TRANSITION TO PARENTHOOD:
EVOLUTION OF A RELATIONSHIP

by

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to explore couples’ successful transitions to parenthood. Little research has addressed the benefits of parenthood and no research has examined the transition in terms of success. The aim of this study was to contribute to a contextual understanding of the influences that may determine a couple’s success with regards to the transition. It was further intended to provide both couples and health service workers with information with which to help partners prepare for this transition. Hopes were that couples, after becoming parents, are able to derive increased marital satisfaction as a result not singularly of their love for their children, but also for their partners.

This study used interview and multiple case methodology. Four couples were interviewed individually, all having determined that they had successfully managed the transition to parenthood. Interviews were then transcribed, from which individual narratives were created based upon the unique story of each participant. Factors that contributed to the couples’ success were extracted from the narratives and transcripts and then analyzed for commonalities. The participants then validated these commonalities.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Much of the research addressing the transition to parenthood has focused on the problems that arise from parenthood and the marital deterioration that occurred resultantly. Little research paid special attention to those who successfully managed challenges, or to the growth that occurs individualistically and between the couple. While it is evident that this adjustment is demanding, it is clear that many couples are managing the change effectively enough to desire more children.

Much of the research generated has emphasized the pathological. It has been based on questionnaires, telephone interviews or interviews conducted only within the first few weeks of the newborn’s arrival home. It is important that couples be granted the opportunity to share information over a longer term concerning what contributed to their success as a couple in managing this transition.

The vast majority of individuals, at some point in life, moves through this transition and become parents. If we are to believe that parenthood is destructive to the spousal unit, it seems even more imperative to discover what successful couples, those maintaining a loving and committed spousal relationship during this change, are doing differently. In response to this need
to understand what couples report as helpful, the research question for this study was: how do couples successfully manage the transition to parenthood?

Rationale for the Study

"About 95% of the people who can become parents do so. For most, becoming a parent involves relationship transition and substantial adjustment, but for many, the transition to parenthood is problematic" (Worthington & Buston, 1986, p.443). Further, Cowan, Cowan, Garret, Coysh-Boles & Boles (1985) reported that "partners already vulnerable from lack of sleep and major shifts in their sense of themselves, their roles in the worlds of family and work, and their intimate relationship, find themselves startled by unexpected difference and increased conflict...It is not unusual for one or both to feel trapped in the ‘foreverness’ of the parent role" (p. 47). The preponderance of data concludes that, although most individuals have children during their lifetime, the spousal relationship changes as a result. Yet there must be some couples who manage the transition well. The question, then, is, what are the successful couples doing effectively to better adjust to the challenges without sacrificing their personal relationship with their spouse?

Russell (1974) and Sollie and Miller (1980) reported that there is some benefit or gratification associated with this transition. These have not been
studied as extensively as the costs. Belsky and Pensky (1988) speculated as to why research has focussed on pathology. They asserted that it “may well have something to do with the more difficult-to-measure nature of the good things or the fact that when it comes to marriages, the positives are outweighed and thus overshadowed by the difficulties that are encountered” (p.150). In order to view the entire picture of this transition, it is necessary to find appropriate measuring tools. How can we learn about this transition or teach expectant parents to cope with these challenges if research is one-sided and biased toward pathology? What hope are we giving parents-to-be? Parenthood certainly demands changes with regard to roles, relationships and priorities, but in my experience, overall it is gratifying and growth producing.

A further rationale for this study is the fact that a systematic approach is needed to support couples as they approach and navigate the adjustment to parenthood. Childbirth education classes would be ideal for intervention efforts to be undertaken, particularly because large numbers of couples voluntarily enroll in these programs. Unfortunately, most classes devote themselves solely to the birth event, with little or no attention paid to the period following the baby’s arrival. Spouses could learn from successful couples what techniques were employed to effect a positive outcome. This in turn would likely stimulate discussion about impending parenthood, initiating more forward thinking, particularly as a team. The maintenance of a happy and
loving spousal relationship will contribute greatly to the health of the
developing family unit.

Approach to the Study

This research began with the intention of using the Critical Incident
Technique as a method to acquire data. However, after a pilot study, I no
longer believed it would capture the full experience of the participants. They
felt restricted and unable to share their whole stories. Consequently, I turned
to an open-ended interview format, which emphasized narrative accounts to
elicit the factors that influenced a successful transition to parenthood. This
design allowed for a fuller context of each individual’s experience; narratives
provided a vehicle for the participants to reflect on and describe their
experiences. “Story cultivates a kind of understanding that goes beyond
explanation to say something more akin to wisdom or illumination.” (Cochran,
1989, p. 74). The meaning behind single events could not have been clarified
without the longer story in which events played a role had a place.

Much of the previous research in this area had restricted participants to
preset questions. I felt that this was an opportunity for me to get the account
directly from the individuals.
The research produced authentic accounts of the participants' successful transition to parenthood. A cross-case comparison of these narratives revealed the presence of common factors, which prevailed in the success of these eight participants during their transition to parenthood.
CHAPTER II
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

Literature relevant to the transition to parenthood and its effect on the marital relationship is reviewed in this chapter. The focus is on research regarding the different factors relevant to the transition to becoming a father or a mother and how those factors affect the couples’ relationship. First, the early literature on this issue is explored, followed by the examination of mediators to the transition, marital changes that occur, the satisfaction with regards to role arrangements and the impact that this has had on both the individual and the couple during the transition.

Early Literature: Parenthood ‘Crisis” or Normal Life Event?

The prevailing feeling of first time parents is that the arrival of their first child will bring joy and a sense of fulfillment. Becoming a parent means continuing one’s family line, linking past with future; it offers an opportunity for husband and wife to grow emotionally closer as they share the excitement
and challenge of bringing up their child (Goldberg, 1988). Considering the romantic notions of parenthood, it is easy to underestimate the stress that might be incurred by the arrival of a couple's first child. Deciding to or becoming pregnant results in a family system that increases in complexity; it involves role transition and substantial adjustments to life.

Researchers have generated debate as to whether or not the degree of stress experienced is considerable enough to label the transitional event as a "crisis" (Dyer, 1963; Hill, 1949; Hobbs, 1965; Hobbs & Cole, 1976; Hobbs & Wimbish, 1977; LeMasters, 1957; Meyerowitz & Feldman, 1966; Russell, 1974). In 1949, Hill first suggested that adding a family member would precipitate a "crisis" for married couples in that it was an abrupt change that rendered old patterns inadequate and necessitated immediate change in the family system. Even though Hill (1949) used the term "crisis" to describe changes in couples' behaviour in their attempt to adjust to the challenging adjustments, he emphasized that these modifications in behaviour could result in either a positive or negative outcome for each couple. He stated that the outcome would depend on a complex interaction of personal and interpersonal variables. Even though Hill's work inspired further research, unfortunately it only centred on the negative results of the birth of the first child. Perhaps if these researchers had focussed on the examination of the complex interaction of variables, more aspects of a successful transition might have been unearthed.
The best known series of studies on this transition germinated from research known as the "parenthood as crisis" series. Beginning with LeMaster's (1957) article and continuing through to the work of Dyer (1963), Wainwright (1966), Russell (1974) and many of Hobbs' research articles (Hobbs, 1965; Hobbs and Cole, 1976; Hobbs and Wimbish, 1977), the main question has been, 'does the transition to parenthood constitute a "crisis"?' Le Master's (1957), Dyer (1963) and Wainwright (1966) all found that the stress experienced by the transition to parenthood reached "crisis" levels. All other research to date has been supported by the view that although parenthood is difficult, it does not necessarily constitute being labeled a "crisis" for parents (Hobbs, 1965; Hobbs, 1968; Hobbs & Cole, 1977; Hobbs & Wimbish, 1977; Russell, 1974).

The criterion for answering this question has been a twenty-three-item checklist developed in 1965 by Hobbs (Cowan & Cowan, 1988). The checklist asked each individual to decide if certain changes were considered to be "bothersome". The responses were summed up to produce a single "crisis" score for each couple. Jacoby (1969) challenged this checklist in a research paper outlining the flaws apparent in the transition to parenthood research. He demonstrated that the checklist only measured negative or bothersome aspects of this transition, thereby neglecting the gratification parents can experience as a result of their offspring. Russell (1974), in response to the critique of the
"crisis" research, introduced a checklist which included those aspects of parenthood which could be considered gratifying. While this was an improvement compared with other studies of the time, it still focused the attention on whether there has been sufficient change experienced by the family to merit the questionable label of "crisis". Research produced during this time is inconclusive, abstract and riddled with methodological flaws. While it did provide evidence that the transition to parenthood can be a difficult and stressful time, it served as a catalyst for researchers to focus too strongly only on the negative aspects.

Mediators to the Transition to Parenthood

Parenthood impacts individuals and couples differently. Michaels, Hoffman & Goldberg (as cited in Goldberg, 1988) stated that "the transition to parenthood is the most universally occurring adult developmental transition, with psychological, sociocultural and biological components, all which interact and influence one another" (p. 2). It is necessary, when considering the impact of the transition on individuals and couples, to take into consideration the following factors that might mediate the quality of the adjustment process.
Age/Sequencing

Belsky (1981) suggested the value of a life-span perspective in this adjustment process. He viewed the timing and chronology of parenting as important factors (Belsky, 1981; 1984). The birth of a child has very different meanings and offers (or restricts) opportunities, depending on the age of the parents (Daniels & Weingarten, 1980). Parenthood generally occurs between the wide span of teenage years through to mid forties (Goldberg, 1988; Thompson & Walker, 1989). One's experiences and the developmental stage, hence age, can result in a qualitatively different experience. Implicit factors influencing the timing of parenthood are the energy of youth and the perspective of maturity (Goldberg, 1988).

A younger parent benefits from a high level of physical energy and a perspective that their lives are not disrupted as much because they are not as set in their ways. However, they can suffer from a lack of psychological readiness, interruption of educational paths and lack of economical independence (Goldberg, 1988; Osofsky, Osofsky & Diamond, 1988). The results of McLaughlin and Micklin (1983) study supported this. They found that among equally educated women from equivalent socioeconomic
backgrounds, the occurrence of the first birth by age 18 was the only factor that negatively affected perceived personal efficacy.

In their literature review, Fedele, Golding, Grossman and Pollack (1988) stated that the transition to parenthood is less severe when the parents are older (McLaughlin and Micklin, 1983). In contrast, Neugarten & Datan (1973) reported that older parents might find themselves facing potential problems and challenges relating to coordinating children. They were more subject to "heightened career demands and diminished levels of physical energy; as well they confront age-related medical risks associated with late pregnancy ... and may also have a sense that they are 'off time' in regard to societal expectations for the timing of first parenthood" (p. 3). Similarly, Cox (1985) pointed out in his review that many adults were incorporating young children at a time when they were experiencing a crisis in their lives: as they approached middle age rather than earlier when they were struggling with self-definition. Cowan and Cowan (1992) noted that there were both pros and cons related to postponing parenthood until partners were in their thirties. This possibly could have provided a foundation for a stronger sense of self, which often is maintained or improved after having a baby. On the other hand, marital intimacy and satisfaction could have suffered as a result of the effort placed on maintaining their growth as individuals, particularly with regards to careers. Mercer (1986) similarly found in a study of women ranging from ages 19 to 40 that there were
perceived advantages and disadvantages of early and late timing. Furthermore, she discovered that most new mothers were satisfied with their choice and that the extent of support available from one's partner, one's social network, and the community mediated the ease of the transition to parenthood. While it has been noted that age does affect individuals' experiences of the transition, and that there are both benefits and drawbacks, few studies have been undertaken to link age and the effects it has on the couple relationship during the transition to parenthood.

Planned Pregnancy

Other factors which mediate the impact of the transition to parenthood has on the couple are length of marriage prior to conception and the decision making process involved in the pregnancy. There is some evidence that parenthood was found to be less severe when parents had been married for a longer time before conception (Dyer, 1963; Russell, 1974). For example, Russell (1974) discovered a relationship between age, length of marriage and marital gratification. Older women were found to enjoy parenthood more if they did not delay conception, while younger women reported that they needed time to adjust as a couple prior to starting a family. However, the research, examining the length of marriage prior to conception and its effect on the
transition to parenthood, is scant and unconvincing. Further, there are complexities to be considered. Specifically, it may not be how long the couple was married prior to conception that is important, but whether or not there are outstanding issues between the couple.

The impact of the child on a marriage often depends on whether or not the child is wanted and planned. Many studies indicate that the postponement of pregnancy until a couple is ready has repercussions for both partners as well as for marital satisfaction. Russell (1974) found that becoming a parent was made less stressful by planning the baby’s conception. Christensen (1968) and Steffensmeier (1982) found that planning increased perceived competency and reflected financial security. Similarly, Glenn and McLanahan (1982), and Wright, Henggeler and Craig (1986), revealed that planning did increase marital satisfaction. Feldman (in press, as cited by Grossman, 1988) established that unplanned pregnancies had a negative effect on the men. Studies inconsistent with the aforementioned found that when the pregnancy was planned, the women were likely to experience a decline in their quality of marriages (Belsky & Rovine, 1990; Steffensmeier, 1982). This suggests that lower expectations could favourably result in less discrepancy between expectations and reality. Another explanation is that these subjects might differ on the degree in which they wanted a pregnancy to occur at all. When a pregnancy occurs before the couple expects it or when a couple has decided explicitly that they are finished
with procreating, it can be very stressful (Worthington & Buston, 1986). Cowan and Cowan (1992) linked decision making styles on pregnancy to marital satisfaction. They divided their subjects into four distinct groups based on the decision-making style adopted by the couples. In so doing, they created a more sensitive measuring environment. Their findings were that those who planned their pregnancies showed very little change in their feelings about marriage over a two-year period. Acceptance-of-fate couples are those who had not made firm decisions regarding parenthood or its timing. In addition, neither of these couplers was opposed to having a child. The couples started at a particularly high level and experienced some decline in marital satisfaction, but were still satisfied midway into the second year of parenthood. Those who felt ambivalent about becoming parents, where both partners expressed positive and negative feelings about parenthood, showed a significant decline in their satisfaction with marriage. Cowan and Cowan (1992) went on to explain that the most dramatic changes were seen in those couples who were divided regarding the decision: one says ‘yes’ while the other says ‘no’. This has been termed the ‘Yes No’ category, where there is strong unresolved conflict about becoming a parent for these couples. “The expectant parents who fall into this category have quite a positive view during the pregnancy. However, at six months post-partum, these couples described a significant decline in marital
satisfaction. A year later, this plummet increased to the extent that they could be termed 'severely distressed'.” (p. 47).

While planning for pregnancy certainly may have an impact, the degree to which the couple desires a child and the extent to which the timing disrupts one’s life plan (career, personal goals, etc.) are important variables to consider when examining its positive impact on the marital relationship.

**Length of marriage**

The transition to parenthood was found to be less severe when parents had been married for a longer time before conception (Dyer, 1963; Russell, 1974). However, Russell (1974) discovered a possible relationship between age, length of marriage and marital gratification. Older women were found to enjoy parenthood more if they did not delay conception, while younger women reported that they needed time to adjust as a couple prior to starting a family. This was likely a result of decreasing energy levels or ambivalence to parenting. There is scarce research examining the length of marriage prior to conception and its effect on the transition to parenthood. What needs to be examined is whether there are outstanding issues between the couple when they conceive versus the time that they have been a couple prior to conception.
Social Class

Another significant factor in the transition to parenthood is class difference. Antonucci and Mikus (1988) stated that the response to and enactment of the parental role varied with social class. Grossman, Eichler & Wickinoff (1980) reported that higher socioeconomic status was associated with better adaptation to parenthood in both men and women. Much of the research, in contrast, supported the view that higher status was also found to initiate more anticipatory concerns and difficulties in adjusting (Thompson & Walker, 1989). Discrepancies found in early studies regarding the degree of stress (or level of “crisis”) reported were used to elucidate the effect of social class on the couples’ perceived stress during the transition to parenthood. It was noted that studies of couples who experienced high degrees of stress limited their sample to middle-class respondents, while those which reported lower levels were made up in large part of working class parents. An explanation for this suggested that expectations regarding lifestyle and relationship are greater for the middle class compared with working class (Cowan & Cowan, 1988; Jacoby, 1969; Russell, 1974). As a result, the changes that occurred as a consequence
of parenthood were perceived by middle class respondents as more disruptive, and thus created more stress. The conflict between role of a parent and other desirable roles may have created tension and might have explained why women reported decreases in marital satisfaction (Steffenmeiser, 1982). Thompson and Walker (1989) similarly stated that middle class mothers experienced more of a loss of identity and freedom than working class mothers did. “Unlike many working class mothers who find security in the gender-specialized work fashioned by parenthood, most middle class mothers believe that parenting squelched whatever marital equality they had managed before children … they feel a loss of status, opportunity, and freedom that most husbands do not suffer and that husbands’ ‘help’ does not mitigate” (p. 863).

Although it is worthwhile to note that it appears that socioeconomic status may be inversely related to marital satisfaction during the transition to parenthood, further research is necessary, particularly with respect to long-term changes.

Social Support

The impact of parenthood can also be influenced by the parents’ social support network. Belsky and Rovine (1984) found that social contact increased with one’s family of origin across the transition to parenthood. Fischer (1988)
similarly found that when daughters became mothers, they often found themselves with a new need for their own mothers, consequently increasing contact with them. Many of the mothers in her study brought food, did laundry, helped with cleaning and childcare in order to lessen the burden for the daughter in the first few weeks of parenthood. She stated that “what became clear in my research is that … actively involved grandparents and other relatives can help to ease the transition to parental responsibility” (p. 215) (Crnic & Booth, 1991). Gottlieb and Pancer (1988) stated that no one had systematically and critically reviewed the different ways in which social support had been measured in the context of transition to parenthood. “We need to reach an agreement as to the kinds of sources of support that are more germane at different stages of the transition” (p. 236).

Both Cutrona’s (1984) and Power and Parke’s (1984) research deserved attention as they have attempted to address this concern. Cutrona (1984) and Crnic & Booth (1991) demonstrated that research had supported the view that social support was a significant determinant of individual differences in reaction to stress. The study found that social support played a significant role in women’s mental health eight weeks post-partum. Specifically, having a close friend other than the husband upon whom to rely, and having a group of friends with whom one could share concerns and recreational activities, reduced feelings of depression at this juncture (Myers & Wall, 1984). Power
and Parke (1984) examined the diverse types of social support networks and the different participants who could ease the transition into motherhood. They distinguished between emotional, physical and informational support. They also scrutinized how husbands, friends, work associates and relatives sustained in different ways. They noted in their findings that emotional and physical support from one's husband, while being desired the most, had the largest decline post-partum. It is suggested that this may have accounted for the decline in marital satisfaction. While researchers concur that women increase contact with relatives during the transition to parenthood and that social support is desirable at this time, it is necessary to continue to strive to understand the nature and variety of supports received, the impact of social support on both men and women, and how these factors interplay and affect the marital dyad.

Satisfaction with Child Care

Modern society has created both a desire and a need for women to remain in the workforce during their parenting years. Beginning in the mid-sixties, a dramatic increase in maternal employment was witnessed. Cowan and Cowan (1992) stated that 45% of mothers were caring for their six-month-old infants at home, but by the time the child was three and a half, only 17% of one or
both parents were staying at home with their children. Research examining childcare alternatives and the effect of maternal employment on child
development has been thoroughly investigated (Belsky & Volling, 1987; Belsky, Steinberg & Walker, 1982). The possible impact of childcare on the parents' mental health, their relationship with their partner, or their development as parents, however, has been virtually ignored (Cowan & Cowan, 1990; Leventhal-Belfer et al., 1992). The little research on this subject has found that higher paternal satisfaction with childcare arrangements is related to lower levels of maternal depression and stress regardless of how the mother appraised the situation. (Cowan & Cowan, 1990; Leventhal-Belger et al., 1992). Marital partners' perceptions and interpretations impact each other.

Studies investigating the transition to parenthood and marital satisfaction need to design research that address the entire family system. Belsky & Pensky (1988) stated that behaviour and feelings are reciprocally and causally related. They went on to state that “it is not simply the case that spousal interactions generate marital sentiments or that feelings about the spouse and the marriage affect what transpires behaviourally between spouses, but rather that over time both of these processes occur” (p.138).
Family of Origin

An individual’s early relationships with parents plays an integral part in shaping the types of relationships established within one’s own family (Belsky & Pensky, 1988; Cox, Owen, Lewis, Riedel, Scalf-McIver and Suster, 1985; Lane, Wilcoxon & Cecil, 1988). Ricks (as cited in Belsky and Pensky, 1988) has suggested that family of origin influences would be mediated through the marriage and that individuals who had experienced healthier relationships with their own parents would be more likely to establish long-term marital relationships.

Lane, Wilcoxon and Cecil (1988) found that the transition to parenthood is less stressful for men and women who had healthy family-of-origin experiences. In addition, perceived security in one’s family-of-origin was found to be more important than any of the other variables (income, education, etc.) influencing the transition to parenthood, particularly for women. Belsky and Isabella (1985) sought to discover if the recollections of parents, how they were treated as children, and how their parents related to one another as husband and wife influenced their adjustment to the transition to parenthood. It was discovered that both husband and wife benefited from being raised in warm, nurturing homes and that this was reflected in their marital relationship. Additionally, if either partner reported being raised in an emotionally cold
household as well as having been exposed to less harmonious marriages in their family-of-origin, then they displayed the most negative change in their marriages. Lewis and Spanier (1979) concurred with their findings relating to the marital relationship they were exposed to as children. They similarly discovered that the higher the marital quality of the family of origin, the higher the marital quality of the family of procreation.

There is some evidence that early childhood experiences influence one’s marital relationship and the effectiveness in which a couple is able to maintain a positive connection during the transition to parenthood. Research focusing solely on the influence of the family-of-origin on this transition and its affect on the marital relationship should be further explored.

While there is little attention paid to the role of childhood experience in shaping the quality of marital relations during the transition to parenthood, it warrants review. Unfortunately, due to the limitations of this study, it will not be dealt with.

MARITAL CHANGE

Most research on the transition to parenthood suggested that becoming a parent results in changes in the marital relationship (Belsky Spanier & Rovine, 1983) It is an unbalanced time for the parents as individuals and as a couple
(Cowan and Cowan, 1992). It may be seen as a time that requires not only a
change in roles and relationships, but also a major change in one's approach to
life (Antonucci and Mikus, 1988). As presented below, the transition to
parenthood demands changes in the self, in roles and role arrangements, and in
the marital relationship. This may result in changes to marital quality, marital
satisfaction and marital adjustment.

Decline in Marital Satisfaction

Both cross-sectional studies and longitudinal studies have suggested a
decline in marital satisfaction as couples become parents (Belsky, 1985; Belsky,
Lang and Rovine, 1985; Belsky, Soanier and Rovine, 1983; Hobbs and
Wimbish, 1977; Hock, Schirtzinger and Widaman, 1995; Russell, 1974; Waldon
research for neglecting to include a comparison group. He argued that “only
by comparing couples who become parents with those who remain childless
can one know whether changes in satisfaction occur even without the birth of a
child”. An example of such is McHale and Huston’s (1985) longitudinal study
which compared couples who remained childless during their first year of
marriage to couples who became parents during that period of time. In their
study, both groups showed significant declines in love and satisfaction, which
suggested that declines could be a result of marital time notwithstanding children. An important consideration emerges from McHale and Huston’s (1985) study, which limited their investigation to newlyweds. The rates of decline reported could be partially attributed to the adjustments inherent in the transition to marriage.

White and Booth’s (1985) study, comparing parent and non-parent couples who were married for an average of three years, found that although the presence of a new baby resulted in slightly greater declines in marital happiness and interactions, the differences do not reach significant levels.

Interestingly, consistency of marital satisfaction, although not addressed in most research, has been found. Rank order between couples’ satisfaction scores has been reported as remaining stable over time (Belsky et al. 1983, 1985; Cowan & Cowan, 1988). Even as marital quality is declining slightly with individuals becoming more unsatisfied over time, those involved in better relationships initially remain more satisfied in general, subsequently (Belsky and Pensky, 1988). Additionally, it appears that men and women experience a decline in satisfaction at different phases of this transition. Cowan and Cowan (1982) found that during late pregnancy, the average level of marital satisfaction was quite high in both sexes. After the birth of the child, women experienced a decline in marital satisfaction, which was most evident in the first six months but continued until 18 months post-partum. Male marital satisfaction was
stable until six months post-partum but then declined steadily until 18 months, suggesting that the husbands’ marital decline may have been impacted directly by their wives.

Despite the report of decline in marital satisfaction in almost every study of new parents, the decline is generally very small (Cowan & Cowan, 1988). It is also significant to note that when parents were given the chance, they were keen to describe the positive aspects of having children (Hoffman and Hoffman, 1973; Hoffman & Manis, 1978; Russell, 1974). Naturally, parenthood involves stresses as couples try to negotiate and become accustomed to their new roles. The bias in the literature towards the costs of parenthood, instead of the gratifications, is a major flaw.

Feldman and Nash (1984) found that overall, men and women viewed their role of parent very positively. Hobbs and Wimbish (1977) found that 82% of mothers and 74% of fathers indicated that their marriages were more happy and satisfying after the birth of the baby. Once again, it is important to underline the changes which occur in a marriage during the transition and how couples manage to cope with them.
Marital Interactions

Researchers have noticed that one of the marital changes which occurs is a decline in some of the couples' positive behaviours. Belsky, Lang & Huston (1986) found a significant reduction in the display of positive affection from the last trimester of pregnancy through nine months post-partum. Specifically, couples' efforts to work at their relationship decreased, and a greater reduction was evident with the wives. In a second study, Belsky et al. (1985) found similar results by observing couples and by gathering data through questionnaires. Spouses indicated that they had become increasingly dissatisfied with the quantity and quality of positive behaviours that their partners displayed. McHale and Huston's (1985) study compared newlyweds who became parents in their first year to those who did not. They found that all couples showed declines over the first year in the number of positively toned behaviours they exchanged, with parents demonstrating a greater falling off than non-parents did. Parenthood was also found to affect marital sex life negatively for both husbands and wives reporting a negative change in their sexual relationship (Cowan and Cowan, 1986). In the latter months of the pregnancy, Cowan and Cowan (1992) reported that half of the couples sexual relationship had diminished. In the early months of parenthood this number increased to include the vast majority of couples in the longitudinal study.
They also ascertained that half of the couples had deteriorated relations when they did find the time and energy in which to engage. When taking into consideration the emotional and physical exhaustion, and the impediments to spontaneity, it is easy to comprehend the changes in both affective behaviour and intimacy. Cowan and Cowan (1992) noted that although these changes were consistent, communication tools such as humour were used to alleviate some of the stresses. Studies should investigate the individual differences in coping with the long-term effects of the transition in order to elucidate a more positive outcome.

**Partners Perception of Relationship**

Each partners’ perception of the relationship has been affirmed to be a cause for some of the difficulties experienced within the marital relationship. With the transition to parenthood, couples increasingly begin to perceive their relationship as less of a romance and more of a partnership (Belsky et al., 1983, 1985; McHale & Huston, 1985), with changes in marital activities becoming more instrumental (MacDermid, Huston and McHale, 1990). In Belsky et al. (1983, 1985), partnership scores increased linearly over time, while romance scores displayed a corresponding decline. McHale and Huston (1985) similarly discovered that “while there was no shift over time for either the parents or
non-parents in the number of activities they did together, couples who became parents increased in the proportion of joint activities that centered around household tasks and childcare responsibilities” (p. 420).

Rather than stating that “partner perspective” is a negative, it could be viewed as a positive way for couples to successfully cope with the increasing demands of early parenthood. Individual differences with regards to the degree in which they value their partner should be stressed. Cowan and Cowan (1992) investigated this issue by asking couples pre- and post-pregnancy to analyze how much they are invested in their different roles -- parent, partner/lover, and worker. Their focus was not on the distinction between partner/lover, but instead in the distinction between parent and partner. They found that the discrepancy between the different levels of psychological investment in parenthood had a deleterious effect on the relationship. Naturally, once they had their baby, both genders’ sense of themselves as parents increased, but what suffered as a result of this fluctuated. When the degree in which they saw themselves as partner/lover decreased significantly, both men and women suffered. They had lower self-esteem and higher parenting stress. Cowan and Cowan (1992) revealed that the degree of psychological investment in a partnership was linked to a more successful transition to parenthood. They postulated that when couples made an effort to overtly value their relationship as a couple, they felt better about themselves and their lives. Thus, the shift
from lover to partner aspect may not be the main architect in the decline in
marital satisfaction. In fact, maintaining an investment in one’s partner, versus
solely investing in being a parent, may be the key component.

MARITAL ROLES

Research suggests that after a baby is born, a shift in role arrangements
takes place as they become more traditionalized (Belsky et al., 1983, 1988; Cox,
1985; Cowan et al., 1985; Cowan and Cowan, 1988; Goldberg, Michaels &
Lamb, 1985; McHale and Huston, 1985; Thompson and Walker, 1989; Cowan
and Cowan, 1992). Specifically, women carry out most of the housework and
family tasks while men work outside of the home (Cowan and Cowan, 1992;
Pleck, 1985; Thompson and Walker, 1989; Ventura, 1987). In fact, even when
both partners are employed outside of the home, women assume the majority
of household chores (Stafford, Backman & Dibona, 1977; Zimmerman and
Addison, 1997). It is this inequity which is thought to be the major cause in the
decline in marital satisfaction (Fish, New & Von Cleaver, 1992; Grossman et
al., 1980; Lavee, Sharlin and Katz, 1996). Belsky et al. (1986) reported that
women, whose burden of household chores increased the most, experienced
the greatest change in the quality of their marital relationship. Fish et al. (1992)
found that with dual income couples, it was the perception of equality that was key, despite the actual division of labour. Cowan and Cowan (1992) found that the distress faced by the couple was not so much a result of this incongruity but rather a consequence of the couple being unprepared for the discrepancy (Kalmuss, Davidson and Cushman, 1992; Palkovitz and Copes, 1988; Ruble, Hackel, Fleming & Stangor, 1988). Even though the division of labour may affect the relationship, it was the incongruity between the women’s’ postpartum experience and her expectations that can have the greatest impact. Research on the role of violated expectations on the marital relationship during the transition to parenthood supports this (Belsky, 1985; Belsky et al., 1986). In fact, they discovered that "women who expected that they would be doing a lot of housework (or that their husbands would be doing relatively little) felt closer to their husbands than women with expectations at the other extreme” (p. 85). Belsky, Ward and Rovine (1986) revealed that when parenting experiences were more negative than expected, the wives’ view of the marriage worsened. Implicitly linked to this idea is that the relationship between marital satisfaction and household division of labour is related to role negotiation and role satisfaction. When a couple was satisfied with the role arrangements, there was a direct link with the personal well being of the man and the woman, as well as how they felt as a couple (Bahr, Chappell and Leigh, 1983; Cowan and Cowan, 1992; Suitor, 1991).
Modern society has opened up more opportunities outside of the home for women. Balancing family and work life after the arrival of an infant is one of the major tasks that couples face today (Cohen, 1982; Cowan and Cowan, 1992; Miller and Sollie, 1980). For women, it appears that there is no perfect solution. Rossi (1968) states that a woman who gives up her career to stay at home full-time may experience a loss of self, and might feel unsupported by societal views (Pistrang, 1984). The working mother, meanwhile, faces problems of overload as she attempts to fulfill obligations in her role as wife, mother and employee (Rapoport and Rapoport, 1976; Thompson and Walker, 1989). Additionally, women carry the burden of childcare arrangements (Thompson and Walker, 1989; Hoffman and Nye, 1974). Finally, there is evidence that women bear emotional guilt from working outside of the home (Cowan and Cowan, 1992; Hoffman and Nye, 1974). Cowan and Cowan (1992) describe a woman’s angst as follows: “In my mom’s day they said to be a full-fledged woman, you’ve got to be a mother and not a career woman; and now it’s switched. I’m expected to have a career and not be a mother. Or be a mother, but keep my career on track. So I’m at home … but I keep wondering whether I ought to be at work. Meanwhile, my friend is back at work feeling desperate because she feels she ought to be at home!” (p. 114).

Role arrangements are the central issue. Stresses are inherent with either option, rendering the parents’ satisfaction with their choice the most important
Belsky et al., 1986; Cowan and Cowan, 1988, 1992; Zaslow and Pederson, 1981). Belsky, Lang & Huston (1986) revealed that women who were less traditional but assumed more of the traditional tasks were more negative about their marriage than those with whom their roles matched their views of themselves were. Cowan and Cowan (1988) found that the most important element for the marriage was not the fact that tasks were shared, but rather their feelings about how the chores were divided. “Some spouses are reasonably content with what would be regarded as fairly traditional divisions of labour, whereas others are dissatisfied with divisions that approach the egalitarian end of the continuum” (p. 129). It is the evaluation of their situations that is key to comprehending women’s and men’s adaptation to becoming a family (Cowan and Cowan, 1988; Zaslow and Pederson, 1981). Zaslow and Pederson (1981) reported that while stress should be expected for women who made role changes, it was part of the adjustment process. When husbands and wives disagreed about their arrangements of family and work, the effects were felt within their marriage (Cowan and Cowan, 1992). As such, continued negotiation should occur between a couple until satisfaction is achieved.

Cowan and Cowan (1992) discovered that “for many modern couples, coordinating a number of work and family roles that they consider important represents a challenge and an opportunity to show their competence.
Managing it all can be hectic for both parents, but when they feel that they are part of a team that is managing it all successfully, there seems to be benefits for how they both end up feeling about themselves and their marriage. Part of the excitement of the journey for pioneers is mastering the hardships they encounter” (p. 124). In conclusion, parenthood places additional demands on both mother and father. Juggling multiple roles with increasing time pressures will create stress until both the individual and the couple find some sense of equilibrium. Proper negotiation of roles and the satisfaction within these roles will alleviate the distress couples face in modern day society.

**Communication**

Evidence suggests that the quantity, style and quality of communication are highly correlated with self-reported marital satisfaction (Gottman, 1979; Gottman, Markman & Notarius, 1977). Meyerowitz and Feldman (1966) reported that the amount of time allotted to communicating with one’s spouse declined during the transition to parenthood. Cowan et al. (1985) found that women similarly reported increasing disagreements and conflicts. It has been noted in every study investigating conflict during the transition to parenthood that disputes regarding the division of labour were the most contentious during the first two years of family life (Cowan and Cowan, 1988; 1992). Cowan and
Cowan (1988) established that over a two year period, 90% of the parents reported increases in discord. While this might present a bleak picture for couples moving through the transition to parenthood, Gottman (1989) found that engagement in conflict could improve marriages in the long term. Notarius and Vanzetti (1983) correspondingly suggested that couples needed to develop a feeling that they could weather controversy together. Also, Krokoff, Gottman & Roy (1988) discovered that an avoidance of conflict could result in a divided view regarding their expectations of the marriages. Therefore it may not be the presence of tension that results in dissatisfaction within the marriage, but rather the inability to keep communicating and working together as a team. Gottman (1989) further speculated that “it is possible that couples who engage in conflict may pay a price in concurrent dissatisfaction and negative affect at home, but the strife may pay off in the long run, provided that the conflict does not invoke stubbornness, defensiveness or withdrawal from interaction” (p.51). The key to a satisfying marriage is not the presence of problems or whether they can always be resolved, but how they talk to each other about them (Cowan and Cowan, 1991).
Summary

Classifying the transition to parenthood as a “crisis” is negative and simplistic. The transition to parenthood is an ongoing process, involving continuous psychological, physical and social adjustments. The majority of the research to date relied on data gathered from questionnaires and/or short interviews generally conducted over the telephone in order to identify and measure stress. Stress in itself is not necessarily negative. It can result in changes that are challenging and constructive rather than overwhelming and pessimistic. Worthington and Buston (1986) note that becoming parents can disrupt some marriages to some extent and other marriages to a great extent. Therefore, more research needs to be done not only to address the changes that occur within the couple relationship, but also to examine the different methods in which individuals handle it and the extent to which they are managed successfully.

Not a single study thus far has been undertaken to specifically analyze how couples manage the transition to parenthood successfully. Perhaps, as Sabshin (1984) suggests, transition should only be defined in retrospective accounts, since those involved in the turmoil do not have clearly delineated concepts of their own. Considering that the vast number of adults choose to embark on the journey to parenthood, the intention of this thesis is to unearth specific
factors that increase the likelihood for a successful transition which offers positive growth and opportunities for the family.
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This study documented the experience of couples who successfully managed the transition to parenthood. It was intended to illuminate specifically how challenges inherent in the transition were handled, while maintaining a healthy and loving partnership. It used an open-ended interview format to collect initial information and to gather the stories from the participants. Interviews were transcribed and individual narratives were constructed from the transcripts (see Appendix B). Subsequently, those narratives were examined to investigate the factors that influence the successful transition to parenthood.

The purpose of this study was to explore the couples' successful transition to parenthood, and to discover what was common to the experience as opposed to unique.
Participants Recruitment

Participant selection was based on the following criteria: participants had to have gone through the transition to parenthood; their eldest child could be no more than four years old; the transition had to have been successful; [“success” was based upon the self-selected individual’s feeling that they had maintained a committed and loving spousal relationship]; they were able to articulate experiences of the transition.

Participants were recruited by word-of-mouth. A network of friends and acquaintances were informed of my intent to study couples’ successful transition to parenthood. The participants who were referred were provided with a letter describing the study and providing a contact number (Appendix C). Once a participant called, the purpose and nature of the study was reviewed and a time was set up to conduct a taped interview.

It should be noted that following the first interviews, it was decided that due to struggles within their marriage, one couple did not meet the criteria. Subsequently, this couple was referred to a counselling resource.
Participants

At the time of the interviews, the participants ranged in age from 29-41. The mean age was 37. Geographically, six of the participants lived in Vancouver and two lived in Burnaby. Below is a brief description of the couples.

De and F have been married for eight years and have known each other for 18 years. Their daughter N was three and a half years old. De, prior to having children, was a marketing executive. F was a manager in an engineering firm. After having N, De stayed at home and F continued in the same career, receiving a promotion to National Director of Canada for his firm. They live in a condominium in Vancouver.

C and Je have been married for six and a half years and have known each other for 17 years. Their son Jo is 16 months old. C worked as an administrative assistant for a large company prior to Jo’s birth. Je worked freelance for an international wire service. After the birth of their child, C stayed home while Je did freelance photography for a number of large clients. They rent an apartment in Vancouver.

A and Dr have been married for five years and have known each other a total of 12 years. Their daughter M is 15 months old. Prior to children, A was a teacher, and Dr worked for a computer company. After the arrival of M, A
continued to work full time as a teacher while Dr worked two days a week for
the computer firm, spending the remainder of his time caring for M and taking
on occasional free lance work. They live in an apartment in Burnaby.

K and P met in 1990 and married in 1993. M was born in 1995, followed by
Ch in 1998. Before marriage, K and P both worked in management roles for
the same large computer company. K has continued her employ with this
company, while P has been trying to develop his own small business. They
owned a townhouse in Vancouver when M was born, but recently bought a
large expensive home.

Interview

The intent of the interviews was to create a format allowing the participants
to freely relate their stories. A relaxed atmosphere and the introduction of as
little structure as possible were essential to the interview. Discussions were
conducted in whichever location was more convenient for the participants.
The ability to engage without interruption from children seemed to be the
primary concern.

Discourse began with the participants being thanked for their interest, time
and consideration. Qualifications were reiterated and it was stated that I was a
Masters’ student, and that this research study fulfilled my requirements for my
degree in Counseling Psychology. The purpose of the study was revisited at this time, and personal interests in this area were shared — specifically, that when I became a parent, I realized the challenges that resulted from this transition. I also stated that I hoped to elucidate the positive outcome having children can have on the spousal relationship.

In addition to explaining the purpose of the study and the confidential nature of it, the participants' options to withdraw at any time were also explained. Consent forms were distributed at this time for the participants' signatures (See Appendix C). Each participant was assured that his or her names would be concealed. Each partner was interviewed separately in order to retain as much integrity as possible. I felt that joint interviews could interfere with the process. I attempted to create the best atmosphere for honest, forthright discussions.

In order to establish rapport, orient the participants and to show respect for their own knowledge about the transition, participants were asked, depending on gender: “I’d like to start by asking you what you think might help or hurt a successful transition to parenthood for men/women in general?” Active listening skills were employed to clarify the participants’ responses. Participants appeared to feel comfortable enough to discuss the issue as an “expert” prior to discussing their own personal process.
The second stage of the interview concerned the participants' individual stories. Each was asked to discuss their life from the time of conception to present day. They were asked to pay special attention to how their personal relationship with their spouses evolved over this time. Participants appeared keen to begin sharing their own stories and without hesitation openly began talking. Close attention to the stories was paid, and skills such as attending and paraphrasing were employed. Occasionally they were offered anecdotes in order to enhance a connection with the participants or to indicate that I understood their feelings. Often humour was interjected, which was representative of the friendly atmosphere established.

The final part of the interview concerned how the participants viewed themselves compared with couples who were less successful. They were asked: “Not all couples are successful at dealing with this transition. What made the difference for you?” Although participants generally reiterated details from their narratives, occasionally new details emerged. In addition, this allowed them to encapsulate exactly what was important in terms of their successful transition.

All participants were asked how they felt about the interview, and if they were comfortable or uneasy. They all stated that the experience was positive and made them feel close to their partners.
Th interviews lasted between two and three hours. All interviews were tape-recorded

**Narrative Construction**

Narrative construction was systematic. Once the interviews were complete, they were transcribed verbatim. I first listened to the interviews to completely immerse myself in their entire stories. I was careful to listen for the meaning of the story. The taped interview was listened to once again while I followed the transcription. I highlighted and made notations in the margins about events, themes, values and comments that reflected the participants’ narratives as to how they managed a successful transition. Repeatedly listening to the discussions and reading the transcriptions enabled familiarization of the individual stories. Once in strong command of their stories, they were organized chronologically, thereby consolidating redundant descriptions into one classification. Cochran (1989) referred to this process by explaining that “the story is not falsified, but straightened or corrected from the disorder of circumstances, transient opinions, impositions and disruptions. The effect of straightening the story is to grasp the meaning of what has happened clearly.” (p. 75). Thus, narratives were created using the participants’ own words as
much as possible. I did not interject my own interpretation, but rather used a few words only to make obvious connections.

**Analysis of Narratives**

Once the eight stories were complete, they were systematically analyzed to identify common factors that contributed to the couples' successful transition to parenthood. Every individual obviously has a different story. These were not analyzed for similarity of events but instead for their resemblance of the meaning or significance behind that event or account. For example, couples reached different decisions pertaining to their division of roles. Regardless of how they divided their roles, the fact that they came to an agreement was significant.

Following the analysis of the narratives, broad categories were created to reflect the types of information found to be important. At this point Dr. Larry Cochran was consulted. He recommended that a few steps backwards be taken. He emphasized that it was imperative to analyze the narratives and transcripts line by line, highlighting significant sentences, paragraphs and/or themes. At this point, it became essential to reread all of the narratives and
transcripts to extract all thoughts, events, comments and/or feelings that related to the successful transition to parenthood.

Care was taken to reference significant themes or topics. After these were identified, separate sheets were made up for each individual, then the determination was made whether or not some examples could be collapsed under one theme. For example, there might have been several examples highlighting the husbands’ involvement at different stages. Concrete examples were put under headings, which reflected the meaning of his involvement, be it ‘Consideration for Partner’ or ‘Relationship Becomes more Functional’. Thus as I worked through my points I asked myself “what is the aim of this?” I was always searching for the meaning of what had enabled them to make a successful transition.

After collapsing points, a comparison of the couples was undertaken. A master list was created with the examples, and then I wrote the individual points on pieces of paper and spread them out on the floor. I grouped similar things together, looked for obvious redundancies and then collapsed further. I continued to ask myself, “can I go further?” I was framing the commonalities to weed out the superfluous, because people worded things differently and gave diverse examples. An illustration of this is how different participants shared the value of optimism. Some spoke clearly about the connection between their happiness and their partners’ or their own optimism. While some gave specific
examples of optimism, others illustrated it continually through their interviews by expressing positive thoughts and beliefs.

Once I had extracted all the commonalties, I separated the one's which all eight participants agreed upon. It had been previously decided that in order to be a common factor in this study, the factors needed to be common to all eight participants.

After completing the compilation of factors, individual stories and transcripts were rechecked to ensure that each factor had adequately captured individual experiences with regards to the couples' successful transition. It was imperative that all eight had evidence from their transcripts to support all of the common factors. I then met with my supervisor to refine and clarify the identifying terms and factors. A few examples were shifted to different categories, but overall it was established that the integrity was preserved and that there were 24 factors common to all participants that eased their transition to parenthood.

**Validation Interview**

Seven of the eight validation interviews were conducted at the participants' homes, and one was done at my home. Interviews ranged from 30 minutes to
one hour, which was an overt indication of their dedication to accuracy. All participants were passionate about retaining the integrity of their stories.

The participants were given a list of 24 factors (see Appendix A). They were then oriented with the following statement: “I have identified several commonalities across a number of couples. Some may reflect your experience, while others may not. My only concern is accuracy. This list is provided for you not simply to confirm, but to consider and reflect upon. Please ask yourself: ‘is this true in your experience?’” Participants were serious in their consideration, giving examples to clarify their meaning (See Appendix D).

Although most participants confirmed the validity of the factors extracted from the individual stories, some raised objections. The researcher was open to objections, asked for clarification and thanked the participants for their careful and honest consideration. I was able to determine that the appropriate meanings were uncovered from the examples and stories in the narratives. To illustrate, several dozen examples were extracted from the narratives and transcripts that were identified as ‘Respect for Partner’. During second interviews, these exact examples were reiterated verbatim.

The researcher again met with Dr. Larry Cochran and collaborated to determine any necessary changes. Modification of a few commonalities occurred, with ‘More Open Communication’ becoming ‘Open Communication’. Some participants had asserted that open communication
had always been intrinsic to their relationship and that having children had not altered it. Meaning was further refined in a couple of places. For instance, while the majority of the couples affirmed that they were materially content, it was determined as a result of two participants that the meaning needed to be restricted to the fact that birth of children was not thought to be financially cumbersome. After some minor changes all eight participants agreed to all of the 24 factors. Further, all eight had evidence from their transcripts to support all 24 factors.
CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Introduction

The interviews of four husbands and four wives yielded eight individual stories of the successful couples' transition to parenthood. Through analysis of these eight narratives, 24 factors were identified. In this study, a factor is first defined by a commonality among all eight people, and secondly by its relevance to aiding the transition. For presentation, these 24 factors were arranged into four groupings of convenience: Foundations for Parenthood, Maintenance of Spousal Relationships, Evolutions and Adjustments, and Support. Each factor was identified in these terms because of its role in forwarding a successful transition. All of these factors have been extracted from the transcripts and narratives and therefore are anchored in the story.

FOUNDATIONS FOR PARENTHOOD

This group of categories related to occurrences prior to the birth of the child. Presence of these factors reflected the couples' mental and physical preparedness for birth.
Deliberate Pregnancy

The major characteristic of this category is an active, cooperative decision that laid the foundation for future partnership in parenting. These couples did not accidentally become pregnant; all of them delayed parenthood to differing extents, until both members in the relationship were committed. Participants described a feeling of cohesiveness as they embarked on this journey. Feelings of regret or ambivalence were absent from these couples, allowing them to move forward in unison.

Examples

I was ready to become a parent, and felt that it was perfectly natural. I was old enough that I had lived a really full life. Through my work I had seen a lot, experienced a lot and was ready to focus and make my number one priority being a parent. Not travel or golf or anything else – the timing was great.

We moved into this stage without feeling that we were missing out because we’d already done things that we really wanted to for ourselves.

I was in my mid-thirties so we were definitely ready; we did not feel that we were missing out on anything. We had done the parties and had had lots of fun.

Even though A was ready before I was, we waited until we were both ready to start a family. By the time we started trying, I was definitely ready.
Material Contentedness

The prevalent feeling amongst these couples was that they were secure and that parenthood would not impose undue financial stresses. While the couples might have wanted more monetary gains, their financial situations were secure enough for needs to be met and affairs to be managed adequately after the birth of their children.

The couples' financial circumstances varied considerably. States of affairs ranged from renting condominiums and paying off debts to owning an expensive home and having an income of six figures. Some couples had modest financial goals; others were lofty. The sacrifices and priorities each couple emphasized were different, but the underlying feeling of security was unanimously present. Due to the reduction of finance as a worry, a major source of stress was minimized, allowing the couples to concentrate on the transition to be achieved.

Examples

We don't make a lot of money, but I don't feel like I need anything more right now. I'm happy with what I have... We talk about it sometimes. We live in a complex that looks like a co-op. It doesn't have a beautiful yard or anything and we just talk about what is
important. I can't even think of something. Maybe I would want another vehicle because we only have one, but I really don't need it because we live so close to everything.

We make a decent amount of money so we are never in danger of not having food or not being able to pay the rent or not being able to run a car or not being able to buy clothes for M.

Our financial situation made the transition easier. It wasn’t stressful me not working (during pregnancy leave) because we had enough money to cover the mortgage. We had plenty of financial capabilities to make those first 6 months very, very easy. We had a home. We weren’t worried about what we would do for childcare, what the stress of childcare would do on our financial situation. It was all budgeted for in advance.

**Achieved Satisfactory Financial Arrangement**

While financial security was adequate, each had to make new arrangements to accommodate the lifestyle change. Issues such as who would take care of the children and how they would pay for this, or how they would manage finances if one person stopped working outside of the home, came to light. Although individuals made sacrifices in order to meet their priorities, they were fortunate enough to find common ground with respect to the future. With one exception, the couples had one of the members’ financial positions enhanced, thereby opening up opportunities with respect to role choices. Since the majority of couples enjoyed an increase in one partner’s earnings, the possibility existed for one individual in each marriage to stay home with the child. In all of
the cases, the couples decided against pursuing their maximum earning potential.

Two of the four couples decided that one parent would temporarily sacrifice their career to stay at home. One couple decided that the father would work two days per week outside of the home and spend the remainder of his time being a stay-at-home father. In one case, although both parents continued to work, the priority was mutually decided to be on the husband’s career. Financial security in this case allowed the mother to reduce her workload outside of the home to four days per week, without creating undue additional stress. Both of these couples derived benefits from their consensus with regard to financial and career priorities. To illustrate, one member of the spousal unit was not prevented from staying at home with the child simply because they were unable to come to an agreement. Also, there was no conflict due to competing needs such as both wanting to stay at home, or one feeling strongly that both needed to continue to work. Acquisition of a satisfactory financial arrangement is one less stress the couples needed to be concerned with.

Examples

Fortunately at the time when we lost my income, F’s income increased dramatically. So I don’t feel like our life has been all that, I mean I definitely have to scrimp more, cut down and change priorities…
It's because my job is better; I'm like the big earner. D's job is more flexible. He works 2 days a week. It works out to 60%, almost 70% of salary because he works at home too.

The only stressful period we had during that time was P was changing jobs and careers. But again, because I felt I had a good career and good financial situation, and we weren't over-extended mortgage-wise or anything like that so it wasn't much of a worry.

Agreement to Division of Roles

When a couple has a child, they suddenly find that they have new tasks, worries and responsibilities that they did not previously. There is a consequent danger of role strain, overload and stress. The successful couples in this study met this overload by arranging complementary division of roles. For example, one husband, Dr, stays at home the majority of the time taking care of M, while his wife, A, who makes more money, works full time. K and P who both work full time have made different arrangements. K is home earlier to arrange dinner and feed the children when necessary. Her husband P picks up the slack on weekends, almost exclusively feeding the children their meals.

The decision-making process concerning the division of roles was respectful, taking into consideration family needs and the strengths of each partner. Although the majority of the couples found their roles dramatically altered following the arrival of the baby, both members worked together to find proper symmetry.
Examples

For me it wasn’t a difficult decision because A makes more money than I do. She’s in a job, working as a teacher, where she has summers off, and holidays at Christmas and Easter. My job wasn’t like that… when we discovered that we were going to have a baby, it was like, “okay let’s start making some serious plans about this”… I knew in the back of my mind even if it had gotten to the point where I had to say to my office “well, you can either have me part-time or you can’t have me at all” that I was comfortable with that.

I never wanted to go back. So for me, a big factor was being able to stay at home. I always wanted to be a stay-at-home mum. Even though I was very serious about my career because I like a challenge and I’m ambitious, I always wanted to be at home, and he’s always wanted the traditional home too. We decided together. It has just worked out. We have been very lucky with the timing financially.

I value my independence and that’s important to me. Even though I continue to have lots of responsibility in my job, I managed to change jobs so that there wasn’t as much time requirement. It’s important for me to feel like I was still an equal partner in the marriage, so I didn’t have to go through that change.

I tend to feed them weekend meals. Also, when we go out socially for any dinner, guess where Ch and M sit – next to me. I look over at K and she grins at me, so I guess that is an understanding we just happen to have.

MAINTENANCE OF SPOUSAL RELATIONSHIP

Factors such as respect for partner, commitment to intimacy, desire to resolve differences, consideration for partner, openness of communication and
the healthy maintenance of the marital relationship are examined in this chapter. All of these factors were present prior to conception and following the birth of the child.

**Respect for Partner**

All eight participants reported deep respect for their partners. They may have emphasized different characteristics of their partners when describing their respect for them such as competency, intelligence, strength of character or warmth. However, the overall impression each individual had for their partner indicated that they took pleasure in them as a person and were proud of them. Without exception, all reported that this was the single most important factor of their marriages. Their respect for their partner created a strong foundation, allowing them latitude in working through a taxing transition.

**Examples**

I have always had respect for De. To me, that is the key ingredient to having a successful relationship. If things are too lopsided, there can be major problems. De is my equal. She does great things. I’ve always been very proud of that.

I feel deep respect for Dr. It doesn’t mean we don’t have disagreements, but it is so much easier to come out of them. Living with him and working through issues is very easy for me because of my
deep respect for him. I respected him before, and I respect him now. I find parenting so much more difficult than he does. He parents well and never complains.

I love and respect P, which is they key to the success of our relationship.

I have respect for F's values – how he conducts himself with others, how fair and kind he is regarding judgements of others.

**Commitment to Intimacy**

Every couple made an active effort to maintain intimacy after the baby was born. Although the couples’ ability to obtain childcare varied and thus were not always able to obtain physical breaks from their child, in each case the couple demonstrated a commitment to intimacy through their efforts and actions. These efforts towards intimacy were specifically oriented towards the couple relationship versus the family relationship. Examples of a couple’s attempt to maintain intimacy ranged from date nights to daily rituals such as physical affirmation of their love for one another. Commitment to the success of the couples’ relationship was strong. Couples felt loved and valued and believed it influenced their ability to experience fulfillment in their new role.
Examples

He does sweet little things, like getting up early in the morning and kissing me before he leaves, even though I'm sleeping. He always phones to say "good morning" to us. He is very cuddly. It's always been important to have physical affirmation of his feelings for me.

A long time ago, we made a commitment never to go to sleep angry.

What I find is that we just try and go out, period. When it works for both of us. One of us will say "wouldn't it be nice to go out for dinner". Having a nanny helps. Last summer once the kids were in bed and the nanny was watching TV, we would just go out for a walk. It was wonderful.

We have always had date nights. My parents live next door and A's live close by. We have one night a week alone, to go to a movie or out to dinner. It keeps us together.

Desire to Work towards Resolutions

In this study, the couples felt a common desire to resolve differences. Couples found that the demands of parenthood increased their motivation to resolves issues quickly. Children naturally place demands on parents, necessitating consistent communication. Parental roles involve the daily coordination of tasks and activities for both children and parents. Some couples experienced an increased desire to work towards resolutions after their child’s birth, while others reported that this was integral to the success of their
relationship from day one. De and F, whose conflict style is loud and fervent, reported that passionate arguments reflect their strong personalities and did not interfere with their loving relationship. In fact, they reported that it allowed them to express their emotions and concerns and then move forward quickly. It was noted with this couple that both independently reported a shift, representing a desire to decrease the quantity of conflict and also to better understand their partners’ motivations. All of the couples reported that issues were not overlooked nor left to disrupt the family equilibrium.

Examples

I mean the amazing part is either now I’m getting too tired or older, but where we used to butt heads and not give in, I’m now finding that we are going back and forth and giving in a lot quicker. De wants to paint green walls. I told her any colour but green. She comes home with these green samples. Not so long ago, there would be no way I would have given in to green walls. It would have been a heated battle. Now, she is going to get green walls. I go “okay, she’s not just doing this to piss me off, she is doing this because she really thinks green is good.”

P and I have had blowups, but we always talk it out. There is even a greater desire now that we have kids. A number of couples we know are separating or going through bad marital problems. We’ve spent a lot of time talking and asking ourselves “how does this happen?” We say we can’t see it happening to us because we’d rather settle our differences than walk away.

We want to finish what we start, even if it’s small things like how clean the house is. We are working even more towards coming to the same
resolutions. Now with M we have less time to waste and more riding on it – we want to agree.

Demonstrable Consideration for Partner

All couples expressed care and concern for their partner. They were thoughtful of their partner, and were willing to sacrifice their own needs or desires to care for their partners'. Forfeitures ranged from very small to quite big, from cleaning the house to staying up all night with the infant so that their mate could rest. Individuals showed care for their partners' feelings and needs, and acted accordingly. These acts of consideration were performed spontaneously and reflected the partners’ ability to assess whose needs were greater. Participants reported that these acts of consideration were indicative of the strength of their relationships and the love they felt for each other.

Examples

We always show consideration for each other. He shows me a lot of consideration. When I am tired he takes M out for a walk. If I need time for myself, he lets me go out without any guilt trip at all. I’m sure it’s a sacrifice for him to do that.

He’s got to have something where he has an outlet because he can’t work all the time. He used to mountain bike, ski and play a lot more tennis. He’s always been very athletic. So even though I’d like to have
him around, I don’t really like to say no to golf because he needs an outlet.

I asked F how he would feel if I took on the job of President at N’s school because it meant I would be spending a lot of time working on this and that he would have N alone more in the evenings. He said, “I think you should do it”. He really feels that it’s important for me to have my own things.

I am the more social one out of the two of us. It is a need – I have to be with other adults. In order to be sensitive to P’s personality and to meet my own needs, I make conscious efforts to arrange the majority of our weekend events with his close friends. It’s not that he would ever complain... He always rises to the occasion.

P is even more considerate of me. He’ll notice that I’m not feeling well, and will let me sleep in, or I know when he has had a rough time so he gets the extra sleep. Two nights ago he pulled his arm while getting into bed and the girls have colds. Now I wouldn’t even consider asking him to get out of bed. I did all of the jumping out of the bed all night long. He wasn’t feeling well, so how could I do that to him? It’s a real give and take.

**Commitment to Relationship**

All of these couples believed that their marriage was solid and permanent. They were committed to working at their relationship to ensure its longevity. Although in some cases the commitment increased after having children, all couples felt solid and secure in their marriage prior to conception. This commitment supplied them with the feeling that while there were new challenges as a result of parenthood, they could work through their disagreements without feeling threatened or that their marriage was at stake.
Examples

I have always been committed to this relationship. I thought of it as a permanent relationship when we got married, but now inevitably so because we have kids. It cements the relationship in a way that is irrevocable, which I love – it’s great. It makes the relationship in some ways more secure even if it wasn’t insecure before.

There is a higher sense of responsibility now that we have N, but not a change in commitment. When we got married, I was convinced it would be forever. We wouldn’t have had N is we hadn’t thought so, and in my mind it hasn’t changed one bit.

We’ve never thought of relationships as disposable. We’re always working towards making our marriage better.

We always verbally tell each other that we are committed to this relationship. We’ve talked about it because some of our friends are separating. Are they just not talking or not listening? If we ever thought there was a problem, we would immediately go to counseling.

Open Communication

Parenthood naturally increases the demands placed on one’s time. Maintaining open channels of communication requires more effort merely due to time restraints. These couples freely expressed their feelings and beliefs regarding both their personal needs and family issues. Although actual quantity of intimate conversation decreased as a result of the demands of child rearing,
couples expressed confidence in their knowledge of their partners’ perspective. They reported that this was due to the fact that they checked in regularly to see how each was feeling and openly discussed new issues which arose as a result of parenthood. In addition, all of the couples emphasized during the interviews that they were careful to explicitly ask their partners if they were satisfied in their new roles. These participants stated that they could and would say anything heartfelt to their partners. They independently reported no hidden feelings or resentments. Daily communication became more practical, but if issues arose, they were dealt with openly.

Examples

We’ve always had open and lively conversations. We speak our minds. There is nothing we won’t discuss and no issue that can’t be resolved.

Our communication has increased on a practical level. We check in with each other in order to see what needs to be done. Our leisure communication has decreased because of the lack of time and because we’re both preoccupied with M. We’ve always been open with each other; it’s part of our relationship. We certainly don’t feel a need to impress each other any more, but that happened before M was born.

Having a solid relationship up front is important because of the stress you go through. We communicate more now, and if we were not trusting to say stuff, that would be difficult. We didn’t know what to expect having a kid, but we knew that whatever it was, we could handle it.
Sharing Short and Long Term Goals

Parenthood demands a test of priorities. Goal sharing, both short- and long-term, is vast and might include an increased need for outside interests, plans for an evening out, parenting, family planning, career aspirations, financial goals and educational planning. Even though some couples reported that goal setting was very limited, during the interviews all of these couples independently reported identical aspirations in the short-term and goals for the future. It was evident in their narratives that even if they were consciously unaware of their goal setting or did not label many of their changed priorities as 'goal setting', their patterns of communications resulted in shared visions.

Examples

We have similar long-term goals. We both want to buy a house and we have five-year goals as far as work. He wants to work less out of the home and I want to continue working. We both have that goal – it's the same.

I'm more of a goal setter than he is. Through discussions, I know we have the same goals. We're lucky because we look at situations similarly.
Know What to Expect from Spouse

When a couple has children, it results in additional complexities and may produce stress while adaptation to these challenges is experienced. The ability to know how one’s partner handles stress, what types of things will cause it, and how that stress will be acted out translates to individuals not being disappointed or shocked by new revelations of their partners personality. For example, if one person lets off steam by being moody and reclusive, a partner who is aware and who has previously developed the ability to cope with this is better off than one who has not. Despite the fact that each person expressed having difficulties with regards to aspects of parenting, their reaction to these difficulties did not become problems of their own.

Examples

There is generally no circumstance that I’m taken out of left field by her reaction. I know that she can be emotional and I know what things to avoid so that she won’t become upset. Most importantly, I am completely secure in my knowledge that she will take care of M and do it well.

People react in different ways. In stressful situations, people do different things and there is no right or wrong. It’s stressful and some people flip out, but the stress will come and if your mate doesn’t understand how you are going to cope with it, the dynamics of how you end up dealing with these problems then become problems of their own. Again, we have arguments and we have flaws, but there are
no things that I go “well, she does things this way, and this is driving me nuts and it’s something that I can’t live with or something that I didn’t know about.” So then all you have to do is cope with the new addition to your family.

Recognize How to Negotiate with Spouse

The couples in this study not only knew how each would react to the new stresses produced as a result of parenthood, but also how to work through contentious issues. Individuals were aware that they could not always “win the arguments”. Hence, they were able to engage in conflict with their spouse without fear of recrimination, and ultimately to come to a resolution.

Couples’ style of conflict resolution varied dramatically. Some couples, such as A and Dr, rarely argued, and when working through issues developed a successful routine. A was the worrier who thought about the issues and then brought them to Dr to talk to him about them. Dr, although previously unaware of her concern, then thought up possible solutions. For example, A was unsatisfied with the amount of cleaning Dr was doing, since he became the stay-at-home dad. She thought about the issue and after realizing how much it troubled her, brought it to Dr’s attention. After trying out a few solutions, Dr came up with idea of creating a chart, which outlined in minute detail the housework that needed to be done. He placed the list on the fridge and ticked
off the various chores as he accomplished them. This inability to recognize what needed to be done was compensated by this chart.

De and F, on the other hand, had a more passionate approach: when issues came up, they argued fervently and, after resolution, moved forward. For example, F may have come home and complained that the house wasn’t clean enough, De would react loudly, and they’d engage and work it out. No residual feeling of resentment would spill over.

The need to collaborate increases during the transition to parenthood. Adjustments demanding changes in patterns of the relationships and in daily routines become more prevalent. For this reason, the "right fit" a propos conflict style is key. Thus, style of communication is irrelevant as long as both individuals are comfortable with it and are able to work towards resolutions.

Examples

It explodes and then it usually goes away. It’s never kept inside. I’ll come home and complain that the house is dirty and she’ll go “aaahh”. Then that’s it. We get on with the way things are. We have never really held back. If we have something on our minds or we don’t like what the other one is going to say, the delivery can be improved on, but we say, “well, it’s out of the way”. That’s mostly our personality. That usually fuels the fire and then “poof!” it goes away and life goes back to normal.
I negotiate with A on important issues. Usually what happens is that A will have a strong opinion about something and I won’t, so I just go along with it.

We disagree but we don’t fight. I’m not argumentative at all. In my opinion, fights and arguments are beyond whatever the issue is you are discussing. If you are actually fighting with each other then you are not actually dealing with whatever started the fight. In our relationship, this has been a real plus because of who we are and it is probably one of the reasons why we decided to get married.

Optimistic Atmosphere Supplied by One or Both Partners

There are some moments of parenthood that seem interminable. Newborns who sleep infrequently can range from a source of stress to a temporary hurdle to clear. Limitations placed on one’s freedom can be viewed as excessively weighty, or as a welcome change of routine and a reflection of new priorities. Within each of these four couples, at least one partner benefited from their partner’s optimism. An optimistic frame of mind lent support to difficult situations. In some cases, both partners were optimists, whereas in other cases a balance was obtained between one partner’s pessimism and the other’s optimism. In all cases, optimism was reported as influencing the couples’ state of mind concerning both their relationships and the challenges of parenthood. Optimism was reported to open up new ways of looking at situations and created positive energy and perspective.
Examples

There is a lot of life left to go and so far we really haven't got any reason to be depressed. It's hard and stressful, but you look around and you go "wow..." There is no way I could ever go to bed depressed, I can go to bed tired and I certainly do a lot of nights, but I can't be depressed because we have a great family. We lucked out.

P and I complement each other. He is unbelievably positive. Where I get stressed and worry that everything isn't perfect, P is more content. He is a truly grounded person and I benefit from being able to look at the world through his eyes.

I remember A saying at the time that it seemed like it would never end (colicky baby screaming every night). I didn't really get that feeling. Even though I hadn't done it before, I knew it wasn't going to last forever. It helped me to be able to say "maybe it will be a few months, maybe a year or whatever, but ultimately that's not a very long time. We'll be able to slog through it and then things will be better one way or another". Again, optimism. Thinking, "okay, it will get better than this when it is hard". It never was really hard.

EVOLUTIONS AND ADJUSTMENTS

Once a couple has had a child, there is a series of evolutions and adjustments that occur. Changes in attitude, feelings and behaviour have been explored. Some came about as a result of considerable effort, while others may simply have happened without conscious thought. For example, freedom to
pursue individual interests spontaneously is restricted once a child is born. The ability to recognize the continued need for outside interests may take time. Negotiation regarding childcare must then be satisfied before this can occur. Things, which prior to children may have appeared effortless and automatic, take considerable thought and compromise. On the other hand, some of the changes that occur happen instantly without thought or preparation. Bonding with one's newborn can be instinctive and may happen completely without effort. Successfully adjusting to the demands of parenthood can reflect the couples' ability to act as a partnership.

Common Bond with Spouse

Couples reported that they felt a strong bond with their spouse once they knew that they were expecting a child. They experienced a sense of being connected together in a more unique, very personal and special way. The child was not the only common bond that the couple had, but was reported to be unique in its strength and permanence.

Examples

This sense of bonding together was very strong when I was pregnant. It was almost overwhelming for both of us. I can’t explain it because it
was so overwhelming. When you see a couple with a baby you say, “that’s nice”. When it actually happens to you, it’s very powerful.

Our laughter might not be as much as it used to be because we aren’t in those situations, I think of it this way: our common thread and our love is the stem. We are all petals on the stem. The stem just gets stronger with every petal that grows on it as opposed to weaker.

If anything, our relationship is stronger because we share this little person. We don’t just love each other; we have love for her. It’s just one more thing we have in common.

**Bonded with Newborn**

All four husbands were alongside their wives, supporting them, at the birth of their child. At the moment of birth, the eight participants experienced an immediate and profound connection. For the majority of the individuals, this bond continued to gain strength from that moment onward. The exception was the one couple who had a colicky child. This temporarily lessened the bonding process for one of the parents, who found that connecting with a crying infant created some challenges. Nevertheless, the instant sense of attachment between the parent and newborn existed. Parents felt a strong desire to care, protect and love their newborn, which did not wane in spite of many hardships.
Examples

Bonding with him was so natural for both of us. We both wanted to be with him a lot.

As soon as he was born, there was never a doubt in my mind, this is my kid and I love her to death. The first six months were hectic, but once the baby started interacting more, the bond grew even stronger.

I bonded immediately.

I felt an immediate bond.

Shift in Focus to Family Unit

Couples without children are able to enjoy more individual freedom. Once a child enters into the equation, necessity requires that more emotional and physical energy be focused on the new family unit. The shift from centering one’s thoughts, concerns and energies on oneself and one’s partner to the blossoming family can be arduous. Couples reported a considerable change in priorities. Along with the necessary redirection of physical energy towards the infant, one’s emotional mindset in connection with the family unit, it’s healthy growth and perseverance, all occurred. Many of the couples made substantial adjustments to their lives, with some amending or sacrificing careers in order to be at home with their children. Couples reported an emerging solidarity as they moved from couplehood to parenthood. Individuals reported that as a result,
their spouses similarly shifted their focus to the family unit, thereby cementing their relationship further.

Examples

The strongest change I notice is that my life is now focused on M, on my family. Even though I still do things with my friends, it's hard to relate to friends without children. I now have less time and less inclination to do stuff outside of the family. I'd rather do stuff with A, or with A and M.

Really the secondary things are not as important. I used to define myself by other things: my career, my hobbies. Now I'm dad.

Our focus has really shifted. We now spend most of our time with our own family as well as our extended families.

I've chosen not to go back to work because my family is more important right now.

I've always wanted to be a stay-at-home mum. I like to do things with other mums, N's school and now we're making plans to redecorate. You really notice your home more when you are in it all the time. Even though I'm not working, and funny enough I don't have any desire to go back to work and certainly not in the same career. Maybe a different career. And never full-time again. I always want to be available for N. Even when she's in school to go on field trips or whatever.

I think the biggest issue is that I realized that I was responsible for another human life, that I had to take care of someone who is dependent every second of the day. All of a sudden, my life had so much meaning I'm ready. I can sacrifice the rest of my life to let him have a really good life. Now I can spend the time that is needed with him or the next two or three or how many kids we have. To spend the
time that is really, really necessary for them to have a successful childhood and to be real, whole people.

Pursue Individual Interests Outside of the Home

Parenthood can feel overwhelming because of the dramatic shift in lifestyle that is centred on the newborn. One can easily imagine how parents can become exclusively focused on their evolving family life. Common to the individuals in this study was that they all developed or maintained outside interests after parenthood.

Some couples had limited activities outside of their marriage and family life, while others’ were extensive. Some individuals found that their careers satisfied this need for outside activities, while others pursued activities that meshed more fluidly with their new roles. For example, Je found that his career offered a variety of interesting opportunities, satisfying his need for extracurricular activities. De meanwhile found that, as a full time mum, she needed to be creative in satisfying her needs and thus became actively involved in a number of activities which indirectly involved her daughter. While most couples ideally would relish more freedom to pursue additional extracurricular interests, they had satisfactorily maintained or developed supplementary activities. Balancing parental roles with outside personal pursuits was reported to create equilibrium, thereby ameliorating the transition to parenthood.
Examples

When I lost my job, I said to Je, “if I’m not going to work, I have to do something for myself. Like I have to make a point of doing something.” So I joined a running club and I joined a book club.

I’m president of N’s school. I exercise once a week and I used to be on the Strata Council. A lot of the things I do are related to N. It’s not an issue for either of us though. In many ways, both of us do a lot more outside of the home than we did before because way back then we both were working full time, and we’d come home exhausted and watch TV.

I try to. I make an effort. I have a couple of pastimes I quite enjoy, fishing for example. So I try to do a couple of things for myself a year. Usually it’s around my father. I also joined Young Presidents Association and I’m on the Board for the Space Centre.

New Capacities Developed

New parents are not taught how to deal with the challenges that confront them and the ensuing feelings that arise. The couples in this study found themselves acquiring new traits, attitudes and skills. Capacities reported ranged from learning how to care for their infant and how to respectfully parent, to shifts vis-à-vis the meaning of life and the development of new traits. Participants reported many positive changes that occurred as a result of parenthood, both intrapersonally and interpersonally.
Examples

It's amazing. When you have kids you re-live your childhood. You look at things differently. You look at things that you have not noticed before. The fact that it is there makes you make a point of it.

As an adult, you can lose your capacity to be amazed. The sense of wonderment is rekindled. Snow becomes something special versus a nuisance to overcome. What you do unconsciously every day as an adult becomes interesting as you watch your child learn and struggle to master those skills. Through your child you learn new things about your spouse as you share childhood stories. As a result of taking care of M, I've also learned a particular variety of patience. I've developed a willingness to not care about what I'm going to accomplish during a given time. If M needs me, I can more easily let go of those expectations. As a result, I don't feel as rushed in all aspects of my life.

I've developed more patience with N and because of that I have more patience with De. I just don't let things get to me as much.

I never realized I had the capacity to love like this.

All of a sudden my life had so much meaning.

Became Comfortable in Managing Child’s Demands

In addition to the new capacities developed, participants expressed that there came a point in time when they felt more capable of meeting their child’s needs. The majority of new parents in this study initially felt beset by the changes in their lives and the demands of their newborns. The progression of
adaptation varied considerably for each individual, depending on their own personal strengths, and differences with regard to the children’s temperaments. However, all of the parents eventually felt in control and capable of understanding their child’s needs and how best to meet them. This does not preclude the parents from feeling perpetually challenged in their roles, since the developmental growth of a child brings about new changes, as do siblings. Getting out of the house, bathing the infant or breast-feeding may present major hurdles initially, but over time a parent can feel more equipped and capable of handling their roles and the changing challenges, even as they consistently evolve.

Examples

I’m comfortable with dealing with all the ups and downs. I know that patience is really important when parenting. Challenging her wasn’t going anywhere. So I’ve changed a lot. I’m really comfortable that way. I’ve learned what works and what doesn’t. I’ve also learned to pick my “no’s”. For example. Right now she is up there in bed with a bathing suit on underneath her pajamas, I wouldn’t have done that a while ago. Now I realize that is not one of the things that really matters.

Finding out how she and I are going to work together was important. You grow into a role and her demands change too. It was made easier because she grew and I don’t have another child. I just became comfortable in my new life.
Involvement of Husband

All fathers in this study were extraordinarily physically and emotionally involved with their children. With one exception, the fathers were absorbed from the moment of birth. Although one father was not as physically involved at the outset with his newborn, he reported subsequent bonding, particularly when his child became interactive, resulting in increased involvement. His perception near the beginning was that his wife was easily handling the transition and that his energies would be best focused on his demanding career.

High degrees of father participation were reported to produce increased respect for their partner, decreased feelings of stress, and a sense of team and partnership. The fathers recounted strong bonding with their infants, which they attributed to their involvement. The participation of the husbands studied was at such a high level that it was consistently referred to throughout the transcripts. References by the wives to the benefits acquired as a result of their husbands’ involvement were abundant. It was clear that this factor profoundly influenced these couples’ transitions to parenthood.
Examples

When M first came home, P ran around doing things for me. One thing we laugh about is when P went out to the drugstore and came home and presented to me, like a bottle of wine, stool softeners he had bought for me! So he was doing stuff like that and because M wasn't latching, we stayed on a bottle. P did the middle of the night feeds that first week. I got all my sleep back in my first week and then I was able to cope. In fact, P gave 90% of the bottles. I really think what makes the difference for me is P's ability to pitch in. He's amazing.

She had colic from 5:00 to 10:00pm. Dr would work until about six, and so by the time he was home, I had had enough. As soon as he got home he would take the baby and start walking around with her and I would eat my dinner. He would then take her out in the snuggly so I could sleep from about 7:00 - 10:00pm. He would take her to Starbucks up the street. They knew her when she was seven days old. That was nice for me that he did that. And he loved it.

I'm seriously emotionally and physically involved — completely. As soon as she tested positive, I was involved. I went to most of her appointments with our GP and the obstetrician, I went to the ultrasound and we attended prenatal classes. We both read a lot of books about pregnancy. I was there at the birth and now I'm a stay-at-home dad.

He took an active role as father. So when I got up to nurse, we would talk in bed together. We had these great talks at three in the morning. He would always change Jo. That was his thing. We didn't even talk about it. Like it was just the way it happened from day one. I changed Jo once in the hospital.
Roles Became More Functional

Independent adults in this study found that role changes created interdependence. In some aspects, this factor reflected the loss of a carefree relationship where two individuals coexisted independently. Prior to having children, participants reported that they were able to be more egocentric. After the birth of their baby, childcare efforts were required from both parents in order to make the household run smoothly. Evidence of this was witnessed in patterns of conversation. More communication was needed to coordinate family activities, chores and meals. Successfully shifting from an independent to interdependent relationship reflects these couples' ability to meet the new demands of their family life without unwarranted stress being placed on one or both members of the spousal unit.

Examples

We definitely talk more about what we’re going to do. We’re very interdependent. I’ve put some things onto him and I’ve taken on some things myself. Neither of us is doing enough now to support itself on its own. With both of us working together, it works really well.

Our roles have become more defined. Before we were single people who were married. We both had our own careers. There was so much more freedom to do whatever we wanted.
It's hard. We always say it's hard, but we are in it together. We realize that. Before we had children, we were living together and enjoying each other. We are a team, working together. I really rely on him as opposed to him just being there.

There is a need there. You can really tell when someone goes away and leaves you with the children. You can really feel the impact. As a role, if you look at what you both do, there is a need there. It is very, very structured around the needs of the kids.

Satisfaction with One's Role

Role changes represent new beginnings. Sometimes when roles change, individuals can become unhappy. The participants in this study, alternatively, had positive assessments of their new roles. The degrees of satisfaction varied: for some the role changes represented fulfillment of a dream, while for others it signified the best case scenario. One individual, F, felt strain within his role as principal breadwinner, as a result of the level of his responsibilities and his ensuing stress. However, he believed that despite this, he would rather maintain his role as the sole breadwinner to ensure both his wife’s happiness and his daughter’s ability to be at home with her mother. Another, K, saw her role as career woman evolving. K and her husband strategized, opting for both partners to work outside of the home until they reached a level where their lifestyle would not be threatened. Ultimately, their roles will change within a few years, ideally allowing her to stay at home.
All of the other individuals were extremely content with their new roles. High levels of self-fulfillment were reported to reflect their increased levels of inner peace. Personal happiness of one member of the spousal unit will undoubtedly affect the other member. Role satisfaction was communal within these couples and reflected the happiness they felt in their personal and family lives.

Examples

I know the priority I place on being a provider versus a parent. Societal pressure for the man to be the worker could have caused a lot of stress. Being a bit older may have helped me be able to identify the fact that I really look at my job as being a parent and then everything else comes after that.

Having a baby adds an element of complexity to your life, which can act as the catalyst for one to determine and define what you want and who you are. We have more choices today with respect to career and there are a lot of strong opinions with respect to those choices. I want to work so I do. It's like working around having the kid helps you to really define what you want and who you are.

I would have had a really hard time if I had to go back to work and leave this little person with somebody else, because I would have been really unhappy, which would have been a real strain on our relationship. When he's not happy, it really affects me. So I imagine if I were that unhappy it would have affected him. I've always been traditional, doing the cooking, shopping and household things. It would have been tough to work full time, come home to N and also to run a household. Now, yes, I have hard times, but I'm doing what I've always wanted to do.
I'm really lucky, I love my work, and I love to go to work. It's hard for me to leave J and C. I really enjoy being with them but it's a reality that I have to go to work. So I never, ever dread leaving them and I come home happy. I love what I do and I come home tired, but I come home knowing that I'm happy to be with them. I come home usually more fulfilled from my job.

SUPPORT

New parents are faced with additional emotional and physical challenges. Much of the support they garner is from each other. This last section encompasses external support, addressing the emotional and physical backing given by those outside of the spousal unit.

External Support

All couples experienced increased chores and responsibilities. The availability and use of external support, including help from professional and non-professional sources was reported to be an effective way to feel less overwhelmed. The types of support ranged from emotional support through acceptance, encouragement and advice, to physical support such as help with childcare, housekeeping and meal preparation. While external support came into play at different stages of the transition, it was most evident during the
early months postpartum, when the new parents felt most isolated and overwhelmed.

C and Je, who had limited external support, found that knowledge of its availability allowed for peace of mind. Their families live out of town and therefore they had limited support when JJ was a newborn. Yet the couple reported that the support they did have contributed to the sense of ‘not being alone’. Thus, they didn’t ask for much external help, but knew that if there were a problem, support would be there.

Examples

The first two weeks, my mum came over every day and helped cook, clean and take care of M. After the first two weeks, mum would help out regularly twice a week and would be available other times if I needed her. Often I would go visit mum. It helped me not feel so isolated.

I was at the end of my rope. That’s when the women descended.

In the first couple of weeks, mum was great. She was over a lot. She lives close by, so I can have her around when I need her. And I had friends that brought meals and stuff, so that always helped.
Participant Validation of Factors

Analysis of the eight narratives yielded 24 commonalities. These factors were subsequently taken back to the participants in order to ensure accuracy (See Appendix A). Each participant was asked to consider and reflect upon each factor and to ask themselves “is this true in your experience?” They were encouraged to give their personal perspectives. Clarification was provided when requested.

Evidence existed that roles were taken seriously. Individuals were explicitly told that they were to validate or invalidate the factors presented to them. I first read the factor aloud, and then the participants looked for clarification when needed. It was apparent that they were invested in their stories being accurately reflected through these commonalities. Commonalities were adjusted to ensure that the meaning was true for all of the participants.

On the whole, participants tended to validate the factors first by offering details, and secondly by direct affirmation. Some new details emerged, but overall the participants reiterated what had been said in the initial interview. Final interviews varied in length from 20 minutes to one hour.
CHAPTER V
DISCUSSION

Introduction

In this interview study, the research question posed was: "How do couples make a successful transition to parenthood?" The focus of this chapter is to address the significance of the research findings, the implications for counseling practice and a basis for future research. A comparative analysis of the eight stories and transcripts engendered 24 factors, which were indicative of a successful transition. A factor, therefore, is a commonality that contributes to the positive adjustment to parenthood. Thus, in order to be labeled a factor not only must it clearly contribute to a positive adjustment but also it must be common to all eight participants. These factors were organized into four categories: Foundations for Parenthood, Maintenance of Spousal Relationship, Evolutions and Adjustments, and Support (see Appendix E).

Limitations of the Research

The presented research on couples' successful transition to parenthood shared limitations common to interview/narrative research. These findings are not able to be generalized to a population, and are exploratory in nature. This
methodology relied on replication of common results to form a pattern of the successful transition to parenthood. In this study, eight participants exhibited common themes in their transitions. This does not infer that such a pattern is common to all successful couples. The sample was small and limited to middle and upper-middle class Caucasian couples. Results refer only to the eight participants of this study. It was not the purpose of this study to generalize, but rather to elicit the broad range of factors that would help couples maintain a positive relationship as they moved through the transition to parenthood. Future studies will be needed to determine generalization of the categories.

The study was also limited by the fact that only one interviewer collected the narratives. The researcher’s perspective and understanding may have affected what emerged. Although another researcher may have extracted different factors, I endeavoured to address potential biases by use of the following procedures. Care was taken to impartially stimulate a broad discussion of the participants’ individual processes. Factors were reviewed by the individuals to check for accuracy and were adjusted as necessary. The supervisor also vigilantly reviewed all factors.

A third limitation was that the participants were limited by their own awareness. There might be other factors which were prevalent but beyond their own conscious awareness level. This limitation is recognized and accepted as being inherent in interview research.
The final restriction was the fact that the researcher chose retrospective accounts of adjustments to parenthood. The logic for this was that the interviewer was interested in an account that included some perspective, since previous interview research has tended to focus only on the first few weeks post-partum. Also, interviews during any of the early months of this transition may have found that these participants were in the midst of the turmoil of this considerable transition, which might have clouded their ability to gauge events. Thus, interviews conducted during the early months may have resulted in different information being transmitted and thus different factors being extracted.

Implications for Theory

The majority of research on the transition to parenthood has been conducted from a negative perspective. It has primarily focussed on whether the transition could be labelled a “crisis”, and if so, to what extent (Dyer, 1963; Hobbs, 1965, 1968; Hobbs & Cole, 1976; Hobbs & Wimbish, 1977; LeMaster’s, 1957; Russell, 1974; Wainwright, 1966). Further, researchers have debated over the degree of marital dissatisfaction (Belsky, 1985; Belsky, Lang & Rovine, 1985) and whether this was the result of parenthood or simply the passage of time (McHale & Huston, 1985; White & Booth, 1985). Instead of
focussing on pathology, my thesis examined healthy relationships. I was intent on determining the best ways for couples to benefit from this developmental transition.

There are a number of areas which researchers have highlighted as problematic for parents during this transition. They previously found that couples reported a significant reduction in displays of positive affection once the baby arrived (Belsky et al., 1985, Belsky, Lang & Huston, 1986). This decline was found to include a negative change in couples’ sex lives (Cowan & Cowan, 1986; 1992). In addition, couples began to perceive their relationship as less romantic and more of a working partnership (Belsky et al., 1983; 1985; Mc Hale & Huston, 1985). Dissatisfaction with the division of labour was also experienced (Cowan & Cowan, 1992; Pleck, 1985; Stafford, Backman & Dibona, 1977; Thompson & Walker, 1989; Ventura, 1987; Zimmerman & Addison, 1997). A decline in the amount of time available to communicate with one’s spouse (Meyerowitz & Feldman, 1966), and an increase in marital conflict was additionally reported (Cowan et al., 1985).

This emphasis on “crisis” and marital dissatisfaction has minimized attention to success in managing this transition, thereby leaving a gap in the knowledge. The gap, specifically, relates to what factors would facilitate a happy adjustment. In this context, the value of the present research is that it
attempts to sketch a broad array of factors, which could influence couples’ success at managing the transition to parenthood.

While there is no specific research aimed at successful transitions to parenthood, there are some that detail factors that can positively influence the outcome. The following are some of these factors, common with my participants’ experiences. Ease of the transition was linked to the availability of social support (Cutrona, 1984; Crnic & Booth, 1991; Power & Parke, 1984). Specifically, in the early weeks, the availability of grandparents to help out with household tasks and childcare lessened the burden (Crnic & Booth, 1991). Having close friends with whom to share concerns and recreational activities was also found (Myers & Wall, 1984). Couples noticed that parental duties required more functional interactions in their relationship (Belsky et al., 1983; 1985; MacDermid, Huston & McHale, 1990; McHale & Huston, 1985). Also, couples benefited from continuing to nurture a psychological investment in each other (Cowan & Cowan, 1992). Child-rearing tensions underlined the need for continued open communication and teamwork (Cowan & Cowan, 1991; Gottman, 1989; Krokoff, Gottman & Roy, 1988; Notarius & Vanzetti, 1983).

Apart from the above results, there are a number of contradictions in the existing research. Following is an outline of some of these inconsistencies compared with my results. In the context of these contradictions, the results of
my study supports the view that pregnancy should be postponed until both partners are ready (Christensen, 1968; Glenn & McLanahan, 1982; Russell, 1974; Steffenmeiser, 1982; Wright Henggeler & Craig, 1986) rather than having an unplanned child (Belsky & Rovine, 1990). Studies have established a strong consistent link between marital satisfaction and role satisfaction. My study supports that role satisfaction is determined by mutual negotiations (Cowan & Cowan, 1988, 1992; Zaslow & Pederson, 1981) rather than by equitable division of household labour (Belsky et al., 1986; Fish, New & Von Cleave, 1992; Grossman et al., 1980; Lavee, Sharlin & Katz, 1996).

Further, the results of my research extend previous studies in identifying specific factors that have not been previously acknowledged. Following are some of them drawn from my eight participants, which contributed to their success at managing the transition. Prior to the birth of their infants, the couples were able to come to a financial agreement to accommodate their desires regarding childcare and they were subsequently comforted in the knowledge that having children would not impose undue monetary stress.

Additional factors, reported in Maintenance of Spousal Relationship, illustrate that my participants had managed to honour their spousal relationship during this shift. They detailed a commitment to intimacy and a desire to work towards resolutions. Not only did they feel a deep commitment to the relationship, they regularly demonstrated consideration for their partners.
Open communication was maintained, and short- and long-term goals were shared. They recognized their spouses' strengths and weaknesses, and thus knew what to expect from, and how to negotiate with, their partners. All couples reported that optimism was utilized to maintain a positive outlook during difficult situations. Finally, each and every one reported that they respected their spouses, which was the foundation of their partnership.

All of the above have not been cited previously, due to the fact that successful couples have been largely ignored. These factors are significant in that they likely represent what couples might prefer to strive towards, rather than focusing on the negative issues, which arguably are not productive. Research studies identifying concrete steps that couples can take to maintain a loving, committed relationship during these fulfilling, albeit challenging, years will greatly benefit new parents. Investigators need to challenge existent biases toward the negative in order to meet the needs of couples embarking on this journey.

Implications for Practice

The individual narratives provided in the appendices might provide counsellors working with new parents with a more comprehensive understanding of the process of change and how each couple handles it
differently. Although common themes emerged, each participant gave prominence to different areas. For instance, one mother talked about her role transition to a traditional lifestyle as a fulfillment of a dream, while another spoke about it as a vehicle for discovering her continued need for work outside of the home. Yet another focused a large part of her narrative on her need for independence and career satisfaction.

This transition impacts many different areas of one’s life. It demands new perspective with regards to priorities. This new outlook reflects the variety of the couples’ lives and experiences, and asserts that this evolution is both individual and complex. The diversity of couples’ experience prompts a caution to counsellors who work with couples that, while their happenings may be similar, each couple is also unique. Counsellors might therefore want to help their clients to explore what is important to them as they negotiate this adjustment.

My research confirms the need for conscientious studies of practical issues influencing the couples’ transition to parenthood, rather than academic arguments such as whether the level of distress experienced by new parents warrants the label “crisis” (Hill, 1949). The merit of my study is that the 24 factors I have identified are specific, clear and practical, so that couples can deliberately concentrate on any or all of the factors needing improvement. Couples could use these factors as points of consideration, to stimulate
discussion, and to expose areas of concern or weakness. For example, in the category outlining the Foundations for Parenthood, the timing of the pregnancy could be discussed to ensure both are similarly committed. Couples could scrutinize the priority they place on working inside or outside of the home. Practical consideration regarding their choices could be outlined and discussed. Maintenance of a lifestyle that does not feel obligatory could be designed.

Working through the category outlining the Maintenance of the Spousal Relationship, couples could reflect upon their own feelings and behaviours toward one another. Are they committed to intimacy? If so, how? Do they show consideration for their partners? In what ways? Do they desire to work towards resolutions or only to ‘win the argument’? Areas of strength or weakness would be exposed, thereby allowing couples to achieve a more realistic outlook of the health of their relationship and their readiness for parenthood.

Discussions based on the Evolutions and Adjustments that can result from parenthood might help to shape rational expectations. Couples may better value the intimacy that develops between each other and between the parent and child. They might better appreciate the shift in focus to the family unit, roles becoming more functional and the need for increased spousal
involvement. Demands on their time could be discussed to ensure that each partner is able to maintain outside interests.

Couples could easily and independently work through these topics in order to stimulate discussion, troubleshoot and identify areas needing more work.

These factors are not simply specific and factual; the researcher has attempted to be comprehensive. Given the effort to be thorough, these factors as a whole might provide a mental map or broad basis for couples' programs. These 24 factors have been divided into four categories, as previously mentioned. Four broad categories dealing with successful transitions can readily be divided into sessions for a group program.

While there is a veritable plethora of classes preparing for childbirth, many of which are embedded in government-run hospitals and institutions, there is currently no established practice that prepares couples for parenthood. Birth, although a profound experience, is fleeting in contrast to the realm of parenthood, which lasts years, has a lifelong impact, and is arguably not instinctive. This research study can be employed as a basis for developing a practice for this.

The hope of the researcher is that as couples gain knowledge and understanding of this challenging transition, they can work together effectively as a partnership to ensure its success. With divorce rates on the rise, we need
to examine further our own behaviours, feelings and priorities and those of our mate.

Implications for Future Research

Further research is required to establish that the factors collected in this study are representative of couples’ successful transitions to parenthood. The explorations should be replicated with more extensive samples of individuals from different socio-economic backgrounds. This might help to refine, extend or revise these categories to further understand the process couples can adapt to ease this transition to parenthood.

As previously mentioned, this study employed the use of retrospective accounts in order to try to capture a process of transition over time. A limitation of this approach is that it may not capture the intensity of feelings. A longitudinal study would address some of these issues and perhaps provide a more in-depth exploration of the process.

Quantitative studies used to test predictive power of various factors could be designed. To illustrate which factors are most influential with regards to success of the population as a whole, measures could be created to determine the extent a unified decision was made regarding conception or the extent that the members of the spousal unit agree to the division of roles once the child is
born. Comparative analysis could be utilized in order to determine which couples fared best and which factors were most closely related to that success.

In addition to replication, this study could be extended through survey research. Focus groups could be utilized to help validate and confirm the results. Once this research study was replicated to ensure validity, these factors could be investigated in a field test program. Counsellors and mental health workers could be contacted and educated so that they could examine the hypothesis as to whether a couple that consciously attempts to realize these factors will make the transition more successfully than a couple not systematically prepared.

Personal Reflections

When I set out to explore the transition to parenthood and how it impacted the spousal relationship, I intended to focus on the difficulties the couples experienced. Through investigation of research, I found that it was biased and focused on the negative. I then opted to avoid examining the pathology and instead to focus on couples who were successful. I was enthusiastic to unearth what these couples were doing differently that made their experiences more positive, in hopes that others could benefit from their accomplishments. I was excited by the prospect of focusing on growth.
Initially it appeared that it would be more difficult to find subjects who had enjoyed their experience as opposed to those who had more challenges. The feedback I was given was “it is easy to articulate what is wrong, however how can one articulate what is going right? It just is.” At the outset it was difficult to find willing participants, but as I worked harder at spreading the word with my network of friends, I slowly began to receive telephone calls from couples interested in participating in this study. From these calls I found that couples were incredibly enthusiastic about sharing their experiences and getting involved in my research. In fact, since I limited my study to four couples, I was unable to interview all of the respondents who eventually called me, rendering those who did not receive an interview disappointed. The serious interest people took in the topic of my study was invigorating.

The eight participants that are included in this study were extremely candid during the interviews. Their willingness to share their precious time and the story of their transitions was inspiring. These couples wanted to be a part of this study because they were dedicated to the healthy preservation of their families. They loved each other and their evolving families, and sincerely hoped that others could share in and benefit from their positive experiences. With all of these individuals, I felt connected to them in a way that was much more than researcher/participant. I left with a great feeling of respect for them.
Their commitment to the accuracy of their story telling was genuinely surprising. In the first interviews, they took their time and gave numerous examples to illustrate their experiences. In the validation interview, they were equally committed to making corrections whenever necessary. I realized that people really want to tell the truth. I now am committed to this type of research because, given the chance, subjects are keen to express their thoughts, feelings and behaviours. Limiting them to questionnaires would not have allowed for the richness and accuracy I found. This process showed respect for them as 'experts'. It is after all their experience, not mine.

It was a disappointment to discover how poor and impractical much of the research in this area had been previously. Although there is a plethora of information, much of it was academic or the results were contradictory.

I have always considered myself to be a person who aspires to help people through counseling and not as someone who found much interest in research. Through Dr. Larry Cochran's tutelage, the process of research introduced to me was inspiring. On par with the results gathered from this study was the learning I gained about this type of research. Dr. Cochran taught me research that respected its participants. He also showed me how to work patiently (and sometimes painstakingly) through the data in order to find the truth.

In these reflections, I want to address not only the eight participants involved in my research, but also all of the clients I saw through my clinic in
New Westminster and my practicum at Family Services. Many of the couples I met there were struggling with the very issues that I was in the throes of examining. It is for this reason that I can appreciate the commonalities I found. Managing the transition from couplehood to parenthood is taxing. It takes team effort and much dedication. The couples whom I saw were trying to learn and to find ways of making real changes in their lives. I respect that effort and feel honoured that those people placed such trust in me.

On a personal note, when I first began exploring the option to do my thesis on this topic three years ago, I had my first child. Many of my friends were similarly going through this transition. We shared our ups and downs and I witnessed much upheaval as well as those who had a relatively easy time of it. It was through my own experience that I realized the great number of challenges that come up and the importance to rise to those. The love and dedication one has for their child indirectly necessitates that the couple relationship be nurtured and honoured.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A

TWENTY FOUR COMMON FACTORS
TWENTY FOUR COMMON FACTORS

1. Commitment to intimacy
2. Desire to work towards resolutions
3. Demonstrable consideration for partner
4. Commitment to relationship
5. Feel materially content
6. Open communication
7. Sharing short and long term goals
8. Shift in focus to family unit
9. Pursue individual interests outside of the home
10. New capacities developed
11. Became comfortable in managing demands of child
12. External support
13. Common bond with spouse
14. Deliberate pregnancy
15. Agreement to division of roles
16. Achieved satisfactory financial arrangement
17. Bonded with newborn
18. Roles became more functional
19. Respect for partner
20. Optimistic atmosphere supplied by one or both partners
21. Satisfaction with one’s role
22. Know what to expect from spouse
23. Know how to negotiate with spouse
24. Involvement of husband in family affairs
APPENDIX B

NARRATIVES
First Narrative

First Question:

In general, what factors would help or hinder the successful transition to parenthood for women?

1. **Secure Relationship**: Have a solid relationship prior to having children. One needs to be beyond playing games. Instead, you must be able to trust each other completely in order to work through difficult issues.

2. **Personal Happiness**: Be happy with yourself. Work through personal issues in order to feel comfortable with self and to know self.

3. **Self-Identity**: Identify your ideals with respect to career versus staying at home. Try not to be influenced by outside pressures regarding your own personal path.

Narrative

Prior to meeting D, I was in a serious relationship. We were planning to get married but the commitment never occurred. Our relationship was full of conflict, we both played games and fought way too often. It was very difficult but I broke off the relationship. It took me two years to recover but once I'd
met D, I knew he was the right one. Our relationship was completely different from the very beginning. Six months after we first met, we were engaged and six months later we were married. We were 26 when we got married and M came along 2 years later.

Although we both wanted children, it was important to D that we wait a few years. Before we even started trying to get pregnant we decided we didn’t want to put our baby into care therefore either D or myself was going to stay home. Once we discussed our feelings openly, it became apparent that I really wanted to go back to work and that D would be happy staying at home. Having that decision made allowed us to look forward to having the baby. We finally agreed that D would work full time until my pregnancy leave was over and then he would work part time, about two full days per week from the home. This is the most special quality about D. In my experiences with men, this lifestyle choice wouldn’t be satisfactory.

For first 4 months of my pregnancy I was very sick. I was vomiting constantly and was finally put on medication. I’m sure I was difficult during these times but D was very tolerant. He knows that I have mood swings and that I get sharp when something is bothering me. D gives me my space to work it out, knowing that eventually I’ll go find him and we’ll talk it through. Luckily, by the time I had to go back to teaching, I was feeling much better.
The early months of M’s life were difficult for me. M did not sleep very much and had evening colic. She cried every evening from 5:00 till 10:00 p.m. The lack of sleep was my biggest challenge. I absolutely hate getting up at night. I resent it. Fortunately, I had some support. My mom came over every day for the first two weeks and did all the housework, cooking … absolutely everything. D would come home by 6:00 p.m. at which time I was at the breaking point after a long day and an hour of crying. As soon as D came home, he would take M and start walking around with her and giving me a chance to eat my dinner. D would then take her for a walk or to Starbucks so that I could sleep from 7:00 to 10:00 p.m. This routine was wonderful for me. D he enjoyed it too.

I found having a baby very isolating. Though I had support, it didn’t feel as if I had as much as I had at work. When M was 5 weeks old I started baby gym, a mother’s aerobics class. My girlfriend and I went there 2 – 3 times a week and had some fun. I remember this as being a highlight for me, I was able to connect with other moms. We’d share our struggles and just love our babies. This ritual forced me to get out of the house, which was a learning tool for me. I learned how to get M out and not just stay at home all day. Since I had these feelings of isolation it became doubly important that I get out of the house. I would go to the baby gym, go to my mom’s a couple times a week or go to Metrotown where moms hang out. Also, Mom took M on Saturday
evenings so that D and I could have date nights. We don’t do that weekly now but we do it when we need to.

Though I felt pressured to stay at home, I knew that it was right for us that I work outside the home. During the commute, I’d feel upset about leaving the baby, but once I arrived at school these emotions dissipated. D loves almost everything about staying at home with the exception of housework. When I went back to work, housework became an issue. Not only does D hate to clean but also he doesn’t see the dirt. Before we had M, I found it easier to do the bulk of the housework. We both have always done our own laundry because I just don’t like to do it. He has his own laundry basket and does it when he needs to. We have had many disagreements about housework until I asked D if he would like me to write down some of my expectations. D came up with the idea that he would make a detailed checklist of chores, for example, wipe counters and he would tick it off when it was done. This has worked well for both of us. I still do housework but D does enough now to keep me happy. We’re both spontaneous with regards to meal times. One of us ends up organizing dinner or we’ll just order something in.

We’re a real team. He pays all of the bills over the computer because I just don’t like doing it. We both have similar short and long term goals. Our initial goal when we got married was to pay off our debts. I had a huge student loan and had bought a car. Last week, we finally paid them off so we’re faced
with the question “What shall we do with a larger pay cheque?” We’ll likely just put it away and either buy a house or go on a vacation. Our long-term goals are that he wants to work less and I want to stay working. I still check in with D to make sure he feels comfortable with staying at home because realistically I could work part-time. I realize this is a sacrifice for his career. I believe it’s crucial to constantly communicate with each other. I learned through my past relationship to be vigilant regarding your partner’s feelings. I don’t ever want to lose this relationship. Since M was born, our commitment has intensified. The stakes are so much higher now that we share a child.

D and I always comment on how hard it is having children but we’re in this together. We have each other to rely on so it hasn’t been a huge shock. Now that M is sleeping through the night, the big difference in our life is our lifestyle. Before M, we were living and enjoying each other. Now we are working as a team. There are a lot of things that we don’t do anymore but I don’t feel a sense of loss. I’m analytical so I look at the pros and cons. I would like to be able to work out more often, go for long walks together or go to the movies. I know that if those things are really important I can find ways to make it happen. I can work out at home, I can go for a walk with M or I can ask M’s grandma to baby-sit if we want to go out. There is always a way but often I want to stay home with M. She is much easier now and we enjoy her so
much. When I was in my 20’s, I would always need to go out every weekend.

Now, I unplug the phone and enjoy our quiet time together as a family.

**Final Question:**

Not all couples are successful at dealing with this transition. Could you share your opinion about what you think makes the difference?

1. As I said before, have a solid relationship up front.

2. Have a plan for child-care. Discuss and plan options that are satisfactory to both you and your partner.

3. Examine personal needs regarding career versus staying at home. There are unique pressures on women who are moving through this transition. Women have more choices and there are strong opinions influencing those choices. Be true to yourself so that you are able to feel fulfilled.

4. Connect with other moms. Feelings of isolation can escalate into feelings of depression.

5. Ignore parenting books. Try to experience your child without being influenced by books. They are often counterproductive and very contradictory. Remember your baby is unique, do what feels right.

6. Advice from family and friends. Listen to what you would like to hear and ignore what you don’t like to hear.
Second Narrative

First Question:

What do you think might help or hurt the transition to parenthood for men in general?

1. Parenting Experience: A good relationship with your parents and a positive role model regarding parenting would make the transition easier.

2. Self-identity: You must know yourself, especially where you place your priorities regarding your parenting role versus your career. You have to separate your needs from societal pressures. These are questions that women have been coping with but now men are beginning to challenge these traditional roles.

Narrative

A and I had a fun courtship. We went out for many dinners, went on camping trips or to the movies often. A and I have always been able to work through issues, we never have fought. We disagree but, in my opinion, once you start fighting with each other you’re not dealing with issues, you’re dealing with emotions. I think that this is one of the reasons we got married, because
we fit that way. We did have conflicts, particularly early on in our relationship when we were in the process of sorting out whom we were relative to one another but I never felt anger during those times. A has occasionally said that it’s frustrating that I don’t ever get angry but I think it works well because we both are relatively non-confrontational.

Our ability to communicate well has allowed us to get our individual needs met. Prior to conceiving M we discussed how we would like our family to function. We both wanted one parent to stay home with our children. It wasn’t a difficult decision for me to decide to be at home for many reasons. Firstly, A makes more money. She is a teacher, which means she’ll have holidays when the children are out of school. She gets home relatively early. Secondly, I wasn’t committed to a serious career path. I was happy with my work but it wasn’t a crucial part of my life. Finally, I am able to work from my home. I work with computers and do some freelance writing. We were lucky because it all fell into place for us. My boss approached me offering me a reduced workload so that I could work part-time. Coupled with my freelance writing I could bring in extra income as well as satisfy my desire to work.

My parents live next door and A’s live on the North Shore so we were able to get reliable and trustworthy child-care. We are lucky because we both get along relatively well with our respective in-laws. I’m very close to my parents; they’re my close friends. Living next door to my parents may be a bit
awkward for A but it doesn’t rise to the level of being a problem. It’s more a matter that we’ll eventually get our own place.

Looking back, our transition to parenthood started before we even started to try to conceive. We were both involved from the start. Once A got pregnant, I went to most of her appointments with our GP, the obstetrician and the ultrasound tests. I set up a private web site so our friends and relatives could view the images from the ultrasound on line. I read several books on pregnancy and parenting and I went to all the pre-natal classes. The birth was extremely difficult. Watching A endure that was the hardest thing I’ve ever watched anyone do. Compared to the birth, parenting has not been really hard.

Initially, it was difficult for A because she wasn’t getting enough sleep and M was colicky. Unfortunately, I was working full time until the end of her maternity leave so I was only able to help out during the evenings. I would usually get home from work at 6:00 p.m. and then I would take M, walk around the house with her, go for a walk or to Starbucks so A could have some down time to take a bath or a nap. By the time A went back to work, M was older and easier. I’m very happy with the situation.

There are days when I’m frustrated but I never find parenting stressful. If I were home all the time, it may be tiresome, but I work part time so I get a break from the routine. I’ve noticed that I really enjoy spending time with M, just the two of us. I’m an only child so I grew up doing stuff on my own. For
me, I get stressed out when I have a big project at work that needs to be completed by a certain deadline. This is one of my biggest adjustments. I have two long days at the office and I’m tired when I get home. It’s also difficult to find time to complete projects because I either have to work on them when M is napping or after she has gone to bed. Sometimes I’m at the computer until 1:00 or 1:30 a.m. Having watched A go through the birth, being a bit tired doesn’t seem so difficult in comparison.

Housekeeping is one of the issues I find difficult to find time for. I probably do more than one would expect from the stereotypical man. Most often A’s the one who will clean something. I feel guilty when she does because it hasn’t occurred to me to do it. This has been of the issues that has most bothered A. So much so that after several discussions it got to a point where I made up a checklist. Now it’s gotten better because I now have a list up in the kitchen of things that need to get done.

This is how our relationship usually works. A thinks about how she feels about certain issues, mulls it over and then initiates a discussion. Through A’s initiations, we end up talking about parenting, financial planning or housekeeping. We don’t always agree but we certainly discuss all issues. One of use usually gives in or we arrive at a compromise. Another example of this occurred a couple of days ago. We were discussing how we were going to achieve our goal of buying a house. A brought it up because she has been
thinking about it, then through a discussion, we figured out the detailed plan. Fortunately, we both have similar goals and values so our discussions are never stressful.

Deciding to become parents is the biggest decision a couple makes. If you buy a house together, you can always sell the house. You get married and you can get divorced. Once you have children, it doesn’t matter what else happens, they are your children together. It cements the relationship in an irrevocable way. It makes the relationship more secure even if it wasn’t insecure before. Our relationship is mature. We love each other and are connected to each other. Our priority is M. We both feel that providing her with security and love is more important than earning more money or having material possessions. We own one car. It would be nice to own another but I’m perfectly capable of taking the bus or sky train downtown. We both look at friends who are workaholic parents and ask ourselves what they do with all that money which makes it worth not seeing their children very much. We are so lucky that we both believe we have everything we need. I wouldn’t be staying at home if our priorities were different.

Our energy goes into making sure M is okay. Sometimes M takes up so much of our energy that we’re not able to give it to each other as much as we used to. We don’t have as much sex as we used to, but that’s fine. It’s not gone forever. We love each other and we have the desire; we’re just tired. I don’t feel
unfulfilled. It will be the two of us again some time in the future. Meantime we’ll have fun as a family. Life is better in more ways.

Final Question:

Not all couples are successful at dealing with this transition. Could you share your opinion about what you think makes the difference?

1. **Maturity**: Having children once you’re comfortable with self and know your own values, priorities and goals.

2. **Self-Concept**: Challenge self-concept in terms of family roles. What is your main role or identity in regards to career/home life.

3. **Communication**: Learn to communicate constructively. Listen to your partner and articulate your own needs, opinions or positions. Work through issues with the purpose of resolution or compromise.

4. **Be Thoughtful**: Choose to have children and put thought into that choice. Trust your own intuition regarding the appropriate timing. Don’t allow yourself to be pressured into having children either from partner or society.

5. **Optimistic Outlook**: Appreciate what you have and be thankful for that.
6. **Take Joy in the Unpredictability of Others:** Your spouse and children are separate individuals who have talents you may not have expected or realized. They may have thoughts or values, which are different from your own. Try to enjoy what makes them different from you. If you want to build things exactly the way you want, then be a sculptor or a writer. People are not built, they build themselves. Enjoy being a part of it, but don’t try to make it your own thing. It’s your family, but you are more its, than it’s yours.
Third Narrative

First Question:

In general, what factors would help or hinder the successful transition to parenthood for women?

1. **Sleep:** Make sure sleep and rest are a priority. Lack of sleep causes crankiness and frustration, which can lead to needless anxiety and miscommunication.

2. **Father’s Role:** Make sure the father is taking an active role at the onset. J eagerly participated right from birth. Whenever J was not working, he’d take over the childcare duties. He would hold JJ, bath JJ … do whatever he could. When JJ woke up for his nighttime feedings, J would bring him to me, talk to me and keep me company while I fed him and then J would change JJ’s diaper allowing me to go back to sleep sooner. It was really great. It wasn’t something we ever discussed, it just naturally happened.

3. **Expectations:** Try not to have any grand expectations. Keep an open mind regarding the experience of parenthood. Go with the flow and try to maintain your sense of humour.
4. **Pamper Yourself:** Do things for yourself. It's important to remember that you have needs too. Try not to focus on household chores too much.

5. **Support Network:** Connect with other parents. I joined a parenting group, which gave me an avenue to share my stories, concerns or celebrations. Spending time with other mothers helps to remind you that there are others going through similar experiences; you are not alone.

**Narrative**

J is 37 and I'm 36. We grew up in Saskatoon and attended the same high school. A year or two after graduation, we began dating. There came a point in our relationship when I wanted a serious commitment. We were young and J wasn't ready. We split up and I moved to Toronto. During my first summer, J was sent to Toronto for a temporary contract. At first, we didn't see each other but we kept in touch and remained friends. Later, I ended up in the hospital and a friend of mine contacted J asking him to visit me since I didn't know many people in Toronto. This is how we got back together. Our time apart made us realize how much we loved each other. J is my best friend.

After our reconciliation J took a job in Vancouver and I quit mine to join him. We lived together for a year and then, at age 29, we were married. Our first year of marriage was awful. J was working for an international wire service so he traveled often. All my close friends were in Saskatoon so when I
moved here I felt completely isolated and very lonely. I had no job and no friends. I thought married life would be different. When J and I fought, we wouldn’t talk for a day or two; sometimes even longer. I was diagnosed with depression. It was a tough time for J and I. I went to counseling to deal with the depression and then J joined me for marriage counseling. The counselor not only helped me but also helped us learn new communication skills. We began to understand each other’s moods and to not take them as personal attacks.

Though we were learning how to communicate, we still had issues, the most contentious being over finances. J’s family members are borrowers; my family is completely opposite. We were very fortunate to meet up with a financial advisor who helped us find a balance. He took the time to get to know us individually and as a couple. He showed us how to cooperate and prioritize. As a result, J was able to get out of debt and now we are saving for a house. Our financial advisor’s role has been invaluable and has had a tremendously positive impact on our relationship.

Since we were dealing with many issues, we waited for 6 ½ years after we were married to have children. Just before JJ was due, I remember a particularly stressful period for me was when J lost his major client. This made me very nervous. J is very positive so he didn’t focus on the loss but rather motivated himself and found a huge contract. It all worked out within a week. A benefit
of this new contract was that all the work was local so he didn’t have to travel anymore. Having J around made all the difference for me in regards to our transition to parenthood.

J was involved from the get go. When I was pregnant, he came to every doctor’s appointment with me. I think that if J could have been pregnant he would have loved to. As I mentioned, when JJ was born, J would change all the diapers, he’d keep me company during the nighttime feedings and he’d help me find the time to sleep. Initially, after JJ was born I remember longing for some of the things we were not able to do anymore such as socializing with other single adults, going to the movies and spending time alone. I’m not sure if we really felt that bad about the changes, it was just an adjustment period. When JJ was 5 months old, we went to the Cayman Islands with some friends. It didn’t take long to realize that “vacations” were not the same as before. J and I adapted. We took turns caring for JJ and we replaced couple time with family time. Even though JJ is 16 months old now, we still don’t go out much. Fortunately, JJ is in bed before we are so now we have some time to talk. JJ has brought so much to our life. I feel our relationship has become better since he has become a part of our lives.

One of the biggest changes for me, was when I made the decision to stay at home with JJ. I had taken a year of maternity leave and was planning to move into a new part time position when I got bumped. I could go back to the job
with no security or I could take a severance package. The moment I decided to take severance, I felt awful. Though I was tortured by the thought of leaving JJ with a stranger, a part of me wanted to have something else in my life. J was very supportive. I told him that if I'm not going to work then I would have to do something for myself. Consequently, I joined a running club and a book club.

The transition from working woman to stay at home mom was made easier because we moved into a complex full of families. Neither of us have parents here and we didn’t have a lot of friends with children so this became our biggest support network. I’m really close to a couple of my women neighbours, which gives me an opportunity for “adult” talk when the kids are outside playing. One neighbour in particular, has become a role model for me. I love the way she interacts with her daughter, how she disciplines her and the way she parents. I know that J would like to buy a house but I’m reluctant because everyone in our complex has been so supportive. I feel very content with where we live and what we have.

The financial loss incurred since I stopped working hasn’t seemed to affect either of us. I think J worries about work. Because he is freelancing, he never knows if he has a job tomorrow. He feels that pressure but I think it has diminished because he has built up his clientele. I also think it helps J that we feel content with what we have. Our financial advisor really helped us put
everything into perspective. For example, we live in a complex that looks like a
coop. It doesn’t have a beautiful yard but that’s not what’s really important.
Perhaps we’d want a second vehicle but I don’t need one because we live so
close to all the amenities. I can honestly say that I can’t think of anything we
need. We don’t make a lot, but I’m happy with what we have.

As a result of J’s decision to do freelance work, our lifestyle is not typical. J’s
hours are irregular. Some days he works long hours, others not at all. Most of
the time, J is able to be around and help out with JJ. It took us some time to
figure out the logistics of dividing the chores. We had long discussions about
the inequity regarding the division of labour. I remember one day when J came
home and I was feeling particularly stressed out because J would not help with
the laundry, household chores or plants but instead would just play with JJ. We
finally decided that day that we would both do the laundry and cooking. J
would care for the plants and I would do the cleaning. It bothered me that I
was being stuck with all the cleaning but I understand how hard he works. I
see how hard he works.

The only big issue now in our relationship is our sex life. We were very
sexually active at the beginning of our relationship but I seem to have lost most
of my sexual drive. This affected J more before we had JJ. He really felt the
loss. Now he tells me it’s not as important because he is not used to it
anymore (laugh). Since JJ, we’ve become closer in other ways. Now we’ll stay
in bed in the morning and just hold each other or J and I will get up and start
dancing in front of JJ. We display our love and affection for each other more.
It's a family thing, we all love it.

Final Question:
Not all couples are successful at dealing with this transition. Could you share
your opinion about what you think makes the difference?

1. **Self-Love:** Feel content with yourself before you have children. Feel
good about who you are, what you've accomplished. If there is
something you really want to do for yourself, for example, travel, do
that before having children.

2. **Solid Relationship:** Have time together as a couple before you have
children. Feel good about your relationship, work through major
issues before you bring children into your world.

3. **Expectations:** Try not to have any expectations, keep an open mind.

4. **Support Network:** Find support through networking with other
parents.

5. **Connection/Open Communication:** Couples need to constantly be
aware of each other's needs.
6. **Parenting**: Couples should try to negotiate common decisions regarding parenting.

7. **Family Time**: Set aside time for family events.

8. **Appreciation**: Remind yourself to cherish the moments you have with the children because they grow quickly. Appreciate the stages the child moves through and meet their needs.

9. **Couple Relationship**: Set aside time for the couple even if it's only 1 hour per week. It's the easiest part to let go of without knowing it.
Fourth Narrative

First question:

In general, what factors would help or hinder the successful transition to parenthood for men?

1. **Lifestyle Change**: Realize the need to sacrifice personal life. Raising a family properly requires much time and effort. It’s necessary for men to come to terms with the fact that, for the time being, leisure activities such as TV and golf may have to be put aside.

2. **Commitment**: I believe men have to work harder at staying committed to their spouses and families. Men are innately different. They are hunters and gatherers and they don’t naturally want to be confined.

3. **Financial Responsibility**: Pressure to financially support family is felt more by men. It is particularly difficult in the modern work because we live in a material culture.

4. **Libido**: A unique difficulty for men is the change in one’s sex life. Having children can temporarily suspend or decrease their partner’s sexual drive.
Narrative

C and I have been together for a long time. There came a time when I knew that C wanted a commitment but I wasn’t ready to give her one. I wanted to see what it would be like to date other women. We broke up and C moved to Toronto. Ironically, I didn’t date anyone until right before we got back together. Even so, through a series of serendipitous events, we both were in Toronto for a short period of time. After having a break from each other, then seeing each other again, we realized that we wanted to be together. I believe our time apart was critical for our eventual success as a couple. It allowed us the time to really appreciate how close we are; that we are best friends.

The length of our relationship gave us the time we needed to work through difficult issues. C and I used to have disagreements where we wouldn’t speak to each other for 2, 3 or 4 days. One issue that threatened our relationship was our opposite ways of dealing with money. I was a spender and C was a saver. We found a financial planner and our lives were never the same. Our relationship has succeeded due to his advice. Consequently, I’ve learned to adapt. I’ve learned to find out what my real values are; what is really important. The financial planner has changed me personally and now C and I cooperate and prioritize. I’ve gone from being heavily in debt to having no debt to having savings.
During our relationship we've worked through many issues, however, the biggest transition for us was when JJ was arrived. Throughout C's pregnancy I was aware that complications might arise so I didn’t allow myself to get emotionally invested. For me, it was the moment that JJ was born that my life profoundly changed. Suddenly, my life had meaning. I was ready. Up to that point, I had lived a really full life. For this, I've been very fortunate. I've had numerous experiences through my work and I've enjoyed many diverse activities. I had done everything I wanted to as an individual up till then. Now, I was ready for the rest of my life, to sacrifice my time so that my child could have a full life. My devotion to JJ was immediate. When JJ was a newborn, I would wake up with C during his feedings and we would talk. It was wonderful; I loved it. We had some great conversations during those times. It was really very special. I'd do anything for my son and for my wife. Although parenting can be tough, it's not a burden in any way.

The biggest change for C was deciding to stay at home with JJ. That was a decision C made. I, secretly, wanted her to stay at home but I would have supported her decision either way. We’re lucky that we can afford to have the choice. We don’t have a lot of money but we’re content with what we have. In fact, C tells me that she is really happy with the way our lives are
right now which makes me feel good knowing that I'm giving my spouse the satisfaction she deserves.

The interesting thing about C and I is that we've become closer since JJ was born. We communicate more effectively and we have common ideals. I'm aware how important it is to monitor our relationship and therefore I ensure that we connect with each other every day. In particular, I need to verbalize my feelings and thoughts. One of the things I enjoy most is hearing about C's day and sharing my own experiences. I've had to work harder to find the time to do this since we've had JJ because C gets so worn out and just doesn't have the energy. She is really great though because she is genuinely interested in my life outside the home.

One of the unique qualities of our lifestyle is credited to my career. I have a really interesting job that allows me to spend a great deal of time with my family. My work schedule is constantly changing. I work at different times of the day or evening and I work for different lengths of time. I'm really lucky; I love my work. I love to go to work. I have the best of both worlds. I never dread leaving JJ and C and I come home happy. I come home energized and fulfilled from my job. On the other hand, there are days or weeks where I'll be involved with a project that demands I work 18 or 20-hour days. During those times, I know how difficult it is for C to cope. She knows when I'm working, I'm having a good time, while she is
spent all her time with JJ, stuck in the same routine. I empathize for her and know those times are tough. Fortunately, I am typically home a considerable amount of the time.

Due to my career, we don't have a routine schedule. I like it that way because life to me is exciting. I don't want to always know what will happen the next minute. I really enjoy that aspect. So taking that into consideration, we just wing it every day. If C is tired, I'll get up, make breakfast and take care of JJ or take him for a walk. We try to share duties. Often we take turns making dinner. I consciously try not to rely on her to make me dinner. I love to cook. To me, it's fun. I enjoy doing it. Again, it's not work. Probably the only thing in my life I would really label work is cleaning. I don't like to clean and I don't like to shop for household items.

Our common love for JJ has created a strong bond and a desire to work hard at our relationship so he will experience a loving family. In so many ways, we're closer now because we love each other and we want our relationship to last forever. We don't fight as often, partially because we don't want to in front of JJ and partially because there isn't much point. We don't fight gratuitously, there has to be an important issue. We also try to do things together. I want JJ to see us do things together. I think that is really important for him. For example, C and I have started dancing together in the living room because he loves it so much. He is watching us to see how
we interact as a family. I remember as a kid, my dad used to come home from work, kiss my mom and she would turn her head. I don’t want JJ to see that kind of stuff.

Another huge change for me since JJ was born is how I view our sex life. I have always had a much stronger sex drive than C. If I haven’t had sex for a while I can feel physically and mentally stressed. Though the frequency of our encounters hasn’t changed much, my love for JJ has created, for me, some peace around the issue. C and I have become closer in so many other ways that it somehow makes up for it.

Currently, I’m aware that we need more couple time outside the home. C needs a break from parenting, a break from the same old routine. For me, I love the family time but I know I get the opportunity to leave and go to work. It’s important to me that I preserve our personal relationship. Now that C has expressed her feelings, we will make a point of getting out more often on our own.

**Final Question:**

Not all couples are successful at dealing with this transition. Could you share your opinion about what you think makes the difference?

1. **Love:** Need to be in love with the person that you marry, you can’t pretend that.
2. **Commitment**: Devote time to each other, as a family, as a couple.

   Individual pursuits need to be put on hold for the first few years. Have children if you are able to freely give of your time without resentment.

3. **Cohesion**: Work towards similar goals. If goals are different, try to negotiate or modify the goals so you are able to move forward in the same direction.

4. **Values**: Analyze priorities and be aware of the true values. Challenge yourself on the material front; learn the difference between needs and wants.

5. **Appreciation**: Be thankful for what you have. Don’t spend time resenting life for what you don’t have.

6. **Marital Support**: Communicate. Make sure you’re connecting with each other every day. Be aware of each other’s needs and feelings.

7. **Humour**: Take the time to laugh.
Fifth Narrative

First Question:

In general, what factors would help or hinder the successful transition to parenthood for women?

1. **Birth**: Initially, a good birth experience could make a big difference.

2. **Support**: Having a support network in place, whether it is family, spouse or friends.

3. **Down Time**: Being able to have breaks from motherhood responsibilities either from support network or affordable childcare.

4. **Self-identity**: It is very important to not succumb to the pressure to return to the workplace. In Canada, most women are fortunate enough to enjoy a government sanctioned 6-month maternity leave. However, in certain careers, one may feel the outside pressures to return to work within a shorter period of time than allotted.
F and I have known each other for a long time. We’ve known each other for 17 years and have been married for 8 of those years. Even though we come from very different places, we were heading in the same direction. Throughout our relationship we periodically went our separate ways but we always found our way back to each other. Right from the beginning, F made me feel loved. He courted me by bringing me flowers and chocolates.

Later, F moved to Calgary for his career. We had decided that when I graduated from University, I would move out there to join him. Even though I knew that I loved him, I wasn’t ready for a serious commitment. Therefore, I decided to start my career in Vancouver. Consequently, we broke up. A few years later, our careers started taking us on business trips. He took one here to Vancouver and a few months later, I took one there to Calgary. A couple months later, he moved to Vancouver and 6 to 8 months later, we were engaged.

Before we were married, our lives were different. I was very serious about my career. I like a challenge and I rise to a challenge. I am ambitious, so I was very focused on climbing the corporate ladder. F worked hard and during leisure time enjoyed his serious passion for sports.

By the time we were married, we knew each other inside out, good points and bad … everything. We grew up together and discussed everything.
F probably knew me better than I knew myself. I remember when we had to go to marriage preparation classes, they would ask you these serious questions and you had to give responses. Everybody else was considered this very seriously. We just joked and laughed and had a good time because none of the questions were issues for us. We just knew that we had the same feelings about them because we had been together for so long. Having said that, I remember the first 6 months of marriage being difficult because I went straight from my parents’ home to our home. F had lived on his own and wasn’t really used to adapting to someone else. This coupled with the fact that we’re both strong-willed and passionate in both good and bad ways made the first 6 months of our marriage tough.

Just after I was married, the organization I was working for moved to the United States. I decided to leave marketing because it required numerous hours and I was already aware that I wanted a career that would be less time consuming when I had children. Even though I was very serious about my career, I have always wanted to be a stay at home mom. However, by the time I got married, I realized that financially, I would probably have to continue working full time. When I got pregnant I still thought that I would have to go back to work full time. It wasn’t until we went through the pregnancy that we started talking about the fact that maybe I could work part time, maybe 3 to 4 days a week. When the baby was 3 to 4 months old, we started exploring the
possibility that I could stay home. We finally decided I could because F was making more money and I was able to negotiate a very good severance package. We were very lucky in terms of timing because financially, things just worked out. We were very happy because we both wanted the traditional home environment.

F and I went through some tough times when N was a baby. I think our attitudes about having a child were different. I was really ready. I really wanted to have a child. F was pretty nonchalant about it. He had always assumed that we would have children, but I was the one who really, really wanted one. Even though he was happy to have a child, he didn’t expect nor was he willing to, let it change his life. My labour was difficult – 48 hours and I ended up having a caesarian section. After a couple of days, F went back to work. Fortunately my mom was around but I remember feeling pretty disappointed. I guess he felt that since I was a woman, I would know what to do with this child. Little did he realize that I had no clue.

During this time, I recall telling F how hard it was. I don’t think that even I realized the toll it took on me until last year. N would scream for 4 hours every evening and F would just hand her to me. I took on all the responsibility in terms of N. I don’t feel like he really participated in child rearing until N was about a year old when she became fun and interactive. I remember trying to come to terms with his behavior rationalizing to myself
that now it was my job to care for the home and N and that his role was working outside of the home.

I was truly fortunate because during the first week, my mom came over and took care of us. I also had friends who brought us meals. I remember not having the energy to cook during those first few weeks. I think that this is pretty typical. Therefore, I remember the first three weeks of N's life as being pure hell ... you know ... not knowing what to do. The first 6 months were still tough because it was just me and this little baby. It was a major change. As much as I wanted to be at home, it was so different not to have any daily adult mental stimulation.

Also, I like to have a tight rein over what is happening financially. Before we were married, our only disagreements were about money. F is more fiscally relaxed than I am. It wasn't the financial loss of my income that was difficult. It was my loss of financial independence. During this time F's income increased dramatically so we haven't had to give up much. I have had to budget more, cut down and be more conscientious of my purchases but our priorities are different now. I would like to be able to afford more childcare or to take holidays alone, but we didn't take holidays before. The most difficult change I've had to cope with is asking F for money. I still have trouble when he questions my expenses because I know that I am careful. Fortunately this doesn't happen often, F is not controlling about money.
While the first 3 months were physically taxing, the first 6 months were tough in terms of my life transition from career woman to stay at home mom. Suddenly I no longer had a cleaning lady and I was the one scrubbing toilets, picking up after a child and all the other miscellaneous household chores. During this time I grew resentful of the fact that F could leave in the morning, go spend time with adults, use his brains and then come home to his little family. It was perfect for him; the house was clean, his dinner was made and his shirts were ironed. F didn’t see my angst. From his point of view, he was getting up early, working hard and that I was doing what I have always said I wanted to do. I’m very stubborn and tenacious so I just kept on going. I buckled down did what had to be done. I just persevered. One thing that saved my sanity during this time was that I started attending a baby group at the Dunbar Community Centre. A health nurse organized it and this allowed me the opportunity to connect with other adults, discuss common concerns and receive valuable advice. This was an important milestone. I wasn’t sure how I could be mobile with this child. I didn’t have any friends in the same situation so it would have been easy to feel isolated and this group showed me how to cope.

Luckily, babies grow and life got easier. I started to do things with other moms and their children. One of the biggest issues for us right now is when F is working really hard and under heavy pressure, he feels like he is getting the
short end of the stick. I tell him that if I was working too, we would both be
stressed and he wouldn't come home to a clean house, dinner made and a
happy, well-adjusted child. Even though he intellectually agrees with me, we
argue regularly about this issue and it has become a recurring theme. This is
our only big issue for us.

F feels resentful that I'm having a great life and he's having a stressful
life. My life isn't easy. I don't sit on the couch and watch TV. I'm always keep
busy—sewing, doing laundry, dishes, etc. I'm just not good at sitting still. Even
though my life isn't easy, I absolutely love my life now. When we argue about
this, we end up exploding. We have loud verbal arguments (laugh) and then it's
over. We never let our arguments carry on for the day partially because we
both don't like going to bed having an issue unresolved. The bottom line for
me is that I don't think that making my life worse would make his life better.
The challenge of taking care of children changes all the time because children
grow. There have been tougher times for me, for example, when N was a
newborn and I was adjusting to parenthood. For F it is difficult because he
doesn't get any wind down time. As soon as he is home, N is climbing all over
him, wanting to play.

Besides the working issue, I haven't really experienced any real anxiety in
terms of our relationship. To me, it's even better. To me, I feel like we had a
strong marriage before and now it's even stronger with sharing a child. I can't
say why we have a strong marriage, just that it's fun! He'd like more sex, but that was the same before N was born. F has French blood and if it were up to him he'd like to have sex 10 times a day. On the other hand, to me, sex has become less and less important as I've gotten older.

Even though F sometimes grows resentful of the working issue, he is a very supportive and sensitive spouse. F shows me affection in so many different ways. Every morning he gets up early, kisses me good bye and phones later when we're awake to say good morning. During the day he will connect with us 2 or 3 times. He really feels that it is important for me to pursue my own interests. I've become involved in our strata council and next year will be the president of N's pre-school. Though F will end up taking care of N on his own more often because of these pursuits, he's o.k. with it. We support each other that way.

F loves to exercise, play golf and ski. Although I would rather he is at home with us, he has to have an outlet. He can't work all the time. It's his only leisure time. Before N came along, F used to mountain bike and we used to ski and play tennis quite regularly. He has always been very athletic so when we go to Whistler, F skis and I take care of Nicole. This does not bother me because I know he needs this outlet and besides, I don't really like to ski without F. Hopefully, when Nicole is older, we will all ski together. I feel blessed that he enjoys skiing with my parents. My dad and him are really close
and they consider each other not just relatives but good friends. I find that F is very similar to my Dad in both good and annoying ways. We spend a fair amount of time with my parents so the fact that my husband and parents are so compatible makes our life very enjoyable. It would be very tough for me if it weren’t this way. The bottom line for me is that in terms of family values, important issues and priorities F and I see things the same way.

When I think about my life and how it’s turned out I just feel so happy and I feel less like I would like to have more. I mean, I would still like to have more if it were possible but I’m happy with the way things are. I expected my life to be not what I wanted it to be. I expected it to be really hard and tough. I remember just being torn apart because I was going to have to leave this little baby with childcare. You could spend time thinking wouldn’t it be nice to have this and that but what’s the point? I mean you would just make yourself miserable if you dwell on it. I have a great life. I really can’t complain. I don’t feel like I’ve made many sacrifices. Sure, I would like to have a house instead of a condo, so we could have the space and have another child. I’ve always wanted lots of children. I used to get really upset about that. I haven’t told F how much this upsets me because he is very proud. We support each other that way. We don’t hurt each other gratuitously … mostly anyway.

All in all, I would say our relationship is stronger now. I know that some couples argue about parenting but fortunately, F and I have the same
philosophy regarding child rearing. If there's an issue, F allows me to be the expert since I'm the one who has time to talk to other parents to see how they handle things, do some reading, go to classes or discussion groups. Our relationship and how we relate to each other hasn't changed much. What we relate about has changed. I mean N is the centre of our lives. She is just a joy. Sometimes I feel like all we talk about is her. We both love her so much. We love each other, we love her. Our love for her is just one more thing that we share ... one more thing that we have in common.

Final Question:
Not all couples are successful at dealing with this transition. Could you share your opinion about what you think makes the difference?

1. If a person was forced to either go back to work or to stay at home. I mean ... yes ... I have hard times but I'm doing what I've always wanted to do. Whereas if I had to do something that made me unhappy, it would affect my relationship. You know I'm happy.

2. If a couple had a real problem child with A.D.D. or whatever else. N is challenging but she doesn't have any unusual difficulties.
3. If a couple hadn't known each other for a long time or had grown apart. For us, we knew each other inside and out. Over the years we grew together.

4. I truly believe that if you are not happy or if you aren't where you want to be then it's because you don't really want it that badly. If you are in a situation that you are not happy with, then you either change it or move on. You have to do whatever it takes. I think a lot of women are really torn between a career and staying at home. I know it was scary for me to think what if I ever want to go back to work and I've stopped? Ask yourself what do I really, really want? I think a lot of women say I can't afford to stay at home. But I think what they mean is I can't afford to stay at home and maintain the same lifestyle. Find out what you really, really want and do it. It won't feel like you're sacrificing ... you'll just feel good for doing it ... feel happy.
Sixth Narrative

First Question:

In general, what factors would help or hinder the successful transition to parenthood for men?

1. Preparedness: In my experience, you will never be prepared for becoming a parent. Impending fatherhood did not all of a sudden mean that I was going to have to become more responsible or change my day to day lifestyle. Parenthood is a transformation and your priorities change. I can’t speak for my entire gender but personally I cannot think of anything that would universally help or hurt a successful transition.

Narrative

D and I have been together for a very long time. I am 37 years old, D is 35 and N is 3 ½. We’ve been married for 8 years and have known each other for 18. In the beginning, I used to dream about how we would live in Vancouver, be married, have babies and have D stay at home. This has
happened for us. My wife, D, is the perfect mix for me. She is traditional but also very business minded, assertive and very similar to me in many ways. We are a great fit.

Looking back, I found that I did not spend much time thinking about how life would be once the baby arrived. The transition to parenthood started 2 days before our baby came. D’s labour was 48 hours. So literally for 2 days before she actually arrived, all I was concerned with was having this little thing and hoping she was going to be all right. Then, N arrived. We were extremely happy and excited. However, the birthing experience completely burnt us out; D ever more so than myself. Luckily, we had family that would help. This was the beginning of becoming worn out parents.

The first 3 weeks were quite stressful, again, more for D than for me. Nonetheless, since I was a first time father, I worried. I remember the moment she made a noise during the night. I would ask myself: Is she breathing? Is she coughing? Is she okay? My whole focus was directed on this tiny little bundle. We were adjusting to becoming parents. I was tired. Unfortunately, life goes on and I had a very heavy workload with many responsibilities. It was impossible to put work on hold to be at home. I was compelled to go back to work a couple of days after N was born.

Fortunately, our mothers were there every day to help D out. They did all the cooking and played with N. This family support was vital to me or I
would’ve had to be home 100% of the time. I could have ended up feeling resentful due to the build up of pressure. In my case, I have absolutely no resentment mostly because becoming a parent didn’t slow me down at all. I was busy with work. I think D felt disappointed because I was not around all the time during these first few weeks. I was so worn out due to working and adjusting to the new baby that it took me quite some time to realize actually how much work N as a newborn was. Luckily, N was a good baby and started sleeping for long periods fairly quickly. After 3 weeks, D and I felt more comfortable with our baby. Once we were over the initial shock of becoming parents, we started to get into a routine.

The toughest part of becoming a father is the stress that I feel I carry for our family. This is the only real point of contention that D and I have. Since I truly want my daughter and wife to be happy, I know I must endure a high stress level but at the end of the day, I pay the price. We both decided and wanted D to stay at home, though, at times, I feel like I’m getting the short end of the stick. I wouldn’t change anything but it’s the contrast between D’s carefree life and my stressful one that makes it difficult for me. Even though I sometimes feel resentful, there isn’t a day that goes by that I’m not thankful. I enjoy my career and I’ve done well. I didn’t attend University but instead I worked my way up from a chain man out in the field to a surveyor. I’ve been persistent, aggressive, had some good breaks and luckily I’m talented. The
reality is Corporate Canada is stress filled. I wake up at 5:00 a.m., I'm out the door by 5:30 and in the office just before 6:00. I'm home by 4:00 p.m. when N wants to go for a bike ride, next is supper, then play time, then bath and bed. It is very busy with a child plus I work most weekends. As I keep moving up the food chain in Corporate Canada I feel additional pressure on my professional life. This is exacerbated by the fact that I'm the sole breadwinner. There is no safety net. I value and cherish having D stay home to be with N yet sometimes I don't feel appreciated for the extra burden I carry. When I feel burnt out and tired I end up reminding myself how great life really is. I hop in my Jeep and have lunch at the Vancouver Club or go golfing. Remembering that life has been very kind to us takes the edge off. It prevents me from going completely berserk about getting the short end of the stick.

Also, life is easier now that D has become more understanding regarding my need to work weekends or my need to relieve my stress by playing golf. She recognizes that it is a give and take situation. I make sure I spend a lot of time with my family by being home by 4:00, playing with N, riding our bicycles together and giving my daughter a bath every night. During the summer months, I leave the office every Friday by 10:00 or 11:00 a.m. so I can hop on the ferry to meet D and N who spend their summers with D's mom on the Gulf Islands. It's about priorities and luckily D is realistic and supportive. This serves to remind me, again, that life has been kind to us. I really am very
happy. There is a lot of life yet to live and so far we really have not had any reason to be depressed. Life gets hard and stressful and I can go to bed tired and certainly do many nights, but we have a great family. We simply lucked out.

I'm also fortunate to be part of the E clan (D's family name). I am so lucky to enjoy an excellent relationship with my father-in-law. H is one of my best buddies. We dine together once a week. We are together every weekend, in the winter at Whistler and during the summers we stay at their cabin on the Gulf Islands. Not only are D, N and I fortunate to be able to enjoy these retreats which we could not afford on our own, but we truly love my in-laws' company. That is the amazing part! Again, we are blessed. When I examine where we are at, I have no regrets. If we had more money and more space I would have another child in a minute. I think we are very practical and perhaps reasonably selfish. We have factored in what the toll would be on us to have another child and for now we are happy with the one and we love her to death. Last night she was in our bed and I was just watching her sleep. I mean, she is a little bundle of joy and I just love that kid more than life itself. N is active and strong-minded; the perfect blend of our two personalities. She is a great kid and she has added so much to who we are.

I think both of us have changed somewhat since we have had N. We have had to become more patient. Also, we don't butt heads as often but this
may be due to age or exhaustion. We still have these explosions but then it usually dissipates. We never keep anything inside so it never lasts long. The frequency of our arguments has diminished. This is due partially because we try not to fight in front of N and also because I have realized that D’s passion about an issue is genuine. She does not argue with the intention of pissing me off but because she really believes in it. So now, I do not take it as a personal attack. Thankfully, we do not have any parenting differences. We do not necessarily discuss parenting, we just kind of seem to do it. Perhaps, it is because we see things in very much the same way. We live the experience. The only thing I remember discussing is the educational options for N. Again, I think we are very similar. We both discipline and we both back each other up.

Even though I cannot say our relationship has changed, we are now more physically tired so we do not relate as a couple as much as I would like. In the evenings we eat as a family, then I bathe Nicole and get her ready for bed. Usually we are both so tired once she is in bed we end up watching TV sitcoms. Up until recently, we used to go to bed at about 10:00 p.m., we would chitchat and then I would pester her for a while. Then it would be lights out. Now, I am so tired that I’m in bed by 9:45 p.m. and D stays up until 11:00 p.m.

We are making a conscious decision to be less complacent and to realize that even though it is great to be the three of us, we are still a couple. I love D to death and that will never change. This is the core. We are very compatible
and so there are no surprises. We have known each other forever so it is no
effort — it is natural. But love on its own is not enough. If you are bright
enough, you realize that you can neglect the couple piece for a while — but not
forever. We have love and commitment and I realize this is pretty early on, but
we need to make more time for each other. It’s a big juggling act. You just
keep all these balls in the air and try not to have too many of them hit the floor
at once. There are things I like to do, things I like to do with D, things I like to
do with N and then there are things you have to do. You juggle it all and try to
keep everybody happy including yourself. In my case, I am pretty happy like I
say, but tired.

Final Question:

Not all couples are successful at dealing with this transition. Could you share
your opinion about what you think makes the difference?

1. **Certainty:** Don’t have children until you are ready to have them. Be
   110% happy with your marriage before you have children, be happy in
   your own skin.

2. **Sound Spousal Relationship:** Know your mate and feel completely
   comfortable with that person. Having children is stressful and everyone
deals with stress differently. How they deal with stress should not be a
surprise. If your mate does not understand how you are going to cope, how you end up dealing with these problems then become problems of their own. One thing is for certain, you are going to have problems. That is a given. Everyone has flaws and is human but if you know the person you are marrying, then all you have to do is cope with the new addition to your family. For me, D has not changed. I look at D now and I look at D before. I see no difference. I see D. We have N and we love her to death, but D today, her role has changed, but I love her the same way as I loved her before and the same way I’ll love her forever.

3. Material Possessions: Don’t focus on material things that you don’t or won’t have. That goes a long way in terms of being happy because then all you have to worry about is making sure that you have a good relationship with your wife and family.
Seventh Narrative

First Question:

In general, what factors would help or hinder the successful transition to parenthood for women?

1. Preparedness: Our age was significant in helping us in that we were ready to have children. We didn’t feel that we were losing out on anything. We had done the parties. The fun, all that type of thing.

2. Financial Security: It wasn’t stressful that I wasn’t working because we had enough money to cover the mortgage. We had plenty of financial capabilities to make those first six months very, very easy for us. And we had a home. We weren’t worried about what we would do for childcare, what the stress of childcare would do to our financial situation.

3. Self Sufficiency: I was well in control of myself and my situation, so that helped me to feel that I could make this transition and I wasn’t all of a sudden going to become dependent on somebody. I value my independence and that’s important to me.
4. **Equal Partnership:** P and I have always had an equal relationship, so he was a heavy participant right from the beginning.

**Narrative**

When I met P, we were both involved in other relationships. I knew once I met him that I couldn’t marry T. I was so head over heels with D. He is so different from anybody else that I had ever gone out with. But I just knew he was the right guy. Our first date, we went to lunch and it continued through dinner. I didn’t get home until 11pm. There was this massive connection. He made me feel so good about myself. It was absolutely amazing! We ended up living together, got engaged and then married. I am now 40 years old and D is 41. We have been married for five years and have two children, M who is almost four and C who is nine months.

Becoming pregnant was very easy for us the first time. We were very lucky. And I feel that helps too, in the transition. The second month trying, I got pregnant. We had a more difficult time with C and we felt so much stress going into the second pregnancy. So, with M, both of us were excited and happy and not thinking about the bad things that could happen. The timing was great too. We were in the middle of building a house, which was due for completion in April. M was due in October. We had lots of time to move in,
settle down and get things ready. You start all that nesting feeling right. The only stressful period we had during that time was that P was changing jobs and careers. But I felt that I had a good career and a good financial situation, and we weren’t overextended mortgage-wise or anything like that. I had carried a rent or mortgage that was only a few hundred dollars less than that, and if I had to, I would go back to work and P would take parental leave to stay home with the kids. I mean that was an option, it was available to us. We were in it together. We talked about our relationship in terms of participation. It wasn’t even much of a big discussion. I would say ‘well, you’d be 50/50, wouldn’t you?’ and he’d say ‘of course I would be’.

I had an easy birth, relatively speaking. God, is there such a thing? But it wasn’t a caesarian and there wasn’t major stress with the baby. The only stressful point of time that we had, and I’ll never forget it, the first week was hell because she wasn’t latching. She wasn’t feeding properly. So I lived at the breast clinic. I have to say that that is where the husbands can get shuffled off and you have to be so careful. It’s kind of an interesting period. P ran around doing things for me. He went out to the drugstore, and came home and presented to me, like a bottle of wine, stool softener he had to get for me. So those were his roles more. And because she wasn’t latching, we stayed on a bottle. P did the middle of the night feeds that first week. I got all my sleep
back in my first week and then I was able to cope. It was a different time; I was nearly at the end of my ropes. Then the women descended.

She ended up latching, so she was 80% on the breast and 20% on the bottle, which allowed P to stay involved. One of the things about the breastfeeding is the total lack of freedom you have because you are with the child 100% of the time. And the lack of involvement with the husband. 90% of the bottles were given to her by P. I think he loved that. He felt involved. I was aware that I could take over 100% and that this could be something that was all mine. I was lucky because I had a strong mother who wanted to be with the baby, as well as a strong husband who wanted to be with the baby. In our case, we were both transitioning, not just me, and then he has to deal with this as an outsider.

When M was six weeks old, we went down to Los Angeles and Palm Springs. My grandmother lives in LA and my parents had a place in Palm Springs. So we went and stayed with them and that was great. So we got to go out for dinner with everybody, and we had lots of hands-on help. My aunt and uncle were there too. One night P and I went to a movie, which was kind of fun to do together. We had lots of family support. You don’t recognize it at the time, but you do when you think about it.

My whole pregnancy leave was such a fabulous, magical time. I loved that time. The only thing that I would say that wasn’t great about my living situation was we were living in East Vancouver and all my friends and family
lived in West Vancouver. But what I would do was get up early with P. So I
was up before M. Every morning it was like, ‘okay, I’ve got to get this done
before she gets up’. It’s kind of the type of personality I am. Then I would get
stressful, and so by 8:00 am the house would be clean and I’d have her dressed
and I would be gone. I’d pack up M and we’d leave for the day and then come
back. I felt stressed until I got out the door, and then it would just evaporate.
When I went back to work, I reduced my workweek to four days. I’ve chosen
not to focus on my career. It’s a conscious choice, right? So I’m wrapped up
in the family emotions, making a nice home and things like that. But you need
money to make a nice home and to put my kids in the classes they want. That’s
where there is some stress in our relationship. Our future is P’s company, not
my job, and since we both work in the same industry, I understand what he is
working on or what’s going on. When business is not doing well, that adds
more stress to our marriage. On the other hand, I’m the only one that he can
talk to about it. And it must be nice for him because he’s the General Manager
and he has no peers to talk to about it. At least when he’s talking to me,
although often we can end up in a fight over it, he’s talking to somebody who
understands. We hardly ever fight though. In fact, P doesn’t fight but I think
that’s why I pick at him more. I pick. I know I’m doing it. I can’t stop myself.
I want to see a reaction from him. He doesn’t like to be in conflict and so I
feel like I have to keep asking him what’s going on so that I have a better
understanding of what he is doing. We never hold grudges though. I heard something once which was never to go to bed angry with each other. And so I have often said that to him. We can’t go to bed until we resolve this. So that seems to work, because he’s a resolution person. Right now we’re negotiating how to balance family time and work time. It’s not that I need him to help, because I have plenty of help. When he isn’t home it’s not like I’m suddenly on my own. My family is ten blocks away and I have a live-in nanny. I’m finding it more and more stressful that he doesn’t come home until 6:30 or 7:00 at night. It’s too late with the kids. It’s about family time. I think we’re going to have to meet 50/50 on this issue. I think sometimes I realize he can’t make it home earlier, but I still want him to realize the impact on the overall family. Maybe the amount of change I want is unrealistic because there are just too many demands on him right now. P is trying to make this business a success. I want him to, and I’ve lost focus in my career because I’m so busy with the emotional side of the family. It’s a conscious choice. So I’m wrapped up in the family emotions. Making a nice home and things like that, but you need money. Maybe we need to come to an agreement like he can work two nights a week, and pick those two nights. We need to talk more about this. It’s hard to balance your time. Couples time really suffers when you are both working because time together means more time away from the kids. Still we try and go out enough in the evening and I do feel like there are times that we get to have
like adults. Last summer, once the kids were in bed and the nanny was watching television, we would spontaneously decide to go out for walks. It was a dream. Having our live-in nanny has been great, not only because it provides opportunity for spontaneity, but also because M enjoyed consistent loving care.

I have to say that kids have definitely taken the passion away for me right now. I just don’t feel as good about how I look. It’s my self-perception; I’m tired of being tired. I can be very critical of myself.

Even though I can be critical of myself and I’m a worrier, I would say overall I’m an optimist. But I’m like, ‘okay, everything has gone so well, so when is this bubble going to burst on me?’ But, touch wood, I’ve had nothing awful happen in my life. Yeah, I’ve had some failed relationships with my boyfriends, and had to deal with my grandparents dying, those kinds of things, but I haven’t had any real tragedy. And financially not tons and tons and tons of money, but God, a lot better off than a lot of people are. But both of us work and that’s a sacrifice. Now my mother thinks I’m making wrong choices, right? She thinks we should move to a small house or another area and be home with the kids. But those are all choices you make as individuals. This is my choice. So I’ve been really lucky. I feel lucky that I got the job I did because, you know, I have always felt at work, ‘when are they going to figure out that I’m just playing?’ I have often said that business is nothing but gossip. That’s why I’m so good at it. You talk to a bunch of people, you find out what
they are thinking and you go, 'this is what I should be doing', then to level off their thinking. I love doing that sort of thing; I love talking to people. Yeah, I love work. There is no doubt about it. I couldn’t not work. The ultimate for me would be to be self-employed successfully. Start a company from my house. And I’d love a third child. I just feel that each time we have another child we become more of a family unit. Our children have now made us even closer. I think of us like a flower. We are all petals and the stem just keeps getting stronger as opposed to weaker with every petal.

Final Question:
Not all couples are successful at dealing with this transition. Could you share your opinion about what you think makes the difference?

1. **Don’t look for equality in marriage.** Women will always give 150%. So think of yourself as giving 150% and you’ll probably be a lot happier than always looking for it to be 50/50. Like don’t think that you take the garbage out once and he takes it out the next time, right? Look for it when you really need it. If you sit there and you are always calculating that I’ve done this and now he owes me, it becomes not loving enough.

2. **Remove stress from your life.** Recognize your limitations.
3. **Financial security.** I don’t mean that you need to be wealthy or anything like that, that you have the potential to earn an income. Don’t go into having kids when you don’t feel that you can’t even support yourself.

4. **Capable of supporting self.** I strongly believe it helps in a happy marriage and a happy family. It’s just the knowledge and security that you are equal and you can support yourself. Be marketable whether you are using the skill to earn money or not. You can always turn that skill into a moneymaking proposition if you need to in the future. It’s bigger than financial. Get involved with the school or PAC. Get some rewards and recognition outside of the family home.

5. **Independence.** Independence of thought, independence of feeling. You don’t have to be rich, but if you enjoy your work and you get a lot of fulfillment from your work, to me that is invaluable.

6. **Respect.** Marry someone that you truly love and somebody that you are compatible with. But you know, for us it works that we are not exactly opposites but we are not similar. But who knows, it might work for somebody who is similar too. As long as there is this love and respect. Marry somebody who you respect, that’s for darn sure.

7. **Be happy with yourself.** I know that my marriage is at it’s worse when I’m not happy with myself.
Eighth Narrative

First Question:

In general, what factors would help or hinder the successful transition to parenthood for men?

1. **Lifestyle change**: It is necessary to put some of the things that interest you on the back burner, for men it is particularly difficult because when they get together, it is usually an event, a hiking or fishing trip, for example. Women keep in close contact with other women by phone or short visits; for men it’s often a big event that is no longer feasible.

2. **Financially secure**: Be financially secure. The financial impact didn’t even cross my mind because K and I were okay.

3. **Don’t take partner for granted**: Don’t assume that the work will be done by your partner; pull your own weight.

Narrative

K and I started dating in 1990. One of the reasons I was so attracted to her was that she is very bright, full of opinions. She’s challenging. I like that a lot.
Before we had children, we did all sorts of things as a couple. We’d do lots of activities, not just movies, but go away for the weekend or on short trips, like going scuba diving.

M was born in 1995. I remember when M first came home and she was trying to breastfeed. There were all these difficulties for K while she was trying to make this work. She was up a lot and obviously getting extremely exhausted, so I took the night feeds for a brief period. You know, I could see K was extremely tired. I guess I was concerned for K at that point. In general, I’ve always thought I would participate equally, but at that point it was more out of concern for her than anything else.

I actually enjoyed changing the diapers because you get really close to your child when you do stuff like that. It’s part of the bonding. When you change their diaper they are sitting up there looking at you. Before I was a parent, God, I would run the other way!

I’ve always made a conscious effort to do more than half because I know that K does all the planning and worrying about things like childcare or who’s driving her to school. I never do that.

I really don’t want to take K for granted. And so I look at what I can do, because I have so little flexibility at my job. It’s lucky that K has a bit more than I do. It’s just how to compensate over here for not doing something over there. For example, I started noticing something. We would go to dinner at
her parents' place and both M and C would always end up in the positions beside me. K would be on the other side. One time it was my birthday, of all things. So I'm sitting here eating and dealing with C and M, and K is over in the corner. I said, "this is getting to be a pattern". I also do the breakfast and a lot of the feedings on the weekends. I'm not perfect though, that's for sure. Today I came home and C's there and she's running all over the place now. So I'm entertaining C and K is getting dinner. I don't cook. I used to cook. But K likes to cook, so that's fine. I can take it or leave it. So she's in there getting dinner and M is sort of self-sufficient now, but C isn't. I got distracted, got into the mail. I consciously heard C in the kitchen pulling stuff out of drawers. I knew she was in the kitchen and I knew K was there. But I didn't think that K had her hands full with cooking dinner. Instead of running and getting her, K had to call me. I think we men are very poor at multi-tasking.

One thing that has really suffered since we've had children is the amount of time to do things together as a couple. During the week, you are pretty much toast by the time the kids go to bed. And then when we are together on the weekends, we end up doing all of our personal things. It's like a tag team on the weekend. K goes off without the kids and I stay with the kids, or vice-versa. Because we both work, we need to work extra hard at finding couple time. It's interesting though, before children you are attracted to each other either through mutual interests or your personalities, or whatever attracts one
person to the other. Once you have kids, they are a very large part of what is
important to both of you and what drives you together. You know C walking
for the first time, isn’t that great; we both feel the same way about it. The
whole dynamics of the relationship changes. Nevertheless, it’s not enough and
K and I have just recently talked about how we need to spend more time
together. We used to have date nights and we’re now taking a parenting
course, which is every Tuesday night, so I think I’ll suggest to continue going
out on Tuesday nights. We also have a lot of outside commitments so we end
up being committed to the family or committed to these other things. This
week, for example, Monday night I had an executive committee meeting and I
didn’t get home until 8:30pm. Tuesday night I had to work because my partner
was in town and K went to the parents’ course. And then Wednesday night
she went out with a friend, and tonight I’m here. We’re busy and apart too
much. It’s probably the weakest part of our relationship right now. We talk to
each other in the mornings or early evenings sometimes when the kids are still
up. A lot of what concerns us is whether we are parenting right, so we always
talk about that kind of stuff. We rarely fight though. If we do, it comes more
from K towards me than the other way around. That’s K’s nature. When I get
mad, I get really mad, but generally I avoid conflict. When I notice that
something is bothering her, I’ll ask her what is bugging her. I don’t let her sit
there. I don’t want it to sit there for a few days. Usually it’s something I did.
We don’t hang onto it though. It’s gone with me within minutes and it’s gone from K within hours.

I never knew what to expect when we became parents, so before it happened I didn’t think about it. I waited until afterwards. With M I didn’t find it that difficult being a parent and I liked it. There was no anxiety over C coming, none whatsoever.
APPENDIX C

CONTACT AND CONSENT FORMS
Contact Letter to Volunteer

Dear ________________,

You are being asked by a mutual contact to participate in my graduate study. This research is being conducted to determine what factors influence a couple’s successful transition to parenthood.

Participation will involve a 1-2 hour interview. You will be asked to recall relevant perceptions and experiences that affected your spousal relationship during the transition to parenthood. Interviews will be tape-recorded, transcribed and assigned a number code to ensure confidentiality. Once transcribed, a narrative will be presented to you to read and verify its accuracy. The total time commitment should not exceed 2.5 hours.

These interviews will be used to develop a thematic framework identifying the common factors of a couple’s positive transition to parenthood. The development of such a framework may impact on how other couples navigate the process of becoming parents. It may also influence the training and practice of counselors who work with couples contemplating having children.

Your involvement is entirely voluntary. You may withdraw from the study at any time. All responses are strictly confidential. A random number will be the only means of identification once the interview is completed.

If you would like to participate in this study, please call me to arrange a suitable interview time.

Thank you for your time and interest.

Respectfully,

Wendy Galbraith
730-xxxx
TRANSITION TO PARENTHOOD

A study exploring the evolution of a relationship.

I'd like to hear your story if:

- You have had your first child within the last four years.
- You feel your spousal relationship has remained positive or, has changed for the better during the transition from couplehood to parenthood.
- You and your spouse would be willing to share your experience.
- You feel content with your marriage.

Your participation involves:

- A discussion with a female researcher, who is a Masters Student of Counseling Psychology at U.B.C., about how your experience of going through changes has shaped the way your spousal relationship is today.
- Two tape-recorded interviews. One 1 to 2-hour interview and one ½ hour interview at a later date.

If you, or someone you know, would like to participate in this study or would like further information regarding this research, please call Wendy at 730-xxxx.
Consent Form

STUDY: Transition to parenthood: evolution of a relationship
INVESTIGATOR: Wendy Galbraith
SUPERVISOR OF RESEARCH: Dr. Larry Cochran

This research is being conducted as one of the requirements for Wendy Galbraith toward a Masters degree in Counseling Psychology. The research is to determine what factors influence a couple's successful transition to parenthood. During a 1-2 hour interview, participants are asked to reflect and share relevant perceptions and experiences meaningful in regards to their spousal relationship during the transition to parenthood. Interviews will be tape recorded, transcribed and given a number code to ensure confidentiality. The narratives and theme descriptions written from the transcripts will be returned to participants for comment and revision. The tapes will be erased upon completion of the study.

The research investigator will be happy to answer any questions you might have concerning the study either before or after the interview. It is important to note that your participation is voluntary and that you have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without prejudice of any kind. If you have questions concerning the study, please contact Wendy Galbraith at 730-xxxx. Also, if you have any concerns about your rights or treatment as a research subject, you may contact Dr. Richard Spratley, Director of the U.B.C. Office of Research Services and Administration at 822-8598.

I HAVE READ AND UNDERSTOOD THE ABOVE AND CONSENT TO BE A PARTICIPANT IN THIS RESEARCH.

I ACKNOWLEDGE RECEIPT OF A COPY OF THE CONSENT FORM.

Name of Participant: ________________________________
Address: ___________________________ Phone #: __________________
Signature: ________________________ Date: ________________________
Researcher: ________________________ Phone #: __________________

Wendy Galbraith

Faculty Advisor: __________________________ Phone #: __________________

Dr. Larry Cochran
APPENDIX D

VALIDATION INTERVIEW
I have identified several commonalities across a number of couples. Some may reflect your experience, while others may not. My only concern is ACCURACY.

This list is not provided for you simply to confirm, but to consider and reflect upon.

Please ask yourself: Is this true in your experience?

We will go through this list together. Please feel free to ask for clarification, to offer illustrations and to give feedback.

Thank you for your time and careful consideration.
APPENDIX E

FOUR MAIN CATEGORIES
FOUR MAIN CATEGORIES

Foundations for parenthood

1. Deliberate pregnancy
2. Achieved satisfactory financial arrangements
3. Feel materially content
4. Agreement to division of roles

Maintenance of spousal relationship

1. Commitment to intimacy
2. Desire to work towards resolutions
3. Demonstrable consideration for partner
4. Commitment to relationship
5. Open Communication
6. Sharing short- and long-term goals
7. Respect for Partner
8. Know what to expect from spouse
9. Know how to negotiate with spouse
10. Optimistic atmosphere supplied by one or both of the partners

Evolutions and Adjustments

1. Common bond with spouse
2. Bonded with newborn
3. Shift in focus to family unit
4. Pursue individual interests outside of the home
5. New capacities developed
6. Became comfortable in managing demands of child
7. Involvement of husband
8. Roles became more functional
9. Satisfaction with ones’ role

Support

1. External support