Fathers, Midwives, and Family Birth:
Fundamental Perspectives for Responsive Practice

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  Father’s Lived Experiences Raising Children with ADHD.

Father of 3 sons…and I was there for every second 😊
My Cheeky Monkeys
My Birth Stories
Consider your questions from education and practice

Write them down for discussion toward the end of the conversation today
The Landscape of Fatherhood

Historical “Themes”

- Father as Moral & Spiritual Educator <1860
- Father as Provider (breadwinner) – 1870
- Father as Sex Role Model – 1950s
- Father as Nurturer – 1970’s
- Fatherhood as Generativity – 1990’s
- Androgynous Parenting???
Generativity

“Any caring activity that contributes to the spirit of future generations.”

— (Snarey, 1993, pg. 356)
The Landscape…

- Masculinities Theories
  - Are about 10 years behind the times in lived experiences of men, particularly lacking an understanding of Millennials
  - However…nothing changes overnight…

- What is ‘masculine’?

- Who is considered a ‘man’?

- Is there such a thing as “fathering” or is it just “parenting?”
Highly salient social scripts exerting influence on men (Brannon, 1985)

- “No sissy stuff” – the absence of ‘femininity’
- “The big wheel” – power and achievement
- “The sturdy oak” – independence, strength, stoicism
- “Give’em hell” – aggression, risk, adventure

Kivel (2007) the “Act-Like-A-Man-Box”… social enforcement of anti-femininity and homophobia
27% of fathers do not live with their children (Pew, 2007)

The amount of weekly time fathers spend with children has more than doubled since 1960 (Pew, 2007)

“Androgynous” views of parenting are entering the literature (Brotherson & White, 2007)

Family equality legislation is increasing the number of gay couples choosing surrogacy but no official data is recorded
Men and the Land of Birthing

“Am I even supposed to be here?”
Men and Prenatal Care

- Much literature exists which reports that there are positive correlations between maternal and child birth outcomes and father participation in pre-post birth care.

- But what of the fathers?
  - Less research has been conducted into father’s experiences and meanings of this transitional journey into fatherhood
  - For certain it is profound: stoicism is not the absence of emotion, but the suppression of its expression
  - Men may also feel trapped and at odds with social scripting and place
Men and Ultrasound (Walsh, et al., 2014)

- Reassurance of ‘normal’ progression of pregnancy
  - Father anxiety and pregnancy fears

- “Reality” of future fatherhood
  - Distinct embodied experience of living child
  - Strong emotional responses

- Rapid “Expansion” of thinking
  - Future visualization of child/father relationship (role functions)

- Network of partner and “others” (outside/peers)

- The clinic experience
  - Half of fathers felt unwelcome or ignored
Anticipation and Preparation

- Increased ‘reality’ increases man other stresses for men
  - Adequacy of “Provider” role functions
  - Maternal health concerns
  - Fetal health concerns
  - Adequacy of “Nurturer” role functions
  - Relational stress and care of spouse/partner

- Moral and Pragmatic Dilemmas
  - “My needs/questions?...but the mother has SO much more to go through”
  - Financial and emotional provision for partner is NOT well-supported in the US workplace
Pre-birth Education? (May & Fletcher, 2013)

- #1: Focus on forthcoming role and relationship changes
- #2: Focus on potential father psychological distress
- #3: Prepare for developing infant communication
- #4: Enhance parent alliance and partnership
- #5: Focus on infant crying…interpretation and patterns and strategies for coping
“On the inside looking in”
- Feeling that their partners have already become mothers and that they are only preparing to become fathers…the disembodied experience

“Present but not Participating”
- Going to prenatal care but feeling cut off…the interloper…satisfied with care (of partner) but feeling as though they really shouldn’t ‘be looking.’

Deference and Support: A Moral Response
- Roles of stoic provider, protector, partner, and gender equal become at odds with needs of partner and social scripting.
Key Concepts for Reflective and Responsive Practice

- Examine the limits and insights that come from our own experiences with fathers and birth
  - What do I believe makes a man a ‘good’ or ‘bad’ father?
  - What do I believe makes a man a ‘good’ or ‘bad’ birth participant?

- Seek to respond to the needs of men in your care
  - What does it mean to you to become a father?
  - What does it mean to you to participate in this birth?
  - How can I best meet your needs in your own experience as we work together as a team?

- Acknowledge the spectrum of differences that will exist
Discussion: Tritton, 2014

- Can you find examples of social scripting?
- What have been your own experiences?
- Questions you’d like to ask that came up before our conversation today? During?
Key Articles/Books for Midwives


- Tritten, J. (2014). *What do you see as the role of fathers in pregnancy, labor and/or birth?* Midwifery Today(Author). Downloaded 10/02/2014 from [www.midwiferytoday.com](http://www.midwiferytoday.com)