

Creativity Needs in Becoming a Father

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Becoming a father, much like becoming a man, is itself a prodigious task all too easily and deceptively signified by a circumscribed and observable event. Thus, we are led to believe that one "becomes" a father when one's female partner has given birth to the jointly conceived baby. Simple enough, or so it seems. In fact, however, becoming a father, just as in becoming a man, is a lengthy, often subtle, and highly complex process of development and maturation (Note 1).

The process of becoming a father actually begins long before conception and birth. Just as the roots of a woman's motherhood are traceable to the distant past of the little girl's wishes to be like her mommy and experience maternal yearning to (re-)create through nurturance, so too can the foundations for a father's attachment and relationship to his infant be observed in the little boy's instincts, wishes, and behaviors linked to both his own mommy and daddy.

There is a "psychobiology" to fatherhood much as there is in motherhood. Benedek (1970) used the term "genuine fatherliness" to convey the instinctual roots of the male's capacity to develop fatherly ties and function as a provider. What observer of what Greenberg and Morris (1974; Greenberg, 1985) discussed as fathers' sense of "engrossment" shown toward their newborn, cannot feel the archaic, instinctual and primary bond evident in this altered state of consciousness? Pruett (1983, 1987) found that fathers were capable of achieving a "biorhythmic synchrony" with their infants, a kind of empathic nurturing similar to that displayed by mothers. I believe we can see these very same responses in the little boy's attitudes and behaviors toward his first puppy, turtle, or even goldfish!

I'd like to turn from analogies to a more limited examination of a small albeit important element in the post-conception phase of prospective fatherhood. There are of course many stages to be traversed even before parturition, let alone prior to the child's reaching infancy (Diamond, 1986). I won't, however, discuss the steps here. I shall instead focus on one essential

though easily overlooked aspect of the process of becoming a father—namely the importance of the male's creative impulse during his partner's pregnancy.

Shapiro (1987) has highlighted the societal perils and pitfalls befalling the expectant father during pregnancy. This period is one of considerable, albeit frequently masked, anxiety, stress and insecurity for "pregnant men" as evidenced by increased substance abuse, workaholism, psychosomatic distress, and sexual promiscuity. Why does this occur and what might prove prophylactic?

As Diamond (1986) discussed, many unconscious wishes along with "neurotic" conflicts are triggered for men during pregnancy, including envy toward the prospective mother; concerns regarding responsibility, adulthood and aging; issues involving competition and wishes to re-establish connections with one's own father; wishes to revitalize one's own parents; jealousy and guilt toward the fetus who is the object of the partner's rapt attention; and unresolved issues and mutuality wishes in the partnership. While "pathological" behaviors exhibited by expectant fathers are partially determined by such unconscious motivations and "unfinished business," I believe the key to understanding such manifestations lies elsewhere. In short, the fundamental hurdle for every man to overcome during this period is not a "neurotic" obstacle, but rather involves the ubiquitous need for *creative expression*.

It is ironic that our society regards a growing fetus in its mother's womb as the ultimate act of male creation—indeed the term is "procreation"! And what man doesn't take a certain pride in his creative potency upon learning that he has impregnated a woman, even when accidentally? Such unabashed pride is supplanted soon enough, however, by the beginnings of the prospective father's developmental challenge (Gurwitt, 1976). During the first trimester and into midpregnancy, the expectant father is confronted daily with the fact that "his" creation is growing in another's body—the body of a mother who "knows" the fetal presence most every moment in a plethora of psychophysiological ways.

The father must experience the impelling events of gestation, quickening, fetal growth, parturition and lactation second-hand; he thereby remains, at some level, always destined to reside outside (Note 2). Joy, excitement, vicarious pleasure, and considerable emotionality notwithstanding, it is culturally expected that the father deny his deeper sense of exclusion in the process (Note 3). Many men will nonetheless freely report that the process does not seem real to them until the actual birth when they can see, hear and touch their child (Herzog, 1982; Note 4).

An important question to address is what goes on internally for the "soon-to-be" father as he waits daily for his "act of creation" to become a

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genuine entity. My clinical and personal observations suggest that he becomes involved, often unconsciously, in a search for a *concrete means of expressing himself* through the birth process. It is very much a *physical* search—a search to feel deep down in his gut and through his body, the reality of the life that lies inside someone else, beloved as that “other” may be. Such a search for the physical and bodily expression of one’s fatherhood is after all but a variation on the theme we see so often in a man’s life—the coming home from a hard day’s labor knowing he’s earned his wages because he feels exhausted; his proud complaints of sore muscles after a long job, workout or yearly softball game; or perhaps the physical joys he feels after “horsing around” and “whooping it up” with his buddies at the weekly poker game, when going bowling, or watching Monday night football.

The issue for most emerging fathers concerns the ways in which *visceral ties* to the as-yet-unborn fetus might be developed. How can the prospective father feel what he knows cerebrally to be true? How can he create for himself the experience that his partner undergoes naturally and hormonally, if somewhat painfully? How can his deeper and more bodily self join in an endeavor which he knows, in an archetypal way, is one of the most profound miracles of his life?

These questions most men are ill-trained to think about let alone articulate in communicable forms. And even if we could easily think such questions, would we be better off living as we do in a culture, which as Shapiro (1987) depicted, is so inhibiting of the “pregnant” father’s true feelings? The artist is undoubtedly most blessed for he can undertake the search without thought and find his physical expression through his oils and clay, his melodies and lyrics, or his prose. Moreover, the scientist can theorize and (re)search, the laborer build, the draftsman design, the farmer reap, the teacher teach and healer heal, while the athlete can win for his “kid to be.” Yet each and every man is a creator-in-waiting during this half year or more. Each is in search of a canvas where he can make his dream into a reality by expressing the deepest urge inside to give life to the tiny evolving being growing inside the woman he (hopefully) loves.

It is the lucky man who can find constructive ways to express his fatherly ties during the time of “wait,” while simultaneously protecting his partner’s (and child’s) health and privacy in serving as a source of strength and support. Such men are able to serve as external beacons to their partners who are understandably submerged in their own inner processes particularly during parturition (Herzog, 1982). To illustrate, Sam spent much of his waiting in building a crib, Murak designed a new program for the computer, Dave became actively involved in parenting his earlier-born child, and Juan sculptured a magnificent piece. Other men aren’t so fortunate, for their

creative search takes them in a different direction—a direction often more destructive and guilt laden. Thus, Arnie began working sixteen hour days, E.J. became quite depressed when he wasn't drinking, Charles began a relationship with his secretary, and Stu became physically ill, insomniac and highly irritable as his fears of "something going wrong" mounted daily.

It is difficult to know when observing "from the outside" who will fulfill his search to adaptively create and who won't. Many men become highly involved in the process as they accompany their wives to Lamaze classes, share in many of her experiences, and eagerly discuss their child to be. Yet beneath the surface of these activities, it is common to find a smothered "inner," visceral man seeking to reach into and physically connect with the experience of becoming a father. Sam, Murak, Dave and Juan could satisfy the search; Arnie, E.J., Stu, and Charles were more stifled in their efforts and consequently turned toward problematic substitute "creations." I propose that only through the discovery of avenues satisfying the prospective father's creativity needs can both parental "creators" share in the "feelings of awe" accompanying the end of pregnancy and the actual delivery.

Creativity is far from an esoteric indulgence possessed by the privileged few. On the contrary, creativity is simply the universal human need for connecting one's inner reality with the outside world and vice versa, and is typically reflected in forms of expression wherein what's inside reaches and affects what's outside. The miracle of parenting is that mothers and fathers make such creativity commonplace; indeed the father "to be" will discover such creative connections every day. The fortuitous prospective father is able to come upon such an expression precisely when it is least biologically accessible and yet most emotionally necessary. Indeed, the capacity to create such a visceral and bodily experience with his distant fetus is assuredly the hallmark of a man capable of touching the miraculous world forever lying outside his control.

NOTES

1. The markers are slightly more variable and culturally bound in the case of "becoming a man." In urban America, for example, a boy might "become" a man when he is initiated into a gang or Bar Mitzvah'd; licensed to drive or legally able to drink and vote; graduated from high school or college; or perhaps most typically, employed full-time and/or married.

2. This psychological reality will later play an important role in the healthy development of the child when the father, by representing the out-

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side world, serves to facilitate the separating child's disentanglement from the regressive symbiotic tie with the mother.

3. "Pathological" acting out in the form of having affairs and the like can partially serve to reinforce this denial. As indicated above, however, I propose that something more important, and from one perspective, more adaptive, is involved.

4. It is likely that the advent of amniocentesis and the use of sonograms has brought an earlier physical reality to the process during the second trimester.

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