

# Intending Fathers: Heterosexual Men Planning for a First Child

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Having a child is often treated as a taken for granted part of heterosexual relationships, a norm so entrenched that there is often little discussion amongst couples as to why they want children. In terms of research, while women's reasons for having children have been explored in detail, little attention has been paid to heterosexual men's reasons for having children. This article presents a thematic analysis of interview data with 10 Australian heterosexual men in couples who were planning to have a first child in the near future. The men's responses involved both self-focused motivations, where the child is essentially positioned as an object (e.g. continuing the bloodline), and other-focused motivations, where reasons focused on a future relationship with the child (e.g. teaching and watching a child grow). Our findings show that participants reported self-focused and other-focused motivations for wanting a child, reflecting both traditional and newer approaches to fatherhood.

Keywords: fatherhood; reproduction; heterosexuality; parenting; family

## Introduction

Having a child is often treated as a taken for granted part of heterosexual relationships, one which requires little explanation or reasoning compared to the decisions of those who do not have children. As Overall writes:

[i]n contemporary Western culture, it ironically appears that one needs to have reasons *not* to have children, but no reasons are required to have them. ... no one says to a newly pregnant woman or the proud father of a newborn, "Why did

you choose to have that child? What are your reasons?" (2012, p. 2, emphasis in original)

Despite the treatment of parenthood for heterosexual couples as axiomatic, there has nonetheless been a shift over time in terms of why heterosexual people decide to have children. Historically in western cultures children were wanted for their capacity to work (Ariès, 1962), whereas children are now more likely to be desired for more personal reasons such as self-fulfilment, giving new meaning to the lives of parents, or continuing a family line (Lupton & Barclay, 1997, p. 143). Morison and Macleod (2015) refer to these more personalised accounts of as valued as the "sacralised children script". In fact, having a child is now a significant financial investment, with the increasing expense of having children being documented in western countries such as Australia (Phillips, Li, & Taylor, 2013) and the US (Lino, 2014). In the face of the financial costs that children bring, then, and despite the joy that they may also bring many parents, it is important to consider what it is that motivates heterosexual people to have children, given as Morison and Macleod (2015) note that fertile heterosexual people are the "invisible norm" when it comes to research on pathways to parenthood, where having children is viewed as a "natural progression" requiring little reflection.

As others have noted (e.g. de Montigny Gauthier & de Montigny, 2013), while there has been sustained attention to the reasons why children are desired by heterosexual women (e.g. Grewal & Urschel, 1994; Papadimitriou, 2008; Sevón, 2005; Ulrich & Weatherall, 2000) and couples as a unit (e.g. Langdridge, Connolly, & Sheeran, 2000), there is relatively little research that focuses explicitly on heterosexual men's reasons for having a child. This is despite the growing body of academic research on fathering and fatherhood, which has primarily focused on heterosexual

men's transitions to fatherhood (e.g. Draper, 2000; Henwood & Proctor, 2003), and gender divisions in parenting (e.g. Doucet, 2006; Hobson, 2002; Miller, 2011). In the following section we provide a brief overview of changing attitudes towards fatherhood before then reviewing existing research on men's reasons for having children. From this review we identify a gap in the literature with regard to reproductive-related desires amongst men, and the research we then report – derived from a sample of Australian heterosexual men planning for a first child – responds to this research gap.

### **Changing Fatherhood?**

Generational and social change relating to fatherhood since the 1970s has meant that it is more socially acceptable for men to be involved in their children's lives, both emotionally and practically, to the extent that "involved" fathering may be a social expectation for men, as well as being desired by at least some men (e.g. Finn & Henwood, 2009; Lupton & Barclay, 1997). Of course, there is debate about how much fathering has actually changed in practice, considering the continued finding of unequal gender divisions in parenting and carework in heterosexual relationships (e.g. Fox, 2001; Miller, 2011; Ranson, 2001; Wall & Arnold, 2007). Furthermore, while there has been increased focus on the idea of the "involved father", ultimately men are still primarily expected to contribute to their children's lives by earning money to support their families, and generally children and care work are fitted in around men's paid work (e.g. Carlson et al., 2015/2016; Holter, 2007; Miller, 2012). Indeed, some have argued that being a father is often not seen as central to men's identities to the extent that motherhood is to women's identities (Hinton & Miller, 2013).

In the context of Australia, where the study reported in this article was conducted, research has suggested that there has indeed been a shift towards fathers

becoming more involved in their children's lives, but that this sits alongside a persistent breadwinner ideology. For example, whilst research with young Australian men without children has shown their interest in becoming fathers and a desire to be involved with their families (Thompson, Lee, & Adams, 2013), other Australian research highlights the continued centrality of breadwinning to many fathers alongside women's continued primary responsibility for the care of children (Baxter & Smart, 2011; Craig, 2006). This division is also often supported at an ideological level in Australia. For example, a recent Australian media analysis found that breadwinning 'involved fathers' were framed as superior to 'stay-at-home fathers' (Stevens, 2015). What sits between the injunction to involvement *and* breadwinning thus requires ongoing attention, and as we argue below, at least part of what might sit in this gap are men's aspirations regarding what it means to have a child.

An examination of men's reasons for wanting children is important as their aspirations may impact on parenting practices, including how involved they are with their children. It is also likely to determine the expectations that men have in regards to having children, which is useful in understanding later experiences. From a demographic perspective, understanding men's motivations for having children may contribute to understanding changing fertility rates and people having children at older ages (or not at all) (Langdrige, Sheeran, & Connolly et al., 2005). This is particularly important in countries with low fertility rates, such as Australia, which has had a fertility rate below replacement level since 1976 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016).

### **Existing Research Exploring Men's Motivations to Have Children**

Research about motivations for wanting children is dominated by quantitative research, using scales and closed-option questions. This focus largely stems from the influential

‘value of children’ approach developed by Hoffman and Hoffman (1973), which elaborates nine reasons for why parents want children. The reasons identified in their review of global research are 1) adult status and social identity, 2) expansion of the self, 3) morality, 4) primary group ties, affiliation, 5) stimulation, novelty, fun, 6) creativity, accomplishment, competence, 7) power, influence, effectance, 8) social comparison, competition, and 9) economic utility (Hoffman & Hoffman, 1973). While this approach is still in use and has been updated (e.g. Nauck & Klaus, 2007), it has been argued that it is individualistic and ignores broader cultural and social contexts (Zelizer, 1985, p. 7).

Beyond a focus on the value of children, multiple quantitative scales have been developed to assess reasons for wanting children. For example, Langdridge, Sheeran and Connolly (2005) developed a scale to assess “reasons for parenthood”, which was then completed by 897 white married couples without children in the UK. Langdridge and colleagues found that men viewed “family name”, “good for relationship”, and “fun” as stronger reasons for having a child than did women, while women rated “biological drive” higher than men (2005, pp. 127-128). Thompson and Lee (2011) adapted this scale for use in an Australian study, which was then completed by 399 single men without children aged 18-25. They found that of those men who desired to have children, the most influential reasons for wanting to be a father were sharing things with a child, developing a special bond with a child, experiencing fulfilment through raising a child, and giving love and affection to a child.

By contrast, there is less qualitative research considering why heterosexual men want children. Qualitative research is important for exploring and unpacking the reasons men give for wanting to have children, and allows for follow up questions and clarification. In contrast to quantitative studies, qualitative research allows men to respond to questions without being given a prescriptive list of options, which are likely

to influence the reasons they give. Existing qualitative research which includes at least some consideration of reasons for parenthood amongst men tends to be either 1) longitudinal, starting from when men's partners/wives are pregnant (e.g. Lupton & Barclay, 1997), 2) retrospective, where fathers reflect back on why they wanted children (e.g. de Montigny Gauthier & de Montigny, 2013; Morison & Macleod, 2015), 3) prospective, exploring possibilities of having children at some point in the future amongst boys and men who are currently are not parents (e.g. Eriksson, Larsson, & Tydén, 2012; Jensen, 2016; Morison & Macleod, 2015), or 4) problem-oriented, focusing on men for whom parenthood may be harder to achieve, including men who experience social infertility, such as gay men (e.g. Berkowitz & Marsiglio, 2007; Rabun & Oswald, 2009). Together, these four areas of research suggest that parenthood is broadly considered to be a socially expected and logical step in a (heterosexual) relationship, but also shows how men's motivations for fatherhood are shaped by broader discourses about masculinities.

In terms of men's thoughts during pregnancy, Lupton and Barclay's (1997) longitudinal study with 16 first-time fathers in Australia found that becoming a father was rarely depicted as a "choice", but was rather viewed as inevitable and a logical step both in their relationship with their partners and for their growth as adult men. This meant that men rarely identified explicit reasons for why they wanted children. Lupton and Barclay argue that fatherhood is viewed as a "natural" part of adult masculinity. Prior to becoming fathers, the men in their study spoke about the love they desired for and from their future children, and did not view "nurturance" and "caring" as non-masculine.

Similarly, Morison and Macleod's (2015) retrospective research with fathers (n = 6) and mothers (n = 5) aged 39-59 in South Africa found that having children was

considered to be neither a choice nor something that was planned in detail. Instead, having children was viewed as relating to romance and love, the value of children and parenting, and a “natural” and socially accepted stage of marriage. Their sample of non-parents aged 21-32 (6 men, 5 women) gave similar responses. Relatedly, a retrospective Canadian study of 12 first-time fathers with one (planned) child 9-19 months old explored why the sample conceived their first child at a particular time. Participants discussed “personal characteristics”, emphasising the importance of a long-standing desire for and love of children, and a desire for family and personal continuity, including continuing the family name (de Montigny Gauthier & de Montigny, 2013).

Studies have also been conducted with samples of men for whom parenthood is not straightforward, such as due to social infertility. Berkowitz and Marsiglio’s (2007) study with 19 gay men with and without children in the US, for example, shows that gay men’s ‘procreative consciousness’ changes through their lives, suggesting that reasons for wanting children are impacted on by the knowledge and availability of methods for gay men to have children. A US study with 14 gay men aged 18-25 without children found that 11 men were motivated to have children because parenting was viewed as ‘rewarding’ and they had a desire to leave a family legacy (although not necessarily be genetically related to their child) (Rabun and Oswald 2009).

As noted above, while research exists exploring heterosexual men’s reasons for having or wanting children, to our knowledge there is no existing research exploring this theme with men who were currently planning to have children with their female partner in the near future. Morison argues that “research that considers the interconnection between fatherhood and manhood often overlooks decision making *prior* to conception” (2013, p. 1126, emphasis in original). It is thus particularly important to consider reasons for having children when in the process of planning for a

child, as people's earlier thoughts about having children often change due to their circumstances (e.g. Qu, Weston and Kilmartin 2000). In order to address this gap, the research reported in this article explores motivations to have children amongst a sample of Australian men who were intending to have children in the near future with their female partners. Drawing on qualitative interview data, it contributes to knowledge about men's reasons for wanting children while they are planning to conceive, when there is an immediacy of thinking about children but the future is unknown. Therefore, the aim of the analysis presented below was to identify how a sample of Australian men speak about their aspirations to become parents in the near future.

## **Method**

This article reports on the first stage of a longitudinal qualitative project called *Feeling, wanting, having: The meaning of children to Australian heterosexual couples*. The study draws on a purposively normative sample (white, middle-class, heterosexual) with no known significant fertility concerns. As has been noted elsewhere, heterosexual couples are often treated as the unmarked norm within research on reproduction (e.g., Morison and McLeod, 2015). For the first stage of the project, interviews were conducted with members of heterosexual couples who were planning a pregnancy via reproductive heterosex (i.e. conception without the use of reproductive technology). As others have noted, pregnancies and births do not always fit neatly into the categories of "planned" or "unplanned" (e.g. Barrett & Wellings, 2002). Couples self-selected to participate if they viewed themselves as 'planning' to have a child, with the main criteria being that participants hoped to become pregnant in 2015. Half of the couples told us they were currently trying to conceive, whereas the other couples were planning to try to conceive in the near future (the women were currently using contraceptives in

the form of the pill or injection), had a more relaxed approach to attempting to conceive (i.e. stopping the use of contraceptives and “seeing what happens”), or were on a break from actively trying. Ethics approval for the study was granted by the authors’ university.

### ***Participants***

Eligibility to participate in the study centred on people being in a heterosexual relationship (married or de facto) planning for their first child, where both members of the couple were willing to be interviewed separately. Participants were also required to live in Adelaide, South Australia, and to have no known history of significant fertility concerns. Participant recruitment occurred in February-May 2015, with the study being advertised in local media and community newspapers, and on Facebook, Twitter, and internet forums about pregnancy and parenting. Snowball recruiting was also used, where participants were asked to pass on the study details to anyone else they thought might be interested in participating. Ten couples (i.e. 20 people) participated in the first round of interviews. While this is a small sample, the depth of the interviews in each round, and the inclusion of both male and female partners, make this an important study in the context of the dearth of longitudinal research starting prior to pregnancy.

Most couples were married (6 couples) with the other couples engaged or de facto (i.e. living together and legally recognised as a couple but not married). Couples had been together for between a year and a quarter and just over 13 years (mean 6 years) and had lived together for between 6 weeks and over 12 years (mean 4.5 years). Of the married participants, couples had been married for between 4 months and 9 years (mean 4 years).

At the time of the first interviews, the men's ages ranged from 26-41 years old (mean 32.6 years old). All of the men can largely be classified as middle class. Over half of the men were university educated, although the highest qualification attained by four of the men was either secondary school or a trade certificate. All men worked full-time, except one who was a full-time student. Four of the men identified as "somewhat" or "quite" religious, with their religion named as Christian or Catholic.

### ***Procedure***

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the members of each couple separately by the first author. This strategy was used as existing research suggests that individuals within couples are likely to have different investments in and desires to have children, and thus participants may talk more freely without the presence of their partner (Miller, Severy, & Pasta, 2004). Interviewing members of couples separately also allows for a more specific analysis of the ways in which gender discourses impact on experiences and understandings. Questions focused on: reasons for wanting a child, how much participants had thought about why they wanted a child, what it would mean to have a child, expectations of having a child, and whether they would consider alternative ways of having a child (via adoption, fostering, or reproductive technology).

As others have found (e.g. de Lacey, 2014), recruiting men for research about reproduction can be difficult. In all cases, the women in the couples contacted us (via email) and indicated a desire to participate. The women who made contact were often keen to participate and it was a requirement of the study for both members of the couple to be interviewed. While several of the men were also interested in taking part and learning the findings from the study, some were less invested in being involved (at least initially), although they were still generous with how much they shared and reflected

during the interviews. The decision to interview members of each couple separately turned out to be an important decision, given that, for the most part, men spent more time thinking about their responses before speaking, and gave shorter answers which were elaborated on with prompting and follow-up questions.

Most participants chose to be interviewed at one of two central business district locations. All interviews were audio-recorded and then transcribed verbatim by a professional transcription service and then examined by the authors for accuracy. Participants were allocated pseudonyms by the authors following transcription. On average, the length of the recordings of the first interviews with men was 44 minutes (range 33-61 minutes). While the interviews with women tended to be longer in length (mean 60 minutes), the length of interviews in terms of recorded minutes should not be seen as a direct reflection of the quality of the interviews, as the interviews with men contributed rich data to the study. As Irvine argues, 'greater quantity of data may not necessarily imply greater quality of data for a given analytic purpose' (2011, 214).

### ***Theoretical and Analytic Approach***

Due to the limited amount of qualitative research exploring men's motivations for parenthood, for this article we took an inductive theoretical approach to examine how the men in our study accounted for their desire to have a child. This is what Braun and Clarke (2006) refer to as 'contextualist', in that it both seeks to explore how people create meaning in their lives, as well as considering how this meaning reflects broader social constructs.

In terms of our analytic approach, an inductive thematic analysis was undertaken focusing on the men's responses about motivations for having a child. Data were thematically analysed following the steps suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006): 1)

becoming familiar with the data, 2) generating codes, 3) identifying themes, 4) reviewing themes, 5) refining specifics of the themes, and 6) selecting extracts that best illustrate the themes identified. Interview transcripts were coded by both authors, focusing on reasons for wanting to have a child/children. These codes were then used to generate higher order themes and then sub-themes within these, with the most frequent themes focused on in this article.

## **Findings**

The men mobilised a fairly narrow range of reasons for wanting to have a child. The reasons given by the men could be organised into two clear higher order themes: self-focused motivations where children were essentially positioned as an object, and other-focused reasons where children were positioned as an active subject and reasons focused on a future relationship with the child. In terms of self-focused motivations, three sub-themes were identified: 1) continuation of the species/bloodline, 2) an inherent drive, and 3) a life stage. In terms of other-focused motivations, two sub-themes focused on a future relationship with the child were identified: 1) teaching and watching someone grow, and 2) interdependencies. Notably, the age of the men did not seem to have a significant impact on their responses in terms of why they wanted a child, so considering the small sample we have not made generalisations in relation to age.

### ***Self-Focused Motivations: Child as object***

Self-focused motivations related to reasons men gave which in effect positioned the child as an object, where an active, intersubjective relationship was not required with the child *per se* to fulfil the motivations. All of the men mentioned at least one self-

focused motivation to have children. This was most frequently discussed in terms of the continuation of the species or bloodline, an internal drive, and a life stage. The importance of self-focused motivations fits with what Warner calls “repro-narrativity”, where people’s lives are “somehow made more meaningful by being embedded in a narrative of generational succession” (1991, p. 7).

### **Continuation of the Species and Bloodline**

The continuation of the species and/or family bloodline was one motivation given for having children:

I think it’s just everyone’s drive to keep the ball rolling kind of thing. To me it seems unnatural not to want to have kids because if you want to get all philosophical about it what other purpose is there except to reproduce and then die? You see it in organisms like mayflies that don’t even eat. They just hatch, breed, die, hatch, breed, die. (Elijah, mid 20s)

I suppose one of the primary biological reasons for anything being alive is to procreate and so, you know, I think - I don’t know, for me there’d be something missing if there wasn’t to be that. I couldn’t imagine being an old person and not having kids. I think that’d feel pretty lonely actually.  
(Michael, early 40s)

Both of these men drew on ideas about having children and continuing the species as a key reason for being alive. While Elijah evoked scientific language to make his claim,

Michael linked his response to emotions and the idea that not having children would mean that something was missing in his life.

More specifically, men also spoke about a continuation of their own bloodline or family:

Because it's part of you, it's another human being going in your footsteps or carrying on your legacy as opposed to it's a kid you've adopted and so forth.

(Tom, early 30s)

These responses highlight the importance placed on being genetically related to a child. While some of the men said they were open to having children in ways which meant they would not be genetically related if they could not conceive with their partner (e.g. adoption or fostering), it was clear that continuing their bloodline was a motivator to have children, or at least one that could be expressed. This is reflective of other studies which have also found that the continuation of the family and family name are reasons men give for wanting children (e.g. de Montigny Gauthier & de Montigny, 2013, Langdrige et al., 2005), and that this is more likely to be expressed by men than women (Eriksson et al., 2012).

### **Inherent Drive**

Having children as an inherent drive, as something innate or natural, was another reason given for wanting children. For example, Josh summed this up by saying he did not have to look up reasons about why or why not to have children, he just had a 'feeling or something inside' that drove him to make the decision:

Josh (mid-late 20s): I'm not sure if it's really - yeah, it was a decision to have a child obviously, but I guess it's a bit innate for me anyway. I've never really had to think, you know, "Do I want a child?" It's always been a natural sort of progression. [...]

Interviewer: Can you describe a bit more what you mean by "innate"?

Josh: It's just this feeling or something inside that sort of drives that - it feels natural, like I haven't had to be coerced or talked into it or you know I haven't had to Google the pros and cons or anything like that

The feeling that having a child is something inherent or innate goes some way to explaining the difficulty in articulating why one wants a child. As Josh says, he did not have to "Google the pros and cons", suggesting rather that having a child is axiomatic, thus positioning the perceived "drive" to have children as unquestioned (e.g. Morison & Macleod, 2015).

### **A Life Stage**

The idea that having children was a life stage or chapter was also expressed as a motivator. One of the ways this was done was by explicitly framing having children as a "next step" or a "stage" in their lives:

I guess it's part of society where you get married and the next step after that is to start a little family. (Luke, early 30s)

It's like being on autopilot, it's like getting home of an evening and you have your dinner. Do you know what I mean? And that's what I feel like this stage of life is in now, okay, have kids; just like having your dinner.

(Steve, early 40s)

While the men's articulations of why they wanted children were not devoid of emotion, the view that having children was a life stage or a next step in life was typically stated in a matter-of-fact way. Thus, Steve talks about being on "autopilot", where having children is as routine as having dinner, and requires little reflection.

Dylan, one of the youngest participants, framed having a child as important in becoming an adult:

In a sense it feels like it's a big step into being a grownup I guess. It seems like it's the most important or the most responsibility we'll have is looking after another human. So I guess I've been thinking about that heaps since we've started trying. Yeah, that's probably the bit I'm looking forward to the most is creating another totally different person and learning about it as we grow it up and as we grow up.

In this excerpt, Dylan frames having a child as essentially a life stage, as "a big step into being a grownup". He comments that the child as well as he and his partner will all grow in some way. For all of these men parenthood can be seen as a "natural progression" which thus fits with normative ideas about what (heterosexual) adulthood

consists of: “courtship, early marriage or newlyweds, parenthood, family with adolescents, ‘empty nest’, retirement and old age” (Morison & Macleod, 2015, p. 67).

### ***Other-Focused Motivations: Child as subject***

While, as documented above, all of the men elaborated self-focused reasons for wanting a child, all of the men also drew on other-focused motivations to have a child. That is, they viewed the child as a subject rather than simply as an object, and it is the relationship with a child that is required to fulfil their motivations. This reflects the finding in previous research of a link between a desire for fatherhood and the perception that this will bring love and connection to children (e.g. Lupton & Barclay, 1997; Thompson & Lee, 2011). In terms of our sample, the other-directed aspects of parenting intentions were primarily expressed in terms of teaching and watching someone grow, and interdependencies with children and partners.

### **Teaching and Watching Someone Grow**

One reason for wanting to have a child was the desire to teach a child and watch them grow (see also Thompson & Lee, 2011). This was often framed in terms of the input that the men would have into raising a child:

I guess it's exciting to think that there could be somebody that would look to me for the answers about everything in life and someone that I can teach about everything that I think too and try and grow up into the best person I can be. I guess it's kind of like a project to make it as good as I think it can be as well as make someone else happy too. (Dylan, mid 20s)

I always thought, “I’ll have a family” but I never thought about how good it would be to have a kid and these days, yes, I think it would be awesome. Spend time with the kid, try to educate, teach and grow up, see how, you know, the kid grows. (Daniel, early 40s)

These men spoke about how teaching their child and watching them grow would be “exciting” and “awesome”, speaking with enthusiasm about the involvement they intend to have in their future child’s life. This may be seen as reflective of newer forms of fatherhood where men are more supported and encouraged to be part of their children’s everyday lives and to be more directly involve in raising them, as we discussed in the introduction. However, some of the men framed this in terms of a “project”, as something to work on, which appears to reduce the focus on the emotional aspects of raising children.

### **Interdependencies**

The ways in which having a child would create and extend interdependencies was another reason several of the men gave for why they wanted children. This was expressed by the men in terms of their relationship with their partner and the fulfilment a child would bring to their lives.

One way in which interdependencies was expressed appeared in discussions about what it meant in terms of their relationship with their partner:

I suppose it's an expression of love with your partner, wife, fiancée or whatever. I think it's the greatest thing that two people can do together. That's probably a really big part of it. (Elijah, mid 20s)

Thus, having a child is an expression of love, viewed as bringing partners closer together as they raise their child.

In addition, participants spoke about how having a child would fulfil or complete them (and their partner) (see also Langdrige et al., 2005, Thompson & Lee, 2011):

I guess we'll feel pretty complete I suppose because we've talked about it for so long. We'll feel like we've got – everyone's here I guess. In a way because we've had the dogs for a while and if they're not there, like if someone's looking after them, it feels a bit weird. So I guess it'll feel like we've got family together. (Dylan, mid 20s)

I guess, I think it would make me happy. Not that I'm unhappy, but more fulfilled-(Stuart, early 30s)

Unlike the self-focused reasons above, this fulfilment is an emotional one which relates to the relationship they will have with their child. While few of the men used the word "love" when discussing motivations for having a child, it was clear that this was implicit in several responses.

## **Conclusions**

As we noted at the beginning of the article, few previous studies have qualitatively explored heterosexual men's reasons for wanting children, and we could not find any which interviewed men when they were in the process of planning for a child with their female partner. Interviewing men who are thinking of having children in the immediate future, rather than in a distant future or reflecting back as fathers, is important in the context of an unknown future. All of the men in our study spoke about both self-focused and other-focused motivations for having children. Thus all men offered multiple reasons for wanting to have children, even though many of them said they had not thought much about why they wanted children and sometimes found it hard to articulate their reasons. This was despite the fact that these men were hoping to have a child with their female partner in the near future.

Our findings support previous research which has argued that becoming a father is important for constructing socially accepted masculinities (e.g. Crawshaw, 2013; Dudgeon & Inhorn, 2003; Hinton & Miller, 2013). This was particularly evident in terms of the self-focused reasons given by the men, where fathering a child may be viewed as important in terms of continuing their bloodline. Our findings also support the importance of fathering in practice for men's masculinities (e.g. Finn & Henwood, 2009; Hinton & Miller, 2013), with several of our participants speaking about their desire to be involved in their future children's lives.

Several of the reasons men gave for wanting children are reflective of other studies with men without children, prospective fathers, and fathers. Thus, while previous research has not been explicitly framed in terms of self-focused and other-focused reasons, our findings support other studies noting the importance of reasons for wanting children that we have identified as self-focused: continuing the family and

family name (e.g. Eriksson et al., 2012; de Montigny Gauthier & de Montigny, 2013; Langdridge et al., 2005), having an unquestioned desire or drive to have children (e.g. Morison & Macleod, 2015), and viewing having children as a life stage (e.g. Morison & Macleod, 2015). Similarly, our findings also reflect other studies highlighting reasons for men wanting children that we have identified as other-focused: wanting to teach and watch a child grow (e.g. Thompson & Lee, 2011; Townes, Campbell, Beach, & Martin, 1974) and the feeling that having children would fulfil them (e.g. Langdridge et al., 2005; Thompson & Lee, 2011). A theme more prominent in previous research was an explicit mention of desiring a child because of love and emotion in relation to a child (e.g. de Montigny Gauthier & de Montigny, 2013; Lupton & Barclay, 1997; Thompson & Lee, 2011). However, while this was not explicit in our research, men occasionally mentioned love or care and inferred closeness with their future child.

Importantly, it was clear that men gave reasons for wanting children which reflected both traditional and newer approaches to fatherhood. However, what is shown in our analysis is that traditional forms of fatherhood interact and overlap with newer forms. As Wetherell and Edley (2014) argue, men's framing of their experiences rely on context and situation, and are fragmented and inconsistent rather than forming singular masculine identities. This has implications for social change, as they argue that "maintenance of power occurs directly, and often very effectively, *as a result* of this fragmented, mobile, and inconsistent discursive scene, but also that, over time, this is how social change and new cultural notions come about" (Wetherell & Edley 2014, p. 361, emphasis in original).

While the self-focused reasons given ~~and the desire for responsibility~~ may be viewed as traditional framings of fatherhood, what may appear to be newer versions of fatherhood were evident in reasons relating to teaching and watching someone grow,

having children as an expression of love and a shared task with their female partner, and having children as personally fulfilling. However, even what appeared to be newer versions of fatherhood were not necessarily altogether new. For example, a US study in the 1970s found that married men said they wanted children because of the experience of parenthood, including the finding that “[t]he positive aspects of becoming a father are the father’s role in educating and training the child and in the opportunity to establish a close relationship with another human being” (Townes et al., 1974, p. 13). This suggests that in some ways our findings indicate a continuum of ideas about fatherhood since the 1970s which blend traditional and newer ideas, and that cultural ideas about fatherhood and institutionalised practices still impact on the involvement that fathers have with their children. Our findings thus support the outcomes from Finn and Henwood’s (2009) study, which suggests that there is much interplay between “modern” and “traditional” ways of being a father (see also Hunter, Riggs & Augoustinos, 2017).

While this article fills a gap by exploring the reasons heterosexual men want children when they are currently planning to have a child, there are some limitations to the research. We particularly note the limitations of the small sample size, which we have drawn on to explore some of the different reasons men may give for wanting children and how these may be implicit or explicit. In addition, as noted earlier, we deliberately recruited a normative sample (white, middle class) from one city in Australia, meaning that these findings also reflect a specific group of men. Despite these limitations, however, this article makes a useful contribution to understanding how men account for their desire to have children in the near future.

## ***Implications***

Understanding men's motivations to have children is important, given first-time fatherhood is commonly a life-changing experience (e.g. Condon, Boyce, & Corkindale 2004; de Montigny Gauthier & de Montigny, 2013; Lupton & Barclay, 1997). de Montigny Gauthier and de Montigny (2013) argue that knowledge about men's decision-making in regards to having a child means that support can be provided during the transition to fatherhood.

While several of the men in our study spoke about teaching and watching their child grow and raising children with their partner, it was also clear that current work structures and social expectations of men as providers influenced their future plans and meant they would be less involved in their children's lives than their female partners (see e.g. Barclay & Lupton, 1999; Craig & Mullan, 2012; Marsiglio & Roy, 2012; Miller, 2011).

This article has reported on the first stage of a longitudinal qualitative study with 10 Australian couples. The study will continue to examine the motivations and desires surrounding having a child and what this might mean later on, for those men whose partners become pregnant, and for those which give birth. Future research by others would also be useful to explore the motivations for parenthood amongst a larger and more diverse sample of men, again with a particular focus on men who are preparing for parenthood and how their reasons impact upon their experiences of parenting in practice.

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