

The Experience of Perinatal Parenthood and the Construction of Paternal Identity

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Full Text: Headnote ABSTRACT: On a theoretical level, this article aims to categorize the increasingly large body of work that exists on fatherhood in order to gain a better understanding of the psychic aspects involved in this stage of development. In a second time, the authors expose two case studies of a clinical research on the transition processes among first-time fathers. The subjects were 25 Greek men of an average age of 30, who were to become father and who participated to a semi-directive interview before and after the birth of their first child. The interviews explored the psychosocial and intrapsychic dynamics regarding the construction of paternal identity. KEY WORDS: Fatherhood, paternity, first-time fathers, identity construction, intrapsychic and psychosocial processes. INTRODUCTION The western world has experienced a great number of socio-cultural transformations regarding forms of parenthood. The evolution of family structures and cultural settings shaped the transformation of parental roles. This occurred at a time when the Feminist Movement was calling for men's active involvement in raising and educating children (Vasconcellos, 2003). When studying paternity, researchers have examined and recorded these transformations regarding their subjects' living conditions and perceptions of life (Le Camus, 2002). In the early seventies therefore when initial publications on precocious paternity began to appear, the new Fathers' Movement was already largely underway. It was only from 1990 onwards that the concept of paternity, the subject of this paper, came to the fore. This concept is synonymous with the processes involved in becoming a father, from the psychological viewpoint. Our paper is divided into two sections. In the first section, we will try to categorize the increasingly large body of work that exists on fatherhood in order to gain a better understanding of the psychic aspects involved in this stage of development. In the second section, we will take stock of the results of our clinical research on the transition processes among first-time expectant fathers. This will enable us to get a better grasp of the psychosocial and longitudinal dynamics regarding access to paternity and how this is organised. The types of research carried out regarding fathers can be divided into three main categories: socio-historical studies; psychoanalytic studies; and, lastly, empirical studies (Naziri & Dragonas, 1994). Studies of a socio-historical nature look at the evolution of the social representation of fathers in western countries and propose answers to various questions involving the changing social roles between male and female as well as the changing economic and legal status of the father (Delumeau & Roche, 1990; Parke & Tinsley, 1984). PSYCHOANALYTIC STUDIES ON FATHERHOOD Studies of a psychoanalytic nature use either material from analytic treatment, or anthropological, mythological or literary material. They set out to answer a series of fundamental questions, such as: What is a father? What does the paternal role consist of? What place should be given to femininity and what place to the male provider ego? What significance do couvades and paternal pathology have? (Badinter, 1992; Corneau, 1989; Delaisi de Parseval, 1981; Naouri, 1985; Revault d'Allonnes, 1991; This, 1980). The field of psychoanalytic studies is, in fact, sufficiently rich and diverse that we can look at it to identify key trends. Distinction can be made between works in English and in French. Anglo-Saxon Psychoanalytic Work Anglo-Saxon writers are most interested in the psychoaffective processes and intrapsychic conflicts which characterise the transition to fatherhood and which are the cause of psychosomatic phenomena and behavioural troubles, and even psychotic behaviour in expectant fathers. Their analyses of intrapsychic conflicts are organized around three main areas (Zayas, 1987): a) the increase in man's dependency needs (Liebenberg, 1969) and his depressive reactions (Zilboorg, 1931); b) the emergence of a form of unconscious rivalry with the child, who is possibly seen as a rival brother (Herzog, 1982); c) the reactivation of Oedipal conflicts (Curtis, 1955; Jarvis, 1962). Moreover, following on from

Benedek's work (1959) in particular, other writers while questioning the focus of psychoanalytic literature dealing with mother-child relationships consider access to parenthood to be a critical stage in psychic development (Cath, Gurwitt & Gunsberg, 1989; Curtis, 1955; Ross, 1979). French Psychoanalytic Work In France, the development of the "Name of the Father" function ("Ze Nom du Père") by J. Lacan in 1956 led to a surge in psychoanalytic literature on the "paternal function". Within this trend, some writers favored a highly theoretical approach towards paternal function, examining it on three levels: symbolic, imaginary and real (Dor, 1989). Paternal function can be narrowed down therefore to the forbidden symbiotic mother-child relation, the filiation and the transmission. Other writers, while gaining inspiration from Lacan, placed more emphasis on the clinical dimension of paternal function and took a more concrete approach when studying the father during pregnancy, birth (This, 1980) and in his relationship with his child (Naouri, 1985). Aside from purely Lacanian inheritance, a few important contributions widened the debate on fatherhood by adding new elements essentially from clinical research (Chiland, 1983; Delaisi de Parseval, 1981; Herzog, Lebovici, 1989). The notion of paternal space covers the couple's relationship dynamic and is, as highlighted by Revault d'Allonnes (1991), illustrative of this novel trend. Empirical studies are for their part mostly Anglo-Saxon, even if this area of research has developed considerably in France since the 1990s (Fivaz & Corboz, 2001; Lamour, 2000; Le Camus, Labrell & Zaouche-Gaudron, 1997, for example). Having led to the invention and use of sophisticated methodological devices, empirical studies look at the involvement of man in his various interactions with woman and child. In particular, it looks at this in the context of the changing social role of male and female (Beau & McGuire, 1982; Berman & Pedersen, 1987; Lewis, 1986; Lewis & O'Brien, 1987; McKee & O'Brien, 1982). While sometimes remaining qualitative and descriptive in nature, the data extracted from the empirical studies is often interpreted from a developmental perspective (Lamb, 1981, 1986), even though more recent research tends towards psychodynamic and systemic approaches (Cath et al., 1989, amongst others). At this point we can categorize the different studies: 1) Those on the specific nature of maternal and paternal contributions and the level of involvement of the father: What are the similarities and the differences between the two parent's behaviour, practices and representations? (e.g. Abelin, 1975). 2) Those on the place the father occupies in the attachment theory and the nature of the father-child bond: How does this father-child bond become established during the first stage of psychogenesis?; What comforting and security-bringing abilities does the father have?; What are the qualitative modes of the father-child bond?; What about the stability and predictive validity of the bond? (e.g. Lamb, 1981; Miljkovitch de Heredia, Pierrehumbert, Turganti & Alfon, 1998; Neyrand, 2000; Steele, Steele & Fonagy, 1996); 3) Those on the precocious role of the father in the emotional, cognitive, social, linguistic development of the child (Kromelow, Harding & Touris, 1990; Le Camus, 2002; Le Camus, Labrell & Zaouche-Gaudron, 1997). The majority of the work carried out recently by developmentalists attaches much importance to the precocious paternal contribution (that is to the father of the preoedipal period). They extend the father's contribution to the whole of the child's development (Le Camus, Labrell & Zaouche-Gaudron, 1997). As such, they see the father both as "a security-bringing attachment figure", "an agent of separation, differentiation and socialisation", "an object of relationship and a partner of communication", or even "a tutor in cognitive learning" (Le Camus, 2002, pp. 160-162). BECOMING A FATHER: THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE PATERNAL IDENTITY In developmental psychology as well as in psychoanalytic debate, one fundamental question arises time and time again either explicitly or implicitly: "How does one become a father?" and "does one become a father in the same way that a woman becomes a mother?" This central question has provoked very diverse answers. Two schools of thought emerge. The first school of thought, while emphasising the prevailing importance of pregenital elements (that is biological bisexuality and the dependence of the man and the woman on the mother), affirms the identity of the psychic functioning between man and woman, and between father and mother (Benedek, 1959; Cath et al., 1989). Some writers criticise the level of importance attached to the biological role of the mother when giving birth, as well as "the overestimation of the symbolic function of the father" (Delaisi de Parseval, 1981, p. 284). Muldorf was the first in 1972 to qualify paternal

presence as "neutral" in the sense that it is experienced as being non-specific by the father who feels, at least at the beginning of the childhood, like a "second mother", attentive to the different needs of the child. Since then, this school of thought and debate have been extended and reviewed by other writers. As such, Hurstel (1987, 1989) underlines that contemporary paternity is affected by three different developments: - the change in family law that gradually substituted paternal power with the notion of childcare, a notion which obviously deals with both parents; - progress in the fields of medicine and biology regarding new techniques for reproduction; - the social break-up of the nuclear family and the emergence of new family structures at the same time as a decline in the number of marriages and a more commonplace view of divorce. As a result, Hurstel underlines that three paternal functions are common to each society: the biological function, the role of nourisher and educator, and the function of giving one's name and guaranteeing the law concerning filiation. These three functions can be reduced to just two basic functions according to certain anthropologists: the biological function and the social father function. The second school of thought highlights the caesura between becoming a mother and becoming a father (Revault d'Allonnes, 1991). The proponents of this approach insist on the biological difference between the man and woman and, consequently, on the otherness of the relational modes between mother and child, on the one hand, and father and child, on the other. More attention is paid therefore to the imaginary and symbolic function of the father in the parent-child relationship. Brazelton (1992 as quoted by Le Camus, 2002, p. 162) amongst others, showed that if the father is sufficiently present around the child from the birth onwards, the baby can differentiate between mother and father from 2-3 months old. Other writers such as Le Camus (2002) complement this differential approach by advocating that fathers are not just different from mothers but that they are also different from each other (depending on their personality) and depending on the stage they are at in the process of paternity and the age of their children. Be that as it may, the transition to fatherhood can be looked at as a "developmental crisis" which leads to the significant restructuring of the man's psyche as well as of his relationship with his partner (Benedek, 1959; Revault d'Allonnes, 1991; Vasconcellos, 2003, amongst others). This normal development crisis, which is evident from the beginning of the pregnancy or even before the pregnancy until the first months of the newborn baby's life, takes on added dimensions when it is the first child. It requires maturity-building psychic work, if not a new "identity synthesis" to enable the father to incorporate his new functions (Vasconcellos, 2003, p. 195). This synthesis does not however always occur automatically and for some men reaching it can turn out to be laborious. This experience of "becoming a father" represents a central point in the lifecycle and takes origin and specificity in the psychic formation of each person while furthermore being strongly marked by social and cultural influences. Against this background, it seems useful to adopt a viewpoint that is developmental, psychoanalytic and psychosocial to study the processes involved in becoming a father. This is what we have tried to do in the clinical research set out below.

THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL CONTEXT OF THE RESEARCH

Despite the abundance of literature on fatherhood, it should be underlined that clinical studies on the subject are relatively recent. In our study, it seemed timely to lay the foundation of an analysis of the psychological consequences of social transformations of the paternal role and function. More pragmatically, we sought to identify the various paternity "scenarios" and the various factors involved in the process of becoming a father by looking at 25 Greek men of an average age of 30, who were to become first-time fathers (Naziri, Dragonas, 1994. Dragonas, Naziri, 1995). We conducted semi-directed interviews with them at three specific moments: before and after the birth of the child. The first interview took place during the first three months of the pregnancy, the second at two to four weeks after the birth, and the third at six to seven months after the birth. During the interviews, we addressed many important topics such as the decision-making process involved in having a child, the fantasy child, the choice of the partner, relationships with the original family, the course of the pregnancy itself, taking care of the baby, decisions regarding its upbringing, etc. By focusing on the elements that make up the personality of the young father and his relationship with the subject, we have tried to reveal the way in which he gives substance to and expresses the various components of paternal function. We sought to outline the process of becoming a father, by getting

a grasp of the paternal function through the man's experiences as he becomes a father and through the systems of representations regarding the paternal role. The interviews were retranscribed in their totality and analysed transversally and longitudinally using the discourse content analysis model (D'Unrug, 1974; Revault d'Allonnes, 1989). Content was analysed longitudinally for certain cases, and transversally for the whole body. The analysis was designed to intervene on two different levels: that of the manifest content (to recognise the representations, attitudes, subjects' practices) and that of the latent content (which emphasises the underlying dynamic of the functioning of the subjects, and in particular their defensive functioning) (Jeammet 1982). A series of sociopsychological studies on various aspects of Greek society has revealed structural changes (Doumanis, 1983; Dragonas, 1987,1992; Kataki, 1984; Moussourou, 1985; Naziri, 1990; Potamianou, 1982): the institution of marriage together with access to the parental role have transformed from being collective objects of negotiation to objects of personal choice. In the traditional setting (most often provincial), responsibility towards the group seemed more important than towards the individual or the conjugal relationship. However, the current framework is marked by its contradictions and its complexity. Individuals have lost their traditional supports which endowed them with a feeling of social belonging and the possibility of personal fulfilment. As such the young Greek men are faced with a stimulating yet, at the same time, difficult outlook: they are supposed to take responsibility for the marriage and the founding of a family depending on their own needs for personal accomplishment while participating in the stakes of dyadic and triadic functional relationship. They are therefore called upon to leave their original families, acquire personal autonomy while belonging to a new network of interdependent relationships. As a result, they find themselves in a continuous process of dismantling and restructuring their masculine and paternal identity. Our study took place in a Greek social context, whose uniqueness is outlined above. In order to determine how these sociocultural factors influence the process of becoming a father, we take as examples two different individuals: one living in an urban environment (Athens) and the other in a provincial environment (Rhodes). Our study is based on certain psychoanalytic concepts about fatherhood and aims to: 1) set out subject representations using the father's own experiences as they evolve before, during and after the birth of the child; 2) determine each subject's intrapsychic dynamics by looking at how he identifies with his parental imagos, his defense mechanisms revealed mainly through discourse structure, his projections of the child as an adult, his image of women through his relationship with his partner, the emotions he expresses and the practices he adopts; 3) study the interaction of the couple regarding their practices, attitudes and emotions when conjugal space must also leave room for paternal space. In order to illustrate the problem more clearly we will present the analysis of two case studies. CLINICAL VIGNETTES Klimis Thirty-three-year-old Klimis is the youngest member of the family and lives not far from his parents. He manages a business with his brother. His wife, who is between five and six years younger than him, comes from the same town and also managed a small tourist shop, before she got pregnant. When asked the first question, "What does becoming a father soon mean to you?" Klimis replied, "it will be an important moment. Of course, it will be something new. We are clearly a big family and I hear what my brother says but, of course, it's not the same thing hearing about being a father and being one". It would seem that Klimis immediately seeks a point of reference in the family and a position in the network of relatives in order to find personal meaning for fatherhood. As his wife's body gradually transforms he himself feels "responsible", and when she tells him that this transformation "pleases her" he "feels relieved". At the same time he feels the need to maintain the image of the stronger sex, reassuring his wife who feels "a little vulnerable" and "sensitive" His defense system functions by covering up any possible cracks and holding onto certain emotions, except when there are moments of elation such as when the child is born, for example. It is for this reason that when he is asked to imagine the child before it is born, he experiences difficulty in seeing beyond the fragmented image of the ultrasound. He can only envisage the child as part of the whole family, without differentiation, "as we have several babies in our family, I think he will be one of the group". Klimis mainly wavers between the vital importance he attaches to his integration into "the family group and close relations"

and his need to define his own individuality. This ambivalent stance between acceptance and rejection of the paternal model is furthermore reflected in the contradictions which characterise his discourse concerning the handling of his paternal power over his own child. Moreover, this ambivalence remains largely unconscious as the field of consciousness is occupied by a symbolic structure which gives meaning to the experience of becoming a father and forms itself around the choice of the child's first name. They will name the child after his paternal grandmother because "it's the only name that doesn't exist in the family", whereas if they were to give the child the name of their choice, it would mean to him that the child would "feel 100 % independent". According to this representation, the first name gives meaning to and defines his relationship within the family and, consequently, a "foreign" first name cuts the subject off from the family line and makes him completely independent. This independence would appear to be threatening as it triggers memories of conflicts regarding the parental image held by Klimis which have not yet been sufficiently resolved. This bipolar structure of "dependence-independence" transpires - at a fantasy level too - like a structural element of the problem of the image of women. Negotiating paternal space, as the birth of the baby nears, looks favorable for Klimis. His wife seems to make room for him and he, himself, has very strong personal motives: he has the opportunity to assert himself, to gain pleasure, to identify himself unconsciously with the female sex. The only fissure in the system which appears during the period just before the birth is the strange feeling that the man, unlike his wife, cannot experience any paternal instinct before the birth because: "To be frank, it's like a mother who has adopted a child and a woman who has her own child. It's like a false maternal affection". However, this profound doubt gives way to exaltation when the momentous occasion arrives and his baby is born. He describes how he felt when present in the delivery room: "Wo sooner had the child's head appeared, when he himself appeared ... at that moment, I felt, I don't know, something like a cold sweat on my hands and, at the same time, anxiety, strong emotions ... I took Maria into my arms and we cried a little, for a couple of minutes". Clearly, the experience of the birth is marked by a very strong emotional closeness that Klimis feels for his wife and his newborn son. This leads us to believe that the experience is part of a process of identification with his wife in which Klimis participates: he felt that he "missed nothing" and that he "felt everything except the pain". Eight months later, the euphoria had given way to a sense of responsibility to educate his child. Klimis tries to handle the frustrations relating to the necessities of everyday life. The emotional closeness between mother and child, brought about by the fact that Maria remains at home with the baby, triggers feelings of jealousy and rivalry in Klimis. Breastfeeding turns out to be central. It reveals his ambivalence which he tries to manage either by rationalizing (reducing the differences between the sexes down to the influence of biological factors) or by repressing the thought of any possible conflict with his wife. It seems that, for Klimis, the positive experience of the transition to fatherhood enables the restructuring of a system of representation, which is characterized by an incorporation of traditional elements as well as new models praising the functional relationship of the couple. But this process remains incomplete and contains several contradictions which encroach on the couple's personal space and, consequently, the father's personal space. Interaction between the different levels (individual, couple, family, sociocultural framework) requires a personal approach which is difficult to put into place. However Klimis seems to have succeeded in one important task: he has managed to negotiate access to this new experience and with conditions favorable to him. Stelios Stelios is 30-years-old and the son of a primary school teacher. He lived in a provincial setting until his university studies in Athens. He graduated in economics and works for an insurance company. His wife, Katerina, a little younger than he, is also an economist. They and their respective families live in Athens. From the beginning of the interview, Stelios deals with the issue directly. While trying to add a personal touch to the fact that he will soon become a father, he talks about his feelings which change from joy and happiness, on the one hand, to threat and heightened anxiety due to his responsibility towards the child, on the other. The search for this personal and existential meaning leads to questions about his identification with parental imagos and with his child. It does not lead him to comments about his relationship with his wife: "It is the most important event in my life until now ... I think of

my childhood, everything that my parents really went through". Idealised paternity is associated with the idealisation of one's childhood which is depicted as an illusory space devoid of anxiety. In this space, father and eldest son occupy the main space and are considered to be role models: the father is notably characterised by a lack of harshness. His relationship with Katerina is his first serious relationship. He decided to choose her because he found that they shared: "common interests, common problems, a common ideology", and sets aside any erotic dimension in making the decision. Throughout his interview, we are aware of his claim on his wife's pregnancy: he "took care of everything in the house", he "really read everything on pregnancy". He seems to ignore the personal feelings of his wife and is very rational about the changes to her body since conception. He expresses his desire, not only to be at the delivery, but to take the place of his wife. However, at the second interview, to our great surprise Stelios tells us that he wasn't present at the birth. Without really giving an explanation for this turnaround, he would appear to have experienced the birth with some frustration compared with his initial hopes. He remains as ambivalent regarding the sex of the child who, in the end, turns out to be a boy. This ambivalence is however largely obscured by his extraordinary ability to communicate and his close bond with his child. He never feels that he has had enough when attending to the needs of his child. When he shows an interest in his wife, it is actually for the baby: "When I am near to her, I am near to the child". If he tries to put into perspective the importance of the bonds between his wife and his child, leaving aside any thoughts and feelings about his conjugal relationship, he clearly expresses his desire to place his child in his own family line. Given that his son is the first grandchild of the family, he will bear, much to Stelios' delight, Stelios' father's name. As a result, the simple existence of the child endows Stelios with particular prestige which is emphasised by the physical resemblance between them. He appears to be completely absorbed by the presence of his son, to the point that any other activity is seen as an obstacle to his participation in the relationship with the child. As such, his attitude reminds us of a form of "precocious paternal preoccupation". When meeting with him six months later, he still appears to be as committed to the intense relationship with his child as he was during the first two previous interviews. The child is presented as an active subject with a great need to explore and have contact with his environment. Stelios, himself, feels exclusively responsible for the child's needs. He not only recognises the weaknesses of the child, but he also anticipates the child's needs. However, his excessive concern with meeting his child's every need may be indicative of greater anguish when he has to deprive the child. By identifying with the child in this way, it will be like depriving himself. The description he gives of his activities with the child give the impression that he is trying to combine both the traditional behaviour of the mother as well as that of the father. Any possibility of conflict with his wife is set aside as any existence of differences between the two sexes is refuted: "We have the same ability. I think I can take care of the child in the same way as Katerina. There is no problem, really in the same way. In this period, we can't say that the woman is indispensable to the baby ... a mother, what else, what else can she do? Before, when she was breastfeeding, there was a difference, but now there is no difference". Stelios seems to internalize the model of the "new father" perfectly. However, this does not appear to be the effect of an ideology involving social representations but rather a personal issue rendering him susceptible to take up stances that reveal a latent desire to be "another mother". The paternal space would seem to be a utopia filled with tranquillity and euphoria, where there is no interaction and therefore no conflict with either partner or parents. The absence of conflict seemingly leaves way for a calm and enriching emotional relationship with the child. At the same time however, there is uncertainty as to Stelios' ability to handle his potentially problematic identifications and to foster a satisfying relationship with his wife and this will only influence the evolution of his relationship with his child.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS By exploiting the possibilities of clinical methodology, we have tried to bring to light the psychodynamic processes underlying the transition to parenthood which cover two issues: intrapsychic, characterised above all by the identifications with parental imagos; interpersonal, structured by the various interrelationships within the couple. Our interest lays firstly in studying the representations of men as regards parenthood and in how these representations evolved during this difficult period of transition. This

study, which is based on interviews, conducted at three distinct moments in the men's lives leads to several findings. Transition to the new paternal identity takes place gradually and develops as and when difficulties concerning their coming to terms with the pregnancy arise and ends a few months after the birth when they acquire self-assurance as a father. In the process of development, the birth can both accelerate this coming to terms with the pregnancy as well as postpone it until the first months of the baby's life. As a consequence, the make-up of the new father's identity differs from one father to the next. It is not just a matter of time but also of the varying gravity of the events which mark this period. Depending on the personality and experiences of each man, parenthood will develop more or less according to the sense of responsibility and obligation felt during this time, as well as to the varying extent to which they feel that they are in a pleasant situation and are responding adequately to this extraordinary event. We can support the idea that the waiting period before the arrival of the child and the birth itself are meaningful and taken to be structurebuilding experiences in fatherhood. However, this sense of fatherhood - as it is projected in the subjects' discourse at symbolic and fantasy levels - seems to grow and lead to a greater number of contradictions as the denning of the role of the father and the relationship between the man and woman evolve rapidly in today's society. While men in their discourse project fatherhood as an occasion to attain personal fulfilment, especially after the birth of the child, the way in which the paternal role will be exercised must be incorporated every time into the couple's particular type of relationship. In other words, the transition to fatherhood presents a challenge as it puts each partner's place in the couple and as parents at stake. The couple therefore has to negotiate each other's participation in responding to the needs of the child and in dealing with the other obligations they have at this stage in their lives. All the while, they must position themselves as coherently as possible in Greek society where the relationship between men and women is rapidly evolving and is nowadays often subject to contradictory messages. On the one hand, Klimis seems to seek refuge by holding a traditional view of the separation between the roles of both sexes, despite the differing and sometimes contemporary ideological references these roles may manifest. On the other, a man like Stelios throws himself into day-to-day childcare and sometimes creates the impression more or less consciously that he is in competition with his partner. Even though in the two case studies used here the subjects experienced their transition to fatherhood with a certain euphoria, they remain anchored in reality as they associate fatherhood with responsibilities and obligations amongst other things. While the two case studies of Klimis and Stelios represent fatherhood as an attempt to attain personal accomplishment, especially after the birth of their child, they were each involved in the dynamics of their couple in very different ways. It seems that the identification mechanism constitutes one of the most decisive factors in the creation of paternal space, as it contributes to either accelerating or slowing down this process. At the same time as the distance is adjusted between the two partners at imaginary and fantasy level, this mechanism may become a central point of access to the paternal function. It can either take shape as a strong claim to possess maternal qualities and to fulfil maternal functions (in the case of a massive identification, we could point to Stelios as he displays this to a certain extent), or it can enable a skilful handling of the ambivalence felt by the man and of his own femininity (in the case of more flexible identifications such as that displayed by Klimis). As regards the relationship with parents, the transversal and longitudinal analysis of the body of interviews highlights the importance of intergenerational challenges and the release processes from the family in order to construct paternal space. We were able to observe in practice the distances that the couple wished to place between themselves and their respective families during the setting up of their household, as well as the intervention from grandparents in the child's upbringing. The way in which the man describes his practices, experience and representations reveals the complexity of the processes of distancing himself from his family of origin. By way of example, the man who moved further away from his parents geographically could still consider family contact to be intrusive and disturbing when trying to define conjugal and paternal space. On the other hand, the man who remained after his wedding near his family or his family-in-law can sometimes make efforts towards creating an autonomous space for himself and his new family. The crucial point for the dynamics of the couple during the transition to fatherhood is the birth and the

period just after the birth. The way in which men position themselves regarding the birth seems both characteristic of the image they hold of women and their capability of becoming mothers, and of how they face up to their own feminine elements. Sometimes, in spite of the reluctance and fear that they express to begin with, the expectant fathers get alongside and support their partners during the birth and retain a positive impression of the occasion. At other instances however after having expressed their intention to be present at the birth, they end up being absent and not facing up to the occasion (as in Stelios' case). Finally in each case, whether the man is present or not at the birth and, contrary to the hypotheses of other researchers, does not seem to bear consequences on the father-child relationship, at least during the first months of the child's life, the period in which we have carried out this research. The issue of name-choosing also formed an essential part of our analysis. The choice of the child's name is an interesting combined example of the release process from the family hold, the complexity of conjugal dynamics and the way in which social representations function. It also shows that name choosing for a child in Greek society is related to the way in which the child is to become part of the family line. More specifically, our research confirms the anthropological analyses according to which the name of the child in Greece continues to be a big part of the family line, unlike other western countries. But at the same time, it shows that name choosing even if it occurs in a conservative environment is subject to intrapersonal and intrafamilial negotiation. As we have already underlined, the choice of a boy's name does not seem to be problematic. Instead, it facilitates the identification process of the man with his father. Choosing a girl's name however often causes tensions as it seemingly opposes the fulfilment of the man's emotional and narcissistic needs. In these conditions, the choice of the child's name would appear to play an essential role in the structuring of the paternal role and brings us back to the question of fundamental and indispensable elements in exercising paternal function. In choosing the name, the father clearly tries to symbolically find a place for the child in the family line, but he also re-affirms his own place. This name-choosing process also highlights the man and woman's negotiation capabilities as they must confront a difficult issue. On the one hand, each is attracted by the thought of fulfilling a personal need to make the child part of his/her family line. On the other hand, the couple tries to maintain a balance between themselves which will inevitably be put to the test during this period of access to parenthood. The outcome of these negotiations often depends on the difficulty experienced, as much for the man as for the woman, in trying to break away from family influence. Two developments emerge. Either the choice of the child's name opens the way for an attempt at reconciliation or to return to the parents. Or, it presents itself as an opportunity to distance themselves from the family line and possibly reinforce the couple's attempt to gain autonomy. Clinical research and discourse analysis on first time expectant fathers can draw light therefore on the psychodynamic processes which underlie the structuring of the paternal function and identity as well as the processes which create intra- and interpersonal problems. These problems are characterised mainly by: 1) identification with parental imagos and the release process of young parents from their respective families; 2) the relationship set up among the couple and the construction of a conjugal space between the two partners at a real, fantasy and symbolic level. The resolution of conscious and unconscious conflicts which includes these areas remains an absolute prerequisite in creating a "paternal space". Managing this paternal space leads furthermore to a restructuring of conjugal relations and raises intergenerational challenges which enable (or hinder) the new father to (re)define his own place in the network of his own identifications and also to satisfy his own narcissistic needs. Even if the elements involved in structuring the transition to parenthood (representations, conjugal space) are not sufficient to predict the behaviour of the father towards the child, it is highly probable that the existence of a certain cohesion and coherence between the experience lived and the system of representations of parenthood, as well as the emotional richness felt in the father-child relationship, constitute very favourable factors enabling the man to better manage, or even to find a way out of the intrapsychic and interpersonal or relational conflicts and to have a better parenthood experience. REFERENCES Abelin, E.L. (1975). Some further observations and comments on the earliest role of the father, *International Journal of Psycho-Anal*, 56, 293-302. Badinter, E.

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