts... whatever is reported you don't take it as gospel, you check it out

I think in the past that most fathers have perhaps been a little bit distant they go and earn the money and play very much a secondary role in terms of the family unit... I think the media now is trying to change that

Well I think it's probably goes to show you when you look back through your results here at the beginning it's quite interesting because just about every point was media. Play a big role don't they? They have a lot to answer for

Therefore family, friends and the media seemed to be the most dominant and accessible sources of traditional and new fatherhood worldviews, when the fathers discussed where they believe the messages about fatherhood are conveyed. However, other sources, at various systemic levels, were implicitly represented in the father's accounts of their lives when generally discussing their experience of fatherhood, rather than in response to the explicit question of where they believed the messages regarding fatherhood are conveyed and these are explicated in the following section.

#### Various sources of fatherhood discourses

The first structure implicitly recognised by fathers as contributing to their notion of self was what they saw and heard about the work force, a structure represented at the meso-systemic level. Fathers discussed both new and traditional discourses being conveyed within the workforce. New discourses were those stemming from more women returning to the workforce and managers within the workforce being more accepting of stay at home fathers.

Probably women going back to work (*created new age husbands*), like no way thirty years ago would you find both the wife and husband working

A lots changing in the 90s ...because women are getting out there and working more and kids are going to day care more

I think fathers have a lot more to do with their kids these days. Probably because of women sort of going out into the workforce...then obviously the kids are either going to spend more time with their dads or more time in day care so I spend more time with X than your average father

My boss...he said go for it (*stay at home fulltime*) because he realizes there's different things in the world than school teaching and I suppose he has that view on there's more to life than your job... You've got to go out and explore it

Some fathers felt that there continues to be competing traditional expectations and discourses conveyed within the workforce.

It's really hard to balance a career and the problem is that as you get older you tend to probably go higher up the ladder and as you get higher up the ladder they expect more from you as well, so then you've got to choose. I'd like to do the high flying job but then family life suffers...I think some men are faced with hard decisions sometimes

I think men have been used to having control and they do not want to give it up. They like control and it still shows up in the work force, even though there's been a lot of inroads and changes supposedly, but that glass ceiling is still there, simply put, men like being in control, they still feel threatened by powerful women ...to not be in control means you've got to be prepared to be vulnerable. Men hate vulnerability

The education system, a structure at the exo systemic level, was also implicitly stated by one father as contributing to his sense of fatherhood, based on 'expert' psychological and sociological perspectives, conveyed in the educational setting.

Going into study and being exposed to a higher form of knowledge if you like, not that I studied new things specifically to do with fathering ...studying some of the concepts like egalitarianism that was something that was challenging and ultimately that had an impact upon my fathering later on. And things like self determination and so forth and then you know learning a little bit about family dynamics like authoritarianism vs. *laisse faire* I developed a much greater consciousness of modelling because I suppose through the developmental stuff and sociology stuff that I did you could see patterns of family dynamics and I suppose dysfunction breeds dysfunction and functionality happily breeds functionality really... I was becoming empowered with an ability to change that trend in my own life

Political movements and other ideological macrosystemic structures, were also identified as informing a fathers sense of himself, both informing him directly and also mediated through other structures, at various systemic levels.

There's been an enormous change in the social fabric of the culture we live in. I think feminism has had a big influence in that time on the roles, the gender roles and I view that quite positively...so there was actually is bit of a conscious decision about X staying in the traditional role

I suppose the man usually earned more money than the woman to start with but they don't so that now. That's why we can afford to do what we are doing. I don't know the women's lib thing came up and it's starting to reverse...you know, why can't I stay at home and you go to work sort of thing

I am becoming more aware that young women are becoming more enlightened ...young women wouldn't tolerate traditional values. I mean feminism has been with us for 30 years. I just hope there are still enough strong feminists out there to keep pushing the barrier

Some of the fathers highlighted religion as a source of information. As a carrier of particular ideologies, religion exists at the macrosystemic level. One of the fathers stated that the Christian scripture directly informed his fathering, while another father perceived that changes within religion have been influenced from societal changes, which are also informing family dynamics.

I mean Adam was created first and Eve was created and what was the reason for the woman being made, to be a mate for the male, so yes, I mean if you go right back to the beginning then there's been that from the word go, that men work and provide...at the end of the day I suppose I'd say I'm the boss

The Roman Catholic religion is on the verge (of breaking down) too. When I say breaking down it's allowing women in as priests and such like so they must be recognizing that women are equal...it's a changing world, women have always played a role and certainly a lot of religions have kept them down

The health system, an exosystemic structure, was also explicated as a source of informing fathers in regards to their expected role. This included conveying traditional messages that fathers are a support, while simultaneously presenting the new fatherhood theme that fathers should be involved, caring parents.

I think my role in it (*pregnancy and birth*) was more of a supportive role. You know X's going through it all, she's the one with the baby in her stomach, she's going to have to deal with it and look after it, it's up to you to be there for her ... I don't remember ever getting any specific messages about what I should or shouldn't do as a father, it was just a supportive thing...there wasn't really much focus on the dads after the birth had occurred...except to be there and be supportive

\*

I suppose the people involving themselves and the parents are still back in that traditional sense (*when the hospital rang our house and I answered, they asked to speak to my wife*)...their perception is that Mums at home and looking after the kid and I was probably just having a day off or something

Like even from birth where the father used to be like sitting in the waiting room to now like the fathers have got to be in there and going to all the classes and learning all that, so I think the whole trend in society right from the time of birth you seem to get the picture that, fathers should be involved...now it's like get them in...the trend is to involve fathers from day one

Family services, both at the meso and exosystemic levels, were also perceived as conveying traditional notions of fatherhood to the fathers who were interviewed through staff interactions at kindy gyms and sporting groups, in addition to the perceived lack of family services available to fathers:

Well one of my boys goes to the X stadium and gym group thing they say, oh, we've got a dad here today, I think the lady who runs it has great joy in trying to harass you, but when I took my son there the first time I was probably the only dad there

Whenever I take X to the gym, or whatever, you know it's oh have you got a day off work...they always assume that it's just a sporadic thing. You know I quite often do the shopping and stuff like that and if I bump into people down the shops it's oh, you've got the day off have you

Like I was thinking I should create a group, you know, new fathers where at least we could talk to each other and tell each other how frustrating it is. Like I really felt the need for something because there's nothing. I felt for a father like me who has just had roles swapped radically like that – where does a man get his sense of community, support, social support, it doesn't exist yet

Fathers also had some sense that there was a macrosystem with rules and norms, which influenced the way in which they chose, consciously or subconsciously to live their lives. Structures at this macro level mediated messages through the sources discussed, such as family services, health, education system, the media, work force, religion and politics:

It comes from when you first start going to school there is those sort of social rules that apply in the school yard and you feel that you sort of have to live in these rules, you know of what's going on what's cool and what's not...they develop from ideas that they get from the larger social sort of status, the larger picture, family friends and the families and friends of your parents, teachers,

priests. They all get it form the larger picture of society and politics

Obviously we all live in society and they've got rules and you can either go with them or go against the rules or change the rules and I don't want to go against the rule because I know that I wouldn't want to ...be different

The external is what you pick up from the broader world and see I wouldn't say that I had good fathering by any means but from the broader culture I picked up what would be more acceptable. So I think I got more cues from the external than the internal ...there was some kind of sense of living up to a standard or expectations

People love the rules, because they're never developed that sense of making their own rules in life, so the apathy after a while makes you lazy or something and you can't stop, or people feel they can't snap out of it

Where 50 years ago everyone was like that (*traditional*). Dad went out to work and mum stayed home and looked after the kids and did the ironing...I think these days there's kind of not any one norm any more...whatever is going to happen next as there is no cliché at the moment. I'd say at least in any given suburb you've got a lot of people that are living in the old traditional way and there are a lot of people who are also living completely different to that, ...the norm is probably a mixture of traditional and modern family values and things

You know it's going to take another couple of generations before people start saying parent instead of mother I suppose ...possibly we aren't going to have to reevaluate ours (*way of thinking*) but coach our children. Because you can hear it at school ...the kids pick up on that (*sexist attitude*)...so they've caught onto the idea and that's probably here to stay now

Within the macro – level there was also an articulation of the role of macro economic change, such as the large scale patterns of dual income families and the drive for materialism and individualism, that reverberates on different systemic levels, such as retail and the education system, to influence parenting and fatherhood:

We have a friend, a couple, who have the role reversal. The wife is out, she's the career woman, and they've got two young children and...I just think that probably it might have been an economic decision that the wife's qualifications means that she had a greater earning capacity...so they made the decision that he would do the child rearing.

When you look around and see what people have got, but that's just society isn't it. All the mod cons, like stereos and TVs and dishwashers and the nice cars and the holidays and it goes on and on...because that's why both people work and that would d be the major arguments – would be over money. We can't afford it, no you can't have that...and the jealousy thing and it depends on what sort of attitude you have like is materialism the thing...and someone next door has a

new car and the people next door have a swimming pool

Like 15 minutes drive from here the whole thing changes. Kids come to school with no lunch, no breakfast, it's weird. Like one kid didn't come to school the other day for 3 days because they didn't have any money. So it certainly in the lower income areas there would be some major problems for fathers... like what you can afford to give your kids or how you educate them...I mean that's becoming more and more now I reckon because there's so many people are sending their kids to private schools

Things like systems, like big global economical systems to down to small childcare, that kind of system or family allowance, things that the government puts out to help families or parents. You know things like that are always slowly being cut down because of this and because of no money and so there is less and less help for a family

### Summary of results

The results indicate that many of the fathers' interviewed were able to articulate more than one discourse that influenced their fathering. The most dominant discourses articulated were those representing both traditional and new perceptions of fatherhood. Most of the fathers' articulated both the new and traditional discourses during the three interviews, even though the two discourses seem paradoxical. This contradiction was evident both within the fathers' accounts and between the different fathers' accounts of themselves as fathers.

The results also suggest that fatherhood, for these fathers, is informed by various discourses, at times contradictory, stemming from different systemic levels. These discourses, which may often be mediated or channeled through the different systemic layers to the father, interplay and interconnect to create an evolving sense of fatherhood.

### Discussion

This research sought to further explore fathers' sense of themselves as fathers guided by a social constructionist perspective within an ecological framework, by collaborating with seven Western Australian fathers, in intact heterosexual defacto or marital relationships, on a series of multiple case conversational interviews. Firstly,

there was an exploration of how the fathers described and interpreted their lived experience of fatherhood, by considering the core discourses that the fathers identified as influencing their meaning making. The fathers explicated two core discourses by which they made sense of their fatherhood; these were those representing the traditional and new father worldviews.

The traditional discourses, which were dominantly represented in the father's stories, conveyed messages such as father as provider, father as head of the house and father as disciplinarian. The new father discourses, also simultaneously conveyed by the fathers, included father as open communicator, father as egalitarian, and father as in touch with his emotions. The current research suggests that contradictory to predictions made in the late 1980s by the popular media (Time Magazine, 1988 "Australian dads are picking up the challenge") and by researchers (Parke, 1996; Seward, 1991) this traditional concept of fatherhood continues to play a key role in fathers meaning making.

Traditional discourses of fatherhood, as discussed by fathers in the interviews, were expressed and sometimes adopted, however often this was simultaneously with the new fatherhood discourses. Thus the fathers found themselves, as Lupton and Barclay (1997), Burgess - Limerick (1995), White (1994) and La Rossa (1997) have found in their research, simultaneously adopting contradictory discourses. This simultaneous adoption of both the traditional and new fatherhood worldviews may be attributed to a kind of post modern malaise, where men are receiving a host of diverse discourses about fatherhood as they wrestle with the consequences of an historical shift that is challenging the traditional notion of masculinity and fatherhood.

As La Rossa (1997) and White (1994) suggested, that while the fathers were seemingly content with changes in economic and political structures which are now

conveying discourses of equality in work and family life, the uncertainty that this creates may have some men yearning for traditional vestiges such as the nuclear family or father as main bread winner, because “back then” you knew what was expected. The traditional discourses as articulated by the fathers interviewed may therefore seem attractive to these fathers because they have a sense of stability, strength and conviction that fathers may feel they need to survive the new millennium.

However, in contrast to Mintz’s (1998) assertion that this historical shift has splintered fathers into diverse highly polarised adaptations of “father” - the traditional, who continues to assert his dominance in the area of bread winning and secondary parenting, and the new, who are making modest contributions in areas of housework and child care, in addition to other fatherhood variations, the fathers in the current research tended to subscribe to simultaneous mediations of both the traditional and new fatherhood adaptations when relaying their sense of self as father. That is, many of the fathers did not subscribe to discourses representing only the traditional or the new conceptions of father but rather were a complex and unique intertwining of both.

This research also aimed to identify the sources of these traditional and new discourses and their systemic position, with which the fathers engage to make meaning. The fathers stories suggest that the discourses were conveyed from various sources at distinct, but enmeshed, systemic levels, including ‘easily accessible’ sources such as family (micro level), friends (micro/meso level) and the media (exo level), in addition to sources implicitly recognised by the fathers such as family services (exo level), the workforce (exo level), political movements (macro level), and religion (exo and macro level). Thus, the fathers stories, suggest that the lived experience of being a father is informed by a number of discourses conveyed from sources at various systemic levels.

These discourses interplay and inform each other, and then are conveyed to fathers either directly or mediated through structures at the various systemic levels.

Such a finding is consistent with Bronfenbrenner's (1977) original theory regarding ecological systems and suggests the need for expert research into fatherhood to consider the complex relationship between fathers and their environment rather than examining the characteristics of either in isolation (Lupton & Barclay, 1997; Mc Adoo, 1986; Moss, 1995; Seward, 1991). In addition the current research also argues against research that focuses solely within one systemic level, such as the familial confines (Hall, 1998), or adopting a social constructionist approach that fails to consider the source of fatherhood messages within their social context and locates the fathers stories, once again, within the family home (White, 1994), that is, as Bronfenbrenner (1989) asserts, examining development without context.

Furthermore, while La Rossa (1997) has also argued the need to consider the influence of politics, economics, the media and expert disciplines on the culture of fatherhood from the point of view of the father, this consideration is couched in unidirectional terms. In La Rossa's (1997) research the complex relationship between these cultural structures is only considered in regards to the effects of macro changes on lower level structures such as the media and the family. Thus there is no opportunity to highlight the complex interplay between fatherhood discourses from structures at various systemic levels. This consideration is essential as Bronfenbrenner (1989) has highlighted, structures at different systemic levels are influenced to a substantial degree by the belief systems, conveyed in discourses, existing in other structures at the same and different systemic levels. Thus, Bronfenbrenner (1989) concluded, and the current research indicates, it is vital that research considers the bi-directional orientations and influences between structures rather than consider structures, and discourses, in

isolation.

This notion has been substantiated by the current research which suggests that each fathers' experience of fatherhood was informed by a complex interaction between discourses conveyed at various systemic levels. For example, for one father the discourse of "father as provider" was conveyed simultaneously by the media, religious scripture, family services, and friends, in addition to being reinforced within the familial home. Rather than these structures, at various systemic levels, directly conveying these messages to the father, they were also mediated through structures at other levels. That is, religious scriptures had conveyed discourses to his own father regarding the need to provide for his family, thus his own father sought to create an environment that mediated this discourse through familial interactions. The father himself went to church, which reinforced the "father as provider" discourse, in addition to watching television advertisements, informed by conservative politics, where father's attempts at cooking for the family resulted in a burnt Sunday roast. On his day off from work, when his wife goes to her part time job, which is now expected of her due to changing cultural and economic discourses mediated through workplaces, he takes his son to a kindy gym where the instructor, informed herself by traditional discourses from sources such as the media, her workplace and her own familial situation, indicates that he is the only father using the service and must be having a day off work.

While it is possible to continue this example in order to fully explicate the systemic interconnectedness of discourses, it is hoped that the essence of the complexity of the enmeshed and cross-generational nature of discourses, that inform a father's meaning making, is clear. That is, structures such as the health system, family unit, the education system and political movements convey various discourses, at times contradictory, both directly to fathers and also mediated through structures at the same

or different systemic levels. This complex relationship has yet to be comprehensively considered in research regarding the experience of fatherhood, however as the present research indicates and as Bronfenbrenner (1989) has argued, it is a relationship that needs to be given further attention in the future.

Such a finding also supports Burgess – Limericks (1998) argument for accepting the validity of dynamic social realities where the “ambiguities, inconsistencies and complexities of everyday life” are recognised, rather than attempting to create “ordered, consistent and coherent realities” which is the conventional intention of everyday life (p. 63). Luscher (1995) too has argued that the act of interpreting knowledge’s and beliefs within a systemic framework has to be open, dynamic and innovative to allow for the complexity of worlds and identities that may be located in and between the micro-, meso-, exo- and macrosystems. Such assertions are true of the current research, which suggests, fathers have a diverse relationship with various aspects of their social world, from family and friends to cultural and economic structures, each conveying multiple discourses, which inform the fathers’ sense of themselves as fathers.

For most fathers it seemed that the systemic interplay between the various discourses occurred subconsciously. That is, while they were able to articulate a number of discourses and sources, which simultaneously and interactively informed their sense of fatherhood, they could not generally articulate how these discourses facilitated their sense of social identity as a father. As one father in the interviews stated, and as La Rossa (1997) has argued, the construction of fatherhood is greatly facilitated by the collective unconscious or imagination.

However two of the fathers were able to clearly articulate the links between the discourses that had informed their sense of self, and were critically aware of the sources at the various systemic levels influencing one another to convey particular narratives in

the community. These two fathers it seems have evolved to what Rohan and Reason (1981) have termed the “realised” level of encountering their social worlds, whereby these fathers have taken responsibility for their feelings, own them and use them to negotiate situations. Furthermore these fathers seem to have the ability to use the discourses deliberately to explore their subjective worlds and make informed choices based on these discourses because they are fully aware of where they have come from and where they have been mediated, due to an ability to critically understand what is driving their perceptions and actions (Rohan & Reason, 1981).

The other fathers it seems, using Rohan and Reasons (1981) logic, interacted with the discourses at the “primary” level, where they may be affected by the discourses and use the discourses to inform their perception of themselves, without knowing that they are consciously doing that. Thus while it was relatively easy for the fathers to articulate the many discourses that informed their experience and in some cases how these discourses were interconnected, these fathers were unaware that these discourses played an integral part in how they viewed themselves as fathers. These fathers also tended to be unaware that they were subscribing to contradictory discourses simultaneously as their meaning making was not as deliberate or conscious as the “realised” fathers.

One source that all fathers were quite clearly able to acknowledge as influencing their sense of self was their own father and family, a source that has been identified in many pieces of research that examine the modern father (Russell, 1983; Biddulph, 1994; Beail, 1982) and that Bronfenbrenner (1989) argues play a key role within the microsystem due to the imparting of value and belief systems. Thus for all fathers their family played a conscious and integral role in informing their sense of self as a father through various discourses. However, contrary to previous research which confines

studies of the role of family dynamics to within the familial environment or microsystem, the current research suggests that family dynamics and fatherhood are informed by discourses mediated through sources at various systemic levels to the microsystem.

The aim of this research was to allow fathers to describe and interpret their lived experience and by doing so collaboratively extrapolate the domains, the meanings fathers construct from these domains, and the complex systemic interconnectedness of these domains, by which fathers come to understand their lived experience. It is hoped that these stories could then be used to inform and ground future family related policies and practice, which to date are overwhelmingly based on “expert knowledge” rather than domains relevant to a father’s lived experience (Russel & Flannery, 1996).

The multiple case conversational interviews and the use of critical participants and a running diary facilitated a rigorous exploration of the fathers lived experience and provides a clear audit trail for the decisions made during the research. This methodology ensured that the research remained grounded in the participant’s experiences, as there were opportunities for ongoing clarification and collaborative reflection on issues raised over the course of the interviews, and in the running diary, from the entire group of participating fathers and the critical participants.

While it is acknowledged that due to the small sample size of seven fathers, the research may not be representative of all fathers, it is felt that the richness of information and the ability to put each father into conversation with each other through the researcher, compensates for this. In addition, while the data is not representative in the traditional sense, the fathers’ stories are nevertheless confidently indicative of the kinds of discourses confronting contemporary fathers, in intact heterosexual defacto or marital relationships, in their attempts to make sense of themselves as fathers. Future

research however, may attempt to expand the research framework with a larger and more diverse cross section of fathers as it is acknowledged that the selected cohort will present one reality of fatherhood that is likely to be quite different from fathers who are not in intact heterosexual, defacto or marital relationships.

In addition, future research may aim to further consider the experience of fatherhood within a systemic framework, considering, in more detail, the sources of discourses informing fatherhood by extending the amount of interviews conducted with the fathers and allowing them to more fully explore their fatherhood experience. This next step would also involve what Michael (1997) has proposed in relation to “systematically and self - consciously attempting to theorise the interrelations of these levels (*micro, meso or macro*)” (p. 324) in a social constructionist account, and include attempting to understand the dynamics and processes whereby discourses arise, are developed, disseminated and stabilised within a system.

Future research could also consider a “truer” adoption of a chronosystem model (Bronfenbrenner, 1989), as the current research only considered a man’s notion of fatherhood once he had become a father. Future research therefore could undertake interviews both before and after a man becomes a father, or adopt a long term chronosystem model whereby there is explication of the changing experience of fatherhood over time and during other life transitions such as the birth of other children, the death of the fathers own parents, divorce, middle age and retirement.

Furthermore, a series of group interviews toward the end of the individual interviews would provide an opportunity for fathers to truly co-construct a story about fatherhood. This would not only allow the fathers to more fully guide the research, in the form of a more participatory action framework, but also allow them to openly discuss fatherhood in the new millennium with other fathers, as opportunity for

discussion among men seems to continue to be limited despite us apparently being in the age of the “new father”.

Given the issues raised in this research it is hoped that future research exploring fatherhood allows the consideration of the complexity, diversity and contradictions inherent in making sense of fatherhood in the new millennium. Such consideration cannot occur within a causal, deterministic framework of studying fatherhood, but rather needs to embrace the notion that fathers engage in meaning making, both consciously and subconsciously, where there is a dynamic interplay of contradictory discourses at a variety of systemic levels. This approach would help facilitate the notion that as a father’s sense of his fatherhood is diverse, complex and evolving rather than unitary and static.

## References

- Arendell, T. (1995). *Fathers and divorce* (pp. 248 – 272). California: Sage Publications.
- Allen, W. & Doherty, W. (1996). The responsibilities of fatherhood as perceived by African American teenage fathers, *Families in Society*, 77(3), 142 – 155.
- Aronowitz, S. (1995). My masculinity. In Berger, M., Wallis, & Watson, S. (Eds) *Constructing masculinity* (pp. 307 - 320). New York: Routledge.
- Barker, R. (1994). *Lone fathers and masculinities*. Aldershot: Avebury. Beail, N. (1982). Role of the father during pregnancy and childbirth. In N. Beail & J. Mc Guire (Eds.) *Fathers: Psychological perspectives*. London: Junction Books.
- Berry, K. (1981). The male single parent. In Stuart, I. & Abt, L. (Eds.) *Children of separation and divorce: Management and treatment* (pp. 34 – 52). New York : Van Nostrand Reinhold.
- Biddulph, S. (1994). *Manhood: A book about setting men free*. Sydney: Finch.
- Bozett, F. & Hanson, S. (1991). Cultural change and the future of fatherhood and families. In Bozett & Hanson (Eds.) *Fatherhood and families in cultural context*. New York: Springer Publishing Company.
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1977). Toward an experimental ecology of human development. *American Psychologist*, 513 - 531.
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1989). Ecological systems theory, *Annals of Child Development*, 6, 187 – 249.
- Burgess – Limerick, T. (1995). Lives- In – Process: Women who own small businesses. PhD. Thesis, Available WWW: Burgess – Limerick, T. (1995). Lives- In – Process: Women who own small businesses. PhD. Thesis, Available WWW: <http://www.uq.edu.au/^hmrburge/publications/tbl/phd/phd.html> [1999, Feb 24].

Burgess – Limerick, T. (1998). Researcher as learner: Negotiating responsive agency. *Feminism and Psychology*, 8, 111 – 122.

Burgess - Limerick, T., & Burgess - Limerick, R. (1998). Conversational interviews & multiple - case research in Psychology. *Australian Journal of Psychology*, 50 (2). 63 - 70.

Connell, R. (1993). The big picture: Masculinities in recent world history. *Theory and Society*, 22, 597 – 623.

Denzin, N. (1978). *The research act* (Rev Ed.). New York: McGraw Hill.

Denzin, N. & Lincoln, Y. (1994). *Handbook of qualitative research*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

Doan, R. (1997). Narrative therapy, post modernism, social constructionism and constructivism: Discussion and distinctions. *Transactional Analysis Journal*, 27 (2), 128 - 133.

Dye, P. (1998). *The father lode: A new look at becoming and being a dad*. Sydney: Allen & Unwin.

Dye, D. (1998, June). Families in transition: Relationship issues on becoming a father. In *Parenting and Family Life* [on-line]. Available WWW: <http://www.law.gov.au/aghome/commaff/lafs/frsp/mensforum/People/33.htm> [1998, June 29].

Ehrenreich, B. (1995). The decline of patriarchy. In Berger, M., Wallis., & Watson, S. (Eds.). *Constructing masculinity* (pp 284 - 290). New York: Routledge.

Flood, M. (1993). The hand that rocks the cradle. *XY: Men, sex, politics*, (Winter), 20 - 21.

Garfinkel, I., Mc Lanahan, S. & Hanson, T. (1998). A patchwork of non-resident fathers. In Garfinkel, I., Mc Lanahan, S., Meyer, D. & Seltzer, J. (Eds.). *Fathers under fire: The revolution in child support enforcement*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

Gee, J. (1996). *Social linguistics and literacies: Ideology in discourses*. London: Taylor and Francis.

Gergen, K. (1985). The social constructionist movement in modern psychology. *American Psychologist*, 40(3), 266 - 275.

Glaser, B., & Strauss, A. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research*. Chicago: Aldine.

Glesne, C., & Peshkin, A. (1992). *Becoming qualitative researchers: An introduction*. New York: Longman Press.

Hall, W. (1994). New fatherhood: Myths and realities. *Public Health Nursing*, 11, 219 – 228.

La Rossa, R. (1988). Fatherhood and social change. *Family relations* 37, 451 - 457.

La Rossa, R. (1997). *The modernisation of fatherhood: A social and political history*. Chicago: The University of Chicago press.

Lamb, M. (1987). The emerging American father. In Lamb, M. (Ed.) *The father's role: Cross – cultural perspectives*. New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Lamb, M., Pleck, J., & Levine, J. (1986). Effects of paternal involvement on fathers and mothers. In Sussman, M. (Ed.) *Men's changing roles in the family*. New York: The Haworth Press.

Lewis, R. (1986). Men's changing roles in marriage and the family. In R. Lewis & M. Sussman (Eds.) *Men's changing roles in the family*. New York: The Haworth Press.

Lewis, C., & O'Brien, M. (1987). *Reassessing fatherhood: New observations on fathers and the modern family*. London: Sage Publications.

Lewis, C., Newson, E. & Newson, J. (1982). Fatherhood participation through childhood and its relationship with career aspirations and delinquency. In N. Beail & J. Mc Guire (Eds.) *Fathers: Psychological perspectives*. London: Junction Books.

Lincoln, Y. & Guba, E. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. California: Sage Publications.

Luscher, K. (1995). Homo interprans: On the relevance of perspectives, knowledge, and beliefs in the ecology of human development. In Moen, P., Elder, G. & Luscher, K. (Eds.) *Examining lives in context: Perspectives on the ecology of human development*. Washington: American Psychological Association.

Kiselica, M. & Sturner, P. (1993). Is society giving teenage fathers a mixed message?, *Youth and Society*, 24(4), 487 – 501.

Lupton, D., & Barclay, L. (1997). *Constructing fatherhood: Discourses and experiences*. London: Sage Publications.

Mac Donnell, D. (1986). *Theories of discourse*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

May, L., & Strikwerda, R. (1992). *Rethinking masculinity: Philosophical explorations in light of feminism*. Maryland: Rowan & Littlefield Publishers.

Mc Adoo, J. (1986). A black perspective on the fathers role in child development. In R. Lewis & Sussman, M. (Eds.). *Mens changing roles in the family*. New York: The Haworth Press.

McLeod, A., Crawford, I. & Zechmeister, J. (1999). Heterosexual undergraduates attitudes toward gay fathers and their children, *Journal of Psychology and Human Sexuality*, 11(1), 43 – 62.

Michael, M. (1997). Individualistic humans: Social constructionism, identity and change. *Theory and Psychology*, 7(3), 311 - 336.

Miles, M., & Huberman, A. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis: An expanded sourcebook*. California: Sage Publications.

Minichiello, V., Aroni, R., Timewell, E. & Alexander, L. (1990). *In – Depth interviewing: Researching people*. Melbourne: Longman Cheshire.

Mintz, S. (1998). From patriarchy to androgyny and other myths: Placing men's family roles in historical perspectives. In A. Booth & A. Crouter (Eds.) *Men in families: When do they get involved? What difference does it make?* New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Moss, P. (1995). What future for fatherhood. In P. Moss (Ed.) *Father figures: Fathers in the families of the 1990's*. Edinburgh: HMSO.

Novak, A. & Berkeley, T. (1984). A systems theory approach to deinstitutionalisation policies and research. *International Review of Research in Mental Retardation*, 12, 245 – 283.

Parke, R. (1996). *Fatherhood*. London: Harvard University Press.

Patton, M Q. (1987). *How to use qualitative methods in evaluation*. California: Sage Publications.

Pennetti, M. (1988). *Coping with school age fatherhood*. New York: Rosen Publishing Group.

Popenoe, D. (1999). *Life without father: Compelling new evidence that fatherhood and marriage are indispensable for the good of children and society*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.

Rowan, J. & Reason, P. (1981). On making sense. In Reason, J. & Roan, J. (Eds.) *Human Inquiry: A sourcebook of new paradigm research*. Chichester: John Wiley & Sons.

White, N. (1994). About fathers: Masculinity and the social construction of fatherhood. *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Sociology*, 30, 119 - 131.

Rosenthal, K. & Keshet, H. (1981). *Fathers without partners. A study of fathers and the family after marital separation*. New Jersey: Rowan & Littfield.

Russell, G. (1983). *The changing role of fathers?* Queensland: University of Queensland Press.

Russel, G., & Flannery, M. (1996). *Working with men and fathers*. Sydney, New South Wales: Macquarie University, School of Behavioral Sciences.

Saco, D. (1992). Masculinity as signs: Poststructuralist feminist approaches to the study of gender. In Craig, S (Ed.) *Men, masculinity and the media*. Newbury Park: Sage Publications.

Sampson, E. (1996). Establishing embodiment in psychology. *Theory and Psychology*, 6(4), 601 - 624.

Sandelowski, M. (1986). The problem of rigor in qualitative research. *Advances in Nursing Science*, 8(3), 27 - 37.

Seward, R. (1991). Determinants of family culture: Effects on fatherhood. In F. Bozett & Hanson, S. (Eds.) *Fatherhood and families in cultural context*. New York: Springer Publishing Company.

Sharpe, S. (1994). *Fathers and daughters*. London: Routledge.

- Shulman, S. & Seiffge - Krenke, I. (1997). *Fathers and adolescents: developmental and clinical perspectives*. London: Routledge.
- Silverstein, L. & Auerbach, C. (1999). Deconstructing the essential father. *American Psychologist*, 54, 397 - 407.
- Strauss, A. (1989). *Qualitative analysis for social scientists*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1990). *Basics of qualitative research: Grounded theory procedures and techniques*. Newbury Park: Sage Publications.
- Violi, D. (2000). The changing face of fatherhood, *Psychotherapy in Australia*, 6(3), 16 – 20.
- West, P. (1996). *Fathers, sons and lovers: Men today talk about their lives from the 1930s to today*. Sydney: Finch publishing.
- Wheelock, J. (1990). *Husbands at home: The domestic economy in post-industrial society*. London: Routledge.
- Williams, P. (1993). Reconstructing fatherhood. *Xy: Men, sex and politics*, (Winter), 12 - 13.
- Wortham, S. (1996). Are constructs personal? *Theory and Psychology*, 6(1), 79 - 84.
- Yablonsky, L. (1990). Fathers and sons: *The most challenging of all family relationships*. New York: Gardner Press Trade Book Company.
- Young, S. (1993). For your own good. *Xy: Men, sex, politics*, (Winter), 14 - 15.

## Appendix A

### Questions for agreement with study participants

1. How much time and effort will be involved?
2. What kind of data collection is involved (eg. interviewing)?
3. Is participation voluntary?
4. Who will design and steer the study?
5. Will material from participants be treated confidentially?
6. Will participant's anonymity be maintained?
7. Who will produce descriptive and explanatory products?
8. Will participants review and critique interim and final products?
9. What benefits will accrue to participants - both informants and researchers?

(Miles & Huberman, 1994)

## Appendix B

### Informed Consent

The conversational interview in which you are about to participate is designed to investigate the lived experience of being a father, that is, what being a father means to you and how you think you came to this perception of fatherhood. The interviews are being conducted by Ms Helen Le Gresley, the principal researcher, a Masters student in Psychology at Edith Cowan University, Joondalup Campus. This interview conforms to guidelines produced by the Edith Cowan University Committee for the Conduct of Ethical Research.

It is hoped that you will be able to collaborate with the researcher for approximately 1 - 2 hours on at least three separate occasions.

A number of fathers will be participating in the interviews. In order to truly understand the nature of fatherhood it is important that the researcher can discuss your experiences/comments with other participants. Rest assured however that your identity will not be revealed in these discussion's as no identifying information will be included in the subsequent interviews with other participants.

Please understand that your participation in this research is totally voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any time during this study.

The study will be co-ordinated by the principal researcher, however the interviews will be viewed as a collaborative partnership between the researcher and the participants, so as to effectively explore and interpret your experiences.

It is expected that this research will explore father's explanations and interpretations of how they came to perceive themselves as fathers, so as to inform future research, policy and practice in family services.

If at any time you feel you need to discuss issues that arise out of the interviews with someone not connected with this research the researcher can provide you with information about appropriate agencies or professionals.

Any questions concerning this project can be directed to the principal researcher Miss Helen Le Gresley on (08) 9400 5562 or her supervisor Dr Neil Drew on (08) 9400 5541.

**I (the informant) have read the information above and any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in the interviews, realising that I may withdraw at any time. I have also reached an agreement with the researcher in terms of the information contained above with any variations to this agreement noted below, and understand that this agreement forms part of the shared expectations between myself and the researcher.**

Variations to the above agreement:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Researcher

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## Appendix C

### Prompts for Interview One (All fathers)

1. When did you meet your partner?
2. How long ago after you met her did you get married or establish a defacto relationship?
3. How long after this involvement did you decide to have children?
4. How many children do you have? What gender?
5. Can you tell me generally how did you learn to be a father?
6. What are these sources telling you about how to be a father?
7. Do you think there are certain expectations about fatherhood:
8. Do you feel any pressure to be a particular father?  
  
Who is this pressure from?  
  
What are they saying?
9. What do you think are the important dimensions of fatherhood?  
  
Why do you think these are important?
10. What are the feelings involved in being a father?

## Appendix D

Prompts for Interview Two (All fathers)

1. Some fathers gave the impression that they just muddled through fatherhood especially in the early years of their child's life. How do you think than that you learnt what you thought was right or wrong in regards to different aspects of being a father?

It may help you to think of something like discipline and how you came to decide whether you should smack your children or not?

2. Most fathers in the interviews talked about the important of being involved in their children's lives, for you it was (insert appropriative words). For others it has been (insert appropriate words).

(a) Why do you think fathers perceive it is important to 'be there' for their children now when in the past most fathers perceived that it wasn't as important?

(b) Who is supporting this notion that a father should be involved and 'there' for their children? Where are you hearing and seeing it?

(c) To what extent to you think you are like this? There for your children and your partner?

3. Fathers also discussed their lives in terms of combining the expectations of being a traditional type father, eg, being the breadwinner, support to wife, with the expectations of being a 'new' type of father.

(a) What type of father do you think you are?

Prompts for Interview Two (Participant One)

1. One of the issues that came up in the last interview is that you suggested one of the reasons you waited to have children is that they would have a great impact

on your life. What impact did you think they would have? Why did you think this?

2. Why do you think it is that last time you expressed that you defer to your wife a great deal for advise and guidance, when you believe that you are now taking an active, valuable role in parenting?

#### Prompts for Interview Two (Participant Two)

1. In the last interview you stated that bonding with children was natural and immediate for mothers but for fathers it was expected to take longer. Why?
2. Quite a significant issue for you last time was your reaction to the 'new age' father depicted in "Party of Five" in that you said it wasn't realistic. What si a realistic portrayal of a father" Who supports this – do you see ti portrayed anywhere else?
3. Why do you think as you discussed last time, that there are some fathers who still live in a traditional way?

#### Prompts for Interview Two (Participant Three)

1. We talked last time about the changing roe of families and you said that it is quite common practice today for single girls to become mothers and not have a husband and that you thought this because of personal observation – what did you mean by personal observation?
2. You also tended to stress the importance of the community in you values f a father. Can you tell me why this is? Who is the community and what are the communities' values?

Prompts for Interview Two (Participant Four)

1. Why did you think that you had to 'do away with being a young male' when you became a father? Who/where represents that fatherhood as meaning that you immediately have to become an old man?
2. In the previous interview you said 'neither of us had any qualifications and we all thought that it made sense for me to go back and try and finish my degree so we could set up a proper family unit'. What is a 'proper' family unit? Who decides this?
3. In the last interview there was also quite a few occasions where you said that it was important that you 'were there' for X? What did you mean by this?

Prompts for Interview Two (Participant Five)

1. In the previous interview the decision for X to stay at home was based on the intense nurturing she could give by being home in the early child rearing years. When/how did you make the decision that this was the best way to go?
2. Most fathers acknowledge that their role evolves over time and they have to work out what their position should be on different issues, like with discipline, and particularly yourself with your son's girlfriends staying over. We didn't really talk about how out worked out what was all right?
3. Previously you mentioned that you thought that religion, the government and the general media pressured families to be a certain kind of family?  
  
What is each of these saying?  
  
How has this affected you as a father?

Prompts for Interview Two (Participant Six)

1. We also talked about your belief that there is no difference between a mothers and a fathers role – if this is the case why do you think that other fathers believe

there is a difference and that they still thought that there are depictions in the media, law and medical professionals that treat mothers and fathers differently?

2. With both yourself and other fathers there was also a tendency for fathers to articulate their fatherhood in terms of what they do with their children and how they do it rather than how they feel. Why do you think this is the case?

Prompts for Interview Two (Participant Seven)

1. You don't seem to defer to X in ways that other partners that I have interviewed have, in that you seem quite confident in your parenting – why do you think other men rely on the advice of their partners?
2. I was wondering if you could compare how you perceived a traditional catholic father to your version of fathering. Why do you think they are different?
3. In the last interview you discussed that you were glad that you did lots of travelling and had lots of girlfriends before you had your child. Why so you think that fatherhood would mean the end of all these experiences?

## Appendix E

### Prompts for Interview Three (All fathers)

1. One thing that emerged for me during the interviews is that a lot of fathers stated that they learned from their own personal experience sand upbringing, and had a more difficult time talking about images/messages that they had taken on from outside their micro world.
  - (a) For you why do you think that it may be harder for fathers to think about things further away from them?
  - (b) What aspects of your upbringing/personal experiences influenced your fathering? Can you think how higher order areas affect these?
2. Father still tend to think that there is still the message for father to be the provider, responsible, and in a support role for their partner among other traditional notions
  - (a) How strong is this talk?
 

There is also the new father talk, like the need to create a bond with your children, the need to be a communicator, the ability to give advise to your children.
  - (b) What sought of challenges arise from there being these 2 kinds of discussions about fatherhood?
3. Do you think there are absolutes in terms of parenting philosophies – in that some fathers listened to both new and traditional father messages at the same time?
  - (a) What do you think influences what type of fatherhood you adopt?
  - (b) What makes one type of talk more influential than the other?

4. Quite a few fathers also discussed that they wanted to be different from their own fathers but actually ended up using the same practices and were disappointed in this because they thought they should be a 'new' father.
  - (a) Why do you think this is?
  - (b) Why do you think these fathers find it difficult to be a 'new' father?
5. Which aspects of the 'new' father and 'traditional' father do you like? How do you meld the two together?

## Appendix F

### Procedure for analysis of qualitative data

Step One: Read transcript

Step Two: Identify your biases (reactions) to the data in the transcript and include in running diary, memos, and notes.

Step Three: Underline significant statements whilst re-reading the statements.

Step Four: Develop a list of categories/codes. Slot significant statements into these categories and present in the form of a matrix.

Step Five: Group common categories that represent a theme. These need to be conceptually similar in regards to the experience. Provide the themes, categories and representative significant statements in the form a matrix.

Step Six: Write exhaustive description by integrating the themes into three or four sentences (paragraph).

Step Seven: Write an integrative statement by drawing on the exhaustive description. This is approximately one or two sentences and is a brief but accurate description of the lived experience.

( Miles & Huberman, 1994) based on Glaser & Strauss (1967).