CONSTRUCTIONS OF FATHERHOOD DURING THE 'TRANSITION TO THE EMPTY NEST' STAGE OF PARENTING

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Abstract

This thesis presents a discursive psychological analysis of the ways in which fatherhood is constructed in a variety of contexts during the transition to the 'empty nest'. The body of the data used in the study consists of thirty three Internet articles describing parenting challenges related to the event of children leaving home, a hundred and sixty four postings of parents' online conversations about transition to the 'empty nest' as well as nineteen semi-structured interviews with fathers whose children have left, or were in the process of leaving home. This range of data was firstly collected in order to explore the breadth of the fatherhood constructions available in everyday settings. Secondly, the aim of the study was to investigate whether the accounts constructed in different contexts varied and how those discrepancies contributed to the understanding of fatherhood during the 'empty nest'. Finally, the different types of data were analysed to contribute to current methodological debates about the role of interviews in qualitative research.

Each of the 3 empirical chapters presents an analysis of constructions of fatherhood from these separate contexts. Firstly, I argue that parenting 'experts' construct 'empty nest' fatherhood in three distinctive ways: through contrasting mothers' and fathers' approaches to their children leaving home, overlooking fathers' role in 'empty nest transition', and by presenting both parents as of equal importance in the process. Secondly, I found that mothers in the Internet chat-room conversations construct 'empty nest' fathers and fatherhood as problematic. Thirdly, the investigation of fathers' online conversations explicates the discursive techniques used for maintaining the fathering identity after the children leave home, the representations of the 'emotional impact' of the 'empty nest', and strategies employed to maintain a sense of masculinity and normativity in the face of 'emotion'. Then, the study focuses on the

interviews with fathers and compares their findings with those from the naturally occurring data analysed in the earlier chapters. In the first instance, the findings unique to the interview data are addressed by exploring the fathers' understanding of the circumstances which affect the perceptions of their children leaving. Then, the study turns towards the interview findings compatible with those from the Internet data and assesses the influence of such compatibility on the current methodological debates in the field of qualitative research. As a whole, the findings of the thesis enrich not only the existing literature into fatherhood and the 'empty nest syndrome' but also explore the relationships between the concepts of fatherhood and masculinity. Finally, the thesis addresses the merits of naturally occurring versus interview data which contributes to the current debates in the field of qualitative and discursive methodologies.

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Acknowledgements

Chapter I. Introduction

Looking through the literature dedicated to fatherhood and fathers there seems to be an abundance of studies focused on men and their parental roles (Lupton and Barclay, 1996). However, when investigating in more detail one is struck by a peculiar asymmetry in the volume of research devoted to different 'stages' of fatherhood. Interestingly, men expecting their first baby, young fathers adjusting to their new role or fathers' from different social, and ethic backgrounds seem to be a priority for academic psychologists, sociologist and social policy practitioners (Lewis-Stempel, 2001; Hobson, 2004; Dowd, 2000; Henwood and Procter, 2003). The influence that fathers have, or may have, on their children's development is one of the major research topics (see Lamb, 1986 for a review). However, the experiences of fathers later in life, during the time when children pass into adulthood and prepare to leave their family home, is somewhat neglected. After uncovering such a gap in the existing literature I asked myself: 'Why?' As the eldest child, who left home to go to university in a country more than two thousand miles away, I was aware of the difficulties that my own 'dad' had experienced adjusting to this new situation. He often talked about how 'weird' it was to stop thinking about me as his child but as an adult, who had a new independent life in a different country. This observation once more added to my astonishment at the scarcity of research into fathers' experiences of children leaving home.

More in-depth investigation of the studies focusing on children leaving home and the subsequent period of the 'empty nest' revealed a preoccupation with the mothers' role during this time (Stewart and Ostrove, 1998; Oliver, 1977; Axelson, 1960; Campbell, 1975; Deutcher, 1964; Borland, 1982; Dunnerstein et al., 2002; Noriko, 2004; Ryff & Seltzer, 1996). Research devoted to the 'children leaving home'

stage of family life, where fathers took centre stage was scarce (Lewis et al., 1979; Nydegger and Mitteness, 1996; Bozett, 1985; Colarusso and Nemiroff, 1982). The most frequently occurring explanation provided for this imbalance of attention was based on the assumption that mothers were the primary caregivers and were much more involved in practical parental duties. The common attribution of the childcare responsibilities to the mothers lied in the heart of another widespread construction. Because the mothers were seen as more involved than the fathers in taking care of the children, they were also presented as much more attached to the parenting role and in consequence much more affected after losing it. The findings and the limitations of the available literature on the 'empty nest' and the process of transition to it are discussed later on in Chapter II.

Deciding on the research questions and data corpus

The preliminary observations described above led to my main research questions: 'Are fathers and fatherhood perceived in similar ways outside of academia?' 'How do members themselves make sense of this phenomena?' In order to answer this question I decided to analyse data from the following sources:

- Internet articles dedicated to the 'empty nest'
- Internet forums for parents whose children have left home
- Interviews with fathers whose children have left home

Such a choice of data sources enabled me to achieve a balance between 'naturally occurring' data, that is records generated without potentially distorting influence of a researcher (Wooffit, 2005) and interviews, which are the dominant

method of qualitative data collection in modern social sciences (Potter and Hepburn, 2005). I discuss the importance and consequences of choosing these two different data sources in Chapters VI and VIII.

On the basis of the preliminary analysis of the data collected from the sources described above I decided to focus on four research questions exemplifying my interest in the influence of context on constructions of fatherhood during the transition to 'empty nest':

How do parenting 'experts' in Internet articles construct fatherhood at the key time when children leave home?

How do mothers in their Internet chat-room conversations construct fatherhood during the 'transition to empty nest'?

How do fathers, in their conversations on Internet forums, construct their experiences of children leaving home?

How do fathers present their experiences of the 'transition to empty nest' in an interview setting?

Overview of the thesis

So far this introduction outlined the development process of the idea for the project and its objectives. Now I describe the remaining chapters of the thesis.

Chapter II examines the existing literature in the field of the 'empty nest' focusing on the position of fathers within those studies. The literature's preoccupation with the topics such as children's motivation to leave home and the conceptualisation of 'empty nest' as a variable affecting parents' marital satisfaction is also discussed in this chapter. A part of the chapter is dedicated to the various 'stages' of the 'empty nest

transition' as presented by the existing research. As the majority of the conducted research employs essentialist theoretical frameworks, from a discursive point of view they lead to a number of limitations which are presented in the chapter. Overall, an account of how fatherhood in 'empty nest' is conceptualised by the academic literature is developed.

Chapter III outlines the details of the theoretical and methodological framework adopted in this study. Here, the influences that shaped the method of discursive psychology and its current form are discussed. I also develop my own position within this framework, which enables focusing on the data and conducting a fine-grained analysis using methodological tools most appropriate for a particular piece of data. Then the process of data generation, details of the analytic process followed and ethical considerations related to the project is described.

Chapter IV, the first empirical chapter, addresses the research question about 'expert' constructions of fatherhood. The focus of the chapter is on how the psychologists, parenting journalists, writers and therapists conceptualise the fathers' role in the process of children leaving home. In order to do that the Internet articles written by people, who are considered to be authorities in the field of parenting are analysed. The analytic process is concentrated on the membership categorisation work which the authors do in their articles and how it builds up the fatherhood accounts. In conclusion, in the context of 'expert' articles there is greater variability of fatherhood accounts than in the existing academic literature. Also, the role that fatherhood constructions play in the context of medium such as the Internet is discussed.

Chapter V deals with the second research question focusing on mothers' constructions of fatherhood in the context of Internet chat-room conversations. In this context the analysis of how women conceptualise fatherhood during the time of children leaving home is performed. I look at the expectations that women formulate

towards fathers and how they view fathers' role in the 'empty nest' transition. The discussion of the ways is which 'experts'' and mothers' accounts are convergent and the consequences of these accounts for the constructed position of fathers in 'empty nest' follows.

In chapter VI the third and fourth research questions of how fathers themselves construct their experiences of the process of children leaving home are answered, taking into account the Internet chat-room data and the interview data. The chapter focuses on how fathers construct emotionality after children's departure and how talk about emotions affects their management of a sense of masculinity. Social expectations towards the participants are discussed in the light of the literature on modern fatherhood and masculinity. This process leads to an argument that the development of the new ideals of fatherhood and masculinity does not eclipse the old ones but seems to compel men to manage both sets of often conflicting requirements. This is particularly important if we are to understand the challenges faced by the fathers whose children have left home. Finally, the chapter is directed towards the discursive functions of talk about the 'empty nest' experiences in an Internet and the interview setting.

Chapter VII continues the work based on the interviews with fathers. Here, the initial focus is on the new analytical pathways which have not appeared in the 'naturally occurring' data. Next, common ground between the literature on 'factors' influencing the process of dealing with children leaving home and fathers' accounts of such circumstances is outlined. Then, the discursive take on the analysis of the data is applied in order to enrich the existing research and emphasise the functional aspect of fathers' constructions. This is achieved by focusing on how the talk about 'factors' presented as affecting parents' coping with the 'transition' is used to build up an identity of a 'good parent'.

Chapter VIII concludes the thesis. It outlines the ways in which the project adds the original contribution to the existing knowledge, by attending to previously neglected topics such as fathers' constructions of emotionality in reference to children leaving home or the management of masculinity and fatherhood in the talk about emotions. The discussion on how the project enriches the existing literature on the 'empty nest transition' as well as current debates within the field of qualitative psychological research follows. The recent debate between the critics and supporters of the interviews is discussed and then the new contribution to the debate based on the analysis of my interviews with fathers is added. The problems attributed to the interviews as a method of data collection (Potter and Hepburn, 2005) are presented and the new ways of overcoming particularly those drawbacks presented by the critics as unsolvable are developed. Finally, on the basis of the convergence of findings from naturally occurring and interview data, I argue that those two methods of data collection are less dissimilar than it has been assumed so far. Finally, the limitations of the study and potential future directions of research, such as further investigation of the role of context in fatherhood constructions are presented. The importance of further investigation into the fathers and the 'empty nest' in the cultural settings different from Western European and Northern American, which dominate existing research is emphasised.

Chapter II. Fathers and the 'empty nest' in existing academic literature

The majority of the literature on the 'empty nest' has looked at the experience of children leaving home and 'empty nest' firstly from a 'realist' epistemological perspective and secondly focusing on the role of mothers in relation to the event of children leaving home. This chapter is dedicated to what is referred to in the literature as the 'empty nest' and the process of transition to this 'stage' of parenthood. The discussion of the main stream 'empty nest' research is crucial to lay out a wider context in which the research on children leaving home is conducted and how it informs the current study.

Overall, the existing research draws a diverse picture of parental experiences. The scholars present issues related to the parents' lives in 'empty' or 'almost-empty nests' and dealing with the children coming back to family home after some time of independence. The literature acknowledges that the emptying of the nest influences parents' marital satisfaction, wellbeing and their sense of fulfilment in life. Finally, there are also articles dealing with the process of launching children into adult lives. Below, I outline each of those areas of the 'empty nest' literature focusing on the studies dedicated to the 'launching phase', as this is the part of the 'empty nest' research that is most relevant to the thesis at hand.

The motives and timing of leaving home

The importance of the discussion of the children's motivation for leaving and the timing of their departure stems from the research representing 'early' home-leaving as more distressing and leading to a commensurate decline in the parents' marital

satisfaction as well as psychological well-being and self-satisfaction (Neugarten, 1976; Harkins, 1978; McLanahan and Sorensen, 1985).

The diversity of reasons for the children's 'flying out of the nest' is emphasised by the existing research. Traditionally, the most popular incentive was marriage (Mitchell, 2004) and historically it was dependent on the family approval (Alwin, 1988). However, in current Western cultures, children are often seen as leaving home in search of independence and education (Aquilino, 1996). Nevertheless, some authors emphasise the influence of the cultural context and suggest that in societies with Eastern ethnicity the decision to leave home is still strongly influenced by the parents and the family (Mitchell, 2004; Goldschneider & Goldschneider, 1989). Substantial parental persuasion regarding leaving home is often associated with the environment of step-families and thus negative relationships with the children. Other 'factors' presented as influencing the decision to leave home are age, gender, country of origin and the language spoken with peers (Mitchell, 2004). Mitchell also found that the reason for leaving varies in reference to ethnicity. For instance, young adults from European backgrounds are presented as leaving to achieve independence, the Chinese to forward their education and Indians for marriage (Mitchell, 2004).

In the research on children leaving home there is a tendency to normalise the timing of the offspring's departure from home. This is apparent in contrasting 'early' home-leaving with 'flying the nest' at the 'expected' time (Cooney & Mortimer, 1999). The most common and accepted age of leaving home is presented as a variable in reference to a cultural background. For instance, in the United Kingdom and the United States the accepted time of moving out of the family home is around 18 or 19 years old (Barber, 1989), however, in Germany it is 23 and 21 for young men and women respectively (Silbereisen, Meschke & Schwarz, 1996) and in Italy it is mid-twenties (Cherlin et al., 1997). The decision as to when to leave home is seen as dependent on

factors including family structure. For instance, a single-parent family structure is presented as accelerating early home leaving. According to academic accounts, young adults also leave early when they have their own children or when they are obliged to do a lot of housework. Cooney and Mortimer (1999) imply a possible connection of the above circumstances when they portray single-parent family structure as increasing the risk of early parenting and as related to a higher involvement of teens in household chores. On the other hand Goldschneider and Goldschneider (1989) state that children are more likely to achieve early premarital residential independence in step-families. They contrast step-families with households run by women only and present the latter as facilitating low intergenerational conflict and therefore more normative timing of leaving home.

The final 'factor' represented in the literature as expediting children moving out of family home is conflict between parents and grown-up children (Seiffge-Krenke, 2006). For instance, young people with aggressive parents are presented as leaving home early in order to distance themselves from their family (Peterson, 2003). Also women with troubled family relations are reported to move out of their parents' house earlier than those who had more positive experiences of family life (Stattin & Magnusson, 1996). The above studies present the conflict in parent-child relations in quite negative terms. However, other researchers, such as Seiffge-Krenke (2006) conceptualise a moderate level of parent-child conflict, balanced with positive encouragement, as being adaptive in that it helps young adults achieve a transition to independence 'in time'. In addition, the research views 'in time' leaving as associated with authoritative parenting practices (Seiffge-Krenke, 2006; Holmbeck et al., 1997; O'Connor et al., 1996; Steinberg, 2001).

At the same time a sizeable share of the existing literature emphasises the role of positive and close parent-child relationship in 'normative' home-leaving. Young

people who regard themselves as constructively attached to their parents reported more 'normative' time of leaving home (Aquilino & Supple, 1991). However, O'Conner et al (1996) highlighted the importance of balance between autonomy and dependence. They mention that young people with a very close relationship to their parents experience more difficulty in separating from their family and achieving independence. Overall a 'normative' home leaving is usually viewed as taking place in line with better quality relationships with parents, higher family income, better social economic status and greater peer involvement (Goldschneider and Goldschneider, 1989; Arnett, 2000). Also, the child's gender has been presented as influencing the timing of leaving home (Flanagan, Schulenberg & Fulini, 1993; White, 1994). Goldschneider and Goldschneider (1989) emphasise the importance of gender in parental expectations of their sons' and daughters' home leaving. Families are portrayed as opting for greater intergenerational independence for sons rather than daughters and for children of both sexes when they have more resources available. Some more modern studies, however, provide contradictory evidence presenting the timing of children leaving as more dependent on young people's role status, such as becoming a parent or being a part of an established relationship (Seiffge-Krenke, 2006).

In conclusion, the literature presented here constructs the experience of home-leaving decisions as influenced mainly by variables such as family structure, age or ethnicity and to some extent the child's gender. Limitations of these studies are recognised by some of the authors who appreciate that research in this tradition lacks the analysis of the negotiations between the parents and the children and the process in which parents influence children's decisions (Mitchell, 2004). From the position of the current study, this literature seems to be overly limited in conceptualising the motivation and the timing of children leaving home. The 'factors' presented as affecting the decision to leave home are defined by researchers and presented as objective,

without acknowledging their interdependence with the context. There is no in-depth analysis of how parents conceptualise the motivations or the timing of their offspring leaving. The current project partly addresses this shortcoming by attending to the fathers' own representations of the circumstances in which the decision to leave home is made.

'Child launching' –the beginning of 'transition to empty nest'

The 'child launching' process, which is represented in the literature as involving a child leaving his or her parents' home for reasons such as college, university, work or marriage, has been conceptualised in existing literature as one of the most demanding and stressful phases in the family adjustment (McCubbin et al., 1980; Crowley et al., 2003; Lenahan, 2005; Hobdy et al., 2007). Such characterisation is usually supported by the studies showing decreased marital satisfaction, a sense of spousal companionship, marital harmony (Aldous, 1978; Wojciechowska, 2007) and also of passionate love-making between parents during the time of children leaving home (Tucker and Aron, 1993). At the same time the transition is conceptualised as the crucial 'stage' of family life cycle, influencing all following transformations such as parents' retirement or establishment of a new family by the children (Carter and McGoldrick, 1989).

Within the 'empty nest' literature there have been many studies exploring the potential relationship between this 'life stage' and a sense of marital satisfaction (Anderson et al., 1983; Rollins and Cannon, 1974; Rollins and Feldman, 1970; Karp et al., 2004; Hagen and DeVries, 2004). The findings of those investigations are varied and often contradictory. Some academics construct a sense of marital satisfaction as increasing after children leaving home (Berman & Napier, 2000; Glenn, 1975; Glenn &

McLanahan, 1982; Hagen & DeVries, 2004). The results have been interpreted in the light of the 'stress role theory' (Barnett and Baruch, 1985; McLanahan and Adams, 1987), which presents parenting as a demanding task. Thus losing such a role from the life of a married couple is constructed as improving their sense of satisfaction from the relationship they have with each other. Other studies, reporting increased marital happiness, explain such a result through increased agreement about core values between the spouses developed through the many years of marriage (Johnson, 1992). This theory, however, does not fully account for the role of the children and their home-leaving in explaining the changes in satisfaction from marriage. On the other hand, White and Edwards (1990) state that life satisfaction improves during the 'empty-nest stage' only when the parents have frequent contact with their non-resident children. This positions the continuation of the parental role in the centre of the psychological well-being of the parents. At the opposite end of the spectrum there are studies that view a sense of marital satisfaction as unchanged or decreased after the event of children leaving home (Markides et al, 1999; Vaillant & Vaillant, 1993). The explanations that are provided for this decline present parents as 'living through their children' because of their unsuccessful marriages (Luckey & Bain, 1970; Lauer & Lauer, 1986). VanLaningham et al. (2001) challenge the idea of improved marital satisfaction after the children have gone by suggesting that this finding is largely an artefact of using cross-sectional data, however there is not enough evidence supporting this assertion. Also, from the discursive point of view the constructions of marital satisfaction are expected to vary not only in cross-sectional data but also in individual cases, depending on cultural, historical and interactional contexts. Other explanations for decreasing marital and life satisfaction in 'empty nest' refer to the 'role identity' hypothesis which categorises social identities as a source of existential meaning and behavioural guidance, which are in turn viewed as necessary for psychological well-

being (Thoits, 1983). In the view of this theory the loss of a parenting role would have a detrimental effect on the spouses and their relationship because of a sudden loss of behavioural direction and meaning in life (White and Edwards, 1990).

From a discursive perspective the main problem with such theories is the conceptualisation of identity as something more or less stable, which can be acquired and therefore lost. The studies and theories above do not take into account the possibility of parental identity developing over the course of any interaction and thus being dependent on the circumstances in which the interaction occurs (Benwell and Stokoe, 2006). From the point of view of discursive psychology, the event of children leaving would not mean losing a sense of purpose and a social identity associated with being a parent. From discursive perspective the way a person constructs the event of children leaving home and its possible impact on their life is crucial in analysing the influence of the 'empty nest transition' on personal and marital satisfaction.

A substantial part of the literature presents quite negative visions of the 'launching children' period, which is deepened by presenting this stage in parents' lives as characterised by elevated family stress (Olson et al., 1983; Pasley and Gecas, 1984; Carter and McGoldrick, 1989). Some of the authors portray such a difficulty as stemming from the complexity of this 'stage' in family development. According to Carter and McGoldrick (1989), although 'launching children' may begin with a single child leaving home, there are other potential familial transitions happening simultaneously such as the changing function of marriage, development of adult-to-adult relationships between the parents and their grown-up children, or the expansion of family relationships by integration of in-laws and grandchildren. Furthermore, due to a possibility of the child returning home after a period of independent living, the task of launching may have to be performed more than once for the same child (Aquilino, 1996).

Anderson's (1990) findings show the child's leaving for college as instrumental in changing parental personal adjustment and marital communication. For instance a father's life-satisfaction is presented as declining along with the adolescent's leaving for college but increasing if the child attends college from home. The same pattern is attributed to personal discussions between spouses. Interestingly, the amount of stress perceived by fathers is said to decrease after the child's entrance to college, regardless of the child's leaving or staying at home. The authors suggest that the period of preparing the child to leave for college may be seen as more stressful than dealing with the changes that follow (Anderson, 1990). However, the study also indicates the possible differences between the leaving of the oldest and the youngest child. An oldest child's home-leaving is conceptualised as related to an increase in the father's health problems and a decline in the mother's life-satisfaction, but these adverse effects are not seen with the departure of the youngest child. These findings suggest that the parents' first encounter with a new transitional task is perceived as more disruptive than the subsequent similar experiences (Anderson, 1990; DeVries, 1991).

Lewis et al. (1989) offer a counter-interpretation arguing that the youngest child's leaving may be disturbing from an economic as well as emotional point of view, especially for fathers living in rural and farming environments. This is explained by the importance of children's labour on large family farms. Furthermore, many family farms cannot afford additional paid labour, which makes the youngest child's leaving an even bigger struggle for the parents. The negative consequences of the launching process on fathers are also emphasised by Lewis et al. (1979). Their well-being is said to be effected especially if they have fewer children and are significantly involved in parental duties and thus derive more satisfaction from the parental rather than the marital relationship.

However, DeVries (1991) in one of her earliest studies suggests the opposite. In her analysis of gender differences in parents' appraisals of 'child launching' she indicates that the fathers perceive this transition somewhat more positively than the mothers. However, generally this experience is said to be appraised by both parents in positive terms. Furthermore, she implies that there is a gender difference in regards to the leaving child and the parents' reaction to it. Apparently, the parents of sons are more concerned with their leaving than with daughters. Interestingly, employed parents are said to give more negative appraisals of this transition than unemployed parents. This finding is somewhat unexpected as the literature overwhelmingly presents employed parents as obtaining their life satisfaction from sources other than their children. This is said to make them less vulnerable to distress related to their children's leaving (Lerner and Hultsch, 1983). DeVries (1991) cites an alternative explanation of this phenomenon from Rubin (1979), in that the parents who made the childrearing the most important task and evaluate themselves on it have greater sense of accomplishment when their children achieve a success such as going to college. This hypothesis is relevant in the context of DeVries (1991) study, where the participating parents mostly had children who left for university.

The most detrimental aspect of the child-launching stage for the parents, according to the literature, is the realisation that their children do not need them as much as previously and the perception of their son or daughter as an independent adult. Some parents' reaction to their child's departure is constructed in the literature as particularly intense and categorised as a post-parental distress syndrome, also known as 'empty nest syndrome' (Robinson and Barret, 1986). It is characterised as an inability to realise that the relationship with the adult child needs to be qualitatively different, leading to the feelings of powerlessness and not being needed anymore as a breadwinner, father and a husband. Finally, it is said to involve fantasising that their

relationships with the children have been perfect (Robinson and Barret, 1986). Other behaviours presented as problematic at this stage are a tendency to hold on to children and the feelings of emptiness and depression (Carter and McGoldrick, 1989).

The child launching process can also be conceptualised in reference to the tasks that parents perform at this stage (Karp et al., 2004). One of those responsibilities is managing conflicting emotions. Parents are constructed as experiencing the feelings of sadness, because the active parenting phase of their lives is over. They are also presented as anticipating sadness they will feel after the children leave and at the same time the happiness and pride from their offspring's autonomy and independence. (Karp et al, 2004). Another significant aspect of this stage of preparation is said to be worry. Parents are reported as experiencing anxiety about their child's readiness for independence or the suitability of the chosen university. This is said to lead to the need for the negotiation of appropriate distance for parents and the child. Usually this means that the child should be far enough away to be able to establish his or her independence and at the same time close enough to maintain a satisfactory relationship with the family. Finally, the parents are viewed as faced with the need to re-think and re-establish their identities and their relationship with each other. The occasion of the child leaving is said to force parents to re-interpret their fundamental roles and re-establish life goals (Karp et al, 2004).

Although a number of researchers emphasise the problematic character of the child-launching process, there are those who see it as a 'natural' and positive stage of the family life cycle (Carter and McGoldrick, 1989). They focus on the importance of understanding that the family's most important role is care, protection and socialisation of children until they are ready to become independent adults. In order to fulfil this familial role the parents are advised to re-develop the responsibilities and functions they have performed so far. The activities such as care giving, teaching, protecting or

controlling are recommended for modification or elimination in order to maintain healthy relationship with the adult child (Nydegger and Mitteness, 1996). This is presented as a part of a difficult challenge, which is to establish new, more satisfying, but at the same time less dependent relationship with the children (Colarusso and Nemiroff, 1982).

The majority of the literature discussed so far has been conducted in the context of Western culture, focusing on parents living in the United States of America and the United Kingdom. However, very little research has been done to establish the role of cultural milieu in the developing constructions of parenting experiences of 'launching children'. From the perspective of discursive psychology members of the same culture have access to similar discursive resources for constructing certain phenomena (Potter and Wetherell, 1987), which indicates a possibility of some differences in constructions developed in those other than Western cultures. As mentioned above the records of such studies are limited. Two available examples focus on the experiences of Israeli parents investigated by Lomrantz (1995) and Lomrantz et al. (1996). Their findings are summarised below. The uniqueness of the 'empty nest' experience in Israel stems from the fact that young Israeli adults have to fulfil compulsory military service, which is related to a significant combat risk for them. This additional factor is possibly exacerbating the distress caused by parting with one's children. Lomrantz (1995) describes the launching process in terms of two tendencies that characterise parents' behaviour and attitude during this stage. The holding tendency is said to encompass the parents' efforts to maintain familial status of a launched child intact. On the other hand, the releasing tendency is constructed as demonstrating the parents' readiness to let go of their child and facilitate his or her autonomy. Surprisingly, the parents during the launching process are said to exhibit signs of both releasing and holding, which emphasises the contrasting features of their 'empty nest'

construction. This finding plays important part in deepening the picture of the transition to the 'empty-nest', as it implies that the launching process includes not just the positive or negative experiences and emotions, but both of these ambivalent reactions. Further Lomrantz et al. (1996) explore this idea by constructing a network of attitudes and coping mechanisms used by parents to deal with a task of launching their child. Although many of these factors are presented as contradictory, they seem to coexist within the same set of psychological reactions. For instance, the emotional investment exhibited by the affective difficulty of separating from the child is presented as a symptom of a forthcoming transitional phase, where parents focus on themselves and on discovering the new opportunities in their lives. Similarly, parent-child strains originating from the loss of old paternal authority are viewed as compensated by the strengthening family relations. This is said to be possible through increasing sense of equality between the parents and the children. Further 'factors' such as dissatisfaction with the army, which is perceived as competing with parental authority reflect characteristics of the cultural positioning of parents in the study. (Lomrantz et al., 1996).

Lomrantz et al. (1996) address another potentially differentiating context of 'children launching' constructions: the parents' sex. They argue that mothers tend to exhibit more emotional investment than fathers, at the same time expressing also more appreciation for the new opportunities opening to them after the launching phase and understanding the need to change their parental role. On the other hand, the fathers are presented as expressing the tendencies to foster their son's maturity more than the mothers do. It is also suggested that this pattern could be related to a father's wish to see his sons as more masculine after leaving home.

An important contribution of the studies described above lies in the emphasis on the ethnical factors such as the identification with the patriotic duties or religious

attitude as influencing parents' reactions to the launching process. Despite these studies suggesting a certain universality of the parents' experiences, others such as Tamir (1989) suggest that certain factors such as social class have a differentiating effect on the transition to empty-nest, with lower-class couples characterised as experiencing more emotionally intense reactions and less sex-role flexibility than middle and upper-class parents. The issue of the universality of the transition to 'empty nest' experiences and/or their dependence on the context holds an important place in the current study. It is important to note that here the analysis of the universality and specificity is focused on the local context of data generation and interaction rather than the broad 'factors' such as ethnicity or social class, even though they are acknowledged.

'Empty-nest': living without children

The definition of 'empty nest' is reasonably precise, describing it as a period beginning after the last child leaves home for whatever reason (Harkins, 1978). Julian et al. (1990) associate it with a beginning of a midlife period, traditionally viewed as one of the major crises in life, especially for men. This is usually explained by the gradual withdrawal of men from their professional lives and confrontation with searching for the new goals for the second 'half' of their lives (Kearl and Hoag, 2007). 'Empty nest', which can also coincide with the slow-down of professional activities, is treated as a first major social loss and therefore a critical reminder of approaching old age, but at the same time as a period of freedom to follow one's own interests (Krystal and Chiriboga, 1979).

Traditionally, the 'empty-nest syndrome' is defined as a maladaptive response to the post-parental transition, stimulated by the reactions to loss (Borland, 1982) and is attributed almost solely to women (Karp et al, 2004; Lewis et al., 1979; Hartocollis,

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2005; Ryff and Seltzer 1996; Norman and Scaramella, 1980; Bovey, 1995; Bigner, 1994). The reactions, that mothers are said to experience, include overwhelming grief, sadness, dysphoria and depression as well as identity crisis deriving from the loss of parental role (Kahana & Kahana, 1982; Borland, 1982). Especially adverse effects on mothers were to be derived when the child's leaving was 'off-schedule' with respect to expected transition (Harkins, 1978). Despite this focus on the mother some researchers recognise that fathers are liable to 'empty nest syndrome' (Lewis et al.1979).

This somewhat gloomy picture of negative reactions towards life after the children's departure is balanced by other researchers, who emphasise the improvement in quality of the relationship between the parents and the non-resident children. They explain this finding in terms of the greater effort that both the adult children and the parents put into maintaining their relationship. The 'empty nesters' are said to make less demands on their children and evaluate the relationship more positively (Umberson, 1996; 1989). Bozett (1985) focuses on the father-child relations after the child has left home and also paints a picture of improvement. Fathers are presented as evolving towards less authoritarian and directive style of relationship. At the same time the grown-up child is constructed as more receptive to the father's influence. The above changes are portrayed as stemming from more voluntary nature of the father-child relationship, enabling both parties a fuller appreciation of each other (Bozett, 1985). However, not all scholars support the view of improved relationships during the 'empty-nest' stage. For instance, Glenn and McLanahan (1981) suggest that despite common beliefs that the primary rewards of parenthood typically come during or after middle-age, there is no convincing evidence in support of this notion.

These quite negative findings from quantitative studies are not supported by the findings of qualitative studies. For instance McAnear (2004) identifies a number of themes describing empty-nest fathers' experiences with their children in very positive

terms. Fathers in McAnear's study express a sense of continuity in relationships with their children by continually identifying themselves as fathers and maintaining to be actively involved in their lives. Although the children live independently from their parents, fathers still provide the support in the form of advice, listening, helping with daily tasks and in some cases material assistance. In situations such as a child's first move into real estate or the stock market, the fathers are said to help their children using their expertise, experience and resources (Nydegger and Mitteness, 1996). Despite this maintenance of aspects of their parental role, fathers also acknowledge a significant change in their relations with the children. They are presented as relinquishing the parental responsibility, especially regarding discipline and correction, at the same time emphasising the importance of withholding one's opinion or advice in certain situations (McAnear, 2004; Nydegger and Mitteness, 1996). The fathers see this aspect of change as providing a more positive focus to their relationships with their children. This freedom from directing and controlling is characterised as enabling the fathers to be more supportive, non-judgemental and less critical, allowing them to simply enjoy relationships with their adult sons or daughters (McAnear, 2004).

The change that the 'empty-nest' fathers experience can take the form of accommodating the child's emerging independence through negotiation of new boundaries and establishing more egalitarian and mutually influential relationship with the children. The difficulty of this transformation is rated diversely by fathers. Some are surprised at how easy it is, while others report struggling to adapt to the new rules of interaction (McAnear, 2004).

Being an 'empty-nest' father also gives an opportunity to reflect on the period of more active parenting. Most of the fathers in McAnear's (2004) study express ambiguity in their contemplations. On one side they report a sense of personal validation through acknowledging the successes of parenthood, satisfaction from their

children's independence and a sense of having fulfilled their duty as a father. On the other hand, they orient to a sense of loss and regret about some aspects of their relationship with their children. Fathers are presented as regretting that they did not perform more involved and effective parenting, what in their words would mean spending more time with the children, listening to them more, improving communication, being more supportive and generally appreciating them more. The sense of loss derives also from the absence of the child from home and feelings of not being needed any more (McAnear, 2004).

Finally, the meaning of fatherhood for men during the empty-nest period of parenting is said to be related to a profound sense of generativity, which is achieved through their adult sons and daughters. Fathers perceive their children as their most important contribution to future generations, their legacy. The experience of having their values and commitments perpetuated through their offspring and the awareness that the children will improve on their contribution are presented as of great significance to fathers in this study. They are said to feel that this assures a sense of immortality (McAnear, 2004).

The picture developed by McAnear (2004) in his study includes only one scenario of the 'empty-nest' experience. The author acknowledges that his focus on the fathers from middle-class and good socio-economic background may limit the findings, arguing that similar studies in a variety of contexts should be conducted.

Returning to the nest

To fully portray the diversity within the existing literature of parenting experiences during the 'transition to the empty nest', it is important to include accounts of the situation when adult sons or daughters come back to their parents' home after a

time of living independently. A depiction of this aspect of the 'transition to the empty-nest' enhances the complexity of the picture by constructing children's home-leaving as often not a single event in either their or their parents' lives. Home-leaving is said to be better construed as a process of separation, where 'launching' and 'empty-nest' phases of family life cycle are performed for many years (Aquilino, 1996). According to Aquilino (1996) grown-up children are presented as most likely to move back home after leaving education or finishing military service. On the other hand the young adults who become parents themselves or secure a stable job are seen as least likely to return to their family home. Furthermore, children are said to return to their parents' home most often in the first or the second year after their leaving (Acquilino, 1996).

What are the reasons for those adults to return to their parents' home? One of the most important reasons seems to be economic necessity due to a divorce or a job loss. For other young adults their parents' home is positioned as a comfortable retreat from the responsibilities of adult life. In some situations, parents and children are said to live together as roommates, which generally involves sharing expenses (Hartung and Sweeney, 1991). The reasons for the adults returning home are also said to vary depending on their economic situation. In lower income families, parents and children living together is conceptualised as a necessity due to a lack of funds for another arrangement. Children in these families are considered as understanding of their parents' economic hardship and appreciating their help. While middle-class households may also cite economic reasons for children returning, the parents also tend to mention the child's immaturity and the fear of being independent as an explanation (Hartung and Sweeney, 1991).

Hartung and Sweeney (1991) generalise that parents assess their relationship with co-resident adult sons and daughters as friendly. However, neither they nor the children describe themselves as expecting the relationship to be permanent. It is

explained as stemming from a certain imbalance in parents' and children's emotional and economic contribution (Hartung and Sweeney, 1991). Looking at the problem in more detail, the quality of the relationship between parents and their co-resident children may be related to the parents' expectations about their children launch (Steinberg, 1987). The parents are said to anticipate home leaving due to entering further education or military service, professional careers, marriage, cohabiting relationship or establishing economic independence. These transitions are expected to move children away from the reliance on parental emotional and financial support (Steinberg, 1987). On the basis of this, Schnaiberg and Goldenberg (1989) constructed a concept of 'incompletely launched young adult', which encompasses these parental expectations. The authors suggest that unforeseen economic dependence on parents due to failing to fulfil parental expectations for autonomy can heighten the parent-child conflict.

Aquilino (1991) extended this theory by describing which scenarios of children returning home are said to be the most stressful for parents. He suggests that coming home to enhance one's education is related to fewer parent-child disagreements and, for fathers, a more enjoyable time with the children. On the other hand, returning home after divorce or a separation is presented as increasing open hostility between parents and children. A similar connection is constructed for the child's financial dependency but if the child contributes financially to the family's budget then it is presented as improving the parent-child interaction. Interestingly, the level of the child's income seems not to have an additional effect. This could be interpreted as an indicator that it is not the amount, which children pay but their willingness to do so is presented as more important for the parents. The relationship between parents and returning children is described as more positive in situations where both the parents and the child are healthy. According to Aquilino (1991), parents are also more satisfied with

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living arrangements when the co-resident young adult has high self-esteem. It is important to note that all the remarks cited above refer to the returning child as not being a burden or a passenger but a contributing partner. Aquilino (1991) hypothesises that health problems may create a burden, which consequently may cause stress and disagreements; however he does not provide the evidence for this suggestion.

Finally, Aqulino (1991) differentiates the quality of the relationship between the parents and their co-resident sons or daughters on the basis of the variables such as education, marital status, age, sex and race. For instance, the researcher suggests that more educated parents are less satisfied with the co-resident living arrangement and have a less enjoyable time with their adult sons and daughters. The unmarried parents are said to report less contentment and less positive interaction with their returned children (Aquilino, 1991; Mitchell, 1998), suggesting that the returning children may place some burden on their parents. Unmarried parents are constructed as experiencing the strain more than their married counterparts. Race was also presented in this study as a factor differentiating satisfaction from spending time with ones' children. Black mothers are said to enjoy the companionship of their returning children more than white mothers, whereas black fathers are presented as enjoying the time with their adult sons and daughters less than white fathers (Aquilino, 1991).

Qualitative studies of young adults returning home after a period of independent living help to establish a more detailed picture. Mitchell (1998) depicts the benefits cited by the parents in her study. These include the companionship and friendship, having the family together and the child's emotional and instrumental help at home. Parents in this study talk also about difficulties, which may stem from the interpersonal conflicts or tensions and a lack of support or deviations from timing of important life transitions. The main problems identified by parents include lack of privacy or independence, the child's lifestyle, messiness or unwillingness to help

around the home, fights, arguments and the young adults' dependency on them (Mitchell, 1998). Although parents report a lot of positive aspects of having children at home again, they also express the feelings of being taken advantage of. Furthermore, parents tend to suggest that their child's return violates the socially accepted picture of the developmental transitions in adult life. In the current economic climate it could be beneficial to investigate whether the parents' constructions of the children returning home differ depending on the current economic circumstances. However, it is important to note that the event of the children leaving home and its' continuity is often conceptualised in reference to a sense of normality. Nevertheless, the benefits of the adult son or daughter's return to the nest are viewed as significant in cases when the parent-child relationship is strong and the parents perceive support and contribution provided by the child as satisfactory (Mitchell, 1998).

Conclusions

The literature on the transition to the 'empty nest stage' is varied and deals with a number of different but also complementary topics. The scope of the research in the field ranges from the evaluation of the reasons and timing of young adults' launching (Mitchell, 2004; Alwin, 1988; Aquilino, 1996; Goldschneider and Goldschneider, 1989; Cooney and Mortimer, 1999 Neugarten, 1976; Harkins, 1978) to the analysis of the effects of children's leaving and returning home on parents (Aquilino, 1996; 1991; Hartung and Sweeney, 1991; Schnaiberg and Goldenberg, 1989). The established literature tends to focus on the prevalence of certain phenomena such as non-normative home-leaving and its causes, or returning home and the 'factors' related to it.

The research on the 'launching process' is mostly dedicated to the effects of the event on parents, conceptualised as changes in marital, life satisfaction and family

stress (Aldous, 1978; Carter and McGoldrick, 1989; Anderson et al., 1983; Rollins and Cannon, 1974; Rollins and Feldman, 1970; Olson et al., 1983; Pasley and Gecas, 1984; Lewis et al., 1979; 1989; White and Edwards, 1990). Some studies attempt to evaluate a degree of stress related to various tasks that parents need to face during this stage (Karp et al., 2004). Many of these studies construct a negative picture of the experience during this major transition (Robinson and Barret, 1986) or adopt a very normative approach to talking about timing or the sequence of events in 'empty nest' transition (Nydegger and Mitteness, 1996).

Generally, the literature looks mostly at the variables that might or might not 'cause' one to feel and experience the 'empty nest', rather than the sense making practices of the members themselves. Most of the studies seem to concentrate on constructing a picture full of variables influencing each other, instead of focusing on presenting the situation from the parents' point of view or attending to socially constructionist character of the phenomena. What I mean by this is that current research does not attend to the interaction-dependent nature of 'empty nest' constructions. So far there are no discursive psychological studies focusing on the ways in which parents talk about the experience of 'launching' children into adulthood. There is also no study exploring what interactional goals are achieved by the parents' talk about their children leaving home.

The literature is contradictory, and it often sees this period as a problem. Such a character of these findings stems, again, from the researchers treating the phenomena as essentialist variables influencing each other and neglecting the possibility of them being socially constructed in language (Potter and Wetherell, 1989). What I mean by this is that from the discursive psychology point of view it is impossible to isolate a factor such as the event of children leaving home and measure its effect on another isolated factor such as the feelings of emptiness. In a discursive view the person can

construct themselves as affected by the departure of their children, however such construction should be treated firstly as very context specific and secondly as developed for a certain interactional purpose such as the construction of identity.

Another important characteristic of the existing literature is that only a fraction of studies on the topic focus solely on fathers' experiences of their children leaving home. The majority of researchers analyses the experiences and reactions from the position of mothers or without differentiating between the parents (e.g. Mitchell, 1998; Aquilino, 1991; White and Edwards, 1990; Carter and McGoldrick, 1989).

Finally, it is important to note, that the majority of the available studies date back to 1970s and 1980s, when interest in family psychology was much greater than today. The methods and theoretical approaches used in these studies were deeply embedded in the tradition of quantitative research, which often limited our understanding of any given phenomena to the establishment of a correlation between a series of authoritatively measured variables. Within this methodological framework the contradictions within the set of evidence is difficult to account for. Therefore, I believe that the inconclusive findings together with the negligence of the fathers in quantitative studies actually encourage taking a new, qualitative approach which will be able to theoretically and empirically accommodate the variation in the data and orient to fathers' own perspectives of the 'empty nest'.

Chapter III Theory and Method

The following chapter is dedicated to the methodological position which underpins this study. Firstly, the roots of discursive psychology and the methodological frameworks that influenced the analytical position within this study are introduced. Secondly, I present two different positions within the framework, which currently shape the face of discursive psychology and address recent debates in the field stemming from this division. Finally, the chapter concludes with a discussion of the methodological issues of generating the data, the particulars of their analyses as well as the project's ethical issues.

'The turn to language' and the foundations of discursive psychology

The 'turn to language' was a paradigm shift which influenced the way language was conceptualised not only in psychology, but in all social sciences and linguistics (Berger and Luckmann, 1966; Burr, 2003). The shift originated in reference to a number of developments in the field of social sciences. One of them was a growing need for an alternative approach to research, which would not be based on experiments usually perceived as conducted in artificial, laboratory settings. There was an increasing recognition of the importance of the ecological validity in studying social issues and analysing the language specific to the cultural context fulfilled this requirement (Gergen, 1999). Another cause of 'turn to language' was the separation of two different views on language and its function (Edley, 2001). The concept of 'language as a mirror of reality' presented it as a transparent, straightforward medium used by people to describe the world as well as their inner states, thoughts and feelings in their 'true' form

(Burr, 2003; Edwards and Potter, 1992; Potter and Wetherell, 1987). This view of language stemmed from a realist position declaring the existence of one 'objective' truth, which was obtainable through methodical and comprehensive observation (Gergen, 1999).

The competing view of language suggests that it is a tool, which is used to construct ourselves, our identities and the world around us. This view of language enables the existence of multiple alternative versions of reality (Burr, 2003; Potter and Wetherell, 1987). One of the first people who contributed to this vision of language was Austin (1962), who attributed a 'performative' character to language. This means that the words we use can have various functions and are employed to achieve a certain goal in an interaction with others. They are not mere descriptions but 'speech acts' actually performing the actions through utterances (Austin, 1962). The focus of this concept is on a speaker's intention, an action a person wants to perform (Potter, 1996). However, the crucial aspect of understanding an utterance is dependent on a cultural and local context. For instance, the same ordinary statement such as 'Can you pass the salt?' can be read, depending on the context, as both a request and a question (Potter and Wetherell, 1987).

According to Goffman (1959) one of the major actions that can be performed through language is the creation of a public identity. It can be used to represent ourselves as acceptable for different groups of people. This can be done by adopting a set of 'local identities' appropriate for each group one seeks an approval from. The site where we perform this action is a social interaction, which is governed by a set of rules and obligations through which a person achieves their interactional goal. Goffman (1967) refers to the set of rules regulating a social interaction as 'syntax' and describes it as used by people to judge and interpret others' identities and motivations. This leads

to the conceptualisation of interaction as a social institution and subject of study in its own right (Heritage, 2005).

Ethnomethodology

The work of language theorists such as Austin and Goffman produced grounds for a project, which became one of the most influential in social sciences schools of thought, ethnomethodology (Garfinkel, 1967; Heritage, 2005; Hester and Eglin, 1997). Ethnomethodology emerged from the studies of Garfinkel (1967), who argued that the actions that actors perform in social context are comprehensible because they are able to make shared sense of the situation they are in and apply this shared understanding in action. This common-sense knowledge and shared methods of practical reasoning were labelled 'ethno-methods' (Heritage, 1984) and therefore ethnomethodology became a way of researching how those 'ethno-methods' were used by people to make sense of everyday life (Heritage, 2005).

An excellent example of Garfinkel's empirical work are his 'breaching experiments' (Garfinkel, 1967), where the experimenters engaged the participants in a simple game, such as 'noughts and crosses'. In the course of play the experimenters would breach the rules of the game by performing unexpected actions such as erasing the participants' marks, moving their token to another cell, etc. The reaction of the participants was mostly an objection and a demand for an explanation. Garfinkel (1967) concluded that this disturbance was due to the participants' inability to make sense of the events within the interpretative framework of 'noughts and crosses'. However, those participants who abandoned the game as a frame of reference and assumed another one such as 'playing a practical joke' did not show the signs of disturbance. The results of those experiments shed light on how dominating the rules of social situations might be

and how the variation of them can lead to attempts to normalize the incongruity (Heritage, 1984). 'Breaching experiments' are just one example of Garfinkel's investigation of everyday social interactions. What he discovered in this and further studies, was an overwhelming normativity with which societal members regarded actions of everyday life and the significance of 'rules' in conceptualising social interactions (Heritage, 1984).

In summary, ethnomethodology can be described as a study of methods, mostly linguistic, which people use to conduct social life in a rational, justifiable and appropriate way (Gergen, 1999; Potter, 1996). The position of context in understanding the meaning of any given utterance is emphasised in Garfinkel's focus on indexicality (Heritage, 1984). The main characteristic of ethnomethodology is that it puts an emphasis on analysing everyday interaction material as valuable in itself and moves away from selecting hypotheses and data on the basis of presupposed theories (Hester and Eglin, 1997). It is important to note that the context in ethnomethodological sense is a very broad term. It emphasises the details of interaction in which the participants are engaged as well as broader social and cultural settings (Potter, 1996).

Membership Categorisation Analysis

One of the strands of social scientific inquiry originating from ethnomethodology is membership categorisation analysis (MCA). It was developed by Garfinkel's student and colleague Harvey Sacks (Sacks, 1972; 1995). MCA developed alongside another very influential line of ethnomethodological inquiry, conversation analysis (CA), however they moved apart significantly thereafter. CA focused on sequential analysis of talk-in-interaction, particularly in naturally occurring conversation. On the other hand, MCA took as its main subject of investigation the

different ways in which categories are used in everyday and institutional settings. Quite recently however, Schegloff (2007) attempted to influence development of the MCA by urging MCA researchers to include sequential analysis in their dealings with the data. Whether this call is going to be widely followed by the MCA analysts is to be seen. In the traditional form, apart from analysing the categorisation in conversations, MCA has also been used to investigate a variety of discourses, such as newspaper articles, television and radio programmes, interviews and various institutional interactions (Benwell and Stokoe, 2006).

The main concept around which MCA is organised is a membership categorisation device (MCD), a collection of membership categories and rules of application (Sacks, 1972; 1995). A simple example of an MCD is a 'family', which in the simplest form includes a set of categories such as a 'mother', a 'father' and a 'child'. Those categories are connected by a set of rights and obligations such as 'taking care of each other' and 'being cared for'. The first example in which Sacks discovered the microprocesses embedded in its structure was a sentence from a child's story:

'The baby cried. The mommy picked it up'. (Sacks, 1972 p. 32)

Sacks noticed that we hear the 'mommy' as being a mother to this particular 'baby'. This, he suggested, stems from the fact that the categories 'baby' and 'mommy' belong to the same MCD 'family'. It is an obligation of the 'mommy' to pick the 'baby' up when it cries. Moreover, 'crying' is an activity seen as characteristic for babies in general and 'picking the baby up' is an activity commonly related to mothers. Those activities were termed by Sacks (1972) 'category bound activities' (CBAs) and were defined as action words linking 'subjects' to 'objects' (Lepper, 2000). Through the concepts of MCDs and CBAs Sacks (1995) was able to formally define context as a

space where certain categories and actions are commonly understood by members of the same culture as belonging together. This line of Sack's (1995) work was influenced by Garfinkel's (1967) research on shared understanding between cultural members and the rules of everyday interaction.

Sacks developed MCA into a systematic machinery to analyse the ways in which people go about their everyday social interaction through categorising themselves and others (Baker, 2000), which will be used in the analysis section of this thesis. One of the first important observations which Sacks (1995) made was that the categories are 'inference rich'. This means that:

'(…) a great deal of the knowledge that members of a society have about the society is stored in terms of these categories' (Sacks, 1995 pp. 40-1).

For instance, the category of a 'mother' in common societal understanding implies 'being female' and 'taking care of the children'. Furthermore, the categories can be 'duplicatively organised', which means that some categories such as a 'teacher' and a 'pupil' belong together in the same MCD 'school' in the same way as an 'employer' and an 'employee' belong to MCD 'work' (Silverman, 2001). Similarly, some categories are organised in pairs, called by Sacks (1972) 'standardised relational pairs' (SRP). Those membership categories are linked together by a set of rights and obligations, for instance 'husband and wife' are connected by the rights and obligations set out in the marriage vows. Categories are often organised in a hierarchical order, where one member of a category is situated in a higher or lower position in relation to an other member, for instance a girlfriend/fiancée/wife (Sacks, 1995).

The way that people as hearers recognise an MCD relevant for a certain membership category is embedded in a 'consistency rule', which says that:

'If a population of persons is being categorised, and a category from a membership categorisation device has been used to characterise a first member of that population, then hear subsequent categorisations as coming from that device' (Lepper, 2000 pp. 18-19).

However, often there is more then one MCD applicable for those same members. For instance, the category 'baby' may be linked to the MCD 'family' as well as 'stage of life'. Despite this in many situations just one of those MCDs will be sufficient. For instance, depending on the local, interactional context of a particular sentence, it is enough for a hearer to recognise a 'baby' in terms of an MCD 'family' to make sense of a particular social situation. This observation is described by an 'economy rule', which says that:

'For any population of Members being categorised, whether the consistency rule, or combining rules are being applied, it may be sufficient to apply only one category to each member' (Lepper, 2000 p. 19).

What is important in the rules of application described above is not only how they are useful in analysing everyday interaction, but also how they account for the methodological and epistemological problems of social science (Lepper, 2000). It is through the process of membership categorisation done in an interactional context that the knowledge about society and culture is produced and acquired by hearers and speakers. Hester and Eglin (1997a) emphasise the interrelatedness of local context and categories by stating that:

'If (…) the constituents of MCD "apparatus" are indexical expressions, then their "orderliness" is to be regarded ethnomethodologically as a practical accomplishment in local settings' (Hester and Eglin, 1997a p.18).

The implications of this are that the orderliness of the cultural resources, which MCDs are regarded to be, are achieved in the use of societal members and not pre-existing in the form of pre-established schemas (Hester and Eglin, 1997). Therefore, we need to understand MCDs as objects assembled from locally available membership categories at any particular time, and therefore entities with inherent flexibility.

The development of MCA was continued in the UK by the researchers from the University of Manchester (Hester and Eglin, 1997). One of the advances constructed there was Cuff's (1993) extension of the concept of SRP. He suggested that SRP was not only an entity which could be found by a person looking into an interaction, but primarily something actively constructed by speakers on a 'turn-by-turn' basis, particularly in the context of the exchange through the use of predicate modifiers. The example which Cuff (1993) uses to illustrate this, involves the alternative versions of the SRP parent/child. Depending on the predicates and CBAs used to describe those categories, the SRP could be modified into a worried parent/difficult teenager or over-controlling parent/normal teenager. The task of both the speaker and the hearer is not to establish a global 'identity', but to construct the very local and specific identifications, which are tied to and stem from the recognisable activities out of categorisations relevant for a particular culture (Lepper, 2000).

Another development of MCA was introduced by Jayyusi (1984), who distinguished between category generated features (predicates) and category bound activities. The former are systematically produced in interaction through their link to a certain category. They are 'conventionally anticipated features' (Hester and Eglin,

1997a). Here the speakers and the hearers construct the relevant categories in order to verify a particular categorisation. The flexible and contextual nature of predicates is demonstrated in Hester and Eglin's (1997a) study of talk between teachers and educational psychologists discussing the children referred to the School Psychological Service. For instance, in one of the sequences cited in the study the parties talk about a child taking part in a 'beating incident' outside of school. The child is described as 'badly beaten up' and having 'quite a bruise on his cheek' the next day. Those predicates can be heard as implying a category 'victim', 'therefore the child *is* a victim' (Hester and Eglin, 1997a p. 34).

A category bound activity, on the other hand, is conceptualised as commonly accompanying a certain category. In this case the partners in an interaction employ a certain category to connect the description to particular categorisation (Lepper, 2000). As in the case of Stokoe's (2003) study of neighbours' disputes the category bound activities are used by speakers to create a normative identity. For instance, in one of the data extracts a speaker uses the category bound activity 'play' in relation to her children to construct a picture of ordinariness and normality of children's behaviour (Stokoe, 2003).

Another important development in MCA is the concept of disjunctive categories (Jayyusi, 1984; Watson, 1978). They are defined as asymmetric category pairings, which generate conflicting characterisations of the same person (Hester and Eglin, 1997). Disjunctive categories such as judge/defendant, victim/offender, doctor/patient have been of interest to MCA in order to investigate how disjunctive accounts are managed by incumbents of those categories in everyday life (Lepper, 2000). Others analysed the use of disjunctive activities in constructing identity (Watson and Weinberg, 1982; Stokoe, 2003). In her study of neighbour disputes, Stokoe (2003) cites a speaker, who through describing disjunctive activities and categories such as

'mother' and 'swearing in front of the children' construct a 'category puzzle' (Watson and Weinberg, 1984). The suggested solution to the problem is the application of a different category belonging to the same MCD, in this case 'family'. Another categorisation of a 'mother', who engages in such an activity could be a 'bad mother' and therefore leads to inference of an alternative identity (Stokoe, 2003).

MCA has been proven to be a useful approach for the analysis of a variety of data types. For instance, Hester and Fitzgerald (1999) investigated organisational features and categorisational work in radio talk shows. Eglin and Hester (1999) analysed how moral order is constructed in newspaper accounts using MCA. Categorisation in institutional settings such as schools was explored by Baker (2000), Hester and Eglin, (1997a) and Lepper (2000). Others also used the interview data, treating it as the material generated in the course of interaction between two competent speakers of a particular culture, who draw on their knowledge of how members of categories routinely speak (Baker, 1997).

The Discursive Action Model

The discursive action model (DAM) (Edwards and Potter, 1992; 1993) was developed within the field of discursive psychology (DP), which is a social constructionist position that takes language as a topic of investigation in its own right. Edwards and Potter's (1992) approach was influenced by a number of theoretical areas in social psychology and linguistics. Firstly, they were inspired by the studies of the relationship between knowledge and language use in linguistic philosophy, such as the research by Wittgentein (1953) or mentioned earlier in this chapter Austin (1962). Secondly, a significant influence on the DAM had the speech act theories (for instance Searle, 1969; also Austin, 1962) advocating a functional approach to language. Those

theories focused on the roles that language could fulfil and the actions it could perform in a variety of contexts. An important stimulation was provided by the ethnomethodological studies of the members' sense-making practices (Garfinkel, 1967; Heritage, 1984) also discussed in more detail earlier in the chapter. Sacks' (1992) application of those ethnomethodological principles to analysis of mundane conversation provided inspiration to change the focus from the researcher-developed data to everyday conversations and their structural features. Finally, the analyses of scientists' discursive practices (Gilbert and Mulkay, 1984) and the post-structuralist emphasis on text's 'ability' to construct reality (Derrida, 1977) inspired insights into techniques of achievement of factuality in discursive accounts (Edwards and Potter, 1992). Such a way of looking at the language means that DAM differs from other qualitative frameworks by challenging the notion of language as a transparent medium and rejecting its ability to access internal mental, cognitive or emotional states (Burr, 2003; Stokoe and Wiggins, 2005).

On the basis of this ground building works three main components of the Discourse Action Model (DAM) emerged. Firstly, this school of discursive psychology focused on *action* performed with the use of language. This means that psychological phenomena such as attribution and remembering treated in cognitive psychology as reflection of inner cognitive processes are by discursive psychologists viewed as acts executed in interaction with others and used for a certain purpose (Edwards and Potter, 1993). The reformulation of the traditionally cognitivist topics earned DP the characterisation as a 'fundamental re-conceptualisation of cognitivist psychology, rather than just another kind of analytic method' (p.147, Horton-Salway, 2001). Secondly, Edwards and Potter (1993) focused on the *position of fact* and *interest* within discursive practices. They investigated strategies that people use to develop accounts that would be read as solid and factual. Related to this issue is a problem of '*stake and interest*'

which increases the risk of discounting a motivated account as originating from a stake that person may have in producing a particular construction. Edwards and Potter (1992) researched not only the ways in which people attend to the stake and interest in others' accounts but also ways of managing the issue in their own constructions. Finally, the DAM provides resources to investigate how accountability for actions or events is managed in an interaction. Thanks to the tools developed within the DAM we can analyse ways in which people negotiate their responsibility for certain behaviours and how those negotiations influence the representation of public identity etc. (Potter, 1992). However, most importantly, people's orientation towards issues of agency and personal responsibility are treated in DAM as a discursive action, rather than a case of cognitive attribution.

The impact of DAM on the field of discursive psychology and also this study is significant as it provides a structured framework in which the analytical process can be conceptualised. It also offers a set of methodological 'tools', which can be used to investigate discursive practices described above. I shall discuss the tools which I used in my analysis later on in the chapter, while reporting analytical processes followed in this study.

The methodological stance of the thesis

Tradition of discursive psychology

To conceptualise the tradition of discursive psychology easily, it is helpful to present it as divided into two different positions. It is important to note that whilst it is a gross simplification, it enables me to clearly discern my own methodological stance in this study. The first position, the critical discursive psychology is influenced mainly by the works of Foucault (1972), who looked at how issues of power are managed in discourse in the different historical periods. The position of discursive psychology

influenced by Foucault is often termed 'top-down' and emphasises the 'deductive'. Within this tradition the investigation is often lead by broad concepts such as power or ideology. On the basis of those the analyst looks for the broad discursive patterns in the data (eg. Burman and Parke, 1993; Hollway, 1989). An example of work done in this tradition is the development of interpretative repertoires (Edley and Wetherell, 1999; Gilbert and Mulkay, 1985) described as a broad unit which conceptualises a certain aspect of social life. It can be in a form of a recognisable schedule of arguments or descriptions which can be distinguished in people's talk by familiar clichés, metaphors or anecdotes (Potter and Wetherell, 1987).

The second position within discursive psychological framework is largely influenced by conversation analysis (CA). It is often presented as a 'bottom-up' approach emphasising the 'inductive'. The analysts in this tradition start their investigations with the data and therefore any concepts described in the course of the analysis derive directly from the data (Silverman, 2001). This approach is predominantly used for analysis of naturally occurring interactions, which as well as the MCA originate from ethnomethodological influences and particularly the work of Harvey Sacks (1995). CA is predominantly used to analyse any natural form of talk-in-interaction (Drew, 2005), focusing on the orderliness and structure of the social action achieved in conversation (ten Have, 1999). Conversation analysts argue that through the investigation of phenomena such as turn taking, sequence organisation and inter-subjectivity it is possible to uncover the formal procedures through which people perform their social practices (ten Have, 1999).

One aspect of CA which is especially important to this analytical position is the approach to investigation of universal concepts such as gender, masculinity or fatherhood. The position of CA in this respect, strongly advocated by Schegloff (1997, 1998, 1999a, 1999b) is that the analysts should not approach the data with pre-

established concepts in mind such as, for instance, 'hegemonic masculinity' (Connell, 1987). Schegloff's (1997) idea of focusing on participant's ways of conceptualising their words appealed to me greatly as I believed it was congruent with the analytical methods I have chosen for this work. Also, I felt it was important to conduct a more exploratory and non-hypothesis based study in the field, which mostly saw research driven by various sociological and psychological theories of fatherhood (as described in Chapter II). Therefore in line with the CA work I have decided to avoid looking at the data through the prism of already existing theories such as hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1987; 1995) or the role theory (for instance Bem, 1974). Despite this decision, I believe that those concepts are an integral part of any gender related research; therefore I briefly outline the most relevant theories below.

Hegemonic masculinity

This concept, which is one of the most popular discursive theories of masculinity, stems from Connell's critique of the role theory, which is presented by him as positioning people, both men and women, in highly rigid stereotypical roles. Connell (1987, 1995) emphasises the role of society in constructing gender and presents it as an agent in creating wide gender orders. In this domain the process of socialisation, for instance parents sanctioning children in order to impose certain gender or social roles, is presented as most influential. However, Connell (1987, 1995) argues that power relations within the society, conceptualised as struggles between dominant masculinity, femininity and marginalised masculinities are largely omitted. In this theory the interrelation between masculinity and femininity is based on one predominant fact, male dominance over women (Connell, 1995). This conclusion leads to representation of power as important feature of men's and women's social experience. Power was introduced to the field of masculinity studies through the concept of hegemony. It provides an opportunity to talk about dominant ideologies in the context of everyday

practices. The concept of hegemony was firstly introduced by Gramsci (1971), who used it to explain how a dominant economic class controls society. According to Gramsci (1971) this was accomplished through active consent of dominated groups and collaboration of political forces such as the law and the state (Hearn, 2004). Therefore, hegemony can be defined as social superiority achieved by subtle interplay of social forces influencing the organisation of private life and cultural processes rather than 'brute power'. This dominance is said to be embedded in religious doctrine, mass media content, wage structures, welfare, taxation policies etc. (Connell, 1987). Therefore, hegemonic masculinity seems to be identified with heterosexuality, patriarchy, wealth and success (Speer, 2001). One of the best examples of hegemonic masculinity exists within cultural ideals publicized by the media. Strong, male icons, such as James Bond, are a popular personification of hegemonic masculinity. In the same way as the above example is fictional, hegemonic masculinity is assumed to be reachable only by a minority of men; however it is at the same time normative, requiring other men to position themselves in relation to it (Connell, 1995). At the same time, despite dominance, hegemonic masculinity does not eliminate other ways of doing masculinity but subordinates them, often by employing technology and science as men's attributes. Also men, who do not embody hegemonic masculinity themselves, can still take advantage of the privileges established through the power relations between hegemonic masculinity and femininity. This can be done by not contesting the customary social order (Connell, 1987).

The main advantage of hegemonic masculinity as a theory is the emphasis on the existence of multiple masculinities as well as their hierarchal structure (Connell, 1985). Also, the masculinities are viewed as complex and full of potential internal contradictions within practices constructing those (Connell& Messerschmidt, 2005). At the same time, hegemonic masculinity is criticised for difficulty with its identification

and operationalisation. It is not certain whether hegemonic masculinity should be viewed as cultural images, cultural ideals or a fantasy (Donaldson, 1993). Hegemonic masculinity is also presented as a set of normative social norms; however, the content of those norms is left unclear. Another difficulty with the vision of hegemonic masculinity as an 'ideal' is the impossibility of embodying it. Some critics see it as inappropriate to define dominant version of masculinity as something that no man would ever realise (Edley & Wetherell, 1999). Jefferson (2002) sees it as inappropriate to talk about a singular hegemonic masculinity. Yet, it is possible that hegemonic masculinities depend largely on social and historical context, there should be many different types of hegemonic masculinity. It could also be argued that hegemonic masculinity is framed within a heteronormative construction of gender, which emphasises gender differences and ignores variability within gender categories (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Finally, although Connell emphasises the relational nature of masculinity that is its existence only within a system of gender relations, hegemonic masculinity is still quite frequently conceptualised as a list of attributes such as competitiveness, strength, rationality or independence (Jefferson, 2002). Such a representation of hegemonic masculinity is prone to oversimplification and therefore is unable to reflect the complexity and range of masculine practices. Instead, viewing masculinity through the window of hegemony and hierarchy leads to representation of men's lives and experiences as following a rigidly defined pattern (Moller, 2007).

When deciding on a way to conceptualise gender in this piece of research I took into account the above critique of the concept of hegemonic masculinity as well as Schegloff's (1997) suggestion that the researchers should treat social science concepts as relevant only if participants orient to them in their turns of interaction. As a consequence, the concept of hegemonic masculinity was not utilised in the analysis of gender in the data. However, as an alternative I decided to analyse the ways in which

'everyday' gender categories are used in an interaction (Hopper and LeBaron, 1998; Stokoe, 2008). In this decision I have been inspired by extensive microsociological work on gender. The pieces most relevant to my methodological decisions are briefly outlined below.

Influence of microsociological conceptualisation of gender

One of the most influential projects leading to conceptualisation of gender as socially constructed was Garfinkel's (1967) study of Agnes, a transsexual raised as a boy, who at seventeen decided to adopt a female identity and later on underwent a gender reassignment process. Garfinkel's aim was to capture the socially situated work where Agnes accomplished the task of passing as a 'normal' woman (Rogers, 1992). Agnes achievement was striking taking into account that she needed to manage that fact of having male genitals and a lack of social resources that being raised a girl provides. Despite this, she analysed ways in which women behave in socially constructed circumstances and used this knowledge to develop a set of procedures enabling her to 'become' female in society (Garfinkel, 1967). This groundbreaking research therefore suggested that being 'male' or 'female' can independent from factors such as biological indicators of sex or even a sex role into which one has been socialised. This led to the idea of that gender can be 'done', performed in social interaction and through language (Kessler and McKenna, 1978; West and Zimmerman, 1987). What followed was development of different schools of analysing the performance of gender through looking closely at the use of language in interaction (Bucholtz et al., 1999).

Ethnomethodology, discursive psychology, conversation analysis and Membership Categorisation Analysis (described above) all investigate social constructions of gender in talk. In this research, which makes participants' orientations a priority, the local context in which the speaker/writer makes gender relevant is of much greater interest than wider discourses or repertoires that can be drawn on (Stokoe,

2000). Stokoe (2008) emphasises the functional aspect of occasioning gender categories in everyday talk. Gender categories are not only used to construct a version of masculinity or femininity but most importantly serve a number of different goals such as narrative description, decreasing ones accountability for some action, nominating a person to perform a certain task and many others. Some researchers stress the importance of understanding participants' gender definitions as constructed in a variety of ways, depending on the local interactional context (Speer, 2001). Different uses of the concept of gender give it a distinct meaning according to a particular context and the aim which a certain construction of gender is used for. Discursive psychologists influenced by CA argue that instead of using a pre-conceptualised category of gender such as 'hegemonic masculinity' we can say that there is a culturally specific way of describing masculinity, which draws on a range of rhetorically effective constructions and is used to do a particular business at hand (Speer, 2001).

Positioning of this study

The position which I adopted for this study is influenced by the principles of the schools and approaches described above. In the analysis I use the resources developed by MCA and DP, bearing in mind ethnomethodological grounding of the work on social construction of gender and therefore masculinity and fatherhood. Thanks to the influence of CA I also orient to the ways in which my participants construct their experiences of children leaving home, without looking at participants' words with pre-supposed theoretical concepts of gender or parenting. In my analysis I look at the relationship between the local interactional context and the discursive constructions which participants create. Schegloff (2007) suggests that this approach should also be applied to membership categorisation investigations. This means that to justify claims about membership categorisation work performed by participants the researcher needs the evidence of participants' orientation towards those particular

categorisation devices (Schegloff, 20007). However, the point on which the methodological approach here differs from discursive psychology allied with CA, is in the use of the different types of data. In my research I decided to include not only the naturally occurring data, which are principally used with CA aligned methodologies, but also the interview data. In the next part of the chapter I explain the process of data collection in more detail.

Sources of data and data collection

The project's initial focus was on the fathers' perspectives of the experience of children leaving home and all the different ways in which fathers construct the changes (or the lack of them) associated with this event. However, in the process of researching the literature dedicated to the topic of fathers or the experience of an 'empty nest', I noticed that the majority of these studies were conducted from the researcher's or parenting experts' point of view, constructing the fathers in a variety of ways but at the same time leaving them 'out of the equation'. In the course of my investigations I recognised that the constructions of fatherhood and the 'empty nest' developed by a variety of 'experts' are prevalent in every-day life, for instance through media such as television, radio and Internet. The analysis of discourse taken from this context would therefore enrich significantly the existing research into the 'empty nest'. Another common category of members often constructing fatherhood in reference to the 'empty nest' seemed to be the mothers. I recognised the potential of their discourses to enrich the existing knowledge about ways in which the fatherhood and the 'empty nest' are constructed in reference to context. However, the task of generating the appropriate data, that is, material that would both present the fathers' perspectives and how they are portrayed by others, was a challenging one. In the end, I decided to include the 'expert'

writings about the fatherhood in my data set and investigate how the 'expert' constructions compare to those created by the parents themselves. I decided to focus on the texts that are easily accessible for fathers, such as Internet and newspaper articles, as those are the works that may be most relevant for the fathers themselves. I also collected the data in the form of mothers' Internet conversations on parenting websites forums, which referred to fathers in the stage of children leaving home.

In the process of choosing the data collection techniques I considered the current debates in the field of discursive psychology, such as the one between enthusiasts of 'naturally occurring data' and interviews. Here I only signal the general arguments relevant to the stage of the project design. However, a much fuller discussion of this topic and its consequences for the project is presented in Chapter VIII. 'Naturally occurring data' is the material which is generated without the influence of the researcher, in other words it would exist even if the researcher was not present. It therefore eliminates the potentially distorting influence of the researcher on the participants (Woofitt, 2005). 'Naturally occurring data' has also its disadvantages. Most importantly, depending on the topic, it may be very difficult to collect the data relevant to the investigated subject, especially in the time frame required for the completion of a PhD. In this instance the interviews may be a more advantageous method of collecting data, as they enable the investigation of the aspects of the topic that are of interest to the researcher. Of course, here we are faced with the danger of imposing the researcher's frame of reference on the participants (Schegloff, 1997). However, according to Linde (1993) the analysis of the interviews is less problematic if the researcher acknowledges and takes into account that what happens in the interview can be representative only of this form of interaction. I also believe that acknowledging the constructive nature of this interactional context with all its qualities mentioned earlier is a valid way of minimising its drawbacks. Further ways of increasing the transparency and soundness

of interviews as a method of data collection include using an appropriate transcription method to the chosen analysis school (Jefferson, 1985) which enables grounding of the analysis in the specifics of the talk. The transparency of the interview set-up, that is the category that the participants were recruited under and the understanding of the task which participants are presented with can also improve the quality of the analysis of the interview data (Potter and Hepburn, 2005). Finally, it is important to understand the interview as an interaction and therefore take into account the interviewer's questions and responses and transcribe the data so that the interactional character of the exchange can be fully appreciated (Potter and Hepburn, 2005). All the above challenges and recommendations were taken into account when deciding on the method of data collection. To meet the project's objectives I decided to gather the interviews as well as 'naturally occurring data'.

Internet data

In order to investigate the subject of children leaving home from the fathers' perspective I collected data in the form of Internet blogs and chat room conversations featuring fathers talking about their experiences of children leaving home. This kind of data also has all the advantages of being 'naturally occurring'. Another set of 'naturally occurring data' collected was the Internet conversations between mothers about the fathers and the process of children leaving home. Finally, I collected Internet articles presenting the 'expert discourse', i.e. developed by psychologists, family issues authors or family and relationship therapists, who are generally considered as being authorities in the field of parenting. The Internet data were resourced using Google browser, which was applied to identify first key websites dedicated to parenting. Further Internet sites were accessed through references from the previous websites. I believe this information to be important in the way the Internet data are conceptualised. Because all search engines can be thought of as the data 'gate-keepers' the researcher must acknowledge

the constructed character of data sourced from the searches performed through the Internet browsers. At the same time my choice of Google is justified by my aim to analyse the articles and chat room conversations which are easily accessible to any person interested in the topic. For this purpose Google browser is a justified choice. The details of the Internet data are presented in the table below:

Table 1. The Internet data inventory.

Data set	Websites	No. of items	Dates of collection
Fathers posts	www.emptynestsupport.com, www.indiaparenting.com, www.soundandvisionmag.com, www.parent2parent.au.com, www.emptynestmoms.com http://www.bbc.co.uk/southerncounties	45	21.03.2006 -09.01.2006
Women's responses	www.emptynestsupport.com, www.parent2parent.au.com, www.emptynestmoms.com www.indiaparenting.com	45	21.03.2006 -09.01.2007
Women's posts about their partner's experience	www.emptynestsupport.com, www.emptynestmoms.com, www.ageconcern.org.uk	33	21.03. 2006 -22.11.2006
Women's posts about their own experience	www.indiaparenting.com, www.parent2parent.au.com, www.prairiehome.forum.publicradio.org, http://groups.yahoo.com, www.christianwomentoday.com, www.emptynestsupport.com	41	21.03.2006 -16.11.2006
General newspaper articles	www.wsaw.com, www.ydr.com, www.parentmap.com, www.s-t.com, www.msnbc.msn.com, www.healthinsite.gov.au, www.expatexpert.com, www.abc.net.au, www.washingtonpost.com http://news.bbc.co.uk/	11	21.03.2006 -22.11.2006
Advice articles from parenting-related websites	www.emptynestsupport.com, www.indiaparenting.com, www.parentingmap.com, www.marriagemissions.com, www.religion-online.org, www.allaboutlifechallenges.org, www.pathpartners.com, www.lcsnw.org	10	21.03.2006 -16.11.2006
Psychology-related articles	www.4therapy.com, www.authorsden.com, www.psychologytoday.com, www.aboutourkids.org, www.svcmc.org, www.cignabehavioural.com, www.netarticlesonline.com, www.directionjournal.org, www.netdoctor.co.uk, www.2theadvocate.com	10	15.06.2006 -29.06.2006
'Expert' interview articles	www.gearingup.com, www.webmd.com	2	26.06.2006

Interview data

In order to further investigate fathers' constructions of experiences of children leaving home I decided to conduct interviews with men, whose children have left home in the last 3 years. This choice of the data collection method was dictated by the objective to add the fathers' own accounts of the 'transition to empty nest' to the already existing pool of knowledge presenting this life event from the point of view of the researcher. The recruitment process of was a long and complicated one, as I found it difficult to gain access to appropriate sample. Initially, the strategy was to contact a parenting organisation, such as Parentline and ask them to distribute materials about my study to fathers, whose children left home. I have contacted them and it was suggested that I send a letter outlining my request and the details of my research. This letter however, did not yield any responses. The copy of this letter can be found in Appendix 6. Next recruitment strategy involved issuing a newspaper advertisement in one Midlands city. This advertisement resulted in one completed interview. The text of the advert can be found in Appendix 7. The final recruitment strategy was to send an e-mail to all staff of a university in the Midlands region of the United Kingdom. This action resulted in many responses of interest and eighteen successful interviews with fathers from a variety of backgrounds. The demographic details of participants and their children are described in the table below.

Table 2. Interviewees' details.

Participant's pseudonym	Participant's age	Participant's occupational status	Class	Relationship Status	Number of children	Gender of children	Number of children not living at home
Mark	59	Professional	Middle	Married	3	2 males 1 female	3
Ben	51	Professional	Middle	Married	4	2 males 2 females	2
Rob	50	Intermediate	Working	Married	2	2 males	2
Steven	57	Professional	Middle	Married	4	2 males 2 females	4
Will	54	Professional	Working	Married	3	2 males 1 female	3
Alex	55	Managerial	Middle	Married	3	2 males 1 female	2
Bill	58	Professional	Middle	Married	3	2 males 1 female	2
Julian	52	Intermediate	Working	Divorced	3	3 males	2
Chris	59	Professional	Middle	Married	4	3 males 1 female	4
Malcolm	53	Intermediate	Working	Married	1	1 female	1
Craig	56	Intermediate	Middle	Divorced	1	1 female	1
Fred	57	Intermediate	Working	Married	2	2 females	2
Richard	59	Retired	Middle	Married	2	females	2
Sam	58	Intermediate	Working	Married	2	2 females	2
Andrew	57	Professional	Working	Married	3	3 females	3
James	58	Managerial	Middle	Separated	3	3 males 1 female	3
Peter	59	Professional	Middle	Married	2	2 females	2
Greg	49	Professional	Middle	Divorced	3	3 males	2

Adam	45	Intermediate	Working	Married	3	2 male 1 female	2

The interviews were arranged and conducted by the researcher and usually lasted between 45 minutes and an hour. The shortest interview, with James lasted 30 minutes and the longest with Richard 75 minutes. All of the interviews were conducted on site of a university in one Midlands city in United Kingdom. In all of the interviews I have managed to establish good rapport with the interviewees. I attempted to set up the interviews as quite informal conversations, focusing on participants' experiences as fathers. I tried to avoid as much as I could falling into the researcher-participant dynamic in order to limit 'interview effect', where the participants would feel inclined to talk about their experiences in such a way as to fulfil the role of a 'good research participant' (Mauthner, 2002). In order to do that I have used mostly open ended, general questions in order to avoid 'leading' the participants into constructing their accounts in certain way. The main themes covered by the interview questions included the child, who left home and the circumstances surrounding their decision to leave; preparation for the event including participant's role in it and how involved they were, participant's reaction to the children leaving as well as the reactions of their partner/child's siblings (if appropriate); strategies of dealing with the event and finally any potential changes in family dynamic after the children leaving. The full interview schedule is included in Appendix 1.

The participants' responses to my questions were always very positive. In many cases I did not need to ask all the questions as the participants were encouraged to 'tell their story' and therefore included many details described above themselves. As mentioned in the 'Ethical considerations' section of this chapter, the topic discussed had the potential to cause emotional distress to the participants; however, in none of the interviews was that the case. It is important to note that in a few cases the participants

reported becoming 'slightly emotional' during the interview; however they were able to deal with those feelings by talking about them to the interviewer.

The analytic stance of this thesis

The interviews are digitally recorded and then transcribed using a simplified version of the Jeffersonian system (Jefferson, 2004; see Appendix 2 for transcription notations). Before and after the interviews, reflective notes are written regarding the researcher's thoughts and feelings in relation to the interview, participants as well as first analytical ideas. The recordings are listened to many times, and in the case of the media data read numerous times. An important step in my preparation stage is the evaluation of the discursive 'character' or 'content' of the data and choosing the most appropriate line of discursive investigation. For instance, in the articles from the Internet written by the psychologists, family issues authors or family and relationship therapists generally considered as being authorities in the field of parenting, the prevalent discursive resource used by the authors are the membership categories (Sacks, 1995). Therefore, in the analysis of these data I primarily employ the techniques from Membership Categorisation Analysis.

In the analysis of the data, where the participants orient to social categorisation, I focus on the membership categorisation patterns using the guidelines from Baker (1997 pp. 142-143). In the first instance, I will identify the central categories embedded in the data such as the standard relational pairs or disjunctive categories, which are either named or implied through the category bound activities (for more extensive discussion of all those concept see the section above about MCA). At this stage I focus on the categories describing the parenting and especially the fathering roles. In the second stage I look at the activities that the participants associated with those categories, which helped in explaining what attributions were made to the

categories. Further, I follow the sequential and indexical structure of those categorisations to explain their interactional role. Finally, by uncovering the links between the membership categories, predicates and activities I analyse the participants' understanding of their social reality (Baker, 1997).

In the 'naturally occurring' as well as the interview data the management of accountability and constructing factuality of discursive accounts are common practices. In order to analyse these actions fully I employ the 'tools' developed within the Discursive Action Model. According to Edwards and Potter (1992), the management of accountability which could be seen as a process of blaming and/or exoneration is often done through the use of the psychological categories such as the memory and attribution and in many cases also emotions (Edwards, 1996). In my analysis I identify those categories and look at what functions they play in a particular context.

I also investigate the strategies and resources which participants used in order to create a sense of credibility in their accounts (Potter, 1996). This is particularly relevant for the 'expert data.' Those articles and programmes are directed at parents and strive to provide advice and guidance on how to deal with the problems which are said to arise in this stage of life. The credibility of the analysis is especially relevant to the data from these Internet articles, as they have the potential to construct normativity in relation to parenting. Those articles are easily accessible for everybody interested in the topic and are directed at parents seeking to learn more about this stage of life. Therefore, the understanding of how the accounts constructed in those articles appear factual is significant for the analysis.

Potter and Edwards (1996) and Potter (1992) assembled a set of guidelines for investigating constructions of credibility and factuality in discourse. One important feature of the discourse in this action is 'footing', which is a term introduced by Goffman (1981) and refers to a range of relationships between the speakers or writers

and the accounts produced by them. For instance, the speakers can present claims as their own or as attributed to others, which manages personal and institutional accountability of the speaker for those claims (Potter, 1996). Sometimes, in order to increase the credibility of the account, the speakers present their claims not as their own, but as produced by others. This is often done when another person's credibility is assumed to be greater than the author's, for instance because of certain category entitlements they possess (Sacks, 1995; Potter, 1996; Edwards and Potter, 1992). For example, the journalists report the psychologists' advice on parenting as the latter are considered authorities in this field.

Another way of introducing the credibility into the description is to produce it as agreed across a set of reliable witnesses, preferably independent from each other. The latter condition is particularly important as it decreases the chances that the shared version is compromised and therefore flawed because of the witnesses' interaction (Edwards and Potter, 1992; Potter, 1996). One of the ways of constructing corroboration is active voicing (Wooffitt, 1992), that is quoting others' speech. Wooffitt (1992) identified this technique in his study of paranormal trades and their understanding of scepticism they are often faced with. The importance of active voicing lies is its ability to present certain views not as the speaker's version of what somebody else said, but as 'actually' their words. They play a role of important evidence supporting the factuality of an account (Potter, 1996).

Other tactics such as vivid description or systematic vagueness, even though essentially contrasting, are often used to achieve the same interactional goal, constructing an account as factual. When the vivid description manages this task by providing a lot of detail supporting the perceptual sense of the account, the systematic vagueness makes global formulations providing a barrier for easy undermining of the details (Edwards and Potter, 1992). Further discursive devices such as extreme case

formulations (ECFs) (Pomerantz, 1986), listings and three-part lists (Edwards and Potter, 1992; Jefferson, 1990) and empiricist accounting (Gilbert and Mulkay, 1984) are also very useful in constructing factuality.

All of the above devices and discursive strategies are taken into account in the coding stages of the analytical process. Then the reiterative process of looking for the patterns in the use of those devices begins. The main questions asked at this stage are 'What is the purpose of this device?' and 'How the task that this device is used for is accomplished?' These are the questions inspired by the tradition of conversation analysis (ten Have, 1999) pinpointing the functional aspect of discursive devices. Finally, the links between the patterns are explored in order to uncover the participants' view of the social order in a particular context (Stokoe, 2003).

Many leading researchers in the field focus on acknowledging the variability of both the discursive practices, that is, what people do through the use of language, and the discursive resources such as the membership categories, three part lists or metaphors (Potter and Wetherell, 1995). This concentration on the variability is important because it helps to enrich the explanation of social processes and avoid simplification often present in other research methods. An important analytic practice facilitating acknowledgement of variability is also taking into account 'negative instances' also called 'deviant cases' as a mean of testing the adequacy of constructed interpretations (Seale, 1999).

Ethical considerations

The project was cleared through the appropriate Nottingham Trent University Psychology Division Ethics and Risk Committee.

The main ethical consideration is the sensitive character of the topic for some interviewees which may have led to distress. In this situation, the participants are to be

informed where they could find appropriate help. Ethical protocols developed by the British Psychological Society are adhered to. The participants are given a participant information sheet with the details and the purpose of the study, as well as a consent form to sign. One copy of the consent form is given to them to keep for future reference. In the consent form the participants are informed about their right to withdraw from the study at any time. Due to the fact that discursive psychology focuses on the participant's language, they are also informed that their words can be used directly in the thesis. However, the researcher can ensure the anonymity of the data. This is achieved by replacing all the names of people and places with pseudonyms.

The ethical issues considering the Internet data are related to the various degrees of public availability of the data. Eisenbach and Till (2001) suggest that one of the most important issues in Internet based data collection is whether the chatrooms are private or public spaces. According to the authors the chatrooms are treated as private when the password is required to access the postings and contribute to the chats. However, the chatrooms which do not require password to access them are widely treated as public spaces, from which data can be extracted. In order to respect the people posting messages on websites, which require a password to access the forums I decided not to use the data from those website and focus only on those which were available for everyone.

Conclusions

In this chapter I have outlined the theoretical and methodological position guiding the study. Adopting an approach driven by the data and tailoring the analytical tools to the requirements of the data type enables to focus on the participants' discursive orientations and their point of view. The fine-grained analysis of their'

constructions, using tools from Discursive Action Model and Membership Categorisation Analysis, is directed at the discursive actions of the participants' words.

Also, I have outlined the process of data generation and charted the details of data sources. The data collection resulted in a substantial and varied body of data reflecting the focus of the project on contextual variability of fatherhood constructions. In the following chapters I present the findings based on the analysis of these records. I start with the investigation of Internet articles written by parenting 'experts'.

Chapter IV: When children leave home: expert discourses of fatherhood

In the context of the empty nest, and in relation to children leaving home, the literature has tended to marginalize the positions and experiences of fathers. The process of letting a child go was constructed as much more difficult for the mother than the father (Karp et al, 2004; Hartocollis, 2005; Ryff and Seltzer 1996; Bovey, 1995; Kahana & Kahana, 1982; Borland, 1982). A lot of the studies employed a stereotypical approach of presenting men as more concerned with their professional careers and therefore less affected by this 'transition' (Carter and McGoldrick, 1989; Karp et al., 2004; Robinson and Barret, 1986). Many researchers focusing on the issues of 'empty nest' ignored the role of fathers completely (Adelman et al., 1989; Cooper & Gutmann, 1987; Dennerstein et al., 2002; Noriko, 2004; Oliver, 1977; Owen, 2005;. Schmidt et al., 2004). Few researchers presented fathers as influenced by the event of the child leaving home; when they were, it was usually associated with very particular qualities such as having fewer children, being significantly involved in parental duties and/or deriving more satisfaction from the parental rather then marital relationship (Lewis et al., 1979). Overall, it could be said that the existing research painted a very restricted image of fathers during the 'empty nest transition'. The question that could therefore be asked is whether other 'experts', for instance people such as family therapists, create similar constructions of fatherhood during the time of children leaving home.

This chapter is based on the analysis of 'naturally occurring' data collected from a number of Internet websites dedicated to issues of parenting at the time when children leave home. The corpus of data examined here consists of what I label 'expert discourse', that is the data derived from articles written by psychologists, family issues authors or family and relationship therapists, who are generally considered as being

authorities in the field of parenting. The details of the quantity of articles and the sites from where the articles were collected are outlined in Chapter III above. The articles which I analyse here are directed at parents and provide advice and guidance on how to deal with the problems which are said to arise in this 'stage' of life. The purpose of these articles is to describe the 'stage of parenting' when children leave home and offer advice on how to deal with the 'challenges' characteristic for this time. The articles published on the Internet are easily accessible for parents so disseminating them on the websites dedicated to parenting increases the chances of reaching the audience interested in the topic. Thus, the Internet articles have the potential to influence how parents themselves represent the time of 'transition to empty nest'. That is why I decided it was important to analyse constructions of fatherhood in this particular context.

From the discursive analytic framework adopted here these texts are also doing far more than simply describing and giving advice. They construct versions of reality (Gergen, 1999) in reference to parenthood and the 'stage' of life when children leave home. It is those articles' constructive work that is the core agenda of this chapter. The analysis presented here focuses upon two streams of discursive activity in the data.

The first one is categorisation work used to construct different representations of fatherhood in the media. To investigate this aspect of the data I use Membership Categorisation Analysis (MCA). The second strand of discursive activity that I am interested in these data is the way credibility and factuality is constructed in the accounts developed in the articles (Potter, 1996). This aspect of analysis is especially relevant to the type of data analysed in this chapter as it has the potential to construct normativity in relation to parenting. For instance, some ways of dealing with children leaving home can be presented as more 'appropriate' then others by describing them as 'normal' and 'common'. This can be achieved by constructing certain accounts as

factual and provided by credible persons. Therefore, the understanding of how accounts constructed in those articles appear factual and people credible is a valuable aspect of the analysis. I will start the analysis by briefly outlining three main discursive collections of fatherhood constructions as children leave home. Each set will be then investigated in more detail using the excerpts from the articles.

The first collection of constructions that emerged after the analysis of the data is 'fatherhood in opposition to motherhood.' This encompasses the accounts where fathers are positioned as holding different characteristics, strategies for coping with children leaving home and emotional reactions to this event than mothers. The main feature of this collection is the strategy of contrasting the fathers with the mothers, often on the basis of the gender differences between them. In the second collection that could be identified in the data, the experts focus only on mothers, and this concentration creates a sense of equating parenting with mothering and therefore downgrades the role of fathers. This set is termed 'unacknowledged fatherhood'. The final collection is the most 'gender neutral' of all identified here, as gender is not directly oriented to by the writers of the articles. Fathers are mentioned as playing an equal part in the experience of children leaving home to mothers. The label for this pattern is 'fatherhood as parenthood'.

As a final introductory remark I would like to stress that the spelling in the data extracts is taken directly from the original source.

Fatherhood in opposition to motherhood

The analysis of data extracts showcasing the accounts where fatherhood is presented as contrasting to motherhood begins with the extract, which comes from an article entitled 'Renovating the empty nest', written by Nancy Thalia Reynolds and collected from an Internet website dedicated to parenting. The writer is presented in the

article as the author of a parenting guidebook as well as a mother to a son who is entering college and to a high school daughter.

Extract 1, article, Renovating the empty nest, N.T. Reynolds.

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1       Although conventional wisdom
2       says moms suffer more than dads when a child
3       leaves home, they may be better off, Kastner
4       says. "Women talk about it for years. Between
5       anticipating and talking about it, they are
6       addressing and adapting to it. Men are often not
7       dealing with their feelings in the same direct
8       way."
9       Shoreline writer Colleen Bollen, mother of two
10      grown sons, agrees. "It was a big adjustment, but
11      I felt I had intensely parented, was very
12      involved and did everything I could, so when it
13      came time to let go, I could do it." Her husband
14      Alan, a webmaster for Boeing, had a harder time.
15      "It came as a surprise to him. He wasn't as
16      intensely hands-on every day, so he didn't know
17      some day it would end. And all of a sudden it was
18      over."
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The analytic focus in this extract is on how the quotes of the multiple speakers are used to construct contrasting accounts of the ways mothers and fathers react to and deal with their children leaving home. In this relatively short extract there are two speakers introduced through active voicing (Potter, 1996). This strategy of quoting another person's speech is often used to provide additional support for the constructed account. Kastner in line 3, is described earlier in the article as 'Seattle psychologist Laura Kastner, Ph.D., author with Jennifer Wyatt, Ph.D., of *The Launching Years*, a book about parenting young adults'. The first statement attributed to her (lines 1-3) starts with an externalising device (Woolgar, 1988) 'conventional wisdom says' which facilitates the reading of the following statement: 'moms suffer more than dads when a child leaves home' as existing independently of the writer's agency. Through the use of externalising devices speakers express certain views and present them as attributed to someone else. This enables them to avoid being assigned those views to themselves, which could be inappropriate for the self-image they want to create (Woolgar, 1988).

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For instance, in the example above, the writer needs to maintain her credibility as an independent journalist and therefore attributes the presented view to common knowledge rather than herself. This strategy also helps to construct as factual the view that mothers are those, who are more affected by children leaving home than fathers, as it presents it as commonly known. However, through the use of 'although' in the line 1 the speaker distances herself from this view and converts it into the advantage for 'moms', who through greater emotional involvement may actually be 'better off' (line 3).

Categorising the speaker as a psychologist is extremely important for establishing the credibility of the account presented in the article. The concept of category entitlements (Sacks, 1995) is a useful analytic device for that goal, developed in the tradition of MCA it shows how certain categories of people in particular contexts are treated as knowledgeable. For instance, simply being a member of a certain category is sufficient to guarantee the person's expertise in the area (Potter, 1996). In extract 1, the use of the category 'psychologist' entitles the speaker to make generalisations voiced in lines 4-8, which can be attributed to this person's professional knowledge. The writer uses the gender categories 'women' (line 4) and 'men' (line 6) along with the category bound activities (Sacks, 1995; Silverman, 2001) 'anticipating and talking' (line 4-5) and 'not dealing with the feelings directly' (lines 6-8) respectively to construct the account of contrast between fatherhood and motherhood. Mothers as women are viewed in society as the ones talking a lot about their experiences and feelings, which in the extract is presented as beneficial for them as it prepares them for the actual 'transition' of children leaving home. On the other hand fathers are positioned as disadvantaged in that they are constructed as not acknowledging their feelings beforehand and therefore are not ready when the time for

the 'transition' comes. In this construction, children's leaving is, for fathers, more unexpected and unanticipated and therefore more difficult.

The second speaker introduced in this extract is 'shoreline writer Colleen Bollen, mother of two grown sons' (lines 9-10). The way membership categories such as 'shoreline writer' and 'mother' are used in those short lines, facilitates constructing corroboration (Potter, 1996). This is a way of introducing credibility into the description by presenting it as agreed across a set of reliable witnesses, preferably independent from each other (Edwards and Potter, 1992). The situation where the 'mother of two grown sons' (line 10), that is the person imbued by her experience of dealing with children leaving 'agrees' (line 10) with the picture drawn by the professional 'psychologist' adds to the impression of consistency and factuality. The representation of women as better prepared than fathers for the transition to the 'empty nest' through discussing and predicting their feelings is therefore supported not only by the 'psychologist' but also by the representative of this group of members. Further evidence for mothers' superior readiness for their children leaving comes from the personal example provided by the Coleen Bollen. She acknowledges the difficulty of the experience by stating: 'it was a big adjustment' (line 10) and then constructing a picture of contrast between her and her husband's parenting experience as well as its role in preparation for children leaving home. The account is constructed using activities which are bound to a mother's membership category, for instance 'parenting intensely'. Other descriptions of behaviours such as 'being very involved' and 'doing everything I could' are linked to a general category of parent. Those activities are arranged in a three-part list (lines 11-12); a listing including three elements, which according to Jefferson (1990) can be used to construct a description as complete or representative. The use of extreme case formulations (ECFs) (Pomerantz, 1986), the discursive devices 'drawing on the extremes of relevant dimensions of judgement'

(Edwards and Potter, 1992; p. 162) such as 'very' (line 11) and 'doing *everything* I could' (line 12, emphasis added) strengthens and formulates a sense of normativity of the account of a mother as a figure devoted to parenting. Furthermore, extreme case formulations here, especially the one in line 12, serve the purpose of displaying commitment to the activity of parenting on the part of the speaker. This is in line with Edwards' (2000) argument suggesting that ECFs are often applied to 'indexing the speaker's stance or attitude' (Edwards, 2000; p. 363).

Colleen Bollen also provides an account of her husband's reaction to their children leaving. Interestingly, in contrast to Colleen, Alan is not categorised by any membership category from the device 'family', instead he is described by a category from standardised relational pair (SRP) (Sacks, 1972; 1995; Lepper, 2000) husband/wife and occupational category 'a webmaster for Boeing' (line 14). This, along with the lack of Alan's own report of his experience in the article, positions him as a person who might be less central to parenting or the children leaving home transition. Colleen's turn (lines 15-18) completes the account. The writer here builds the picture of contrast between the mother and the father comparing their involvement in parenting responsibilities: 'he wasn't *as* intensely hands-on every day' (lines 16-17, emphasis added). The presented lack of day-to-day investment in fathering duties is viewed as accountable for the lack of preparedness for the feelings that came after the children left home (line 15, 17-18).

The construction of fatherhood in this extract presents men as unprepared and taken by surprise by their children leaving home. The writer positions fathers in opposition to mothers, who are presented as systematically anticipating and preparing for the transition to the 'empty nest' stage of parenting. This contrast is attributed to the disparity between the accounts of mothers' and fathers' level of involvement which is also apparent in the membership categories used to describe the characters featuring in

the extract. Colleen Bolen is categorised as a 'shoreline writer' and 'a mother of two grown sons' (lines 9-10). This categorisation puts emphasis on the parenting responsibilities of the person. On the other hand, Alan is categorised in reference to his relationship with Colleen ('her husband', line 13) and his professional responsibilities ('a webmaster for Boeing', line 14). The membership categories associated with Alan do not assume category bound activities linked to parenting, therefore increasing the contrast between motherhood and fatherhood represented in the extract.

The construction of fatherhood in terms of contrast to motherhood is also formulated in extract 2. It derives from a transcript of an interview with Dr. Sylvia Gearing, who is introduced as a popular American psychologist, an author and also 'a pioneer in psychology'. As in the previous extract the psychologist membership category has important analytical implications in terms of the construction of credibility of the 'speaker'. The interview was sourced from the website run by professional psychologists and counsellors who offer 'innovative therapies, relationship programs, creative and spiritual classes, and programs in women's, children's and parenting issues' (http://www.gearingup.com/html/Home.htm, 2007). According to this website, the interview was conducted during a television program (CBS 11 News), which provides important insight into the context and the purpose of the interview. Apart from the interviewer and Dr Sylvia there is a third party, the public watching the programme. They are the main addressee and recipient of the recorded interaction.

Extract 2, interview with Dr Sylvia Gearing, CBS 11 News.

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1      The Myth of the Empty Nest (…) (lines omitted)
2      Q: Are there differences between fathers and
3      mothers in navigating the empty nest experience?
4      Dr. Sylvia: New research argues that the empty
5      nest is not such a terrible loss for women, as was
6      popularly portrayed in the media in the 1970s. On
7      the contrary, men are much more likely to have a
8      difficult time when their children leave home.
9      Most moms now feel invigorated, recharged and
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10        ready for the next, exciting stage of their lives.
11        Q: What are those differences?
12        Dr. Sylvia: Mothers and fathers anticipate and
13        experience their children's departures very
14        differently. Although many women in these studies
15        were traditional, stay at home moms, the reality
16        was that they were looking forward to their
17        children leaving home. They had already started
18        planning and preparing for the next stage, whether
19        that meant going back to school, going to work or
20        exploring new interests.
21        Q: What happened to the fathers?
22        Dr. Sylvia: In contrast, the men did not want to
23        talk at all about preparing for the change. They
24        were much less likely to view their children leaving
25        home as a major transition and, as a result, were
26        less prepared for the emotional component of the
27        transition.
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An important analytic aspect of this extract derives from its interview form, which invites the reader to look closely not only at interviewee's turns but the interviewer's as well. This is particularly important as immediate local context (such as a question of an interviewer) has often been said to influence the answer of the interviewee (ten Have, 1999). The first line of the extract provides a title of the interview and as such serves an important purpose of grabbing the reader's attention and informing them about the following story. This is usually achieved by introducing contrasting categories (Lepper, 2000). The title in extract 2 (line 1) uses two categories, 'myth', which suggests fictional story and falsehood, and 'empty nest', which is a categorisation device grouping categories such as 'parents', 'children' and category bound activities such as 'leaving home'. Therefore, the title constructs the view that there is a certain generally known 'belief' about an experience concerning certain groups of people, and that this 'belief' may be false. In this way, the article has a chance of attracting the target audience.

The interviewer's first question (line 2) introduces two membership categories relevant to the 'empty nest' ('mothers' and 'fathers') and immediately puts them in contrast with each other by introducing the concept of 'differences' between them. In her answer Dr Sylvia confirms this construction by providing what is considered

factual evidence ('new research argues', line 4) designed to strengthen the credibility of her account. This formulation also plays an important role in constructing corroboration (Edwards and Potter, 1992). The account constructed by Dr Sylvia explains the 'myth' introduced in the title, by contrasting 'the new research' with the account of the 'empty nest' as a 'terrible loss' 'popularly portrayed in the media in the 1970s' (lines 4-6). The myth introduced in the title refers to the construction of the empty nest experience as a 'terrible loss' for mothers. This formulation plays an important role in positioning this view as old-fashioned. There is also an extreme case formulation (ECF) in line 5, which is usually defined as an expression using extreme phrases such as all, every, always, in order to support an account from challenges against its credibility (Pomerantz, 1986). The form of ECF use in line 5 however is a 'softener' version of the device (Edwards, 2000). The 'Softener' versions of ECFs help to retain a sense of the speaker's reasonability by avoiding too extreme claims but at the same time maintaining their generalising function. The 'Softener' types of ECFs are also more immune to negation, because of their apparent awareness of empirical realities (Edwards, 2000). The ECF is line 5 therefore opens the opportunity (not utilized explicitly) for suggesting that even though it is not 'such a terrible loss' it may still be *a loss* for women.

Interestingly, the extreme version of the 'empty nest' as conceptualised in the 1970s is implicitly attributed to 'men', who are positioned as 'more likely to have difficult time when children leave home' (lines 7-8). The contrast here between 'mothers' and 'fathers' is constructed by the discourse marker (Potter, 1996) in line 7 ('on the contrary') and the disparity between the negative view of fathering experiences ('having difficult time') and positive picture of mothering experiences ('feeling invigorated, recharged and ready for the next, exiting stage of their lives'). It is also supported by the use of a three-part list (Jefferson, 1990) and the generalisation 'most

moms' (line 9). Interestingly, the temporal indexical (Jayyusi, 1984) 'now' in line 9 contrasts the category of mothers in the 1970s (line 7) with the category of modern 'moms', probably the subjects of the 'new research', mentioned in line 2. This technique positions this description as much more up-to date.

The issue of the differences between mothers and fathers is explored further in the answer to the second interview question (line 11), referring to additional specification of disparities between those two categories. The picture of contrast between mothers' and fathers' experience of their children leaving home is emphasised by the use of the ECF '*very* differently' in lines 13-14 (emphasis added). Dr Sylvia introduces another membership category 'traditional, stay at home moms', which is associated with the predicates of non-working, devotion and involvement with the children. This category is juxtaposed with a disjunctive activity (Jayyusi, 1984) of 'looking forward to children leaving home' (lines 16-17). That means that certain behaviours are not considered appropriate for particular membership categories in a particular culture. In this case our cultural knowledge tells us that 'traditional moms' are not supposed to look forward to their children's departure. That is why Dr. Sylvia introduces this account with an indexical 'although' (line 14) and distances herself from the account by presenting this information as deriving from the 'studies' (line 14) and therefore being independent from herself.

The picture of contrast between fathers' and mothers' experiences is being built from the question asked by the interviewer in line 21. The formulation 'what *happened* to the fathers' (emphasis added) implies a lack of agency, not attributed before in reference to mothers. In her answer, Dr Sylvia uses the membership category 'men' and bound to it the activity of 'not wanting to talk' (lines 22-23) emphasised by the ECF 'at all'. The shift from the membership category 'fathers' to 'men' helps to construct the explanation of fathers' negative experiences of children leaving as

attributed to the implications of their gender, such as reluctance to talk about feelings (lines 22-23) or a tendency to underestimate the importance of major life events (lines 23-25). These gender membership category predicates are presented as responsible for the lack of emotional preparation of fathers (line 26) for this 'transition'. This attribution is constructed as factual by the use of the formulation 'as a result' (line 25) building a causal relationship between the lack of emotional readiness and avoidance of 'emotion talk'.

In extract 2 fathers are again positioned as disadvantaged in the experience of the transition to the 'empty nest'. The assumed difficulties that fathers have are attributed to their 'masculine' way of dealing with emotions. The author of the article orients to gender in this extract and therefore constructs a bridge between 'manhood' and fatherhood and emphasises interconnectivity of those two categories. This account challenges what is presented as a commonsense view of mothers as those who suffer most when children leave home and portray fathers as those experiencing difficulty during this transition.

Another example of the 'fatherhood in opposition to motherhood' constructions comes from an article written by the American 'Newsweek' writers Barbara Kantrowitz and Karen Springen.

Extract 3, article, 'Free at Last', Barbara Kantrowitz and Karen Springen.


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1       Fathers are often more likely than mothers to feel pangs
2       of regret rather than euphoria. "It's very common for
3       this to sink in for the fathers after the fact," says
4       Coburn. In her book, "Letting Go: A Parents' Guide to
5       Understanding the College Years," Coburn describes one
6       father who kept his son's dirty track shoes in the front
7       hall. Other fathers may feel they've lost their buddy or
8       basketball partner. Sophia Bender's father, Thomas, a
9       history professor at New York University, says one of
10      the "everyday emptinesses" he feels is at breakfast,
11      when the family would read The New York Times and chat.
12      He's appropriately taking the historical perspective,
13      comparing this transition to others in his life as a
14      parent—like when Sophia didn't have to be walked to
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15          school anymore. As a fourth grader, he recalls, "she was
16          quite enthused to be liberated." But he missed the
17          walks. Then, as now, "something you enjoy disappears."
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In extract 3 there are a number of discursive devices constructing a sense of factuality of the account (Potter, 1996), which were also observed in previous extracts. In lines 3-4 the writer introduces a speaker 'Coburn' who in an earlier part of the article is categorised as 'Karen Levin Coburn, Washington's assistant vice chancellor for students (and an empty nester herself)'. This along with being an author of a guidebook for parents of children going to college (lines 4-5) constructs category entitlements to expertise in the area of parenting and transition to the 'empty nest'. As in previous extracts, active voicing (lines 2-3; 10; 15-17) and constructing corroboration by citing the words of 'experts' serve the purpose of building the credibility of the article.

However, what I would like to focus on in this extract is the membership categorisation work done by the writer. In lines 5-8 Coburn is cited as giving an example of fathers' reactions to their sons leaving home. One father 'kept his son's dirty track shoes in the front hall'; others 'may feel they've lost their buddy or basketball partner'. Interestingly, those activities and predicates could easily be recognised in Western culture as bound to the category 'man'. The use of those gender specific activities and predicates defines fathers' reaction to their sons' leaving in terms of their membership to this category and therefore makes the spectrum of their reactions to this event severely limited. A similar strategy can be observed in the way the author presents Thomas 'Sophia Bender's father' (line 8) in conceptualising his experience of his daughter leaving home. Apart from his relationship with Sophia, Thomas is also categorised in reference to his professional experience as 'a history professor at New York University' (line 9). In the description of his transitional experiences he is said to be 'appropriately taking the historical perspective' (line 12) which is an activity bound to a membership category 'history professor' and a direct

reference to his professional status. This strategy constructs the view that even the experiences not related to Thomas's professional role, such as parenting, are conceptualised in occupational terms, making it a dominant framework for describing Thomas. This strategy may have important implications for how Thomas's identity is constructed in this extract. From the way the author writes about him, it could be implied that the most relevant aspect of Thomas's self is his occupation.

The final extract which represents the 'fatherhood in opposition to motherhood' constructions comes from the website dedicated to providing psychological advice on parenting and relationships. The extract is in a question-answer form, where the question is asked by a member of public and answered by a professional psychologist. As in the previous extract this membership category plays an important part in building credibility of constructed account.

Extract 4, article, Empty Nest: Question and Answer,

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1        Q: We hear so much about mothers being depressed
2        and unable to accept the empty nest when the kids
3        leave home. In our family, however, it was Dad who
4        took it hard. He went into a tailspin for more
5        than a month.
6        Is this unusual?
7        A: No, it happens very commonly. In a recent
8        study, 189 parents of college freshmen were asked
9        to report their feelings when their son or
10       daughter left home.
11       Surprisingly, the fathers took it harder than the
12       mothers.1 (…)
13       Why do men sometimes take the empty nest so hard?
14       One of the chief explanations is regret. They have
15       been so busy—working so hard—that they let the
16       years slip by almost unnoticed. Then suddenly they
17       realize it is too late to build a relationship
18       with the child who is leaving home forever.
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The question asked in lines 1-6 is built on a basis of a contrast between common knowledge and individual experience. The author of the question refers to the shared cultural knowledge by stating 'We hear so much…' (line 1). The 'we' in this case

emphasises the shared character of the 'heard' views and could stand for 'the members of this particular culture'. Therefore, according to the author of the question it is widely known that 'mothers' react by 'being depressed and unable to accept the empty nest when children leave home' (lines 1-3). This common view is then contrasted with individual experience of the speaker in formulation 'In our family, however, it was dad who took it hard' (lines 3-4). The footing (Goffman, 1981; for a discussion of this concept see Chapter VIII) here is again an interesting one, as the speaker provides the account from the stance of 'our family' and not his or her individual position. This procedure ensures reading of the observation 'it was dad who took it hard' as made by more than one person, the whole family. This adds to the factuality of the account.

The reaction of the father described in the question is constructed in very negative terms: 'took it hard', 'went into tailspin for more than a month' (lines 4-5). The latter idiom describing a rapidly deteriorating state is often used in reference to someone's mental condition. It also builds a sense of surprise and unexpectedness achieved by the use of the word tailspin, which literal meaning is 'a sudden fall by an aircraft' (Siefring & Speake , 2005). Therefore, the father's reaction to his child leaving home is constructed as challenging and a negative influence on his psychological well-being. Line 6 adds to the troublesome character of the father's reaction. By asking the question 'Is it unusual?' the speaker expresses a suspicion that the father's reaction may be unconventional. This suspicion probably stems from the earlier mentioned presumption that the mothers are those who react more severely to their children leaving home.

The psychologist's answer dispels the speaker's doubts by expressing a generalising view 'no, it happens very commonly' (line 7). The speaker is able to express such a generalising account because of their incumbency to the membership category 'psychologist'. In our common cultural knowledge psychologists are people

expected to possess knowledge about people's 'normal' and 'abnormal' behaviour based on their professional experience. However, in order to increase the factuality of this generalisation the author refers to the 'evidence' from 'a recent study' (line 8) designed to compare mothers' and fathers' reactions to their children leaving home. This study is presented by the speaker as supporting the view that children leaving home is a more distressful event for fathers than mothers (lines 7-12), thus normalising the reaction of the father, whose case is presented in lines 3-6.

The final part of the psychologist's answer is designed to provide an explanation for the apparent distress experienced by fathers whose children leave home. Interestingly, the grief apparently felt by fathers is attributed to their involvement in professional responsibilities resulting in a lack of time to spend with children (lines 14-16). This lack of time is constructed as accountable for neglecting to build a relationship with the children (lines 16-18). Most importantly, the realisation that the time to bond with the children has finished comes 'suddenly' (line 16). This formulation is in line with previous accounts describing fathers' emotional reactions to their children leaving as surprising and unexpected. Another similarity of this account with the ones analysed earlier is the attribution of the problematic responses to activities and predicates bound to gender categories. In this case this is a 'breadwinning role' and a preoccupation with occupational responsibilities.

In conclusion, the pattern of fatherhood presented in opposition to motherhood builds the picture of fathers as not prepared for the transition to the 'empty nest'. Fathers are presented as taken by surprise when their children leave home, unprepared for the change in family lifestyle and faced with regret over lost opportunities of being more present in their children's lives. The writers repeatedly draw on the gender membership category 'men' and the predicates bound to it such as unwillingness to discuss feelings or a lack of involvement in day-to-day parental

responsibilities in order to explain the fathers' unpreparedness. Constructing fatherhood in close relation to masculinity is apparent in categorising fathers by predicates and activities bound to male gender category, for instance preoccupation with professional career, reluctance in discussing emotions, and a lack of involvement in parental duties. Those predicates bound to the category 'man' are deemed responsible for the sense of surprise and difficulty that the fathers are faced with when their children leave.

The same strategy of employing gender categories and their predicates is engaged in the construction of mothers, who are presented as benefiting from their greater involvement in parenting responsibilities, emotionality and openness in expressing emotions. Those activities and predicates bound to both 'female' and 'mother' membership categories assure greater appreciation of the 'parenting stage' and therefore better preparation and easiness in transition to a stage of life where children are not present in everyday life. Mothers are constructed in the articles as focused on parenting and their children's life and therefore less prone to feelings of regret due to lost opportunities.

The construction of the family in the articles analysed here is heavily gendered, traditional and heteronormative (Wilkinson and Kitzinger, 1995). Mothers are categorised in terms of their caregiving role, whereas the fathers are positioned as focused on their providing and professional responsibilities. Furthermore, the use of the discursive strategies constructing those accounts as factual (Potter, 1996; Gilbert and Mulkay, 1984; Woolgar, 1988; Sacks, 1995) adds to a normative overtone of those constructions.

Unacknowledged fatherhood

'Unacknowledged fatherhood' is the focus of the following section. The collection of constructions presented here differs from the previous one as fathers are excluded from the discussions of children leaving home. The accounts presented here focus on mothers and their experiences of the transition to the 'empty nest'. The first extract exemplifying the 'unacknowledged fatherhood' constructions comes from the article 'Free at Last' by Barbara Kantrowitz and Karen Springen mentioned earlier in the chapter.

Extract 5, article, 'Free at Last', Barbara Kantrowitz and Karen Springen

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1       Most parents say good-bye to their kids one at a
2       time. But Stephanie Furstenau Asklof, a middle-
3       school vice principal in Des Moines, Iowa, is the
4       mother of twins. So last month she had the
5       bittersweet pleasure of emptying the family nest in
6       a single swoop when she and her husband dropped off
7       daughters Adrienne and Tori at Northwestern
8       University.
9       DRIVING BACK HOME afterward, Asklof says, "I
10      probably cried about halfway across
11      Illinois." Now, as she slowly adjusts to a quiet house,
12      she's grateful to be distracted by work and is still not
13      sure what comes next. "I've got a chance to reinvent
14      myself," says Asklof, 52. But how?
15      After the first few weeks many parents find that it's not
16      so bad to live in a clean, peaceful house with only one
17      load of laundry a week. "What has surprised me is how
18      happy some parents are to be empty nesters," says New York
19      child psychiatrist Alvin Rosenfeld, author of "The Over-
20      Scheduled Child." "They really say, 'OK, I'm done with it.
21      I don't have to rush between ice hockey and soccer."
22      That's especially true for working mothers, who no longer
23      feel so torn.
```

Categorisation work in this extract starts from the very beginning, with the general membership category 'most parents' and bound to it activity 'say good-bye to their kids' (line 1). It is important to remember that the membership category 'parents' includes two sub-categories: a 'mother' and a 'father', however after introducing the 'parents' category, the sole interest of the author is directed at the 'mother' sub-

category, in this example 'Stephanie Fusterau Asklof, a middle-school vice principal (…) the mother of twins' (lines 2-4). The experience of 'emptying the family nest' (line 5) is ascribed in emotional terms (metaphor: 'bittersweet pleasure', line 5) to her only, mentioning a man only by a category referring to his relationship to Stephanie 'her husband' (line 6). The 'husband' is mentioned only in the context of a very practical category bound activity of 'dropping off daughters' at university (lines 6-7). The reactions to the children leaving home are also presented solely from the perspective of the mother. Through active voicing in lines 9-11 Stephanie reports her emotional reaction 'I probably cried about halfway across Illinois'. Crying is an activity bound to a membership category 'woman' and the use of it in describing Stephanie's reaction positions it as related to her gender. Ironically, this focus on the 'maternal' side of the transition to the 'empty nest' experience reveals a lot about the construction of fatherhood when children leave home. In this account the position of a father is very marginal, if not non-existent. The parental experience is equated with the experience of the mother.

In line 15 the author comes back to the membership category 'parents' describing the experience of adjusting to the situation of children's absence at home. The 'parents' are said to discover the positive aspects of this new experience, such as a 'clean, peaceful house' and 'only one load of laundry a week' (lines 16-17). However, those advantages are implicitly relevant to mothers: the activities of cleaning and doing laundry are traditionally bound to the membership category 'mother' or 'woman'. The same strategy of identifying the parenting experience with mothering is apparent in lines 20-21 where another speaker introduced in the extract, 'New York child psychiatrist, Alvin Rosenfeld, author of the "Over-Scheduled Child"' (line 18-20) cites the words of 'parents (..) empty nesters' (line 18). He mentions 'rushing between ice hockey and soccer', which again is an activity bound to a category 'mother'. The

mothers are mostly seen as those, who take their children to extra-curricular activities such as hockey and soccer, as for instance in an American concept of 'soccer mum'. Through mentioning those activities the focus is again directed at the mothering side of the parenting experience, neglecting and minimising the relevance of the fathers' contribution to the process of transition to the 'empty nest'.

The following extract is derived from an article entitled 'Leaving the Nest' sourced from the Australian website dedicated to the health issues.

Extract 6, article, 'Leaving the Nest', Loss of motherhood

```
1       Empty nest syndrome can afflict both parents, but
2       mothers seem to be most susceptible. Many mothers
3       may have dedicated 20 years or more of their lives
4       to bringing up their children, and see motherhood
5       as their primary role. This is true even for most
6       working mothers. Once the last child moves out,
7       the mother may feel that her most important job is
8       finished. Similarly to anyone experiencing
9       redundancy, the mother may feel worthless,
10      disoriented and unsure of what meaning her future
11      may hold. However, most mothers adapt in time.
12      Psychologists suggest that it may take between 18
13      months and two years to make the successful
14      transition from 'mum' to independent woman.
```

The direction of the attention towards mothering rather than parenting or fathering experience is apparent from the title, where the experience of the children 'leaving the nest' is described as 'loss of motherhood'. This formulation constructs motherhood as something that can be gained and therefore lost, but also that this loss happens when children leave home. Therefore, in this line motherhood is conceptualised in terms of activities, which can be performed only when children are living together with the parents. In line 2 the author introduces the membership category 'parents', but then focuses on the subcategory 'mothers' positioning them as those, who are more 'susceptible' (line 3) to the 'empty nest syndrome' (line 2). Those formulations are characteristic of a medical discourse and construct the reactions to children leaving

home in terms of a 'disorder' or 'disease'. Together with the formulation 'empty nest syndrome can *afflict*' (line 2, emphasis added) suggesting a lack of agency, parents' reactions to the experience of children leaving home are constructed as somehow independent of them.

Presenting mothers as more vulnerable to the experience of the 'empty nest syndrome' is attributed to a particular significance that mothers assign to their parenting role. This construction is achieved by the use of activities bound to the category 'mother' such as 'dedicating 20 years or more to bringing up their children' (line 4-5) and 'seeing motherhood as their primary role' (line 6). Then the 'job' of parenting is juxtaposed with mothers' professional career (lines 6-9) by the introduction of the category 'most working mothers' (line 6). In this comparison the parenting responsibilities are deemed the 'most important job' (line 8). These ECFs 'most' add to the normativity aspect to the construction (Pomerantz, 1986). The metaphor of parenting as a career continues when the consequences of children leaving home are compared with the consequences of 'redundancy' (line 9-12). This formulation along with the focus on mothers' experience builds up the construction of parenting as a gendered job. Mothers are also positioned as vulnerable and in danger of feeling 'worthless, disoriented and unsure of what meaning her future might hold'. This three part list (Jefferson, 1990) helps to create the sense of normality and normativity of those feelings in the context of children leaving home.

Despite this negative description of the consequences brought by the transition to the 'empty nest', there is a solution to the problem of the lost motherhood identity. According to the author of the extract, it is an acquisition of a new identity, the one of an 'independent woman'. The author normalises this is a course of action by saying that it is employed by 'most mothers' (line 12). The use of the membership category 'psychologists' (line 13), who is entitled to knowledge about not only 'the successful

transition from 'mum' to independent woman' (lines 14-15), but also the timeframe suitable for it 'between 18 months and two years' (line 13-14) builds up the factuality of this model of dealing with children leaving home. The final consequence of the distinction between the categories of 'mum' and 'independent woman' is in the form of important implications for the category 'mother' and the predicates assigned to it. The formulation in lines 14-15 presents 'mum' as dependent on her parenting responsibilities and defined through her relationship to her children. In a way being a mother and an independent woman are juxtaposed in this construction, excluding each other.

Another extract classified as exemplifying 'unacknowledged fatherhood' also employs the category of 'motherhood' and positions it within the centre of 'empty nest transition'. Extract 7 comes from an article 'An empty house can mean a full life for parents' by Erin Herdanez, marketing writer of an American newspaper 'The Advocate'.

Extract 7, article, 'An empty house can mean a full life for parents', The Advocate.

```
1       Robin Marrero, another social worker in the area, said
2       parents feel varying degrees of loss during this stage
3       in their life.
4       Often, the difference between those who experience
5       minimal trauma versus major trauma is determined by how
6       well the parent kept his or her individuality as their
7       child grew up, Marrero said.
8       "It's not healthy to abandon your own interests," she
9       said.
10      "Ideally, there's balance."
11      Many times, empty nesters are experiencing sort of a
12      vacuum affect, Huertin said.
13      "They're spending an awful lot of time and energy in
14      child-rearing," Huertin said. "And when the kids move
15      out or when a spouse leaves, there's a vacuum. They have
16      to look for ways to fill the vacuum."
17      Children leaving the nest can leave their parents'
18      schedules wide open and can affect their identity and
19      self-esteem.
20      "If your identity is wrapped up in being a wife and a
21      mother, and all of a sudden there's much less need for
22      you to be a mother or a wife, what you get is your sense
23      of worth has been diminished," Huertin said.
```

Extract 7 introduces two speakers, Robin Marrero, a 'social worker' (line 1) and Huertin (line 12), who earlier in the article is also categorised a social worker. This is the same strategy which was used in previous extracts in order to build the factuality and credibility of the account. 'Social worker' is yet another membership category which has important entitlements to knowledge about issues of family life and therefore also the time when children leave home.

In the first 6 lines of the extract the general picture of parents' reactions to children leaving is built through the words of Robin Marrero. In the first part of the extract the writer uses gender neutral membership categories such as 'parents' and 'empty nesters' and constructs an account of their reactions to children's leaving in quite negative terms. The choice that the parents are presented with by the social worker is between a 'minimal trauma versus major trauma' (line 5). The experience of either of these options depends on how the parent manages to 'keep his or her individuality' (line 6) while fulfilling parenting responsibilities. Through active voicing the writer builds a normative account of distinction between those who experience 'major' and 'minimal trauma'. From this account we can read that parents, who deal with the transition in a 'healthy' (line 8) way maintain their own interests and balance between them and the family life (lines 8-10). The normativity on these guidelines is strengthened by the use of the word 'ideally' (line 10). On the other hand, active voicing of Huertin constructs a picture of 'empty nesters' (line 11), who experience the 'major trauma'. They are categorised through 'spending awful lot of time and energy in childrearing' (line 13-14). The ECF in this formulation strengthens the sense of certainty in presented account (Edwards, 2000), but also by adding to extremity of it decreases its pervasiveness. In the case of those parents, whose primary focus is childrearing, children's leaving is presented as resulting in producing a 'vacuum' (line 15) and influencing their 'identity and self-esteem' (lines 18-19).

The final part of the extract shifts the categorisation work from the gender neutral categories of 'parents' and 'empty nesters' to 'a mother' and 'a wife' (20-21, 22). This reallocation of focus puts the whole extract in the perspective. Is it possible that 'mothers' were in the spotlight of this text all along? Yet spending a lot of time on parenting responsibilities and putting them first, often ahead of one's individual interest is an activity bound to a category 'mother'. This positions them as the parents, who experience the children leaving home as 'major trauma', whose 'sense of worth' (lines 22-23) is dependent on being needed by others. This representation redefines used earlier membership categories of 'parents' and 'empty nesters' to 'mothers' and neglects to acknowledge the experience of children leaving for fathers.

The final extract representing the 'unacknowledged fatherhood' constructions comes from the website providing articles about a variety of psychological problems, such as relationships and family issues.

Extract 8, article, Empty Nest Syndrome.

```
1      What is empty nest syndrome?
2      Empty nest syndrome is the feeling of loss or sadness
3      when children leave home to attend school for the first
4      time or when the child has graduated and goes away to
5      college.
6      If the mother is the primary caregiver for her child,
7      she often experiences a sense of loss of worthiness.
8      Missing the involvement in her child's everyday
9      activities, a mother may have a temporary identity
10     crisis.
11     These feelings, if not addressed, can lead to depression
12     and anxiety. Unaccountable tears and emotionalism after
13     a child has left, are some of the signs of empty nest
14     syndrome.
```

The opening question 'What is empty nest syndrome?' (line 1) sets the scene for explanatory character of the article. From this one question it can be implied that the following material provides a definition of the phenomenon in question. Moreover, formulating it as a 'syndrome' positions the concept in a medical frame of reference

and has important analytical implications for the way people in relation to it are positioned. Indeed, the next four lines (2-5) provide a definition of the 'empty nest syndrome' as 'a feeling or sadness when children leave home (…)'. Then the membership category of people to whom those feelings may concern are pinpointed and categorised as 'the mother' (line 6), however with a condition of being 'a primary caregiver' (line 6). This condition is presented as significant for the appearance of effects of children leaving home such as 'a sense of loss of worthiness' (line 7) and 'temporary identity crisis' (lines 9-10) which is attributed to 'missing the involvement in her child's everyday activities' (lines 8-9). Further consequences include 'depression and anxiety' (lines 11-12) as well as 'unaccountable tears and emotionalism' (line 12). The majority of those 'symptoms' is not presented as gender-specific, but stemming from certain involvement in parenting responsibilities, specifically a membership in a category 'a primary caregiver'. Interestingly, this type of parental involvement is only attributed to a category 'mothers' and it is the only group discussed in relation to the 'empty nest syndrome'. Once again fathers are not mentioned in relation to parenting and the experience of children leaving home. Mothers are the ones focused on by the author and positioned as disadvantaged by their sole involvement in parenting responsibilities.

To sum up, the 'unacknowledged fatherhood' constructions in the data are marginalising the fathers' position in parenting and experience of the transition to the 'empty nest'. Through focusing on mothers in discussions about parenting, men are excluded from the experience and the category of parenting redefined in terms of motherhood. What those constructions have in common with the 'fatherhood in opposition to motherhood' is a traditional and gendered categorisation of mothers and fathers. The only difference between those two traditional accounts of family life lies within the consequences those gendered activities have on parents' experience of their

children leaving. In the constructions representing 'fatherhood in opposition to motherhood' the consequences of gender predicates are positive for the mothers, helping them to prepare and appreciate the experience of active parenting as well as the transition to the 'empty nest'. On the other hand, the fathers are positioned as disadvantaged by their gender predicates, which are seen in the data as causing men to be surprised, unprepared and regretful when their children leave home. The same characteristics which were presented in the first collection as helping mothers to be better prepared for children leaving home and focus on themselves, in the second are blamed for the great difficulty and distress which mothers are said to experience. In the 'unacknowledged fatherhood' the involvement, emotionality and focus on children are presented as putting mothers in a vulnerable position.

Gender-neutral constructions: fathering as parenting

The final section explores the most 'gender neutral' constructions, which position fatherhood as equal to motherhood. Extract 9 is particularly interesting from the MCA point of view, as its main feature is an extensive categorisation work accomplished mainly through the careful use of category bound activities. The extract comes from an article 'Empty Nests and New Beginnings' written by Katie Leboeuf, M.A. and sourced from the website dedicated to health and psychological issues.

Extract 9, article, 'Empty Nests and New Beginnings'.

```
1        "Janie…what are you doing?!?" I could feel my cheeks
2        start to redden. I was caught in the act. Richard had
3        come home from work early and had seen me wearing my
4        youngest son Jason's warm-up jersey.
5        When he realized I was crying, his face softened and he
6        came and sat next to me. I think he understood; this
7        hadn't been easy on him either. Our "baby" had just
8        recently gone off to college on a football scholarship
9        and ever since we had said that last "good-bye" our
10       lives hadn't been the same. I still cooked for a family
11       of five, yet didn't have an appetite to eat a bite. Our
12       refrigerator was full of leftovers. Richard was
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```
13          different too, we had talked as if we had been looking
14          forward to having a quiet and empty house — a sort of
15          second honeymoon period — but instead we were like
16          strangers at the dinner table. I had caught him several
17          times sitting in Jason's room just looking at his
18          "stuff." I was guilty of that too, I had to admit it
19          made me feel a bit closer to my son, like
20          he was on an overnight or something, and would be home
21          in a short time instead of being six states away.
```

Extract 9 begins with a short story narrated by Janie. She starts off with active voicing citing Richard's question '"Janie…what are you doing?!?"' (line 1). The question refers to the activity of 'wearing my youngest son Jason's warm-up jersey' (lines 3-4). In the very short four lines we are presented with two characters and we can easily categorise them even though their membership categories are not explicitly mentioned. We can read that Janie is a 'mother' as she mentions her 'youngest son Jason' (line 4), a person who could be categorised as a part of a standardised relational pair (Sacks, 1995) 'mother-son'. Janie is also described in the text as performing a set of activities bound to a category 'mother' such as cooking for a family (line 10) and 'crying' (line 5).

Richard is categorised by 'coming home from work' (line 3), which positions him in a category of a working/professional man. Through Janie's formulation 'our "baby"' (line 7), Richard can also be classified within a category 'father'. The use of the word '"baby"' is particularly interesting in this context, as it is a disjunctive category (Hester and Eglin, 1999; Jayyusi, 1984) to activities such as 'going off to college on a football scholarship', which Janie binds with the 'baby' in her construction. Furthermore, the use of the word 'baby' positions Janie in the category 'mother', as a part of standardised relational pair 'mommy/baby' (Sacks, 1972) and signifies her emotional orientation towards her son. Most importantly it puts Janie in the position of a mother of a 'baby', not a young man who went to college to play football. In this way Janie orients herself towards the past, when her son was still a

'baby' and was close to her and her husband. This orientation towards the past is also apparent in 'still cooking for a family of five' (lines 10-11) and spending time in Jason's room and 'just looking at his "stuff"' to feel closer to him (lines 16-18), which is an activity shared by her and Richard. By presenting herself in this way, Janie positions herself as not prepared for the changes that were brought by her child leaving home.

The father's reaction to this event is also presented as negative. Janie reports that the experience of their youngest son's departure 'hadn't been easy on him either' (line 7) and that 'he was different too' (line 12-13). He is presented as using the same coping strategy to feel closer to his son as Janie (lines 16-18). However, spending time in Jason's room is presented by Janie as inappropriate, something she is 'guilty' (line 18) of, which through this conceptualisation is viewed as unacceptable. In this context this activity is constructed by Janie as disjunctive (Jayyusi, 1984) and inappropriate to the category 'parent'. This along with the difficulties in accommodating to their son's leaving creates a picture of unpreparedness and helplessness.

The author of the extract mentions an activity that would be more acceptable in the situation of approaching the 'empty nest', namely 'looking forward to having a quiet and empty house' (lines 13-14), however Richard and Janie only talk 'as if' (line 13) it was the case. Instead they are 'like strangers at the dinner table' (line 15-16). This formulation is particularly striking in this context as those two people are members of a membership category device (Sacks, 1995) 'family' mentioned in line 10. More than that, Janie and Richard are members of a category 'couple' or even 'husband and wife', as Janie mentions a 'second honeymoon period' (line 15), which is a predicate bound to a category 'marriage'. Husband and wife membership categories are also a standardised relational pair (SRP) and as such are interconnected with certain rights and obligations (Sacks, 1995). Richard is described in lines 5-6 as fulfilling one of those obligations,

support in the time of need. However, neither Janie nor Richard fulfil their obligations by 'being like strangers at the dinner table' (lines 15-16).

The picture of parenting and fatherhood drawn in extract 7 is an emotional and difficult one. Janie is presented as oriented towards the past; she still has not adjusted to the changes that happened in her family life. By using disjunctive category bound activities and predicates the writer constructs a picture of parents struggling with adaptation to a new family situation. They are still entrenched in their parenting categories, not succeeding in acknowledging the change and failing to fulfil their obligations to each other. Constructions of fatherhood and motherhood are strongly gendered and traditional in this extract, however, characteristics of fatherhood when children leave home are not omitted, but are (implicitly) discussed. Most importantly, the father as well as the mother is presented as equally affected by their child leaving.

In the next extract a father's position is also acknowledged and gains emphasis. Extract 10 comes from an article already used in this chapter, 'Renovating the empty nest' by Nancy Thalia Reynolds.

Extract 10, article, 'Renovating the empty nest', Nancy Thalia Reynolds

```
1      Even well-prepared parents can be blindsided by the
2      intense emotions that arise when our fledglings take
3      flight. One day we're kissing boo-boos; the next,
4      writing college tuition checks. Perhaps the biggest
5      surprise is how the relationship of the two people
6      left in the nest is transformed, too.
7      After years of pedal-to-the-metal parenting, couples
8      may feel disoriented when that focus is gone. "Where
9      marriage issues have been pushed under the rug -- now
10     they come out," says Seattle psychologist Laura
11     Kastner, Ph.D., author with Jennifer Wyatt, Ph.D., of
12     The Launching Years, a book about parenting young
13     adults.
14     John Judd of Edmonds retired early and his wife, Teresa,
15     adjusted her nursing schedule to homeschool their two
16     daughters. One is now married, and the other is heading off
17     to college. For the close-knit family, adapting to the
18     empty nest was tough. "It's made it a little harder to say
19     goodbye," John says. Teresa adds, "It's a kind of grief,
20     although intellectually you know it's right and good."
```

The extract starts with the view stating the likelihood of intensive emotional reactions to children's leaving, even among 'well-prepared' (line 1) parents. The experience is presented as unpleasantly surprising ('blindsiding', line 1). This sense is also achieved through the contrast between two activities bound to a category parent: 'kissing boo-boos' (line 3) and 'writing college tuition checks' (line, 4). Furthermore, both of those activities belong to two different stage of life MCDs (Sacks, 1995), the first one being a parent of a baby and the other parents of students. The fact that both of those were presented as happening is a very short space of time (one day after the other) (lines 3-4) adds to the sensation of the unexpectedness of the event.

The most surprising element of the children leaving home process categorised by the author are the changes happening in the relationship between parents (lines 4-6). Here the categorisation of parents as 'two people left in the nest' has implications for the way they are positioned in the text. In this context parenting is a single most important predicate identifying the parents. When children leave there is no other membership category left to replace being parents. Without the children, parents are just 'two people left in the nest'. This picture corresponds with the view presented as expressed by a psychologist (mentioned earlier in the chapter) suggesting that married couples who through focusing on their parenting responsibilities neglected addressing their marital issues are faced with them after their children leave home (lines 8-10). Therefore the changes in the marital relationship are constructed as stemming from the concentration on parenting responsibilities when children are at home, and the inability to refocus on the relationship after they are gone.

In the final part of the extract, there is an example designed to support the claims made by the writer. The example of parents focusing on their childrearing responsibilities is constructed through the use of membership category bound activities such as 'retiring early' (line 14) and 'adjusting nursing schedule to homeschool their

two daughters' (line 15). Those activities are corresponding to the category bound predicate 'close-knit' (line 17) used to describe a family of John and Teresa Judd. Through the active voicing John and Teresa are presented as supporting the claim of the author. The father is cited admitting that being focused on the children 'made it a little harder to say goodbye' (lines 18-19), whereas the mother focuses on the emotions experienced by her. Interestingly, her emotional description is constructed on the basis of contrast between emotion and cognitive category, which is a common way of conceptualising emotions (Edwards, 1999). Her affective reaction of 'kind of grief' (line 19) is contrasted with the cognitive sensation of 'knowing it's right and good' (line 20). The emotion traditionally associated with rather negative experiences of loss is combined with a positive certainty about 'rightness' of the children leaving home experience. This may be related to the fact that activity of letting 'adult children' go in order to help them achieve independence and maturity is an obligation that binds the categories of a parent and a child.

Fatherhood in extract 10 is presented as an integral element of parenthood. Both the mother and the father are voiced in the text and the writer uses gender neutral categories such as parents and couples. However, still the traditional gender predicates associated with fatherhood and motherhood are noticeable. It is the mother who takes care of 'hands-on' parenting responsibilities and talks about emotions, whereas the father is presented in reference to his professional/work responsibilities.

The following extract was taken from the article also mentioned previously in the chapter, 'Free at Last!' by Barbara Kantrowitz and Karen Springen. Just before the extract starts, the article discusses how universities in United States of America help parents prepare for their children leaving home. Some universities are described as holding special preparation sessions for parents. Those sessions are designed to give advice for the transition to the empty nest stage. We join the article in a place where the

choreographed goodbye ceremonies (line 1) at the Washington University are discussed.

Extract 11, article, 'Free at Last!' Barbara Kantrowitz and Karen Springen

```
1        Some schools choreograph the farewells. At Washington
2        University in St. Louis, parents get two and a half
3        days of orientation, ending with a moving send-off.
4        In August, New Yorkers Mark and Andrea Turnowski
5        stood on the quad with thousands of other parents
6        holding glow sticks the school had distributed as a
7        salute to the parade of new freshmen, including their
8        daughter, Rachel, 18. "I thought the symbolism of
9        the event was a nice transition," Mark Turnowski
10       says. "They made it comfortable for you to say
11       goodbye." Karen Levin Coburn, Washington's assistant
12       vice chancellor for students (and an empty nester
13       herself), says the school has come to recognize that
14       this is a major shift for the whole family. "No
15       matter how active parents are, and this is mothers
16       and fathers, there's this sense that this very
17       important role in their lives, this day-to-day
18       parenting role, is over," she says.
```

The extract introduces parents Mark and Andrea Turnowski, who are presented in the text as taking part in the choreographed 'send-off' (line 3). In the context of this event the activity of standing in the square 'holding glowing sticks the school had distributed as a salute to the parade of freshmen including their daughter, Rachel, 18' (lines 5-8) is constructed as bound to a category parent. This is an excellent example of local construction of membership categories, activities and predicates bound to them (Sacks, 1995; Lepper, 2000). Sacks (1995) strongly advocated the idea that the relationship between membership categories, category bound activities, and predicates was not a fixed one but flexible and negotiated in the course of local interaction.

In the data discussed here the role of a father is acknowledged as important in the experience of saying goodbye through active voicing (lines 8-11). In his turn, Mark

uses a footing shift when expressing his opinion that through the event held by the university 'they made it comfortable for you to say goodbye' (lines 10-11). The shift from 'I' in line 8 to 'you' in line 10 helps to create a sense of neutrality (Potter, 1996) and generalisability. Through this strategy Mark emphasises that the impression of comfort in saying goodbye was not only his experience but could be shared by other fathers and parents.

The next speaker introduced in the extract is 'Karen Levin Coburn, Washington's assistant vice-chancellor for students (and an empty nester herself)' (lines 11-13). This categorisation is again very important for the sense of credibility created in the extract. Especially the category of 'empty nester' gives the speaker entitlement to knowledge about the transition to the 'empty nest' through personal experience. The following view expressed by Coburn acknowledging the significance of children leaving 'for the whole family' (line 14) is expressed not only from the professional but also personal perspective adding to the sense of factuality of that view. In her final turn, Coburn positions categories of both 'mothers and fathers' (lines 15-16) on equal level in terms of the influence that children leaving home has on them. ECF's 'very important role' in lines 16-17 and expression 'day-to-day parenting role' (lines 17-18) achieve the sense of investment of the speaker in the account constructed (Edwards, 2000) and strengthen the factuality of the account (Pomerantz, 1986).

The final extract analysed in this chapter comes from the American newspaper website 'South Coast Today'. It was written by The Times journalist and was based on an interview with Kate Szal, a therapist from Wesport.

Extract 12, article, Coping with the empty nest, Robert Lovinger-standard Times staff writer.

```
1          Feeling loss is natural when a child leaves home,
2     but it can be a time for new beginnings, too, says
3     Westport therapist
4     Many parents are relieved when their children take wing,
5     but most feel at least a twinge of loss of purpose. And
```

```
6      for some, the departure can be devastating, leaving a
7      gaping wound in search of healing.
8      "We might also think about it this way: When our
9      children leave home, we, as elders, begin to embrace a
10     larger circle that will include their offspring," she
11     says. "We move to the outer ring of the circle. We pass
12     on our wisdom and do what grandparents do."
```

The extract begins with a statement normalising a 'feeling of loss' (line 1) when children leave home by constructing it as 'natural'. This formulation is attributed to the 'Westport therapist' in order increase credibility of the claim. The normalisation of the feelings of loss is continued in lines 4-7 constructing 'at least a twinge of loss of purpose' (line 5) as relevant for most parents. Other possible reactions include a sense of relief (line 4), which is attributed to 'many parents' (line 4) and a sense of devastation and 'gaping wound in search of healing' (line 7). The latter is constructed as less common as it is ascribed to only 'some' (line 6) parents. This formulation suggests that very traumatic emotional reactions to children leaving home are not as 'normal' and 'natural' as less distressing responses. From the perspective of the question about the way fatherhood is constructed in this extract we can see that neither mothers nor fathers are singled out. The 'parents' (line 4) membership category is used in this extract suggesting that emotional reactions to children leaving home does not depend on the gender but on the incumbency to the category 'parents' and all the activities, predicates and rights and obligations bound to it.

In the second part of the extract the therapist is cited through active voicing (Potter, 1996) reformulating the experience of children leaving home from the position of a parent to the position of a grandparent (lines 8-12). This shift is constructed as enabling fulfilment of new activities such as 'passing on our wisdom' (line 8), which is an activity bound to a category 'grandparent'. Interestingly, the footing (Goffman, 1981) from which the therapist is formulating her account positions her in the group of grandparents ('we', 'our', line 8). This opens a possibility that the speaker has a

personal experience of being a 'grandparent' and therefore has inherent knowledge of all the rights and obligations attributed to this membership category. Moreover, speaking from the position of a member of this category improves credibility of the account (Potter, 1996).

The collection 'fathering as parenting' includes most 'gender neutral' constructions of fatherhood. The writers do not focus on the differences between mothers and fathers, but present their role and contribution as equally important. In this discursive pattern there is no distinction between the emotional reaction of fathers and mothers. This is achieved by the use of the membership category 'parent' which enables the speaker to orient to the parental responsibilities rather than the gender and also through reports of both men's and women's reactions to their children leaving.

Conclusions

In conclusion, the analysis identified three different and distinctive ways in which fatherhood is constructed. 'Fatherhood in opposition to motherhood' positioned fathers' reactions to children leaving home as qualitatively different from the responses of mothers. The fathers' reactions were presented as much more negative than the mothers' and were attributed to the activities and predicates stemming from their gender, such as unwillingness to discuss their feelings and focusing on professional rather than parental responsibilities. In the 'unacknowledged fatherhood' the role of fathers in the experience of children leaving home was neglected by the 'experts'. The mothers were presented as the membership category, for which the 'transition to empty nest' was a relevant experience. Interestingly, in contrast to the first pattern, mothers' emotional reactions to their children leaving were constructed as distressing and problematic. The final discursive pattern, 'fathering as parenting', is the only one that

did not make references to gender as an important factor in the children leaving home experience. Both the fathers and the mothers were presented as playing an equal part in the process and their emotional reactions were not distinguished on the basis of their gender.

Despite this, it is important to note that the constructions of the family and fatherhood in all of the patterns identified in the data are very 'gender normative' as well as 'heteronormative'. There usually are both parents –a man and a woman, the mother taking care of the children and the house and the father less involved in day-to-day family duties as well as focused on his professional career. This picture of parenting is emphasised as normative through the expert category entitlements and 'real life' examples from parents.

Another important feature of these constructions is the wide use of gender categories and predicates to explain both male and female behaviours as well as some of their consequences. However, what is particularly interesting is that the gendered behaviours are presented as disadvantageous for both mothers and fathers. The mothers are constructed as struggling with the acceptance and the adaptation to the 'empty nest' because of their gendered behaviours such as not pursuing a professional career in order to focus on the family and children. At the same time fathers' gendered behaviours such as concentrating on their working life and the resulting neglect of hands-on parenting is presented as leading to unpreparedness for the 'empty nest transition' and regret. Whichever way we look conforming to gender stereotypes is constructed by 'experts' as having a detrimental effect on the parents.

The constructions found in the data can also be compared to the ways in which fatherhood and motherhood are presented in the literature on the topic of children leaving home. For instance, the 'unacknowledged fatherhood' is a collection mostly corresponding with the majority of relevant literature, where women's position as a

primary caregiver is presented as associated with adverse emotional reactions when children leave home (Borland, 1982; Karp et al, 2004; Lewis et al., 1979; Hartocollis, 2005; Ryff and Seltzer 1996; Norman and Scaramella, 1980; Bovey, 1995). Women's greater involvement in parenting responsibilities and the sole identification with the 'mother role' is in some of those studies deemed responsible for the overwhelming grief, sadness, dysphoria and depression (Kahana & Kahana, 1982; Borland, 1982), therefore putting women in a vulnerable position. Although some of the studies in the area of the transition to the 'empty nest' acknowledge the possibility that fathers may find the experience of children leaving home difficult (Lewis et al., 1979), the picture of mothers as being disadvantaged is the most dominant one in the academic discourse. What is therefore original and particularly important in this piece of research is the variability of fatherhood constructions that was found. The analysis of the above data provides the evidence that in the context of the Internet articles there are more than one way of representing fathers in the transition to the 'empty nest' and each of those distinct constructions serve a different discursive purpose.

The final implication of these analyses is their potential to set a broader discursive context in which the analysis of further data can be executed. The Internet is exemplary of the discourse which fathers and mothers alike are faced with when they approach the time when their children leave home. In the context where parents are faced with those constructions, there is a possibility of them positioning themselves in relation to them. Whether it is challenging or conforming to them, I will illustrate in the following chapters how parents acknowledge those discursive constructions in their talk.

Chapter V: When children leave home II: mothers' discourses of fatherhood.

As the subject of this thesis is the constructions of fatherhood when children leave home, the chapter focusing on the accounts produced by mothers may come as a bit of a surprise. However, taking into account the methodological and theoretical framework informing this study, there are very good arguments justifying the analysis of constructions developed by mothers. To reiterate, one of my objectives is to investigate a variety of contexts in which fatherhood is constructed and as I show later on one of the things that women do in their conversations is talk about their partners as fathers. Secondly, as Stokoe (2008) insightfully observed, there is a common misconception within some social constructionist research that only men can construct masculinity. We must surely be careful not to extend this false impression into constructions of motherhood and fatherhood. One of the aims of this chapter is to investigate the ways in which mothers develop constructions of fatherhood and compare them with accounts created in other contexts, such as discussed in previous chapter 'expert' articles.

In Chapters II and IV the literature on 'empty nest' was shown to focus on the mothers' role in the event of children leaving home and presents it as relevant mostly to women (Stewart and Ostrove, 1998). A number of studies present the transition to 'empty nest' as a stressful and challenging process for mothers, often due to coinciding perimenopause related depression (Schmidt et al., 2000). Other explanations of the challenging character of the 'empty nest' changes are based on the hypothesis emphasising the importance and centrality of the maternal role to women's well-being. For instance, Oliver (1977) presented mothers whose children have left home as experiencing post-mothering conflict stemming from the socialisation of women, which constructs parenting duties as a major role in their life and also a primary source of self-

esteem. Some studies portrayed women after the departure of their last child as vulnerable to the 'empty nest syndrome' with symptoms including depression, identity crisis and deteriorating psychological and physical health (Bart, 1971; Phillips, 1957; Curlee, 1969). However, many studies question the prevalence of 'empty nest syndrome' constructing mothers as experiencing unchanging or improved sense of well-being compared to women with different familial circumstances (Axelson, 1960; Campbell, 1975; Deutcher, 1964; Borland, 1982). Some more modern studies conceptualise 'empty nest' as an opportunity for growth and transformation (Owen, 2005) and indicate that mothers report positive changes in their mood state after departure of children which stems from increased flexibility and amount of free time (Dunnerstein et al., 2002). Also women experiencing 'empty nest' were constructed as undergoing positive personality changes which included decline of dependence and self-criticism and growth in confidence and decisiveness (Helson & Wink, 1992).

Other studies have portrayed women as in need of redevelopment of their identity following the departure of children (Noriko, 2004; Ryff & Seltzer, 1996). Noriko (2004) also emphasised the importance of support and friendship in facing the challenges of the transition. Another important circumstance, presented by the literature as helping women to deal with the event of children leaving was a professional career (Adelmann et al, 1989; Coleman & Antonucci, 1983; Faver, 1984; Verbrugge & Madans, 1985). Therefore, the women, who were socialised to be primary caregivers tended to sacrifice their professional development of the sake of family life and were thus reported to struggle after the loss of their parenting roles (Adelmann et al., 1989).

What is most important about this short review of motherhood and 'empty nest' literature is the premise that this transition is central to women's rather than fathers' lives. Regardless of whether studies report positive or negative changes post-launching, they are usually presented in reference to mothers.

One of the objectives in the present chapter is to investigate whether mothers' position themselves as central in the 'empty nest' and what roles do they attribute to fathers in this transition. I also discuss the ways in which women constructs fathers' experiences of children leaving home. The data used to meet those aims are derived from Internet forums dedicated to issues of parenting and 'transition to empty nest'. The websites where those forums were established are EmptyNestSupport.com and AgeConcern.org.uk. The forums on those websites are sites where parents talk about ways in which they and their partners approach the challenges of an 'empty nest', however in this particular chapter I focus on women's accounts only. From a discursive perspective applied to the analysis of this data, women's conversations achieve certain discursive aims. They are not only constructing realities (Gergen, 1999) of being a mother and a father when children leave home, but also actively and contextually connecting those realities with constructions of femininity and masculinity.

The analysis of the data revolves around the issue of difference between the fathers' and mothers' experiences when children leave home. I explore constructions of fathers' behaviours as problematic, including lack of support for their female partner in the situation of children leaving home. Then participants' orientations towards the causes of those problematic behaviours are explored together with constructions of alternative sources of help for mothers. Finally, the overall picture of fatherhood constructions is completed by the analysis of a couple of deviant cases (Potter and Wetherell, 1987).

The extracts of data analysed in this chapter could be described as interconnected; that is the extracts are related to each other. For instance, there may be a series of responses to a question posed by one of the previous forum users. In many ways these data are similar to a group conversation, where one person asks a question and then consecutive persons respond taking into account the question as well as the answer of the

previous person. Therefore, many of the constructions are created collaboratively. The analysis of the extracts will take into account this feature of the data.

Problematic fatherhood

This section is dedicated to the discursive constructions which position mothers' experiences of children leaving home in opposition to those of fathers'. By attending to the membership categories, activities and predicates assigned to them (Lepper, 2000) I explore ways in which mothers extend this differentiation of their own and their partners' reactions to children leaving in ways which problematise fathers' behaviour during the transition to 'empty nest'.

The first extract analysed here is derived from EmptyNestSupport.com website and is one of three posts originating a thread of responses.

Extract 1, mothers chat-room, 'Husbands & Empty Nests'

Posted by LisaLou on November 7 2005, 12:47:38

```
1    We delivered our last child (son) to college on Aug 12th this
2    year. We've visited him twice since, had him home twice and
3    expect him home at Thanksgiving. He calls us regularly and
4    takes our calls anytime. We really miss him...he's our
5    baby...and he's a great person, so we miss just being around
6    him. I feel like I'm handling it pretty well. I started making
7    tons of lists of things I wanted to do before he left for
8    school. I have the blues once in awhile, but all in all, I'm
9    doing okay. My husband appears to handle it okay on the
10   outside, but he seems frozen to the sofa. He spends a lot of time
11   sitting on the sofa flipping the tv channels, which is boring to
12   me. I don't mind him handling his adjustment to this change by
13   watching tv, but I can tell he's ruffled because I keep planning
14   things and looking for things to do. How can I keep moving forward
15   and not leave him out. My way of working thru things is to try
16   something new. His way is to sit still until he feels motivated
17   again. I don't think either way is right or wrong, but I'm worn
18   out with slowing down to keep him comfortable. Has anyone else had
19   their hubby respond this way? What did you do? My husband is a
20   wonderful husband, so I hate to even say these things out loud,
21   but my friends are at different stages, and my Mom passed away
22   last year, so I don't have anyone to ask for advice. Thank you for
23   listening!
```

Extract 1 is designed on the basis of a contrast between the reactions of the participant and her partner. In the first 6 lines the author constructs an account of a 'happy family' at the stage of 'transition to empty nest'. This is achieved by the use of a set of categories, predicates and activities representative of the Membership Categorisation Device (MCD) 'family' and 'stage of life' (Sacks, 1995). In lines 1, 2 and 4 the pronoun 'we' is used, which can be read as representative of membership category 'parents in the stage of children leaving home' thanks to activities bound to it such as 'delivering our last child to college' (line 1), 'visiting him twice' (line 2), 'having him home once' (line 2), 'really missing him' (line 4) and 'expecting him home at Thanksgiving' (line 3). The last activity also refers to an activity bound to a category 'child (son)' mentioned in line 1. Together with activities such as 'calling regularly' (line 3) and 'taking calls anytime' (line 4) the author constructs a picture of a 'good son' and earlier 'good parents'. What I mean by 'good' in this case is fulfilling of the obligations bound to the standardised relational pair (SRP) 'parent-child' (Sacks, 1995), which the author draws on in her account. In this way the account of a family is constructed where both the parents and the child fulfil the obligations not only stemming from their relationship but also appropriate for the 'stage of life' they are assigned to. In these first lines, the parents' reaction to their son leaving home is presented as shared and common for both parents: 'We really miss him…' (line 4) and 'we miss just being around him' (line 5).

However, this account of joint emotional reaction is contrasted in the latter part of the extract with the account of differing strategies employed by the author and her husband to come to terms with this transition. The sense of contrast between tactics employed by the mother and the father is emphasised by the changes in footing (Goffman, 1967) from 'I' (lines 6-9) to 'he' (lines 9-12). By the use of this device 'LisaLou' assigns ownership to her coping methods and distances herself from strategies used by her husband. The author constructs her strategies as active: 'making tons of lists of things' (line 4), 'keeping

planning things and looking for things to do' (lines 13-14), 'my way of working thru things is to try something new' (lines 15-16) and also effective: 'I feel I'm handling it pretty well' (line 6), 'all in all I'm doing ok' (lines 8-9). On the other hand the father's strategies are constructed as passive: 'he seems frozen to the sofa' (line 10), 'sitting on the sofa flipping the tv channels' (line 11), 'watching TV' (line 13), 'sitting still until he feels motivated again' (lines 16-17) and ineffective: 'my husband appears to handle it ok on the outside' (line 9), 'I can tell he's ruffled' (line 13). The author uses stake inoculation (Potter, 1996) to presents herself as not evaluating both of those two different strategies: 'I don't think either way is right or wrong' (line 17). However, just a bit later on she does present the husband's reaction as problematic: 'I'm worn out with slowing down to keep him comfortable' (lines 17-18). The problematic nature of the husband's way of dealing with the child leaving home is presented by the author as stemming from the conflict between her need to 'move forward' (line 14) and the obligation of 'keeping him comfortable' (line 18) and not 'leaving him out'(line 15). This implied obligation could be interpreted as stemming from the SRP (Sacks, 1995) 'wife-husband', which is implicitly embedded in the account. The author identifies herself as a member of a category 'wife' by 'affiliative' use of possessive pronoun 'my' in the utterance 'my husband' (line 9) (Sacks, 1995). This strategy enables the author to claim the membership in the category related to the category 'husband'. Then the author actively binds the activity of supporting the husband to the implicit category 'wife' and in this way constructs it as an obligation binding the SRP of 'husband' and 'wife'.

The conflict between fulfilling her own and her husband's assumed needs is constructed as the reason for publishing the post. Interestingly, the author constructs an elaborate account of exactly why she submitted her query at the public forum designed for 'empty nesters'. She constructs her action of discussing her marital problems in the public domain as inappropriate ('I hate to even say these things out loud, line 20), however

excusable due to the lack of appropriate persons to ask for advice ('friends at different stages', line 21; 'my Mom passed away', line 21-22). This strategy of accounting for public expression of problems has been observed before by Sacks (1972), who suggested that when a person is in trouble there are categories of people they have a right to approach for advice (relationship proper: family and friends) and categories of people who should not be approached (relationship improper: strangers). However, if all accessible members of relationship proper category are removed from the person's environment then that gives them a warrant to turn to next most appropriate category (Schegloff, 2002), which is stranger with experience of the problem at hand, in this case other 'empty nesters'.

The next extract is a response to the extract 1. In the fragment 2 the husband's reaction is also constructed as problematic, however for an entirely different reason.

Extract 2, mothers' chat-room, 'Husbands & Empty Nests'

Posted by MasonB on November 7 2005, 18:42:12

```
1    Hi Lisa,
2    I wish I could help, but my husband was the total opposite when
3    my daughter left for college. Actually, it sort of made me mad
4    because it didn't seem like it even faise him, she's suppose to
5    be "daddy's little girl", he's suppose to be upset. It sounds
6    like you have the right idea though, maybe plan some stuff that
7    he really enjoys doing.
8    Brigitte
```

Here, the event of a child leaving home is presented as not affecting the author's husband in any way: 'it didn't seem like it even faze him' (line 4). This assumed lack of reaction is also presented as evoking strong emotional response in the author: 'Actually, it sort of made me mad' (line 3). The use of downgrading 'sort of' achieves a sense of softening an extreme emotional category 'mad' and defends the author from appearing irrational. Brigitte's account of her emotional reaction is constructed by her as stemming from the expectation she has towards her husband: 'he's suppose to be upset' (line 5). However, what are those expectations based on? Interestingly, the author employs the

categorisation '"daddy's little girl"' (line 5) in order to warrant her requirements. The category 'daddy's little girl' is based on SRP 'father-daughter' and is bound with a set of mutual rights and obligations. In the extract 2, the author orients to the obligations of the father and presents them as 'being upset' (line 5) when the daughter leaves home. Therefore, a father in this extract is presented as expected to react emotionally when children leave home. Not fulfilling this requirement stemming from the relationship with the children is constructed as problematic for the wife.

Another aspect of husband's reactions to the event of children leaving home presented as problematic is the issue of support for the wife. This topic is introduced in one of the posts.

Extract 3, mothers' chat-room, Are husbands being supportive?

Posted by <u>FALLENOAKS</u> on August 10 2005, 20:55:24

```
1    Not seeing much about husbands and the support or lack of
2    support that they give. My husband gives no support and matter
3    of fact I find that he reacts to things however I react,
4    meaning if I cry and am down he does the same. If I get angry
5    he does the same. Reading all the posts makes me realize that
6    there are so many of us having these feelings of emptiness.
7    Honestly, although I married, I am alone. Do any of you feel
8    the same way?
```

In extract 3 the problematic behaviour of the author's husband during the 'children leaving home transition' stems from the obligations embedded in SRP 'husband-wife'. The author draws on the obligation of support (lines 1, 2), which binds the categories of 'husband' (line 1, 2) and 'wife' (implied through the use of personal possessive adjective '*My*' in reference to the category 'husband' in line 2). The author presents the husband's behaviour as reacting 'however I react' (line 3), crying, when she does and getting angry when she does (lines 4-5). When for some people experiencing the same emotions, sharing them with the partner could be seen as a form of support, in this particular case it is presented as not effective form of support. By

reacting to the event of children leaving home in the same way as the author, her husband is presented as not fulfilling the obligation of caring for his wife. In the line 7, the author orients to such behaviour as an expected characteristic of the Membership Categorisation Device (MCD) (Sacks, 1995) 'marriage'. That could be interpreted as the reason for the construction created in line 7: 'although I married, I am alone'. This account is designed on the basis of contrast, which presents the feeling of being alone as a predicate not belonging in the MCD marriage. In this way the author constructs her husband as failing to fulfil expectations of support stemming from the nature of their relationship. The problematic character of the husband's behaviour can be interpreted as leading to questioning the marriage's normativity. This is why the post concludes with the question 'Do any of you feel the same way?' (lines 7-8). It is designed to elicit posts of support from other married women lacking their husbands' support. In this way the inappropriate (from the point of view of social rules embedded in MCD 'marriage') state of being alone in marriage could be normalised.

Important aspects of the construction developed in extract 3 are the gendered expectations voiced by the author of the post. Fallenoaks constructs a very stern account of how husbands, and implicitly men, should behave in the situation of children leaving home. Namely, they are not supposed to feel and express negative emotions because they are expected to take the lead in being a supportive side in the relationship. This is exemplary of a very stereotypical view of masculinity, where men are required not to show emotions, be 'the tough one', not ask for help but be the one providing it (Brannon & David, 1976; Good et al., 1989; Levant and Pollack, 1995).

The next extract highlights the activity of sharing emotions when children leave home and again presents it as not comforting in this particular context. Extract 4 is a fragment of a post posted in response to Extract 3.

Extract 4, mothers' chat-room, Age Concern

Wed December 28, 2005 11:11 PM

```
1          [line omitted] I remember when my husband and I took our
2          younger daughter to Gatwick to fly out to the US to work.
3          (Our elder daughter was away at university.)
4          I hugged and kissed her as she went through to boarding.
5          My husband was so choked he couldn't speak. My husband
6          and I hung around until take-off, in case she changed her
7          mind (a false hope). When her plane details disappeared
8          from the screen we looked at each other with a mutual
9          feeling of great loss and drove home for three hours lost
10         in our own thoughts without a word to each other.
11         Our home which had always been a happy, lively place full
12         of our girls' friends and boyfriends, was quiet and sad.
13         I often found myself in her bedroom looking at some of
14         her memorabilia from her more recent years hung on her
15         pinboard.
16         We were each bereft and could not be a comfort to one
17         another. We had invested so much in being mother and
18         father, that somehow we had lost the husband and wife.
[lines omitted]
```

The account here is of a father sharing the experience of the children leaving home with the author. She uses the categorisation 'my husband and I' (lines 1, 5-6) as well as pronoun 'we' (lines 8, 16, 17) and possessive pronoun 'our' (lines 11, 12) to create a sense of mutuality of experiences and reactions. Even though this categorisation could be interpreted as orienting to the SRP 'husband-wife', the analysis of activities bound to the categories used suggest a slightly different account. 'Taking our younger daughter to Gatwick to fly out to the US to work' (lines 1-2), 'hanging around until take off in case she changed her mind' (lines 6-7) and 'looking at each other with a mutual feeling of great loss' (lines 8-9) seem to be more appropriate as bound to implicit category 'parents' in the 'empty nest' 'stage of life MCD (Sacks, 1995) 'rather than 'husband and wife'. This reading could be supported by the author's categorisation in lines 17-18: 'we had invested so much in being mother and father, that somehow we lost the husband and wife'. It is this identification with 'mother' and 'father' categories as well as their individual focus on their own feelings which are presented by the author as to blame for her and her husband's inability to provide

support for each other: 'We were each bereft and could not be a comfort to one another' (lines 16-17). In a way, assuming membership in the category 'parents' and performing activities bound to this category is presented as preventing the author and her husband from being able to fulfil obligations binding SRP 'husband-wife'. Consequently, this construction presents the author and her husband as able to properly fulfil obligations of only one category at a time. When they are presented behaving appropriately to the membership category 'parents', they seem to let the standards slip in fulfilling the obligations of membership category 'spouses'.

As it was the case in earlier extracts, here as well the author does not recognise sharing and experiencing the same emotions by husband and wife as support during the children leaving home experience. The inability to provide support during this time is presented as stemming from neglect of obligations embedded in SRP 'husband-wife'. However, in extract 4 the husband is not presenting as solely responsible for providing the support. The author presents this duty as expected of herself to a similar degree as of her husband.

To sum up, in the analysed data women construct fathers' behaviour during the time when children leave home as problematic. Interestingly each of the women contributing here has different ideas of what constitutes problematic behaviour. Both expressing and hiding emotions seem to be seen as troublesome. Women present themselves as disappointed when their husbands are not actively dealing with emotions associated with their children leaving home (as in extract 1 and 3) but also when they are not expressing their feeling about children's departure from family home. The account of expectations formulated in the above extract includes both supporting the mothers and at the same time showing some vulnerability.

Mothers explaining their husbands' unsuccessful supporting behaviour when children leave home

In the above analysis I identified which behaviours exhibited by fathers are constructed as problematic by their wives/partners. In this section I focus on ways in which mothers construct explanations for men's failure in providing effective supportive behaviour. Extract 4 is a response to the Extract 3, which is the first in the series of posts, where the expectations of support from husband to wife are voiced. The subsequent postings all orient to this construction of husbands and 'supporters'.

Extract 4, mothers chat-rooms, 'Husbands & Empty Nests'

Posted by depar22 on August 10 2005, 21:04:35

```
1    In general, I think husbands try to be supportive, but it's the
2    genetics that won't allow them. I don't think they are as
3    compassionate. They have similar feelings, just expressed
4    differently. I think mine feels I should get meds for myself
5    and our college student. These are some of the questions I've
6    been posting.
```

The author in extract 4 constructs a generalisation regarding the membership category 'husbands' (line 1) and presents them as 'trying to be supportive' (line 1) but unable to. The lack of success in being supportive is ascribed to by the author to 'genetics' (line 2) which demonstrate themselves in not being 'as compassionate' (lines 2-3) and expressing feelings 'differently' to women (lines 3-4) This construction presents husbands as not accountable for their assumed incapability to be supportive. Presenting the cause of it as inherent constructs the behaviour as beyond men's control and decreases their sense of agency when it comes to handling emotions.

This generationalisation is then supported by an example from the author's personal experience: 'I think mine feels I should get meds for myself and our college student' (lines 4-5). Interestingly, the example is designed as a speculation ('I *think*')

about the husband's feelings. The author constructs her husband's attitude towards her and their child's behaviour as condemning and disapproving, however without providing any 'evidence'. What is important in this construction is the author's focus on her perception of the husband's feelings rather than his side of the story. As surprising as such a 'guessing game' may sound, from a discursive point of view it actually plays a very important role. By suggesting the use of medication the husband is also constructed as advocating a 'quick fix' and therefore unwilling to take time to discuss the 'problem'. Through the reference to the need for the medication the author's and her daughter's behaviour is pathologized. Therefore, by presenting her husband as the one suggesting medical help, the author presents herself as not understood and not supported by her husband. At the same time she constructs her partner as cold and unsympathetic, unwilling to give her appropriate help in the time of need. A similar way of presenting a husband's thoughts is used in the extract 5.

Extract 5, mothers' chat-room, 'Husbands & Empty Nests'

Posted by BambiMom on August 11 2005, 02:46:56

```
1          I think my husband is trying, but it doesn't take very
2          long at all before I can tell he thinks "okay, we
3          talked about this once already- get over it".
```

In the above extract the author uses the same strategy of binding the category 'husband' with the activity 'trying' (line 1), constructing him as unsuccessful in supporting her. This failure is presented in the form of assumed impatience with the wife's willingness to discuss a topic more than once. The author uses an interesting variation of active voicing (Potter, 1996) to provide example of this impatience. In lines 2-3 they are not words, but thoughts that are reported: 'I can tell he thinks "okay, we talked about this once already- get over it". The author orients towards her capability to be able to recognise her husband's thoughts by stating 'I can tell' (lines 2-3). However,

the vital question is what makes this capability credible or believable? In this particular context it could be interpreted as stemming from implicit SRP 'husband-wife' and the nature of the bond between those categories. In this extract as well as in extract 4, the ability to know or assume the husband's feelings or thoughts is presented as relevant to the category 'wife'. It is the relationship between the husband and wife that makes the presupposition of another person's thoughts and feelings seem credible.

Coming back to the discussion of the causes of men's perceived lack of effective support for their wives during the 'transition to empty nest', let's look at the extract 6.

Extract 6, mothers' chat-room, 'Husbands & Empty Nests'

Posted by lizbeth on August 17 2005, 06:35:20

```
1        Husbands try to be supportive, but emotions are
2        naturally a weakness for them.
```

Here the husbands' difficulty in managing emotions is presented as stemming from their 'nature': 'emotions are naturally a weakness for them' (lines 1-2), which presents them as not accountable for this difficulty. Again the activity of 'trying to be supportive' (line 1) is bound to the membership category 'husbands' (line 1), constructing them as unable to be emotionally supportive in an effective way. By using the 'nature argument' the author orients to the concept of gender and constructs men as inherently different and even inferior to women, at least in the domain of emotions. This construction is a consistent with traditional view of masculinity which portrays men as not willing to express their emotions.

The discussion of the causes of husbands' inability to be supportive for their wives during the transitions to 'empty nest' continues in the extract 7, which also is a response to extract 3.

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Extract 7, mothers' chat-room, 'Husbands & Empty Nests'

Posted by <u>Hope</u> on August 10 2005, 21:38:12

```
1    Dear FallenOaks:
2    As far as men go, what can you expect when most of them were
3    raised not to show emotion and to always be strong -- not that
4    this is a good thing, perhaps this new generation of men will
5    be better and I think they are but there's a ways to go.
6    Hope
```

In this post, the author constructs another reason for men's lack of support. In this case, husbands' ineptness in regards to emotions is attributed to their upbringing: 'most of them were raised not to show emotion and always be strong' (lines 2-3). By this construction Hope orients to socialisation as a cause of failure in delivering effective support. This construction is carefully created, using an extreme case softener (Edwards, 1999) 'most of them' (line 2) instead of an ECF such as 'all of them', which makes the construction much more immune to being refuted. This construction is contrasting to the one presented in extracts 4 and 6, which presented the cause of husbands' inability to express emotions as genetically ingrained. However, despite this fundamental difference, the effect which all of those constructions produce is the same. Women construct men as unaccountable for failure to provide emotional support to their wives, what makes their expectations of this type of support groundless (line 2).

The most important aspect of the extracts above is that they present the husbands' inability to provide effective support as related to men's reluctance in expressing emotions. The mothers develop a series of explanations for this behaviour such as genetic predispositions or a process of socialisation, which conditions men not to express emotions. However, what is particularly important about such causal constructions is their potential to decrease fathers' accountability for not providing effective support. This is where the women's accounts seem to be mutually exclusive. On one hand mothers report a set of expectations they have towards their husbands, but

on the other they construct them as incapable of meeting those expectations due to the factors which are beyond their control (genes and socialisation). From a discursive perspective however, it is important to look at those supposedly contradicting results from the point of view of their functionality. What the constructions of expectations and the causes of failure to meet them do is the careful management of position. In this way women present themselves as central in the 'transition to empty nest'. At the same time by voicing expectations towards fathers and then presenting those as unable to meet them women marginalise men's role in the event of children leaving home. The same effect is achieved by constructing other women as more appropriate sources of help in the context of launching children. The next section is dedicated to the analysis of this discursive activity.

Constructing alternative sources of help

I start with the analysis of extract 8, which is further response to extract 3, where FALLENOAKS asks for feedback about husbands supporting practices.

Extract 8, mothers' chat-room, 'Husbands & Empty Nests'

Posted by <u>Clafra</u> on August 24 2005, 21:52:26

```
1     I just wanted to say that I think men are very
2     different in the way they approach most problems
3     and so the average man would most likely be similar
4     in their reaction here. Men want to fix things. If
5     this is a problem, then there should be a solution.
6     If they can't fix your sadness, then they really
7     are not sure what to do. I believe they mean well
8     (except for my X..LOL) but they do not necessarily
9     have the "where with all" to fix this problem. That
10    is why we have websites like this and why we have
11    girlfriends.
```

Here the problematic characteristic of men's reaction to the 'transition to empty nest' is not presented as stemming from a difficulty with expressing emotions but rather from an 'inappropriate' approach to dealing with those emotions. The author in extract 8 constructs a generalisation about ways in which men approach problems. In this construction men's strategies are presented as 'different' (line 2), based on 'fixing things' (line 4) and finding 'a solution' (line 5). Moreover, men are constructed as rigid and unimaginative in applying those strategies: 'If they can't fix your sadness, then they really are not sure what to do' (lines 6-7). It could be argued that the reference to 'fixing problems' is a reference to classic concepts of masculinity, where men are presented as using very practical approach to problems; for instance, 'doing' things instead of for instance 'talking' about them. However, what is particularly interesting about this extract is the construction of some emotions when children leave home as problematic. In line 6 the author talks about the 'sadness' that men want to 'fix' but are unable to because 'they do not necessarily have the "where with all" to *fix this problem*' (lines 8-9, emphasis added). Therefore men are presented as considering 'sadness' when children leave home as something inappropriate, a problem that needs a solution.

In extract 8 men are presented as unable to 'fix' the problem of negative emotions experienced by mothers, whose children have left home because of their inappropriate approach to dealing with emotions. The membership category bound to the activity of successful 'fixing this problem' (line 9) is 'women', oriented to by the pronoun 'we' (line 10) and category 'girlfriends' (line 11). This reading can easily be explained when we look at the context in which this extract was produced. This posting is a 'turn' (ten Have, 1999) in an Internet conversation, whose participants are recognised by the author as incumbents of the same category to which she belongs. In this case this is a category 'wife', implicitly oriented to by the 'affiliative' use of the possessive pronoun 'my X' (meaning my former husband). Overall, the author of the

text considers other women as a more effective source of help and support than fathers. A similar construction is provided in extract 9.

Extract 9, mothers' chat-room, 'Husbands & Empty Nests'
Posted by NCMom on August 15 2005, 19:33:32

```
1       My husband is supportive & tries, but still, I
2       don't think most men get it. In most cases, we're
3       the ones who put our careers on hold to have &
4       raise the kids (even if we do have jobs, we're
5       usually the primary caregivers). That's why I came
6       here - to find other woman who know exactly what I
7       am going through.
```

Extracts 6, 7 and 8 construct the causes of husbands' ineffectiveness in supporting women at this critical time as stemming from men's difficulties in expressing and dealing with emotions. In comparison to this, extract 9 presents a different account. Even though men's reactions to the empty nest are still constructed as problematic (not understanding the women's experience), the reason for it is not presented as related to emotional differences but to men's less significant involvement in parenting duties. In this extract it is not the 'emotional nature' but sacrifices made for the children that are most important in understanding the issues of 'transition to empty nest'.

In extract 9, the category 'husband' is bound with the predicate 'supportive' and activity 'trying' (line 1), however through the use of discourse marker 'but still' (line 1) this categorisation plays the part of an exception supporting the rule that 'I don't think most men get it' (line 1-2). The generalisation presenting men as not understanding the experience of 'empty nest' ('it' in line 2) is constructed as a result of fathers' lesser involvement in parenting responsibilities. This meaning is achieved in very subtle way though. Firstly, the author uses extreme case softeners (Edwards, 1999) 'in most cases' (line 2), and 'usually' (line 5), which strengthen the account but at the same time make it much more resistant to refutation. Secondly, she uses the implicit

membership category 'mothers' represented by the pronoun 'we' (line 2). By binding this category with an activity such as 'putting our careers on hold to have & raise the kids' (line 3-4) and a membership category 'primary caregivers' the author constructs an account of women as mostly and directly involved in child-rearing and therefore more knowledgeable in the experience of 'transition to empty nest'. This particular argument is also presented as the reason for visiting the website and the forum: 'to find other women who know exactly what I am going through' (lines 6-7). Therefore, even though the author's husband is presented in a more positive way as being supportive and trying, she still constructs other women as more able to understand fully her experience of children leaving home.

In conclusion, in the last two extracts analysed above the issue of husbands' support is again dominant? However, in those extracts the mothers go a step further. In extracts 8 and 9 fellow mothers, who experienced the event of children leaving home are presented as more knowledgeable and able to provide the appropriate form of help. By contrasting mothers and fathers in reference to supporting behaviour and dealing with emotions, women present themselves as 'experts' in this field. The context in which this data is produced is particularly important as the Internet parenting forums are used by women to create a sense of community and access the help and support from women with similar experiences. Interestingly, the 'virtual help' received through the Internet is presented as more valuable and effective in comparison to husbands' 'trying to be supportive'.

Increasing variability of fatherhood constructions: deviant cases

So far the constructions of fatherhood developed from the data create a rather negative view of fathers as reacting problematically in reference to the event of children leaving home, at least from the point of view of the mothers. In this section, however, I focus on the deviant cases, which present more positive account of fathers.

Extract 10, Mothers' chat-room: Are husbands being supportive?

Posted by <u>Rosey C</u> on August 12 2005, 20:16:18

```
1    I must just be lucky, but my husband has been very supportive.
2    I think he feels the emptiness also now that all 3 of our sons
3    are finally finished with college and out on their own. Two
4    live a 5 hr. drive away, and the youngest about 30 minutes. But
5    I know he misses them too, it's just that his life has not
6    changed as dramatically as mine has. He still has pretty much
7    the same routine now as he always did, and doesn't seem to mind
8    very much the quiet house. I say to him, "it seems so empty",
9    and he says to me "how can it be empty, we're still here?" and
10   he's right. [lines omitted]
11   He is very supportive and understanding
12   and always hears me out, and tells me that I can do whatever I
13   want now and is pushing me to move forward. [lines omitted]
```

It is important to analyse this extract in the context of the previous ones. This particular post came quite late in the sequence of posts, which presented husbands as rather unsupportive as a group. Therefore, the author creates a contradictory account, which presents her personal example as an exception stemming from chance ('I must just be lucky', line 1) rather than evidence which could undermine generalisation?? created collaboratively by previous posters.

In extract 10 the author constructs her husband as 'very supportive' (line 1, 11) and 'understanding' (line 11). In her account the activity of being supportive is defined as 'always hearing me out' (line 12), 'telling me that I can do whatever I want now' (lines 12-13) and 'pushing me to move forward' (line 13). This capability of

providing effective support is constructed as stemming from the husband's experience as similar to the author's emotions when their children have left home such as 'feeling the emptiness also' (line 2) and 'missing them too' (line 5). On the other hand some of the husband's reactions are presented as different from those of the author. The husband is presented as 'not seeming to mind very much the quite house' (lines 7-8) or not perceiving the house as 'empty' (lines 8-10). This discrepancy is constructed by the author as stemming from a different degree of impact the event of children leaving home had on their lives. The husband is presented as not experiencing any significant changes to his daily routine (lines 6-7); contrasting with the author, whose life is said to change 'dramatically' (lines 5-6).

The importance of this extract compared to the previous ones lies in the construction of the husband's reaction in non-problematic terms. Even though the husband's reaction is presented as different to what in some instances, those disparities are not seen as problematic but rather as enabling the endowment of effective support. Moreover, any differences in reactions are carefully accounted for by the author decreasing the husband's accountability for any disparities of perception. Despite this posting presenting men as capable of providing the effective support when children leave home, the author does not challenge the construction created by the preceding 'speakers' but presents her account as an exception stemming from chance. A similar effect is achieved in the last extract, however through the use of different strategies.

Extract 11, Mothers' chat-room Are husbands being supportive?

Posted by <u>BambiMom</u> on August 23 2005, 05:08:37

```
1        When I posted here a week ago, my daughter had not
2        left yet. After going through the past week, I have
3        to say that my husband has been wonderful! He was
4        great with her in the move-in. He didn't make his
5        usual comments about the amount of stuff she had
6        (her boyfriend did that instead- too funny!). He
7        was a great Dad - helping her figure out how to
```

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8        hang heavy pictures with adhesive hooks, helping
9        set up , going out with me to take back a chest at
10       Target and find a different one that fit in her
11       room without complaint (he usually hates that kind
12       of thing!) Going out to get a VCR after a nice
13       lunch together. And he was much better at a
14       coherent and appropriate goodbye than me!
15       He seems to have known exactly what I have needed.
16       On the way home (only about an hour or so- what a
17       baby I am!), I cried of course! He suggested
18       stopping at this huge RV place by the highway to
19       look- we are planning to retire in 3-4 years and
20       have always enjoyed that fantasy of motorhoming
21       like my parents. We spent about an hour looking at
22       the "fantasy" models. Then we stopped and looked at
23       modular homes- a plan we have for some property we
24       own.. Stopped at a favorite restaurant in a nearby
25       town for dinner at his suggestion. And since then
26       he's been so sweet- suggesting we go out to eat and
27       to a movie on Saturday (a little thing, but
28       something we rarely do!) Holding me for my
29       seemingly endless and random crying jags. I have
30       renewed respect and love for him. Now I feel that I
31       need to "pull myself together" so he doesn't feel
32       like I see our life together as "empty".
```

Extract 11 refers to a post written before her daughter actually left (lines 1-2) by the same author. She presents herself as a slightly surprised by the positive behaviour of her husband during the week when her daughter moved out of home. The support which the husband provides is described in practical as well as more emotional terms. The activities categorised as supportive include 'not making his usual comments about the amount of stuff she [daughter] had (lines 4-5), 'helping her figure out how to hang heavy pictures' (lines 7-8), 'helping set up' (lines 8-9), 'going out with me [author] to take back a chest at Target and find a different one that fits in her room without complaint' (lines 9-11), 'going out to get a VCR after a nice lunch together' (lines 12-13) and 'being better at a coherent and appropriate goodbye' than the author herself (lines 13-14). All those activities are by the author bound to a category 'great Dad' (line 7) and are presented as unexpected. This sense of surprise is conveyed by comparing this behaviour with the 'usual' one, for instance 'not making his usual complaints' (line 4) or '(he usually hates this sort of thing)' (lines 11-12). In this way

the author constructs herself as not expecting her husband to behave in such a positive way.

The positive and surprising behaviour of the husband in this case is not only presented as stemming from his paternal role but also from his marital obligations. One sentence grouping the activities fulfilling the obligations bound to SRP 'husband-wife' is 'knowing exactly what I have needed' (line 15). This is presented as including stopping on the way home from the daughter's college to spend some time on activities enjoyable to the author (lines 17-25), 'suggesting going out to eat and to a movie on Saturday' (lines 26-27) and 'holding me for my seemingly endless and random crying jags' (lines 28-29). Again, those activities even though bound to SRP 'husband-wife' are presented as unexpected by the author. Similar strategies as before are used to convey this meaning such as contrasting current behaviour with those in the past: 'a little thing but something we rarely do' (lines 27-28). Because of this construction of unexpectedness in reference to the effective support provided by the husband, this account is not discursively designed to challenge previous generalisation, which presented men as not capable of being supportive in the situation of children leaving home, but rather plays a role of exception supporting 'the rule' constructed earlier by the previous authors.

Conclusions

Mothers' Internet chat-room conversations about the experience of their children leaving home and their husbands' part in this event were the focus of the chapter. The analysis of the posts evolved around constructions of differences between mothers' and fathers' experiences, which were addressed in majority of the extracts. The accounts of fathers' reactions to children leaving home being different to women's

resulted in a presentation of those reactions as problematic. In some of the extracts women constructed their husbands as needing support during the 'transition to empty nest'. Others portrayed men as not emotionally involved in the process of children leaving home and therefore not fulfilling the expectations women held towards them in reference to their fathering role. Differences in expressing and dealing with emotions were also constructed as one of the causes for men not fulfilling their obligations as husbands. Genetics or upbringing was pinpointed as the main causes of disparities between male and female behaviours. This, however, lead to constructing men as not accountable for not providing the support for their wives during 'children leaving home transition'. Other reasons for the husbands' lack of support presented by the authors of the posts were fathers' lesser involvement in parenting duties. All those reasons were constructed as sufficient to decrease expectations of support towards men. Even in the deviant cases which presented examples of supportive husbands the authors constructed their positive supporting behaviour as surprising and unexpected.

One of the dominant constructions in the data presented husbands as 'trying' to be supportive, which resulted in evaluating those attempts as unsuccessful. The construction of husbands as 'trying' could be interpreted as a form of phenomenon observed by Sacks (1995) called seeing an 'imitation'. Sacks (1995) argued that we can categorise certain behaviour as imitation if we consider the person performing this behaviour as not entitled to be doing this action. The example that Sacks provided was of a young girl behaving coquettishly being considered as imitating a woman. This means that because a girl is an incumbent of a category 'child', which is not bound to an activity of 'flirting', her coquettish behaviour is considered only an imitation of a 'women' because this is an appropriate category for the activity of 'flirting'. If we apply the concept of imitation to the construction of husbands 'trying' to be supportive, we can see that what this construction does is present the category of 'husbands' as not

bound to the activity of 'being supportive effectively'. This constructs men as not capable of providing effective support for their wives in the situation of children leaving home. Even extracts providing exceptions to this 'rule' protect this corpus of knowledge against induction (Sacks, 1995) by presenting the examples of 'supportive husbands' as the exception. This suggests an interpretation that this construction is not designed to appear as a general rule that is flawed, but that the examples provided are not 'standard' incumbents of the category (Sacks, 1995). What this means is that the women conversing on the Internet about the experience of children leaving home collaboratively and actively construct a 'new' body of social knowledge which presents men as unable and most importantly not expected to be able to provide effective support for their wives in the context of 'transition to empty nest'.

In the data analysed above we can observe the co-existence of the old and the new norms of fatherhood and masculinity in practice. We see that the women orient towards the traditional 'norms' of masculinity but also to the new 'ideals' of more involved fathering (more on this topic in chapter VI). Mothers' present themselves as requiring men to exhibit qualities characteristic of traditional masculinity such as strength in the face of emotion and ability to support and protect them, but at the same time show involvement in parenting and concern when children leave home. However, the collective mothers' view is that the fathers do not fulfil those expectations, particularly in reference to providing effective support.

The category which is actively bound in the data to the activity of 'providing effective support' is 'women'. The site where this support is being provided is the Internet forums, which are used by parents to share their experiences, give and receive advice. Women, however, construct themselves as able to provide effective support to each other because of the assumed similarity of their experiences, feelings and ways of dealing with emotions. Presenting women's strategies of dealing with the challenges of

'empty nest' as successful in comparison to men's strategies was also evident in the expert constructions of fatherhood in opposition to motherhood discussed in chapter V. At the same time, in many of the posts, women construct themselves as the main party influenced by the event of children leaving home and they assign to fathers the secondary role of providing (or not) the support for them. This allocation of relevance of the 'empty nest' experience to the mother is convergent with the expert construction of fatherhood as unacknowledged (Chapter IV), where mothers were also presented as a members mostly impacted by their children leaving home. Another similarity with this construction lies in presenting the event of children leaving home as distressing and having negative emotional consequences for the mothers. Finally, the mothers' positioning of themselves in the centre of the 'empty nest transition' reflects the constructions present in existing academic literature on 'empty nest', where women are identified as a most relevant category for investigation of children leaving home process (for instance Stewart and Ostrove, 1998; Bart, 1971; Adelmann et al, 1989).

In conclusion, women's Internet conversations about the 'transition to empty nest' are a site of constructions of fatherhood but primarily a place where masculinity and femininity are constructed and managed. Through the orientation towards differences in expressing and dealing with emotions, as well as strategies of facing the challenges of the experience of children leaving home, the authors construct an account of masculinity and femininity as contrasting phenomena.

So far in the chapters I have focused on the construction of fatherhood developed by 'third parties' that is 'experts' and mothers. The following chapters, however, investigate fathers' views on experiences of 'empty nest' and their own position in this process.

Chapter VI: Emotions when children leave home: managing masculinity and fatherhood.

The previous two empirical chapters investigated parenting 'experts' and mothers' constructions of fatherhood in the context of the Internet chat-room conversations and articles. Both 'experts' and mothers presented fathers in rather critical light. Apart from just one construction acknowledging the equal status of mothers and fathers in the context of 'empty nest', the majority of the accounts portray fathers as unprepared for the transition of children leaving home and ineffective in dealing with its challenges. Fathers were viewed as particularly struggling with the provision of support for the female partner and the management of emotions related to the children leaving. As outlined in Chapter II the research on the 'empty nest syndrome' rarely tackles the issue of emotions in reference to fathers as it presents the mothers as more emotionally affected by the event of children leaving home (Bart, 1971; Phillips, 1957; Curlee, 1969; Karp et al, 2004; Hartocollis, 2005; Ryff and Seltzer 1996). However, within more general literature on fatherhood, the researchers reported the emergence of a concept of a 'New Father', whose emotional and caring characteristics are much more emphasised.

Increasing fathers' emotional involvement

Androgynous fatherhood, also called 'New Fatherhood', involves sharing of the childcare as well as the family provision (Robinson and Barret, 1986). Therefore, the dual-earner family structure means that men need to get involved in household responsibilities (Cabrera, 2000; Parke, 1996). Some fathers, constructed as pioneers of the new movement, were reported to reduce their working hours to spent time with

children; the paternal leave and sick-child-leave policy for fathers was also developed during this time. Organisations were said to be changing their policies and therefore being constructed as family-orientated (Robinson and Barret, 1986; Parke, 1996; Swedin, 1996).

In more recent studies of family life, the role of a 'modern father', involving for instance taking a parental leave has been presented as more popular. In Scandinavia the introduction of paternity leave and child-care leave had significant impact on how fathers were portrayed (Huttunen, 1996). Men, who actively shared childcare and housework, were considered as having greater understanding of the tasks traditionally assigned to women (Swedin, 1996; Bergman and Hobson, 2002). Huttunen (1996) who conducted a study of characteristics and experiences of fathers on parental leave presented them as satisfied, experiencing great enjoyment and obtaining a lot of benefits from staying at home. The most important advantage, which the fathers oriented to, was the increase in emotional relationship with the child. The fathers presented themselves as gaining a new focus on life values, pleasure and importance of the time spent with a child, and appreciation of domestic work, which earlier was done by their wives (Huttunen, 1996).

After an incorporation of traditionally feminine activities such as childcare and domestic duties into the fathering role, the researchers were interested how this change affected men's masculine identity. A qualitative study of Norwegian fathers, who took a paternal leave, suggested that fathers saw themselves as 'doing fatherhood' in a new, different way. Participating fathers constructed their accounts of parenting on the basis of the contrast to 'mothers' style' of parenting. Participants depicted themselves as being more active, taking the child out for various outdoor events more often, being less anxious and controlling in comparison to the mothers, as well as being able to set clear boundaries between themselves and the child. Furthermore, men's

representations of parenting as a masculine occupation were also related to their dissociation from housework. Fathers were presented as using their time on parental leave to establish close and emotional relationship with their child by the application of their own, 'masculine' style of childcare, which did not include housework or over-involvement with the children. Those were viewed by them as strictly 'feminine' domain (Brandth and Evande, 1998). These findings suggest that despite the development of a 'new' construction of fatherhood, it is still complicit with many standards of traditional masculinity. This is particularly apparent in fathers' firm disassociation from the 'feminine style' of parenting. It could be hypothesised that such strategies enable fathers to maintain a masculine identity in the context which was usually associated with traditional masculinity.

From the examples of the academic literature presented above, it can be confidently inferred that the experts' accounts have played a significant role in constructing the notion of fatherhood in reference to masculinity. As Lupton and Barclay (1997) conclude in their research 'fatherhood is constructed in these forums in certain dominant ways that are related to the purpose and audience to which the writings are directed' (p. 60). In these accounts fathers are often positioned as clinical 'stimuli' causing various 'reactions' on their children or as concerned fathers requiring professional help with difficulties of parenting tasks (Lupton and Barclay, 1997). Fathers are therefore seen as incompetent in activities constructed as traditionally feminine such as nurturing, which is congruent with concept of traditional masculinity.

A similar process of construction is apparent in modern mass media. Accounts created in film, television, newspapers or popular parenting books present very normative view on fatherhood. Film and television often portray fathers in satirical or idealistic way, very rarely challenging the dominant gender role model. For instance, in television sitcoms and films men are presented as becoming single parents as a result of

accident or misfortune, but not through a conscious decision. Similarly in newspaper reports teen, divorced or gay fathers are portrayed as 'anomalies', not as a 'normal' group of parents. Finally, modern parenting guides although using more 'non-gender–specific' language compared to their earlier counterparts, are still directed primarily at mothers, with fathers singled out in a few chapters (Lupton and Barclay, 1997; Sunderland, 2000). Fathers are usually presented as 'helping' mothers to take care of children or being involved in parenting duties 'if they wish'. This suggests that for men the nurturing responsibilities are of secondary importance (Sunderland, 2000). Moreover, the fathers who are primary caregivers are constructed as exceptions. For instance, in newspaper articles about 'stay-at-home-dads' the focus is on presenting them as masculine *despite* being involved in day-to-day nurturing role (Wall and Arnold, 2007). This is achieved by focusing on the fathers' breadwinning activities and emphasising the traditionally masculine characteristics such as being involved with sports or having a muscular physique. Moreover, the authors focus on men's parenting responsibilities which could be classified as masculine, such as coaching sports teams, playing active games with the children or being involved in political issues of importance to parents in general (Wall and Arnold, 2007). The quite compulsive effort to maintain a sense of masculinity in 'stay-at-home-dads' only reinforces the fact that 'warm, loving and involved parenting and primary care-giving are still considered feminine' (Wall and Arnold, 2007: 521).

What I believe is apparent is that the development of the concept of a 'New Father' has raised new expectations of men without removing the old norms of traditional masculinity. Because of the changes in the modern society and especially the increased participation of women in paid employment, there has been new and in many ways contradictory norms and tasks added to the already vast array. Men became expected to participate actively in child-care, be more emotionally accessible and share

power and intimacy with their wives (Silverstein & Auerbach, 2002; Henwood & Procter 2003). At the same time the society also provides the norms for 'being masculine' which include behaviours such as avoidance of emotions and intimacy, being in control at all times and expressing strength (Clare, 2001). Some fathers are also presented as experiencing discomfort stemming from the need to combine their breadwinning duties with the involvement in day-to-day parenting responsibilities (Henwood and Procter, 2003). Therefore many men are faced with a difficult task of manoeuvring between these contradictory expectations and negotiating a personally appropriate version of a fathering masculinity, which would enable them to dissociate themselves from this apparent conflict (Silverstein & Auerbach, 2002). However, what is particularly important is that some fathers are shown to try to incorporate the ideals of the 'New Fatherhood' into the ideals of masculinity, presenting active care of the children as 'macho'. Also finding a successful arrangement between traditional fatherhood expectations and the 'New Fatherhood' ideals is said to be an important source of satisfaction for the fathers (Henwood and Procter, 2003).

Although the wider literature on fatherhood developed a construction of a 'New Father' (LaRossa et al., 2000; Robinson and Barret, 1986; Griswold, 1993; Parke, 1996; Swedin, 1996, Henwood, 2003; Wall & Arnold, 2007), who was more nurturing and practically involved in parenting duties, the practice of expressing emotions in reference to paternity was still a largely neglected topic. Those researchers interested in men's expression of emotions suggested that such behaviour was usually presented as appropriate in a few rigidly defined contexts such as death, football or a loss of job (Walton et al., 2004; Buzzanell & Turner, 2003; Bennet, 2007). Needless to say, the situation of children leaving home has not yet been identified as a context, where the fathers routinely talk about emotions. Such dependence on circumstances to validate emotional expression was explained in terms of the ideals of masculinity. Traditional

men were presented as concealing emotions, or otherwise risking putting themselves in a position of vulnerability and dependency (Seidler, 1991, 1997). Therefore, there seem to be a disparity between the more general literature of fatherhood acknowledging the fathers' 'right' to express emotions in the parenting context and the 'empty nest' literature, neglecting fathers' emotional experiences during the time when their children leave home.

Taking the above arguments into account it is crucial to investigate how the fathers themselves construe their place, role and emotionality in the 'empty nest' transition. In order to achieve this goal, the following chapter presents an analysis of the data in the form of the fathers' contributions to the Internet discussions about children leaving home and the qualitative interviews with fathers, who have experienced 'transition to empty nest'. The Internet data were posted on the website dedicated to the issues of parenting and what is referred to as the 'empty nest'. The majority of the data analysed here derives from EmptyNestSupport.com. This site was set up by Natalie Caine, an American therapist and a mother, who in anticipation of her own forthcoming transition to the 'empty nest stage' decided to establish a support group for parents whose children are at any stage of leaving home. The forum of the website is open to both fathers and mothers; however there are far fewer fathers who use this resource. A similar situation is apparent on other websites, which contributed to the body of data used in this chapter (Parent2Parent.au.com and Indiaparenting.com.). The only exception to this 'rule' is a website dedicated to sound and visual systems which also has a section dedicated to other topics, one of them being family life. On this particular website (SoundAndVisionMag.com) men are the dominating party. In this chapter I look at the issues, which fathers raise as important and the ways in which they construct fatherhood in this 'female dominated' context. The context is important also in the interview data, mainly because of the role of the interviewer, whose contribution to the

interaction will also be taken into consideration in this chapter. The analysis focuses on the fathers' accounts of emotions and their consequences for constructing masculinity and fatherhood when children leave home.

When children leave home: fathers' emotions in the Internet context

What I found most striking about the fathers' posts, given the discussion in the introduction to this chapter, were the frequent constructions of emotionality. Most of the posts collected from the parenting websites present emotionality as a difficult and quite a negative consequence of the 'transition to empty nest'. Such a construction is apparent in the following extract.

Extract 1, fathers' chat rooms

```
1          Posted by Dad on October 14 2005, 11:53:50
2          I have had the priveledge of raising the best
3          son a father could have. But now he's
4          23..going to school part time and working full
5          time, and has just moved out into an apartment.
6          It really hurts to let go...
7          Oh well...I knew this day would come, but I
8          was in no way prepared for these feelings, an
9          d I'm not sure any amount of preparation would
10         have helped.
11         Anyways, It really hurts..this empty nest
12         stuff.., I find myself crying in the morning
13         usually, also at various times of the
14         day...yes some men do cry...
15         But I can see he's very happy and
16         experiencing life on his own.
17         I just keep telling myself..he's still my
18         son, he just doesn't live with me anymore,
19         and he's happy...which to me, is most
20         important.
```

The important aspect of the emotions' construction in this extract is their unexpectedness, which is presented in lines 7-8: 'I was in no way prepared for these

feelings'. The ECF 'in no way' emphasises the lack of preparation for the emotional side of 'letting go'. The emotional reaction to a child leaving home is also constructed in contrast with the cognitive awareness and anticipation of the event. The cognitive state of 'knowing' (line 7) is here constructed as opposing the emotional state of 'feeling' (line 8). Interestingly, this is quite a common way of depicting emotions as a construct opposing a rational thought. According to Edwards (1999), this distinction plays an important part in negotiating accountability. Whereas we can be held accountable for our cognitive, rational actions of preparing for some event (line 8) we cannot be responsible for the emotions associated with it. The contrast between the cognitive and the emotional is deepened in the extract by questioning the effectiveness of the preparation for the emotional reaction ('I'm not sure any amount of preparation would've helped…', lines 9-10).

The theme of unexpectedness of an emotional reaction is continued in line 12 which reads: 'I *find myself* crying'. This wording emphasises the lack of agency in the performed action and also a lack of control over it. Looking analytically at the activity of 'crying' a natural question from the MCA point of view is whether it is bound to any category and if so to which one? Interestingly, the author of the post purposefully emphasises his action of binding the activity of 'crying' (line 13) to the category 'men'. The way in which this effect is achieved is incredibly intricate. The statement in the line 13 '…*yes*, some men *do* cry' takes a dialogical form through the use of an affirmative 'yes', which is put there to oppose an implied denial, represented by the dots (…). 'Yes' here is an answer to something unsaid but hearable such as implied prejudice: 'Men don't cry'. The second strategy used to increase the robustness of the statement is the extreme case softener 'some', which by decreasing the extremity of the account makes it more immune to denial (Edwards, 2000). Also, from the context of the post we can infer the conditions under which it is appropriate for men to cry. The men that

'do cry' are 'dads'. The difficult feelings related to the event of a child leaving home are constructed as warranting the action of crying not only for the author himself but also for other men in a similar situation.

The negative aspect of emotions is also evident in line 6, where the activity of 'letting go' is presented as 'really hurting'. This construction of emotional reaction is more characteristic to the sensation of physical pain and is emphasised by the ECF 'really'. A very similar construction of emotions related to children leaving home is created in extract 2.

Extract 2, fathers' chat rooms

```
1       Dad's can hurt too
2       Posted by EmptyNesterDad on August 5 2005,
3       15:52:14
4       My Son just left with his girlfriend to find
5       opportunities in Computer technology in the
6       Portland Oregon area, which is about 2,500
7       miles from his home in Ohio. I am aching with
8       Pain. I don't know if I am different than
9       other men, but perhaps because I raised my son
10      by myself for several years until meeting his
11      Step Mom, I have a different view than most
12      men.
13      This all hurts a bunch more than it should
14      perhaps, I don't even know. I thank God for
15      Him and the times we have shared together with
16      him. I see him everywhere in the House, though
17      He is not here, and it is very hard for me.
18      I am hurting, and yet I want him to know the
19      joys of living life and making it on his own
20      all that much more. I feel like I have just
21      taken a major part of my life and put it in a
22      drawer.
```

The opening statement in extract 2 (line 1) serves as a title setting a context for the rest of the excerpt. The membership category 'dad' is linked to a category bound activity 'hurting' in a very emphasised and provocateur way. The use of the discourse marker 'too' suggests that the category 'dad' is in not always associated with hurting and in this way constructs an account of fathers who do not normally experience this sort of emotions. By designing the statement 'Dad's can hurt too' in this way, the

author constructs an opposing account of fathers capable of experiencing negative emotions. Interestingly, this procedure is comparable to the one in the extract 1: 'yes some men do cry' (line 14). The consequence of interpreting those two statements in this way is incredibly important for the construction of fatherhood and masculinity. 'Dad's can hurt too' (extract 2, line 1) and 'yes some men do cry' (extract 1, line 14) construct fathers as in need of defending their right to emotionality. Even though 'Dad' is extract 8 presents himself as distressed when his children leave home, for instance to 'find opportunities' (lines 4-5), he uses a discursive strategy to diminish his responsibility for experiencing such emotions: 'I am aching with pain' (lines 7-8). Interestingly, even though this predicate reflects the author's emotional state it is constructed as embodied. This construction corresponds with the use of verb 'hurt' in line 1, which also has connotations with the physical experience of pain. This strategy emphasises the powerful and overwhelming character of the emotional reaction to children leaving home. Such construction of emotions in terms of the physical experience plays an important part in negotiating the author's accountability for going through described feelings (Edwards, 1999). By presenting the emotions as physical and therefore beyond his control EmptyNesterDad presents himself as unaccountable for it.

The final feature of the construction of a negative emotional reaction to children leaving home is evident in activities such as 'thanking God for Him and the times we shared together' and 'seeing him everywhere though he is not here' (lines 14-16). This design could be described as more characteristic to the process of grieving for someone who is lost. Such as choice of words refers to the event of a child leaving home in terms of a permanent loss. The metaphor in lines 20-22 'I feel like I have just taken a major part of my life and put it in a drawer' emphasises the perception of the parenting role as a completed stage.

The process of talking about the emotions as powerful and overwhelming is presented as prompting the author to contemplate his masculinity. This is apparent in the statement 'I don't know if I am different than other men' (line 8). The reflexivity seems to be built tentatively, with hesitation and uncertainty by using statements such as 'perhaps', 'I have a different view' and 'I don't know'(lines 9-10). According to Potter (1996), the last statement can be used as a display of disinterestedness in relation to a possibly important issue. In this indirect way the author signals the contrast between himself and 'most men' which potentially and problematically declines his membership in this category. However, this potential withdrawal from the category 'other men' is justified by his independent parenting: 'I raised my son by myself for several years' (lines 9-10). This very subtle construction presents a strong emotional reaction to a child's leaving as a factor differentiating 'dads' from 'other men'. However, the emotions are not presented as affecting fathers' masculinity because the experience of being a parent justifies the strong emotional reaction to the event of children leaving home.

Extract 3 is another 'negative' construction of emotions during the 'transition to empty nest stage'. This extract differs in a way from the previous ones as it does not refer to the event of a child leaving home but rather to the anticipation of this event.

Extract 3, fathers' chat rooms

```
1       Posted by G-Rott on April 11 2005, 08:01:04
2       A Father's Struggle
3       My son just turned 18 back in February (…)
4       I expected this to be my wife's
5       struggle, but I'm finding that I am
6       struggling more than her with "letting go"
7       of my son. He will be commuting to college,
8       so he'll still be living at home...but still,
9       I feel "not needed" by him anymore...and I
10      fear for him when he is out and I don't have
11      all the details. . A couple months ago I
12      started going out to dinner with him twice a
13      month...just to chat...and we've started
14      praying together (well I do all the praying),
15      about every other night. The praying
16      especially, has helped. I also told him how
```

```
17        much I'm struggling with this, so that he
18        would understand how I
19        feel...hopefully...but it still hurts....and
20        I'm not quite sure how to deal with
21        it.....It's like, I finally got what I
22        prayed for all my life...and now I'm
23        watching it drift away
```

The difficulty of preparing for the event of a child leaving home is signalled by the activity 'struggle' included in the opening line, which suggests that the process is constructed in terms of problems and difficulties. The 'struggle' is presented as resulting from the author's son 'turning 18' (line 3). Interestingly, this problematic nature of the transition is constructed as unexpected for the father as he reports: 'I expected this to be my wife's struggle' (lines 4-5). This indicates that initially the activity of 'struggling with letting go' (line 6) is routinely bound to the membership category 'wife'. The formulation 'but I'm finding' (line 5) emphasises the unexpectedness of the problems with preparing for 'transition to empty nest'. Lines 9-11 define the 'struggle' in terms of negative emotions: 'feeling 'not needed'' and 'fearing for him'. Unlike the dads from the previous extracts, the father here presents himself as actively employing strategies designed to help him deal with the transition. Those include 'going for dinner to chat', 'praying' and 'telling him how I'm struggling with this' (lines 11-17). The organisation of those strategies in a three part list (Jefferson, 1990) helps to construct the record as complete and therefore presents the father as exerting every possible option of dealing with the problem facing him. The intensity of the experienced pain is emphasised in the statement: 'but it still hurts.' (line 19). In this construction, even though the author performs all the actions designed to help him deal with the preparation for his son leaving, he still experiences the pain. In a fashion similar to the previous authors, the father here emphasises his lack of preparedness for the process of 'letting go' and a shortage of resources for coming to terms with the change (lines 20-21).

The metaphor concluding the extract (lines 21-23) is designed to emphasise a lack of agency or control over the unveiling events: 'I finally got what I prayed for all my life… and now I'm watching it drift away'. Interestingly, this account contradicts the earlier picture presenting the efforts that the author makes in order to deal with his son becoming more independent (lines 9-11). The construction of a negative emotional reaction to children leaving home is also apparent in extract 4.

Extract 4, fathers' chat rooms

```
1        Posted by natalie on September 13 2006,
2        21:44
3        A DAD'S REQUEST IN THE EMPTY NEST
4        WHY DON'T I COUNT IN THE EMPTY NEST
5        I am a dad whose kids have all left home.
6        I guess I could be the intellect guy who
7        fixes problems and acts like I am ok, but
8        I am not. My house is too quiet and I am
9        lonely. There, I said it! I am lonely.
10       Lonely for my kids!
11       One is married and the other two are in
12       college. I had no idea I would be so sad.
13       My wife is too, but that seems more
14       acceptable. She and her friends talk and
15       cry together.
```

The construction of emotions when children leave home created here is presented as affecting the author's membership in the category 'men'. This category can be inferred from the lines 6-7, where the author refers to the membership category 'intellect guy, who fixes problems and acts like I am ok' (lines 6-7). Those predicates and activities are bound here to an implicit category 'man' and are organised in a three part list (Jefferson, 1990), which makes this construction appear complete. The author puts himself in contrast to this specific construction of a 'man' by admitting to 'not being ok' (lines 7-8). This negative state is constructed as deriving from the feelings of loneliness due to the children not living with him any more (lines 8-10). The description of those emotions is again organised in a three part list (Jefferson, 1990) 'I am lonely.

There, I said it! I am lonely. Lonely for my kids! (lines (9-10). This non-traditional use

of this device strengthens the effect of the construction and emphasises the emotionality of it. The representation of emotional consequences of children leaving home continues in the line 12, where the emotion of 'being sad' is mentioned. Interestingly, following the other authors, whose posts are analysed in this chapter, the 'dad' here also constructs this emotional reaction as unexpected and surprising: 'I had *no idea* I would be *so* sad'. The ECFs (*in italics*) are used to strengthen the impact of the construction. However, the predicate of 'being sad' is bound to a membership category 'wife' to a greater extent because in this arrangement it is presented as 'more acceptable' (line 13). This construction implicates that mothers' emotional reactions to children leaving home are more readily approved than those of fathers'. This reading is supported by the lines 14-15 presenting activities of 'crying and talking together' as bound to an implicit category 'women' ('she and her friends'). Again we can observe that the author positions men as in needing to fight for their 'right' to exhibit emotions. In contrast, the women are presented as already having the capacity and the frame of reference to express their feelings.

The construction of emotions in this extract is very direct, explicit and developed through the use of words usually associated with descriptions of feelings such as loneliness, sadness, hurting or struggle. In contrast to those the emotions in the following two extracts are constructed in much more indirect way.

Extract 5, fathers' chat rooms

```
1        Posted by nealatthewheel on April 19 2005,
2        11:14:17
3        I hear you ,man. My daughter turned 18 in
4        Feb. as well. It's good to know there are
5        other dads here.
6        We visited the college she will be
7        attending( about 130 miles from home) I
8        thought I was gonna lose it , but actually
9        seeing the place made it seem more real and
10       I actually feel better.
11       Like a friend told me, if we try to pretend
12       it is no big deal, we will feel like we are
```

```
13          going nuts. It IS a big deal, a huge
14          transition and we will have some bad days,
15          no doubt. But we are not alone and you are
16          not alone. Keep thinking that.
```

What the further two extracts have in common is the presentation of emotions as 'uncontrollable,' This feature of an emotional reaction to the event of a child leaving home is evident in lines 6-10, where the author describes visiting his daughter's future college as a situation when he thought he 'was gonna lose it' (line 8). This quite a colloquial formulation constructs a strong emotional reaction to the 'reality' (line 9) of a child's leaving home. The experience of visiting the college, even though difficult, was presented by the author as beneficial in the long run as it 'made it seem more real and I actually feel better' (lines 9-10). Through constructing corroboration (Edwards and Potter, 1992): 'like a friend told me' (line 11) the author strengthens his account of the event of leaving home as a normative, shared experience. The significance of the transition is emphasised by the use of ECFs (Pomerantz, 1987) 'big deal' and 'huge transition' (lines 13-14). The author suggests that denying the significance of children leaving home makes it more difficult to deal with: 'if we try to pretend it is no big deal, we will feel like we are going nuts' (lines 11-12). Again, the idiomatic phrase 'going nuts' could be interpreted as describing the uncontrollable aspect of emotional reaction to the transition.

The negative character of the response to children leaving home is emphasised in lines 14-15 'and we will have some *bad days*, no doubt'. Again, the author focuses on constructing the experience as common among his peers, this time through the use of a pronoun 'we'. The use of idiomatic expressions and indirect, generalising formulations (bad days) contrasts the representation of emotions in this extract with quite open and direct descriptions of emotions in the previous extracts. The effect achieved through this strategy is a presentation of the author as a person a bit awkward towards emotions and not used to talking about them. Such a construction is another

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strategy used to preserve the masculine identity in line with the traditional ideal. By avoiding the explicit references to emotions the author maintains his image of an 'unemotional man'. At the same time the use of colloquialism and idiomatic expression creates a subtle picture of a man affected by his child leaving home. This construction's potential to jeopardize the 'masculine ideal' is avoided by attributing the 'bad days' to all the fathers and therefore normalising them.

Extract 6, fathers' chat rooms

```
1          Name: Concerned Father
2          Country: USA
3          Comment:
4          The first thing I asked my daughter was
5          "don't fall in love with someone from the
6          other side of the country" and that's the
7          first thing she did! now the boy wants to
8          marry her and both are thinking to move out
9          of Florida! I'm going crazy over this idea,
10         having a horrible time with her, I want to
11         keep her near by so I can see her or visit
12         them often .. is that asking too much? how
13         can I learn to let go?
```

The construction of emotions in this extract is again quite limited in description compared to previous extracts. As in extract 5, it is also based on the idiomatic statement describing the author's reaction to his daughter 'moving out of Florida' (lines 8-9) as 'going crazy over this idea' (line 9). This negative reaction is presented as having implications for the relationship with the daughter: 'having a horrible time with her' (line 10). Interestingly, those negative emotions and reactions are very subtly justified by the author. The author presents himself as belonging to a membership category 'parent' by attributing to himself an implicit activity of forbidding: ''don't fall in love with someone from the other side of the country''' (lines 5-6). The daughter's disobedience to this request is bound to a category child ('and that's the first thing she did', lines 6-7). By the use of those category bound activities,

the father and the daughter's relationship is constructed in terms of the implicit standardised relational pair (SRP) 'parent –child'. The request to not fall in love with someone because of too great geographical distance could be considered by a number of readers as unreasonable and inappropriate. However, the author frames it in terms of parental prohibition, which is one of the obligations binding the 'father-child' SRP (Lepper, 2000) and through this technique constructs the request as acceptable. At the same time the daughter's disobedience and leading from it consequence of 'marrying and moving out of Florida' (lines 8-9) is framed as alarming and unacceptable. By employing this strategy the author presents himself as not accountable for his negative emotional reaction. The extremity of the father's reaction to his daughter potential moving away could also be explained in terms of his construction of 'father-child' relationship after the child leaves home. By presenting the activities such as 'keeping her near' and 'visiting often' (line 11-12) as desirable, the author constructs the picture where physical presence is crucial to maintain the 'father-child' relationship. Furthermore, this model is constructed as reasonable through the use of rhetoric question 'is that asking to much?'(line 12). By constructing this elaborate justification for his negative emotional reaction, the author manages to undermine his accountability for it and establish an identity of a 'reasonable father' fulfilling his obligation towards his child.

All of the extracts so far construct fatherhood when children leave home in terms of quite negative emotional reactions. On the basis of this observation the next two excerpts can certainly be described as deviant cases (Potter and Wetherell, 1987).

Extract 7, fathers' chat rooms

```
1     Author Message IBDad
2     My avatar shows my 2 grown children - and that
3     picture is already a few years old. But I don't
4     have a more recent picture of both of them, as
5     mu son lives here in NY while my daughter lives
6     1100 miles away in Florida.
7     40 days from today my son will be getting
```

```
8      married.
9      He wull be 25 next month and my daughter will be
10     27 a few weeks later.
11     My wife and I have been married for 31
12     years and we think have rather
13     successfully raised our kids and now the
14     nest is empty ... and that is not a bad thing.
```

The main difference between this and the previous extracts is the virtual lack of emotion's construction as well as creation of a positive account of the 'empty nest'. The author of this post presents himself as a father of grown-up, mature 'children', who are represented by the activities bound to an implicit category 'independent person' such as 'living 1100 miles away' (lines 5-6) and 'getting married' (lines 7-8) or predicates such as age: 'He will be 25 next month and my daughter will be 27 a few weeks later' (lines 9-10). The author also positions himself as a mature person by mentioning that his digital representation on the website ('avatar', line 2) 'shows my 2 grown children –and the picture is already a few years old' (lines 2-3). This reference to age and experience in parenting adds to the author's sense of credibility (Edwards and Potter, 1996). This strategy helps to present created constructions of the parenting roles as much more reliable. The author employs the MCD 'marriage' including the SRP 'husband and wife', in this case in the form of 'my wife and I' (line 11) and binds it with the activity of 'successfully raising our kids' (line 13). The change of footing (Goffman, 1981) from 'I' to 'we' (line 12) suggests that the positive opinion of the author's parenting experience are also shared by his wife, again adding to the reliability of the account. This very normative picture of a family life coupled with another reference to the author's long-term experience in this field: 'My wife and I have been married for 31 years' (lines 11-12), puts him in a position of expertise. This has very important analytical implications as it makes the evaluation of the 'empty nest' (line 14) as 'not a bad thing' (line 14) much more authoritative. By employing such experience

and wisdom the representation of children leaving home in relatively positive terms is much more forceful and persuasive.

It is important to note that the posting presented in extract 7 is very different from the postings analysed so far, not only because it constructs a positive view on the empty nest but also because it does not deal with the construction of emotional consequences of children leaving home. In many ways a similar account is created in extract 8.

Extract 8, fathers' chat rooms

```
1       cheesehead
2       I feel your pain, my friend. However, take
3       heart that you will get over it and it won't
4       last long. When our youngest child, our
5       daughter, finally left for college, we were
6       an empty nest for the first time in about 33
7       years. It took us about 35 minutes to get
8       over it and adjust to our newfound
9       freedom. It definitely gets
10      better. Actually, it gets downright
11      great.
```

The one feature that distinguishes this extract from the previous ones is the context in which it was published. It is derived from a website which is not dedicated to the issues related to 'empty nest' or not even more general parenting, but describes a variety of sound and vision equipment. The extract 8 was posted in the 'Just chat- off topic' forum and is a part of a thread regarding children leaving home.

The author (line 1) constructs the 'empty nest' as 'newfound freedom' (lines 8-9) and the time it got him and his partner to adjust to it as very short ('about 35 minutes', line 7). The positive aspects of the 'transition to empty nest' are accentuated in the lines 9-11, which construct this time as 'definitely getting better' (lines 9-10) and 'downright great' (line 11). The author presents the event of a child leaving home as anticipated by the use of the word 'finally' (line 5) in reference to his daughter leaving home to go to college. This particular extract is contrasting with the posts analysed

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previously as it constructs the experience of 'empty nest' and parents' reaction to it as very positive and easily adjustable to.

When children leave home: fathers' emotions in the interview context

So far the chapter focused on fathers' account of emotions created in the context of the Internet chat-room conversations. Interestingly, the fathers in an interview setting develop corresponding accounts of emotions.

Extract 9, interview, Richard 08.02.07

```
1       Justyna:    What was your first reaction to the news that
2                   that your daughter's gonna be .hh moving out
3                   (.) of °your home°↑
4       Richard:    Well I was pleased really because I think you
5                   bring your children up to be independent (.)
6                   and when they become independent and erm m::
7                   b- being responsible as well in that she
8                   didn't just up sticks and go- it it was a
9                   natural process=
10      Justyna:    =mhm
11      Richard:    f- .hhh h far better than me when I was young
12                  you know=
13      Justyna:    =mhm
14      Richard:    I was pleased that she was finding her own
15                  feet and moving on because the younger
16                  daughter was the more- is the more vulnerable
17                  of the tw[o: ]
18      Justyna:             [mhm]
19      Richard:    I'm dyslexic and sh[e's ] dyslexic
20      Justyna:                       [mhm ]oh I [see]
21      Richard:                                  [and] it made
22                  her a little bit vulnerable you know=
23      Justyna     =mhm
24      Richard:    so to see her (.) beginning to take for-
25                  woman- oh it'as great you know
26      Justyna:    mhm
27      Richard:    .hhh erm (.) my rea- I f- I was surprised by
28                  me own reaction (.) I have to say
29      Justyna:    mhm
30      Richard:    yeah .hh (0.5) because we shared a very good
31                  friendship me younger daughter and I (.) we
32                  shared the same taste in music
33      Justyna:    mhm
34      Richard:    you know (.) erm .hh the same taste in .hhh
35                  (.) a lot of erm:: (0.9) fashion I s- we were
36                  both very keen on Americana: and
```

```
37      Justyna:     [mhm:      ]
38      Richard:     [that sort] of thing you know so .hhh when it
39                   came to clearing her room hh (1.0) .hh like
40                   our life together was all in there you know=
41      Justyna:     =yeah
42      Richard:     My elder daughter moved out more methodically
43                   [than me]
44      Justyna:     [°m:: °]
45      Richard:     younger daughter she was sort of a:rh she's a
46                   bit more chaotic so
47      Justyna:     [mhm]
48      Richard:     [she ] went and left her room more or less
49                   intact .hh so I was helping to get some
50                   things together and pack up and I just
51                   completely broke down you know
52      Justyna:     a::h
53      Richard:     it completely got to me yeah (.) and I- i- it
54                   took me completely by surprise- one minute
55                   [I was]
56      Justyna:     [yeah]
57      Richard:     happily tidying up=
58      Justyna:     =yeah
59      Richard:     .hh and I just went to pick one thing up (.)
60                   I think
61      Justyna:     mhm
62      Richard:     (.) looked at it and then suddenly it just
63                   hit me that (0.5) family life was over hh
64      Justyna:     [m::]
65      Richard:     [that] period in your life where you're
66      Justyna:     [ye:s]
67      Richard:     a family had ended
68      Justyna:     mhm
69      Richard:     and it just hit me like an avalanche (( two
70                   knocking sounds)) you know and it really ((
71                   scraping sound)) upset me you know
72      Justyna:     mh::
73      Richard:     yer:: it passed but you know for a- .hh I'm
74                   not a I'm not (.) I am an emotional pers[on ]
75      Justyna:                                             [mhm]
76      Richard:     but not to that extent
77      Justyna:     mhm
78      Richard:     I was- I was quite a I was quite hh
79                   surpihhsed by it you know
```

In extract 9 Richard is asked by the researcher to talk about his initial reaction to his daughter leaving. In the first part of the answer Richard constructs his 'reaction' in reference to the consequences of leaving home for his daughter. He presents himself as 'pleased' (lines 4, 14) because of the independence gained by his daughter through the move (lines 14-15). He constructs his role in preparing his child for the transition as very normative 'I think you bring your children up to become independent' (lines 4-5). Especially the change of footing from 'I' to 'you' frames the activity of 'bringing the

children up to become independent' as relevant not only for Richard but also for other fathers and parents alike. Therefore, the event of a child leaving is presented as a natural consequence of growing up and a sign that the parents fulfilled their duties successfully. The level of this success is magnified by the presentation of the daughter as 'vulnerable' (line 16, 22), which is presented as increasing Richard's satisfaction that his daughter is 'finding her own feet' (line 14).

At the same time this positive construction of the reaction to a child gaining independence is juxtaposed with the emotional reaction that Richard constructs as having experienced in the context of packing his daughter's possessions (lines 48-49). In a short story which Richard is reporting, he presents himself as 'completely broke down' (line 51) and 'really upset' (lines 70-71). This negative emotional reaction is presented as very sudden: 'one minute I was happily tidying up (…) and then suddenly it just hit me' (lines 54-62), unexpected: 'took me completely by surprise' (line 54), very intensive and overwhelming: 'it completely got to me' (line 53), 'like an avalanche' (line 69). The use of those idiomatic expressions and metaphors is designed to emphasise the unpredicted, strong and out-of-control qualities of reported emotions. Richard also emphasises his construction of himself as 'surprised' by reiterating it in three separate places (line 27, 54 and 79). As in the previous extracts in this chapter, these strategies are used to decrease the father's accountability for experiencing such emotions. Another way of presenting oneself as not responsible for experiencing intensive feelings is constructing an external reason for them. Richard does it while setting the scene for the story about packing his daughter possessions. In lines 27-36 Richard presents himself as surprised by his own reaction 'because we shared a very good friendship me younger daughter and I' (line 30-31). By presenting himself as having a close relationship and many common interests with his daughter, Richard

manages to validate his reaction and attribute it to the circumstances rather than himself.

In extract 9 the mitigation of accountability is followed by the introduction of the 'emotional person' identity (line 74). A certain difficulty with acquisition of this identity is demonstrated by repair in lines 73-74, where Richard starts off a categorisation of himself with 'I'm not a- I'm not', which is then repaired after a pause to 'I am an emotional person (…) but not to that extent' (lines 74-76). It could be argued that 'to that extent' refers to the degree to which Richard presents himself as affected by his daughter leaving: 'completely broke down' (line 51). This categorisation is therefore designed to explain Richard's sense of surprise at the intensity of experienced emotions. The interviewee presents himself as a person emotional 'to a degree' and therefore constructs the experienced emotions as not fully attributable to his 'emotional person's 'nature'. This therefore puts this categorisation and repair in line with the previous strategies of mitigating accountability for intensive emotional reaction to child's leaving.

A similar construction of deeply emotional reaction is apparent in extract 10.

Extract 10 interview, Steven: 06.08.07

```
1       Justyna:    So could you tell me a little bit about the
2                   time when erm when erm Jack left home and erm
3                   (.) what was the reason behind [it]
4       Steven:                                   [.hh]
5       Justyna:    and how did you feel about it
6       (...)
7       Steven:     so then, when he went off to University I've
8                   (.) felt (0.5) very low erm and (.) you know
9                   I did as parents do and took him to .hh the
10                  university and installed all his stuff and
11                  that was fine and we had a little manly hug
12                  and I'd get in the car and drive off around
13                  the corner=
14      Justyna:    =yeah
15      Steven:     where I stopped the car to have a weep!
16      Justyna:    o::h
17      Steven:     heh .hh I did feel very, very
18      Justyna:    yeah I can imagine
19      Steven:     low about it as you can imagine erm
```

Steven produces an account of his emotional reaction in response to the interviewer's question and describes himself as feeling 'very low' (line 8). He produces a story of a specific situation, when his feelings were particularly apparent. He constructs a very normative description of parental behaviour when children leave home through the use of a membership category 'parents' (line 9) and presents his behaviour as adequate for this particular category: 'I did as parents do' (lines 8-9). The activities bound by Steven in this context include taking his son to university and installing 'all his stuff' (line 10) and having a 'little manly hug' (line 11). Interestingly, the use of a minimisation 'little' could be designed to decrease the significance of this display of emotion and present it as more appropriate and bound to a category 'men'. It is a representation of a restrained, controlled and at the same time masculine way of expressing emotions. It is presented as appropriate for the context of a son going to university. However this very reserved picture of doing emotions is contrasted with the second part of the story, where Steven presents himself as getting into the car, driving off around the corner, stopping a car 'to have a weep' (lines 12-15). This very direct and open construction of emotions is presented as relevant only for the situation of solitude, not to be witnessed by the leaving son.

The two accounts from the interview data involve the use of similar discursive strategies minimising fathers' accountability for experiencing unexpected and overwhelming emotions as in the account created in the naturalistic data. The observed compatibility of constructions created in both types of data (interview and naturalistic) is extremely important in terms of supporting the findings and presenting them as not context specific and existent among a variety of groups of people. The construction of emotions and mitigation of accountability for them is common to all three types of naturalistic data analysed so far. It is also a strategy used by people in a variety of settings, not necessarily characteristic to the context of children leaving home. For

instance Edwards (2000) reports strategies of mitigating accountability in the marriage counselling sessions. What I mean by that is that the reported ways of construction of emotionality apparent across the variety of contexts, including both interviews and 'naturalistic' interactions.

The following extracts explores the links between expression of emotions and the fathers' representations of masculinity.

Extract 11, interview, Julian 07.09.07.

```
1       Justyna:    some (.) some people talk to me and say that
2                   for a man it's harder to erm express em
3                   emotions and talk about them for instance in
4                   such situations as children leaving hh do you
5                   think it's it's true in your case?
6       Julian:     it's hh (1.0) tch it probably is yes (.) I
7                   find it easier to to talk to my wife about it
8                   than I do to the children.
9       Justyna:    yeah mhm (.8) do you think that- d'you kn-
10                  why do you think is is that
11      Julian:     (1.5) .hh (2.0) If I'm honest it's probably
12                  because.hh (.) that's the way I think men
13                  should be
14      Justyna:    mhm mhm (.) and how do you think (.) men
15                  should be hehe
16      Julian:     hehe
17      Justyna:    in general
18      Julian:     erm (1.0) hh (3.0) yeah not show (.) emotion
19                  erm (1.0) hh the word isn't hard it's erm
20                  (2.0) tough being able to take whatever comes
21                  in (.) stand up to it you know.
```

In this extract the category of masculinity and its possible relevance to the issue of expressing emotions is introduced by the interviewer, who presents a construction of men as finding it 'harder to express emotions (…) in such situations as children leaving' (lines 1-5) as reported by 'some people'. As requested by the interviewer ('(…) in your case', line 5), Julian positions himself in reference to this statement. He accepts the construction as 'probable' (line 6), however, also provides a description of circumstances re-constructing the statement as more complex. The membership category of 'my wife' (line 7) is constructed as 'easier to talk to' (line 7) in

comparison to 'children' (line 8). When asked by the interviewer for the possible reason for this differentiation between the categories 'wife' and 'children' (line 7 and 8), Julian attributes it to his normative construction of masculinity: 'that's the way I think men should be'. After some interviewer probing (lines 9-10), Julian identifies normative masculinity with 'not showing emotion' (line 18), being 'tough' (line 20) and 'able to take whatever comes and stand up to it' (lines 20-21). This very traditional way of constructing masculinity is presented by Julian as very normative and echoes common constructions in masculinity research (Connell, 1987; 1995; Phillips, 2005; Jakupcak et al., 2005), where the masculine 'ideal' is presented as reluctant to discuss emotions, strong and able to deal with facing him difficulties. In conclusion, extract 11 provides important evidence to support the construction of fathers as mitigating responsibility for experiencing emotions to maintain their sense of masculinity.

In extract 11, the interviewer's construction of masculinity was accepted by the interviewee and incorporated in his construction of normative masculinity. In extract 12 the interviewer introduces a similar construction, which is managed by the participant in a slightly different fashion.

Extract 12, interview, Richard 08.02.07

```
1        Justyna:     (...) .hh do you think that erm erm it
2                     mi- that your kindof surprise from your
3                     reaction- emotional reaction .hh might have
4                     been to do with erm (.) .hh er the fact that
5                     men generally are seen as people who n:: not
6                     always express the emotions or
7                     something=
8        Richard:     yeah I think
9        Justyna:     do you think it's th[e case↑]
10       Richard:                         [yeah I think] there is
11                    an Northern man (.)
12       Justyna:     mhm
13       Richard:     r[eaction]
14       Justyna:      [ mhm   ]
15       Richard:     I think northern e/E?nglish men have a
16                    persona of (.) of  not showing emotion .hhhh
17                    (.) I'm never really d- because I lived in a
18                    matriarch because it's a terrible female
19                    family
```

```
20        Justyna:      mhm
21        Richard:      I think a lot of that was peeled off me
22                      [you know]
23        Justyna:      [yeah]
24        Richard:      because I lived with three women
25        Justyna:      [mhm]
26        Richard:      [who] were very emotional
27        Justyna:      mhm
28        Richard:      .hh you know and for a man to live with
29                      three women he
30        Justyna:      he
31        Richard:      it's a big learning curvehhh
32        Justyna:      yeah hehe
33        Richard:      you know .hhh and having done that for
34                      twenty odd years
35        Justyna:      mh:h
36        Richard:      I didn't think myself as a- (.) you know I
37                      am a hands on (.)affectionate person you know
38        Justyna:      mhm
39        Richard:      I'm a touchy, feely, sort of person
40        Justyna:      mhm
41        Richard:      you know .hhh (.) e-e- (.) by nature I
42                      would not do that you know=
43        Justyna:      =mhm
44        Richard:      and I don't (.) you know I FInd >as I get
45                      older actually I do< (.) I find now I can sit
46                      in a cinema and er and actually cry or watch
47                      tele and cry
48        Justyna:      mhm
49        Richard:      which I didn't do when I was younger
50        Justyna:      [oh I see]
51        Richard:      [.hh and] I don't know if that's part of
52                      the aging process whether you lose a little
53                      bit of control of your emotions as you get
54                      older
55        Justyna:      °yeah°
```

In this fragment of data, the interviewer refers to the interviewee's words from

extract 9 (above), where he presented himself as surprised by his emotional break-down

in the situation of packing his daughter's possessions before her leaving home. In

response to this account, the interviewer introduces a generalised construction of men

as having difficulty expressing emotion and presents this view of men as a possible

reason for Richard's 'astonishment' at his own emotional reaction (lines 1-7). It could

be argued that the generalised way of framing masculinity plays a very important

interactional role, as it gives the participant a possibility to talk about their experiences

in more abstract terms. In this way the interviewer gives the participant choice to

distance themselves from this generalised construction or engage with it. Interestingly,

the self-repair in interviewer's turn (lines 1-3) suggests a certain reluctance and care in

constructing this generalised view of masculinity, an attempt to present it as neutrally as possible. Richard initially accepts the interviewer's construction as a viable explanation (line 10), but then builds it up by adding other categories, which could explain his increased emotionality.

Firstly, the participant introduces a concept of a 'northern English man persona' (lines 15-16), presenting not men in general but men from northern England as those who have trouble expressing emotions. Therefore, he constructs geographic and national origin as more relevant than gender itself in reference to the issue of 'not showing emotions' (line 16). Secondly, Richard distances himself from the 'Northern English man persona', by stating that 'a lot of it was peeled off me' (line 21) because of living in a female-dominated household (line 18-19). In this way he constructs a vision of himself as having had a traditionally masculine way of dealing with emotions, which was changed through his experience of living with 'three women who were very emotional' (lines 24-26). By this point Richard has shifted the focus of the conversation from explaining the issue of being surprised by his emotional reaction to justifying the experiencing of the emotional reaction itself. This shift suggests that the participant is afforded agency in constructing issues which he presents as most relevant for him. The reasons that Richard presents as providing an excuse for his emotional break-down are the experience of living with women, which is presented as 'a big learning curve' (line 31) and the aging process (lines 44-45, 52), which he presents as possibly responsible for losing 'a little bit of control' (lines 52-53). Devising those explanations is employed to mitigate Richard's accountability for 'giving in' to deep emotions and through this maintain his masculine identity. Such a reading is particularly evident in lines 40-42, where Richard presents himself as inherently not likely to succumb to such emotional behaviour. This suggests that Richard presents himself as masculine 'by nature' (line

41), which was 'softened' in a way by his experience of living in a female dominated household and the aging process.

Difficulties with expressing emotions in the context of 'empty nest' are further explored in the following extract.

Extract 13, interview, Will 11.07.07

```
1       Justyna:     general thing (.) a lot of people say that
2                    .hh e men- for men it's m::uch harder to talk
3                    about emotions .h and especially in time in
4                    times of transitions and kind of some things
5                    hh do you think it's true or was it true
6                    in your case
7       Will:        well (.)
8       Justyna:     the the the talking about emotions
9       Will:        I- I- I've never been able to talk about
10                   emotions so er you know and I don't think it
11                   really matters if it's a time of transition
12      Justyna:     [mhm]
13      Will:        [or not]
14      Justyna:     mhm
15      Will:        to be honest
16      Justyna :    [mhm]
17      Will:        [I don't] I don't really find .hh erm (.)
18                   it easy to talk about (.) feelings
19      Justyna:     mhm
20      Will:        erm (.) so er: (.) so, yes I I think I I
21                   would I and (.)I don't think that
22                   particularly  (1.0) particularly varies you
23                   know I think that I think I'm always erm (.)
24                   it's yes I I- and I'm not
25                   quite sure (1.5) whether it is a (.) gender
26                   thing (.) I think maybe partly it is erm and
27                   partly it's a personality thing .hh erm
28                   (.0.5) but erm you know I suppose it's (1.0)
29                   yeah just the way I am I guess
```

In this particular fragment of the data it is the interviewer who introduces the concept of gender as possibly relevant in terms of expressing emotions in the times of transition (lines 1-6). Interestingly, this construction is very subtly but systematically managed by the interviewee. Firstly, Will changes the focus of the construction from general: 'a lot of people say' (line 1) to more much more specific and personal: 'I've never been able to talk about emotions' (line 9-10) distancing himself from the construction, which places gender in the centre of explaining difficulties in expressing

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emotions. He also presents himself as reluctant↑ to accept this as a sole justification by questioning it in lines 24-26: 'I'm not quite sure whether it is a gender thing' and also by providing alternative explanations such as 'personality' (line 27) and 'just the way I am' (line 29).

In this extract the role of the interviewer who introduces the construction of gender as affecting emotional expression is very important as it put the interviewee in a position where he is required to refer to this construction. From one point of view this action of the interviewer could be seen as problematic (see the discussion on Hepburn and Potter, 2005 paper in Chapter VIII) as it has a potential to encourage the participant to fulfil a role of a 'good interviewee' and agree with the interviewer's statement. However, as illustrated by the extracts above, the participants are able to challenge the researcher's categorisations and develop their own, presenting them as more relevant and applicable in the specific context.

Positive aspects of 'empty nest transition'

It is important to note that deviant cases of positive constructions of fathers' emotional reaction after children leaving home are apparent in both interview and naturally occurring data. In the Internet chat room conversations some fathers presented the event of children leaving home as not emotionally overwhelming but as an expected and natural event. A similar construction is created in extract 14.

Extract 14, interview, Chris 11.09.07.

```
1       Justyna:    So erm: (.) how did you feel when Andrew was
2                   em: about to leave home for the first time
3                   (0.8) and how did you prepare (.) as a family
4                   for this event↑
5       Chris:      hh I think we recognised it was going to be
6                   inevitable (.) so it didn't come as any great
```

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```
7                          shock (0.7)
8          Justyna:        mhm
9          Chris:          it was more a question of making sure he felt
10                         happy
11         Justyna:        [yeah]
12         Chris:          [about] being dropped off at university (.)
13                         because he was away at university in
14                         Middlesbrough which is three hours drive away
15         Justyna:        mhm
16         Chris:          but he has relatives in that area and I think
17                         he felt reasonably comfortable a- a- and at
18                         home fairly quickly (.) he knew it was only
19                         going to be for ten or twelve weeks and he'd
20                         be back home at Christmas
21         Justyna:        mhm
22         Chris:          (1.0) so it wasn't really that big a deal on
23                         our part (.) I suspect it was a much bigger
24                         deal from his perspective
```

After being asked about his feelings related to his son leaving home (lines 1-4), Chris presents this event as 'inevitable' (line 6) and not 'a great shock' (line 6-7). Interestingly, his use of footing 'we' attributes this account not only to himself but possibly to his whole family, which category was earlier introduced by the interviewer (line 3). Overall, Chris's construction presents his son's leaving as expected and not an emotionally overwhelming event. Moreover, in his account Chris orients to his son's feelings as of greater importance: 'it was more a question of making sure he felt happy' (lines 9-10). He contrasts his as well as his wife's (the use of 'our' in line 23) perception of the event (line 22) with the suspected perception of leaving by his son: 'I suspect it was much bigger deal from his perspective' (lines 23-24). Interestingly, even though the interviewer uses a category describing emotional reaction 'feel' (line 1), Chris does not incorporate it in his account of his reaction, but instead uses categories more appropriate for describing a cognitive response, such as 'I think', 'we recognised' (line 5) or 'big deal' (line 22). By using this discursive strategy, Chris presents his reaction to his son leaving as not emotional but more rational.

Extract 15, interview, Alex 12.07.07

```
1          Justyna:        So er how how did you feel when she said that
2                          she wanted to go away for (  )
3          Alex:           well I thought it was a (.) great idea↑
```

```
4        Justyna:      mhm=
5        Alex:         =to do that to have a gap year I think (.)
6                      probably (.) I was (1.3) concerned (.)
7                      because she was quite young and going on her
8                      own
9        Justyna:      °yeah°
10       Alex:         to south America
11       Justyna:      yeah
12       Alex:         er::r (0.8) and she was planning to travel a
13                     lot
14       Justyna:      mhm
15       Alex:         so very (.) much keen that she did it (.)
16                     a::h and (.) worried but not unduly worried
17       Justyna:      mhm
18       Alex:         we accepted that it was (1.5) part of growing
19                     up
```

Here the complexities of footing take a slightly different form than in the extract 15. The shift in speaking position is apparent in lines 3 ('I thought') and line 18 ('we accepted') and is employed in the construction of reaction to the event of a daughter leaving home. Alex presents his reaction to his daughter leaving quite ambivalent. Firstly, he uses very positive terms: 'I thought it was a great idea' (line 3), 'we accepted that it was part of growing up' (lines 18-19) but then incorporates more negative emotions: 'I was concerned' (line 6). Similar juxtaposition of accounts is repeated in lines 15-16, where Alex presents himself as 'very much keen that she did it' but at the same time 'worried'. However, this more emotional construction is quickly justified and presented as 'not unduly' (line 16). The rationalisation of the 'worrying' and being 'concerned' (line 6) is done by referring to Chris's daughter age: 'she was quite young' as well as her plans after leaving home: 'she was (…) going on her own (…) to South America (..) and planning to travel a lot' (lines 7-13). Those circumstances are presented as justifying the feelings of worry. Overall, Alex constructs his reaction to his child leaving as very rational. He presents himself as positive, supportive and only 'reasonably' worried, which makes him appear a 'good parent' and a sensible person. In order to present his reaction as even more rational and justifiable he constructs the final part of his account from the position 'we' (line 18), which could be interpreted as referring to a footing of a couple, in Alex's case himself and his wife.

By shifting the speaking position from 'I' to 'we' the interviewee achieves additional validation of his 'rational' reaction to his daughter leaving home. It is not only he but also his wife that has similar understanding of this event, making the reaction shared and therefore more acceptable and justifiable.

Overall, as in the 'naturally occurring' data, in the interviews there are also deviant cases of accounts constructing fathers' reaction to children leaving home as not emotional, but rational and rather positive. Those deviant cases add to the sensation of a variability and depth in the construction of emotionality after children leaving.

Fathers' versus mothers' emotions

Another important element of the fathers' constructions of their reactions to children leaving home is a strategy of comparing their responses with those of their partners, the mothers. This analytical thread was common in my Internet data, where the 'experts' in their articles presented mothers as better prepared to deal with emotional challenges of the 'empty nest' than fathers. Also, mothers in their Internet chat-room conversations oriented strongly to the issue of a difference between men's and women's experiences in relation to the children leaving home. The same contrasting strategy was also prevalent in the interviews with fathers.

Extract 16, interview, Malcolm 16.07.07

```
1       Justyna:    what about your wife do you think that e- (.)
2                   the kind of the transition of (.) your e-
3                   daughter moving er: from home .hh changed her
4                   in some way
5       Malcolm:    .hh tcht (.) not really (.) er::m (0.8) I
6                   mean she I think she still probably misses
7                   her actually being there
8       Justyna:    mhm
9       Malcolm:    sort of- perhaps more than I do I can you
10                  know I can sort of (.) .hhh (.) she probably
11                  thinks about it more
12      Justyna:    aha
13      Malcolm:    I just kind of accept it most of the time
```

```
14       Justyna:     mhm
15       Malcolm:     er:: until you get one of those phone calls
16                    that says you know I've done something stupid
17                    you know hehe
18       Justyna:     hehe
19       Malcolm:     broke my leg or something like that
20       Justyna:     yeah:h
21       Malcolm:     .hh erm:m (1.0) and I think probably my wife
22                    (.) thinks about that side of it more and
23                    worries a bit more
24       Justyna:     mhm
25       Malcolm:     about what she's doing and so on [erm]
26       Justyna:                                      [mhm]
27       Malcolm:     I tend to kinda (.) you know  I worry if it
28                    happens hehe there's no point in worrhhying
29                    beforehand
```

In extract 16 Malcolm constructs his wife's reaction to their daughter leaving home in opposition to his own reaction. He presents his wife as missing their daughter 'perhaps more than I do' (line 9), thinking about the event more (lines 10-11) and worrying 'a bit more' (line 23) about possible accidents that could happen to their daughter (line 19), even before they actually happen (lines 28- 29). On the other hand Malcolm presents himself as 'just kind of accepting it' (line 13) and worrying only when there are grounds for it (lines 27-28). In this way Malcolm creates an account of his wife as more emotional and less rational than him in her reaction to their daughter leaving.

A similar discursive strategy is also used in extract 17, however interestingly the mother is presented here as suppressing her emotions after the children leaving.

Extract 17, interview, Richard 08.02.07

```
1        Justyna:     and what about her ((wife)) reaction to: to
2                     your daughter leaving (0.5) .h did [she]
3        Richard:                                        [m- me wife↑]
4        Justyna:     yes
5        Richard:     yes (.) she was upset yeah she was upset but
6                     she .hh (1.0) she's a very she's very strong
7                     you know
8        Justyna:     mhm
9        Richard:     she's a nurse
10       Justyna:     mhm
11       Richard:     erm: and erm .hh (.) and deals with her
12                    emotions w- well (0.5) sometimes too well .hh
```

```
13        Justyna:     mhm
14        Richard:     you know wht I mean- she's t- sometimes .hh
15                     too stoic (.)
16        Justyna:     mhm
17        Richard:     but erm (.) .hh hh yes she was upset (…)(0.5)
18                     she she she was upset yeah hh
19        Justyna:     mhm
20        Richard:     but she she sh:: (.) she's not the sort of
21                     woman who would make a big deal of it you
22                     know
23        Justyna:     mhm
24        Richard:     but she was upset yeah
```

In extract 17 Richard presents his wife as 'upset' (line 5, 17, 18 and 24) but at the same time 'very strong' (line 6) and 'a nurse' (line 9). The use of this professional membership category is designed to explain the attributes that Richard assigned to his wife such as her stoicism in the face of emotion (line 15) and ability to deal with her feelings well (lines 11-12). This quality of emotional-control is presented by Richard in slightly negative way by the use of the formulation 'sometimes too well' (line 12). Interestingly, this account of Richard's wife's emotional strength comes directly after interviewee's construction of an intensive emotional reaction during packing his daughter belongings (see extract 9). In this way the contrast is created between a construction of Richards expressed emotionality and his wife's reserved reaction.

So far the fathers presented their reactions to children leaving home in opposition to those of their partners. In the following fragment of data, the interviewee subtly questions such construction.

Extract 18, interview, Malcolm 16.07.07

```
1         Justyna:     could you- if you could compare (.) for
2                      instance your reaction to your erm: your
3                      daughter leaving and your wife's reaction (.)
4                      how did it how did °it [look like°]
5         Malcolm:                            [.hhh] I think my
6                      wife was was obviously a bit more upset and
7                      probably hhh (.) probably more concerned at
8                      least (.) sort of outwardly I mean us chaps
9                      tend to .hh feel=
10        Justyna:     =mhm
11        Malcolm:     you have to be the strong one and so on
12        Justyna:     mhm
13        Malcolm:     I mean you know whilst deep down you are
```

```
14                        probably feeling (.) very similar you know
15        Justyna:        mhm
```

In this extract the interviewer asks Malcolm to compare his and his wife's 'reaction' (lines 2 and 3) to their children leaving. Initially, the interviewee presents their reactions as contrasting, with negative emotions ('upset', line 6; 'concerned', line 7) attributed to the mother. The use of the word 'obviously' (line 6) is an interesting one, hinting at the existing expectation that women experience stronger and more negative emotions when children leave home. However, this expectation and construction of mothers as more affected by the 'empty nest' is immediately put into question by the use of the words 'at least sort of outwardly' (lines 7-8). Malcolm presents men in general as experiencing very similar emotions to mothers, however being unable to express them due to perceived expectation of behaving as 'the strong one' (lines 8-15). This construction as in previous extracts in this chapter refers to the traditionally masculine representation of men ('chaps', line 8) as 'strong' (line 11). It is also blamed by the interviewee as prohibiting fathers from expressing their feelings of concern and worry in the situation of children leaving home. This construction is quite a dramatic one, presenting fathers as only able to experience their emotions inwardly and burdened with their common belief that they need to appear 'strong'.

Another interesting feature of this extract is the use of cognitive categories such as 'feel' and 'think'. In her question the interviewer asks about the participant's 'reaction', which is a very general term cognitive term. In his answer the interviewee uses categories associated with emotions such as 'concerned' (line 6), 'upset' (line 7) and 'feel' (line 9). In this way Malcolm present his and his wife's reaction in emotional rather than rational terms and creates a construction of themselves as sensitive people, in touch with their emotions (even though he may not show them outwardly himself).

In conclusion, the analysis of extracts presented above is congruent with the findings from the 'naturally occurring' data as it also reveals the construction of fathers'

reactions to children leaving as contrasting with those of mothers. In most of the cases the mothers are presented as more emotionally affected than fathers, whose reactions are constructed as more rational and justified. Despite this, there are also deviant cases presenting an opposite account, where the mother is presented as 'the strong one' and avoiding expression of emotion. Most importantly the strategy of contrast is employed in both of those cases and parents' reactions are presented as juxtaposed. These findings also create a similar account to these developed in the existing research in the field of the 'empty nest' which presents mothers as more affected than fathers by children leaving (Lomrantz et al., 1996; Karp et al, 2004; Lewis et al., 1979; Hartocollis, 2005; Ryff and Seltzer 1996; Norman and Scaramella, 1980; Bovey, 1995) and in this way utilise the account of contrast between men and women.

Conclusions

This chapter focused on the ways in which the fathers whose children leave home construct their emotions in response to this event. The analysis was based on two types of data: the interviews with fathers as well as their Internet postings from the website dedicated to parenting. The overarching conclusion is that in both of those very different contexts the fathers presented themselves as deeply affected by the event of children leaving home and were willing to talk or write about their emotions during this time. It is important to note that even though there was a noticeable variability in those constructions of emotions, most of the authors oriented to the intensity and unexpectedness of those feelings. Interestingly, in many extracts this construction of emotionality went together with the negotiation of masculinity. The fathers, who presented emotions as unexpected and beyond their control, undermined their rational accountability for experiencing those feelings. In this way, their emotional behaviours such as crying were warranted (Edwards, 2000) and did not threaten the fathers' sense

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of masculinity. Those strategies of 'secure' (in regards to masculinity) emotional expression are of great significance if we take into account a limited amount of studies investigating men's emotional discourse. The current study enriches the literature on the circumstances in which men talk about emotions (Walton et al., 2004; Buzzanell & Turner, 2003; Bennett, 2007) by providing evidence of another context in which men can express emotions, i.e. the event of children leaving home. Secondly, the analysis here provides the evidence that talking about feelings does not need to jeopardise men's masculine position. Through the use of discursive devices aiming to mitigate accountability for experiencing emotions, fathers succeed in maintaining their masculine status.

Constructions of fathers' emotionality in the context of children leaving home have been found to be a common analytical thread across all types of data analysed in the chapters based on 'naturally occurring' data. Therefore, not only is there a similarity across 'naturally occurring data' and the interview data but across different types of 'naturally occurring data'. 'Experts' in their articles and 'mothers' in Internet chat room conversations largely constructed fathers as emotionally incompetent. The 'third parties' presented dads as not prepared for the constructed emotional turmoil of the 'empty nest transition' and reacting problematically to the challenges, such as being supportive towards a female partner. The expert articles' authors as well as mothers oriented to fathers' gender and characteristics traditionally constructed as stemming from it as responsible for men's incapability of dealing with emotions. For instance, they constructed an account of fathers as reluctant to talk about their feelings and not involved in 'hands-on' parental duties. Those gendered qualities were then in turn presented as decreasing the expectations towards the fathers in terms of their dealing with emotions.

Fathers themselves also oriented to emotions during the time of children leaving in their 'naturally occurring' Internet chat-room conversations. Interestingly, whilst talking about emotions men focused on the intensity and overwhelming quality of emotions, which seems to be in contrast with earlier research which presented ability to control emotions as highly desirable and common among men (Seidler, 1997). However, by analysing the functional aspects of those constructions I have found that presenting emotions as intensive and overwhelming is a strategy employed to decrease fathers' accountability for experiencing such strong emotions. This in turn is utilized to maintain a strong, masculine identity. Similarly to the accounts created by 'experts' and mothers, fathers also presented themselves as not prepared for the intensity of emotions related to children leaving home.

Looking at the findings above from the point of view of the wider fatherhood literature, fathers in my research seem to be eager to redefine their parenting role, which traditionally has been viewed in terms of the breadwinning and nurturing responsibilities (Mintz, 1998). For the first time we see such a domination of talk about emotions in reference to fathering role. Even though men in my study still acknowledge their responsibilities to support (practically and emotionally) their children and partners, they also see themselves as those who need support in dealing with emotions. However, in presenting themselves in such a way, the fathers recognise the danger of losing their traditionally masculine image of a strong, rational person. Thanks to the discursive analysis of the data we can see that the fathers try to manage this danger on a micro, interactional level.

With their attention on the emotional experiences of the 'transition to empty nest' the image of fatherhood created in this research seems to more alike the concept of 'New Fatherhood' in general parenting literature (Robinson and Barret, 1986; Parke, 1996; Swedin, 1996). Obviously the existing concept of a 'New Father' does not extend

to the 'empty nest' stage, but focuses on fathers' experiences with young children. Therefore I would suggest the emergence of a concept of a 'New Empty Nester Dad', who does not shy away from talking about his emotions, but fights for his right to express them against the social expectations characteristic for traditional masculinity. This is because 'Empty Nester Dad' recognises the contradictions of the expectations of modern fathering, which promotes everyday, hands on, practical and emotional involvement in parental duties (Swedin, 1996; Bergman and Hobson, 2002; Huttunen, 1996) and the expectations of traditional masculinity prohibiting outwardly expression of emotions (Wall and Arnold, 2007). 'Empty Nester Dad's' biggest challenge is to manage those contradicting expectations in order to maintain their integrity and a sense of masculinity. This difficult management task is achieved in everyday discourses.

It is important to note that not all fathers constructed the experience of their children leaving as emotionally moving. Some accounts of the transition presented the event in positive terms, as something anticipated, awaited and in many ways liberating. The positive aspects of leaving home were also recognised in reference to a young adult moving away. Observing the child becoming an independent and happy adult was constructed as an ultimate compensation for the negative emotional experiences endured by the fathers or the siblings staying at home.

Chapter VII. Dealing with the 'transition to empty nest': key factors in the eyes of fathers.

One of the main directions in the existing literature on the 'empty nest' is the exploration of the circumstances presented as facilitating or impeding the process of coping with children leaving home. Through the analysis of the interviews with fathers (see Chapter IV for the details of this string of data) I have found that there is common ground between existing literature and the findings from this data. The constructions of the circumstances influencing parents' coping with the approaching 'empty nest' were not evident in the Internet data. Therefore, in this chapter I focus on how the findings from the interview data engage with and enrich the existing 'empty nest' literature on 'factors' affecting parents' perception of children leaving home as well as their coping with this transition.

The issue of 'factors' determining the 'difficulty level' of the experience of 'empty nest' has usually been tackled using quantitative research methods and/or adopting a realist methodological position. An advantage of such an approach is simplicity of the final findings. In the 'positivist' research tradition some 'factors' are labelled as having positive or negative influence on the parents' adaptation to the transition. However, at the same time this approach does not attend to the intricacies of the context and overlooks the variability and potential ambivalence of the relationship between the 'factors' and the process of coping with children leaving home. Also most of this line of research is concerned with identification of 'factors' presented as influential for parents in general, without focusing the attention on either mothers or fathers (Cooney and Mortimer, 1999 for a review). Taking into consideration my earlier observations regarding the common identification of parenthood with motherhood in the 'expert' accounts of empty nest, there is a strong possibility that fathers are omitted

in this line of research. However, in my analysis of the interviews with fathers, I have found that they often oriented to the issue of the circumstances influencing their perception and adaptation to children leaving home. The 'factors' referred to in this chapter, have already been discussed in a wider context in chapter II. The summary below is designed to refresh the issues most relevant to the data in question.

One of the 'factors' presented in the existing literature as particularly significant is the timing of a child's leaving, suggesting that 'early' home leaving is more distressing in contrast with what is referred to as 'normative home leaving' (Cooney and Mortimer, 1999; Neugarten, 1976; Harkins, 1978; McLanahan and Sorensen, 1985). The lack of marital support and satisfaction was constructed as particularly relevant during the early 'stage' of the transition, which is referred to as the 'launching period' (Aldous, 1978). Also, the number of children as well as their gender was presented as influencing parents' perception of the event of leaving. DeVries (1991) and Lewis et al., (1979) constructed parents as being more concerned when they had few offspring and when the children were sons rather than daughters. The greater difficulty of dealing with a son leaving was attributed to alleged higher level of conflict between parents and sons (Suitor and Pillemer, 1988). On the other hand, the continuity of contact with children after they have left home was identified as important for parents to view their life after 'empty nest' as 'satisfying' (White and Edwards, 1990). The children's birth order was also identified as influential; however there was no unified stance on this issue in the literature. Some authors constructed the leaving of the oldest child as most stressful (Anderson, 1990; DeVries, 1991), whereas others viewed the loss of the youngest child as most difficult (Lewis et. al., 1989). The research also presented conflicting results in reference to the professional involvement of mothers and fathers. Both DeVries (1991) and Rubin (1979) reported that parents without a strong professional career were less affected by their children leaving home because

they were presented as deriving more sense of accomplishment from their children success such as going to university. On the other hand, Lerner and Hultsch, (1983) as well as Williams (1977) and Adelmann et al. (1989), presented parents and mothers in particular as perceiving the transition as difficult. This was constructed as stemming from the loss of 'parenting role' when it was the sole focus of the person's life (Williams, 1997).

In my research I wanted to investigate the issues described above from a different, more discursive perspective and focus on the ways in which fathers themselves constructed different 'factors' as facilitating or hindering the process of coping with the event of children leaving home. The topic of circumstances affecting parents' adaptation to the 'empty nest' did not emerge in the analyses of naturally occurring data (Chapters IV-VI); however, it did emerge within an interview setting presented in this chapter. Notably, as an interviewer I introduced some of the common social categories into my conversations with fathers and thus invited them to position themselves in relation to my constructions (Hepburn & Potter, 2005). However, my interview schedule was not designed with the existing literature in mind (see Appendix 1 for the full interview schedule). Also, my analysis of the data was systematic and did not focus solely on the issue of 'factors'. In contrast with the previous research, the emphasis of my analysis is on the discursive actions done by the talk about the circumstances. In addition, during the interviews, I often found that fathers oriented themselves to the issue of 'factors' influencing the perception of children leaving home even before I was able to raise the subject. I shall attend to the issue of my role in the interviews and its methodological consequences in the analysis which follows and in detail in Chapter VIII. However, here I firstly discuss the 'factors' already mentioned in the existing literature and the ways they are constructed by the fathers in an interview setting. Secondly, the 'factors', which are not recognised in the existing research, but

which fathers themselves oriented to in my conversations with them are discussed. Finally, the discursive objectives achieved through the construction of certain circumstances as facilitating or hindering the process of adaptation to the 'empty nest' is addressed.

Engaging with the findings of existing literature

Early home-leaving

One of the 'factors' presented in the literature as hindering the process of coping with children leaving home is the perception of the event as happening too early. The majority of the literature on the event of young adults leaving home looks at the issue of timing of leaving from the perspective of the children rather than that of the parents (e.g. Seiffge-Krenke, 2006). However, in my research I focus on the timing from the fathers' viewpoint and how it influences their perception of the children leaving.

Before the commencement of the first extract, Bill, talked about his eldest son who went to university at the age of seventeen because of his two-year advancement in the schooling system.

Extract 1, interview, Bill 05.10.06

```
1        Justyna:    I was thinking (.) erm (.) what did you think
2                    about your first son living erm leaving home
3                    and erm and at quite an early age
4                    (…)
5        Bill:       I was very unhappy about him going to
6                    university at the age of seventeen anyway
7        Justyna:    mhm
8        Bill:       because I felt he was too young and a
9                    socially he::e em::m (.) was never (.)
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10                          terrihhfically er:
11          Justyna:        hehe
12          Bill:           skilled (.)(...) so I thought it wasn't going
13                          to work out (.)
```

Bill presents the issue of his son's early home-leaving as quite a negative event: 'I thought it wasn't going to work out' (line 12-13) but also as making him 'very unhappy' (line 5). However, what is particularly important is that it is not the timing per se, which is constructed as having a negative impact on the son and the father, but the perceived lack of social skills due to his young age (lines 8-13). This is an important advancement over the existing literature, which does not provide the reasons why the early home-leaving is constructed as more problematic in comparison to 'normative home-leaving' (Cooney and Mortimer, 1999; Neugarten, 1976; Harkins, 1978). While this is a construction developed only by one person and cannot be generalised or treated as a discursive 'pattern', I want to argue that there may be a variety of reasons constructed as making early home leaving difficult for parents. Therefore, the father here does not present the early timing itself as challenging but his son's inexperience in social situations, which are constructed as necessary for successful homeleaving. By recognising and attending to the requirements for a successful transition to adulthood, and at the same time his son's shortcomings in this matter, Bill creates his identity as a rational person, knowledgeable about life and its rules but also an attentive father knowing his own child well.

Rob, whose son left home while still in college in order to move in with his girlfriend also orients to the issue of timing.

Extract 2, interview, Rob 04.10.06

```
1           Justyna:        (.) and uhm (.) what did you think about the
2                           timing of his leaving?
3           Rob:            .hhhh (0.8) the timing ((cough)) I
4                           thought I thought, initial, my initial
5                           reaction was (.) he's very young and his
6                           girlfriend is even younger
```

```
7        Justyna:    uhm
8        Rob:        (.) and uhm (.) and I think that was just an
9                    instant reaction, but the more I thought
10                   about it the more I thought the timing was
11                   quite good
12       Justyna:    uhm
13       Rob:        erm:: (.) .hh ((sigh)) that (.) it would
14                   probably help him to (.) develop (.) skills
15                   and uhm (.) independence
16       Justyna:    uhm
17       Rob:        and uhm, so I was quite (.) quite encouraging
18                   of him to leave. I didn't want him to make
19                   any mistakes though but
20       Justyna:    [sure]
21       Rob:        [I knew] that he would have to make mistakes
22                   but uhm((sigh)) yes, you feel like (.) .hhh
23                   protecting him but in a way letting him go is
24                   is is is is protecting him as well.
```

As in the case of Bill, Rob presents himself as initially focused on his son's and the son's girlfriend's young age (lines 5-6). Interestingly, Rob does a lot of self-repair at the beginning of his answer (lines 4-5), which along with the audible in-breath, pause and a cough in line 3 could suggest some kind of interactional trouble (Sacks, 1995). In this case all those qualities of speech make the account look as very carefully and cautiously constructed. However, what is different in Rob's construction of the timing of his child's leaving is the appreciation of the positive aspects of the decision to leave home: 'it would probably help him to develop skills and independence' (lines 14-15). This appreciation of the benefits of early home-leaving is constructed as influencing a more positive reaction to the event itself: 'so I was quite encouraging of him to leave' (lines 17-18). Despite the recognition of the benefits and his encouraging reactions, Rob presents himself as having certain reservations about his son's early home leaving: 'I didn't want him to make any mistakes though' (lines 18-19). The effect of this ambivalence in Rob's response is also built in lines 21-24, where he presents himself as recognising the inevitability of his son 'making mistakes' and resulting from it urge to protect him. Interestingly, this need is constructed by Rob as a normative reaction, applicable not only to himself but also to others in the same situation. This meaning is achieved through the systematic ambiguity of 'you' in the

line 22, which could have a singular as well as plural reference (Sacks, 1995). Due to the use of 'you' Rob assigns his willingness to protect his son not only to himself (singular) but also to everybody (plural) in a similar context. The sense of ambivalence in Rob's constructed perception of his son's leaving continues in the lines 23-24, where he again presents 'letting go' as fulfilling the function of protecting his son, even though in a different way.

The analysis of the extracts presented above is supportive of the position that early home-leaving is potentially problematic for parents. The fathers attending to the issue of timing present it as impacting on their reaction to the children leaving, however they do not evaluate it as an entirely negative or positive 'factor'. What seems to be more relevant is not the timing per se, but the children's apparent lack of social skills and experience, which are presented as related to a young age. These qualities are presented as having more negative impact on the fathers' coping with the children leaving than the timing itself. At the same time, in extract 2 the process of early home leaving is presented by the fathers as helping young people to acquire the necessary social skills and life experience. In this way entering the transition of leaving home at an early age is constructed as beneficial.

The constructions developed by these two fathers present the timing of children leaving in a much more ambivalent way than the accounts in the literature, which focuses on negative aspects of children leaving home early. However, from the discursive point of view we can also look at the constructions analysed above in reference to their function. In the extracts above, by presenting themselves as concerned about the timing or readiness of the children to leave home, fathers do 'being a good/protective parent' and in this way construct their identity in those terms. Through recognising the requirements for successful 'transition to adulthood' participants build up an identity of an 'experienced and knowledgeable person', who knows about the

'rules of the world'. The participants seem to recognise the context of an interview as a setting relevant for this particular version of identity. This may be due to the fact that they have been recruited as incumbents of the category 'fathers' and the interviewer's questions refer to their fathering experiences. This may therefore lead to the interviewee's wanting to present themselves as 'good' members of this category.

What is most important about the discursive approach to the issue of 'factors' is that they are not treated as stable variables influencing the fathers' perception of the event of children leaving home. That is why I use inverted commas whilst referring to this issue. Considering such 'factors' as stable entities (not tied to the particular conversational goals) essentially affecting the process of coping with launching children is characteristic for realist methodological positions, which treat language as a transparent medium. From my analytical position the talk of 'factors' is discursively analysed as achieving a certain interactional goal such as establishment of a desirable and appropriate identity for a particular setting. Thus above, the focus of the analysis is more on how the identity work achieved is about being a 'good parent' or an 'experienced and knowledgeable person' as showcased above.

Number of children

Another 'factor' reported by the existing studies as influencing parents' perception and reaction to the event of children leaving home is the number of children they have.

Extract 3, interview, Alex 12.07.07

```
1      Justyna:    Em- do you think that the whole change and
2                  transition that you're kindof in the middle
3                  of at the moment
4      Alex:       yeah
5      Justyna:    do you think it kindof has some influence on
```

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6                        your life?
7                        (…)
8           Alex:        And a:lso I think- I mean- (1.3) I might be a
9                        bad start cause actually at the moment (.)
10                       you know reasonably (.) trouble free for us
11          Justyna:     mhm
12          Alex:        but I do know a lot of people who find it a
13                       real struggle (0.8) a::nd (2.0) so fors- I
14                       certainly know one friend who's got one child
15          Justyna:     mhm
16          Alex:        and er:: she's finding it really difficult
17          Justyna:     mhm
18          Alex:        So maybe having three children makes it a bit
19                       easier
20          Justyna:     mhm
21          Alex:        er:: (.) the fact that it happens over time
22                       er:: (.) cause another couple we know
23                       (1.3) the daughter left to go to university
24                       at the same time the son decided to go to
25                       col- away to college at 16 so they [sudd]enly
26          Justyna:                                         [a::h]
27          Alex:        down you know
28          Justyna:     yeah
29          Alex:        having had two children then none
30          Justyna:     yeah
31          Alex:        So I know that- (.) you know that people do
32                       find it difficult but I have to say at the
33                       moment (.) I think we haven't found it (.)
34                       too difficult
```

In extract 3 Alex constructs his experience of his children leaving home as 'reasonably trouble free for us' (line 10), which shifts the footing from which the construction is generated from an individual to that of a couple or a family. Through this alteration Alex adds certain credibility to his construction of the transition as unproblematic as he presents it as relevant not only to himself but also to other members of his family. Alex contrasts his experience with those of other people and presents their experience as a 'real struggle' (lines 13) and 'really difficult' (line 16). ECF 'real' is used to strengthen the credibility of the account (Edwards and Potter, 1992). Alex presents the difficulties that other parents have with the transition as stemming from having only 'one child' (line 14), whereas having 'three children' (line 18) is constructed as making the experience 'a bit easier' (lines 18-19).

This construction presents the circumstances of having just one child and shares a common ground with earlier research, which suggests that the experience of children leaving home is more stressful for parents who have fewer children (Lewis et

al., 1979; DeVries, 1991). However, Alex's account elaborates on this assumption by orienting to the issue of timing (line 21), presenting a situation where both children leave at the same time as also 'difficult' (line 31). Therefore, the 'factor' of 'graduality' of children leaving is constructed as making the transition challenging even in the situation of having more than one child: 'so they suddenly down having had two children and then none' (lines 25-29). In this case it is the idea of 'suddenness' that is presented as particularly trying.

However, from a discursive point of view having more children is presented as making the 'transition' easier and therefore is used as a justification for categorising the experience as rather easy and 'reasonably trouble free' (line 10). Alex needs to validate his construction of his own experience as not difficult in order to avoid the reading of his words as presenting him as not concerned by the event of children leaving, which would in turn jeopardise his identity of a 'good parent'. A construction orienting to the same issue is generated in the extract 4. Just before the extract commences Ben talks about his involvement with his younger children who are still living with him at home.

Extract 4, interview, Ben 26.07.06

```
1       Justyna:    Do you think that uhm having uhm the younger
2                   children at home uhm still at home
3       Ben:        yeah
4       Justyna:    influenced a bit your reactions uhm your to
5                   your older children's leaving (.) do you
6                   think it felt maybe more secure, because you
7                   [have]
8       Ben:        [you still got more]
9       Justyna:    yeah
10      Ben:        ABSOLUTELY it makes it a lot easier, it makes
11                  it a lot easier, because they are well (.)
12                  it's like people sa::y about err (.) if
13                  you've got say two dogs and one of them dies
14                  you still got one that you gotta take out for
15                  a walk, still barking, still making a noise,
16                  it's not like silence (.) understand
17      Justyna:    mhm
18      Ben:        my dog (.) I mention this to my-, I had my
19                  dog, my dog died just before Christmas
20      Justyna:    oh
21      Ben:        and I only have one and that was really
```

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22                    strange because house seemed so quiet uhm but
23                    (.) absolutely, that makes a difference. If
24                    you've got a succession of children somewhere
25                    or another the::n (.) yeah (.) the loss is
26                    kindo different
```

The interviewer introduced the concept of some of the children staying at home as ameliorating the reaction to others' leaving (lines 1-7). Ben joins the interviewer in this construction by completing the turn, which is evident in the overlapping speech (lines 7-8) and the use of extreme case formulation (ECF) 'ABSOLUTELY' (line 10). Also, Ben presents the 'factor' of some children staying at home as making the transition 'a lot easier' (line 10). To explain the influence of some children staying at home he uses a simile of losing only one of two dogs, which still requires the person to continue performing activities which are expected of somebody who has a dog (lines 12-16). It could be read that having some children still at home helps to maintain the routine of a parent, which is therefore presented as changing the perception of 'loss' (lines 23-26).

In conclusion, a large number of children alone is not presented by the participants as benefiting the parents during the time of home-leaving transition. In contrast to the literature (Lewis et al.; 1979; DeVries, 1991), in my analysis I orient to fathers' complex and subtle accounts, which emphasise other circumstances such as the graduality of the children leaving or the maintenance of the 'parenting' routine. These are the circumstances which the fathers construct as facilitating their adaptation to the 'empty nest'. The discursive analysis of the fathers' words also reveals their attempts at presenting themselves as 'good parents' regardless of categorising their experiences of children leaving home as difficult or not. This is done by developing the explanations for this apparent lack of strain, such as having more children or maintenance of the 'family routine'.

The Sex of the Child

The sex of a child was one 'factor' identified in the existing literature as influencing a level of stress associated with children leaving home, particularly in the case of sons (DeVries, 1991; Suitor and Pillemer, 1988). In the extract below Steven is also attending to sex as possibly influential, but interestingly, he only has sons.

Extract 5, interview, Steven 06.08.07

```
1      Justyna:   What's most interesting for me is to see (.)
2                 this variance and (.) this lots of different
3                 situations and you know (.) life erm
4                 challenges and different things that happen
5                 along the way
6      Steven:    mhm
7      Justyna:   and and you can see a lot of different
8      Steven:    yeah
9      Justyna:   life scenarios
10     Steven:    [yeah]
11     Justyna:   [you ]could say
12     Steven:    yeah yeah
13     Justyna:   that erm: (  )
14     Steven:    .hhh erm of course I can't speak from my own
15                experience but I suspect it's a bit different
16                with daughters as well
17     Justyna:   mhm
18     Steven:    cause we've only got [boys]
19     Justyna:                        [yeah]
20     Steven:    and got nothing to [(   )]
21     Justyna:                      [do you] think it would be
22                different if you've ha- had a daughter
23     Steven:    erm as I say it's very hard to know, isn't it
24                but it e- I suspect that one (.) as a father
25                one would have a different sort of
26                relationship with with a daughter
27     Justyna:   yeah
28     Steven:    than the one you have with with a son .hh and
29                that might be (0.8) that might be more
30                difficult
31     Justyna:   mhm
32     Steven:    and certainly by report (.) I mean fathers
33                are often very protective of their
34                [daughters]
35     Justyna:   [yeah]
36     Steven:    for one thing so .hh you know actually oh
37                crikey she's out there
38     Justyna:   mhm
39     Steven:    she's roaming in you know Manchester or as it
40                might be if it was one of ours if it had been
41                a girl and you'd be thinking o::h
42     Justyna:   [hahaha]
```

```
43        Steven:      [she's] not very safe whereas you don't tend
44                     to think that with the (.) with the boys I
45                     mean they could get beaten up of course but
46                     they yeah (.) but (.) I think on the whole
47                     fathers are perhaps more (.) are more
48                     protective
49        Justyna:     m::m
50        Steven:      of their daughters and therefore will find it
51                     more difficult when they're (.) .hh when
52                     they're at a::h at a distance
```

During a broad discussion about how parents in general deal with the transition of children leaving home, Steven orients to the issue of children's sex by presenting the situation of having a daughter as another 'factor' which he 'suspects' could make the experience 'a bit different' (lines14-16). After a probing question from the interviewer, Steven provides a more general and universal account around the 'different sort of relationship with a daughter' (line 25-26) which is presented as changing the experience of her leaving. The universality of this construction is achieved through the use of impersonal proverbs 'you' and 'one' (lines 24, 25 and 28) (Sacks, 1995). The 'difference in relationship' that Steven constructs is related to the issue of safety. He presents this as a concern particularly relevant in the case of daughters' going out (lines 36-43). Even though Steven recognises sons as in danger of getting 'beaten up' (line 45), he presents this issue as of a less concern than the safety of daughters: 'you don't tend to think that with the boys' (lines 43-44). Interestingly, what exactly constitutes the safety problem with daughters is left unsaid. It could be assumed that the concern is not spelled out because it is presented by the participant as obvious or too distressing to voice.

The 'difference in the relationship' with daughters is not only constructed as stemming from the potential dangers' for girls, but also from the fathers' qualities. Steven constructs fathers as more 'protective' (lines 32-33 and 47-48) towards their daughters and it is this feature of a 'different relationship' a father has with a daughter, which is presented as central to the explanation of this variation. The fathers'

protectiveness towards their daughters is subsequently reconstructed as a difficulty (line 51) rather than simply a difference in experience.

The issue of protectiveness is also oriented to in extract 6.

Extract 6, interview, Alex 12.07.07

```
 1 Justyna: Do you think that (.) some kind of- (.) that
 2          the gender- the difference in gender has had
 3          some influence on your reactions and how you
 4          felt about your children leaving
 5 Alex:    .hh Yeah I think (2.0) I'd worry more- I
 6          worry more about (.) the daughter I worry
 7          more about Brenda (.) I am not sure that's
 8          entirely logical because obviously you
 9          worry about (0.5) sexual attacks on your
10          daughter
11 Justyna: yeah
12 Alex:    but actually the way (.) you know (.) being
13          attacked (.) violence
14 Justyna: mhm
15 Alex:    is perhaps more likely to happen to a boy so
16          you never know and er:: (2.4) and after the
17          event Brenda did tell us about one awkward
18          moment she had in a taxi
19 Justyna: mhm
20 Alex:    when she (.) you know got out quickly
21 Justyna: mhm [mhm mhm]
22 Alex:        [so you ] do realise with hindsight that
23          there were situations which were a bit iffy
24          (.) so I think probably (2.4) there is that
25          element but Brenda is very, very assertive
26 Justyna: aha (.) oh
27 Alex:    whereas Chris
28 Justyna: mhm
29 Alex:    is very (.) relaxed
30 Justyna: mhm
31 Alex:    almost too relaxed
32 Justyna: mhm
33 Alex:    so you can almost you know in different ways
34          you can worry about them because of their
35          personalities
36 Justyna: mhm
37 Alex:    as much as about (0.8) their gender- so
38          Brenda I would worry about because (.) she's
39          a girl
40 Justyna: mhm
41 Alex:    and because she's a bit (.) all over the
42          place she's not very well organised
43 Justyna: mhm
44 Alex:    you know she she does everything on (.) very
45          impulsive
46 Justyna: mhm
47 Alex:    John (.) is totally organised so he is
48          probably the one we worried least about
49 Justyna: mhm
50 Alex:    and Chris (.) because he is the youngest(0.7)
```

```
51             and because he is our baby (.) and because
52             he's too relaxed
53 Justyna:    heheh
54 Alex:       I worry about him for different reasons- so
55             we probably worry about the eldest and the
56             youngest but the one in the middle (.) as it
57             happens (.) probably the least
```

Once the issue of sex is raised by the researcher (lines 1-4) Alex orients to the issue of protectiveness by presenting himself as worried 'more' about his daughter Brenda (lines 5-7). He then questions the justification of those feelings by estimating the possible risks that daughters and sons in general face (lines 6-13). In contrast with extract 5, here Alex voices the danger he sees as particularly relevant to daughters, namely 'sexual attacks' (line 9). The pause in line 9 presents the 'sexual attacks' as a delicate and interactionally troublesome topic. The 'reality' of this sort of sex-related situations is given credibility by Alex through reporting 'a bit iffy' (line 23) event during his daughter's travels, when she had to 'get out quickly' from a taxi (lines 18-20). From this construction it could be concluded that Alex views being female as increasing the risk of sexual attacks which in return leads to more worry about his daughter. However, this account is followed by the introduction of the concept of personality characteristics, which is presented as competing with the issue of sex. Alex compares each of his children in reference to their personalities. He presents his daughter as 'very, very assertive' (line 25) but also 'a bit all over the place (lines 41-42), 'not very well organised' (line 42) and 'very impulsive' (lines 44-45). His youngest son Chris is categorised as 'very relaxed (…) almost too relaxed' (line 27-31). The characteristics of Alex's children are presented as equal to sex reasons for worrying: 'you can worry about them because of their personalities as much as about their gender' (lines 34-37). However, the issue of gender seems to be relevant only in the case of Brenda (lines 38-39), whereas in the case of the sons, John and Chris, it is the personality and age which are important. Interestingly, despite Alex's earlier

recognition of the dangers such as 'being attacked (.) violence', which he presented as more likely to happen to a boy (line 15), Alex still constructs his daughter's experiences as more worrying.

In contrast to extract 6, where children's sex is presented as affecting father's worrying about them, Mark in extract 7 firmly dissociates himself from the concept of a child's sex as influencing his reaction to the children leaving.

Extract 7, interview, Mark 19.07.06

```
1      Justyna:    Do you think er that gender em played some
2                  role in your reaction to (.) the child
3                  leaving maybe the fact that Kate is a girl
4                  you know- maybe made you perceive
5                  this differently because of that
6      Mark:       .hh (9.0) I'm not very aware of that (.) I
7                  mean that it would make a difference (.) I
8                  think what (.) what I'm aware of is (4.0) the
9                  particular relationships between (.) me and
10                 my wife .h and each individual child and and
11                 those childrens'(.) individual (2.0)
12                 characteristics and its you know- the (5.0)
13                 the way they moved (.) the  three of them
14                 moved the house (.) was actually very typical
15                 of them
16     Justyna:    mhm
17     Mark:       as people the three .hh different ways erm
18                 probably actually my (.) closest
19                 relationship was with my oldest (0.8) child
20     Justyna:    mh
21     Mark:       erm: (1.3) and that you know so that (.) made
22                 the difference and that interacts with uhm
23                 with the way that they left (.) I suspect
24                 that was just because he was our first child
25                 (.) and- and- also there was quite a big gap
26                 he's seven years older that- seven to eight
27                 years older
28     Justyna:    mhm
29     Mark:       than than the next one so he (.)was the only
30                 child for quite a long time
31     Justyna:    mhm
32     Mark:       and I think that makes a difference
33     Justyna:    mhm
34     Mark:       I think (.) .hh in terms of what I'm aware of
35                 that kind of thing made more of a difference
36                 than the gender thing
```

In extract 7 it is the interviewer who introduces the issue of child's sex possibly having impact on the father's reaction to children leaving (lines 1-5). After a

very long pause (line 6) indicating trouble with the construction presented by the interviewer, Mark resists this view by presenting himself as 'not very aware of that' (line 6). Instead he provides a competing explanation for the variation in his reaction to his children leaving: 'what I'm aware of is the particular relationships (…) and those children's individual characteristics' (lines 8-12) as affecting the father's reaction (lines 21-22 and line 32). In Mark's construction of the reasons influencing his coping with each of his children leaving, differences in relationships with those children as well as their personal characteristics and the manner of leaving are more important than their sex.

In conclusion, the assumption that the event of a daughter leaving is more stressful than that of a son (DeVries, 1991) is challenged by my data. The only father, who constructs sex as a differentiating factor, does not present this construction as based on his experience but on his expectations based on existing gender stereotypes. On the other hand fathers, who experienced both their daughters' and their sons' departure present other factors such as personality, age and the quality of their relationship with the children as of equal or greater importance than gender. From the discursive point of view the presented above account also achieve other important goals. Firstly, through focusing on the children's personal characteristics and the qualities of the relationship with them, fathers' construct the importance of person's individuality and looking at them as more than beings defined only by their gender. Secondly, through emphasising such a view and challenging the interviewer's constructions of gender, fathers present themselves as reflexive and 'non-traditional' in terms of their views.

Continual involvement

White and Edwards (1990) suggested that parents need to maintain the contact with their children after they leave home in order to view their 'empty nest stage of life' as satisfying. Fathers in my study who presented themselves as continually involved in the life of their children and still providing guidance and support even after their moving out of family home, also constructed the involvement in positive terms. One such example is presented in extract 8.

Extract 8, interview, Rob 04.10.06

```
1     Justyna:    so what do you think changed after your son
2                 left home in a house
3     Rob:        what between us two?
4     Justyna:    yeah
5     Rob:        (sigh) erm (.) well, it's not like he's (.)
6                 disappeared uhm (.) so the change between us
7                 it's not like (.) erm (.) it's not so
8                 profound it's not (.) he's gone and we'd
9                 know even with the first one when he left, he
10                went to university we didn't see him for
11                several weeks
12    Justyna:    uhm
13    Rob:        whereas Tim my youngest son we see him
14                probably at least once a week, in fact I've
15                seen him this morning, he came in this
16                morning and erm I cooked him some breakfast
17    Justyna:    eh
18    Rob:        and erm cause he's at college on a Wednesday
19                and he dropped in to see us and we're seeing
20              him tonight for tea
21    Justyna:    oh, great
22    Rob:        and erm (.) (sigh) so it doesn't feel like
23                he's fully left yet
24    Justyna:    uhm
25    Rob:        and certainly we're still involved and we're
26                still concerned and my wife will ring him (.)
27                and see if he wants any groceries, she's
28                [going]
29    Justyna:    [(( laughter ))]
30    Rob:        grocery shopping tonight and wants to know
31                you know does he need any (.) any groceries,
32                or (.) washing powder or whatever and erm, so
33                she's still (.) struggling to let go of him I
34                think, you know, in a way
35    Justyna:    uhm
36    Rob:        and erm, (.)
37    Justyna:    what about you, do you?
```

```
38        Rob:        ((sigh)) (1.0) well, I suppose I worry, I
39                    don't worry so much about the groceries but
40        Justyna:    mhm
41        Rob:        but erm: I worry about him (.) being able to
42                    (.) run his car and and you know as an
43                    apprentice he needs to buy a lot of tools
44        Justyna:    mhm
45                    (…)
46        Rob:        and erm (.) I feel (.) quite comfortable
47                    that he's nearby, I can talk to him on the
48                    phone I can (.) er:: see him, I know where he
49                    lives (.) it's not like he's disappeared, you
50                    know, [so]
51        Justyna:         [mhm]
52        Rob:        that's my feeling
```

Rob is asked by the interviewer to describe changes after his son has left home (lines 1-2). In the answer to the question Rob constructs the change as 'not so profound' (line 7-8) and goes on to justify this categorisation. He presents his younger son as not 'disappeared' (line 6) and contrasts his leaving home with that of his first son who 'went to university and we didn't see him for several weeks' (lines 9-11). Rob presents himself and his wife as still very practically involved in their younger son's life. He orients to activities, which could be described as characteristic of a situation when a child is still at home: 'I've seen him this morning (…) I cooked him some breakfast' (lines 16), 'we're seeing him tonight for tea' (line 19-20). Rob constructs himself as well as his wife as 'still involved' and 'still concerned' (lines 25-26) about practical issues in their son life such as 'groceries' (line 31, 39), 'car' and 'tools', which he needs to buy for his apprenticeship (lines 41-43). Interestingly, the issues that Rob presents as worrying him and his wife are to an extent normative and bound to gendered categories of 'mother' and 'father' (Sacks, 1995). For instance, his wife is presented as worried by the groceries and Rob reports being concerned about 'tools' (line 43). However, this stereotypically gendered account is not entirely coherent as Rob also presents himself as preparing his son's breakfast (lines 16), which is an activity not stereotypically bound to category 'father'.

In lines 42-47 Rob constructs the account of his continual involvement and close contact with his son as making him 'feel quite comfortable' (line 46). Rob's

reported physical closeness to his son (lines 47-48) is contrasted with a possible disappearance (line 49), which could be read as potentially less comfortable.

In extract 9, Craig orients to his less direct involvement in his daughter's life.

Extract 9, interview, Craig 11.09.07

```
1       Justyna:    How did you prepare erm as a family for for
2                   this kind of this step (.) in in family life=
3       Craig:      =how did we- (.) for the step of her moving
4                   out
5       Justyna:    mhm
6       Craig:      Well aside from (.) erm (1.0) .hh let me
7                   s:::ay (.) I suppose material things like
8                   making sure she had what she would need (.)
9                   when she was living independently at
10                  university .hh er: material things etcetera
11      Justyna:    mhm
12      Craig:      .hh erm (.) as I say we've always been a very
13                  open family er:m
14      Justyna:    mhm
15      Craig:      if any of us have any problems we've always
16                  been able to talk to each [other]
17      Justyna:                              [that's] great
18      Craig:      about those problems or any misgivings that
19                  we might have about whatever
20      Justyna:    yeah
21      Craig:      .hh er:m .hh and er:m (.) so she's a- I think
22                  she has always known that even when she left
23                  home we would still be there as a contact=
24      Justyna:    =mhm
25      Craig:      if she had any problems (.) which she did
26                  from time to time
27      Justyna:    sure
28      Craig:      and we're always only too helpful to e- e-
29                  erm to only too pleased to help her out with
30                  any problems that she could have
31      Justyna:    mhm
32      Craig:      .hh to help her solve those problems herself
33                  but with a little bit of guidance
```

During a discussion about the practical preparations for his daughter leaving (lines 1-10), Craig orients to his emotional involvement in his daughter's life. He categorises his family as 'very open' (lines 12-13) and 'always (…) able to talk to each other about (...) problems or any misgivings' (lines 16-19). Interestingly, Craig constructs this account from the footing of the whole family (lines 12-13) attributing such a perception not only to himself but also to his wife and the daughter. He also presents his wife and himself as continually supportive to his daughter; even after she

left home (lines 22-23). This continual involvement in solving potential problems is constructed by Craig in very positive terms: 'we're always only too helpful (..) only too pleased to help her' (lines 28-29), which presents the couple as continually ready and happy about still being needed by their daughter (line 29).

In the both extracts presented above, the fathers construct themselves as well as their wives as being continually involved in the lives of their children, even after they have left home. This involvement is categorised by fathers in very positive terms, as making them feel comfortable and happy. This suggests that being in close contact with the children and being able to help them solve the problems they have is constructed as easing the 'empty nest' transition. This finding engages with the work of White and Edwards (1990), who also presents parents' continual involvement in their children lives as beneficial for them. However, the discursive approach to the analysis of my data reveals another function of this construction of continual involvement. By presenting themselves as maintaining the support for the children, it could be argued that fathers were building an account of themselves as 'good parents' and create this feature as still important for their identity. More extensive discussion of the maintenance of the fathering identity in my interview data can be found in Chapter VIII.

Birth order

Existing research on the phenomenon of 'empty nest' presents the birth order of children leaving home as influencing their parents' reaction to the event. However, it is not certain whether it is the eldest or the youngest children leaving which is presented as mostly stressful for parents (Anderson, 1990; DeVries, 1991; Lewis et. al., 1989). In the following section I look at how do fathers themselves construct this issue.

Extract 10, interview, Ben 26.07.06

```
1      Justyna:    what was your first reaction about, well when
2                  she told you she's gonna move house at first?
3      Ben:        when she was going to university (.) well
4                  it's interesting you asked that because uhm
5                  (.) I didn't actually find it very hard (.)
6                  because (.) it was the second time (.)
7      Justyna:    mhm
8      Ben:        because when my son went (.) that was much
9                  harder (.)
10     Justyna:    mhm (.) this is very interesting
11     Ben:        yes, cause it's kinda like it's strange for
12                 the first one to go, but then the subsequent
13                 ones you think well that's what people do.
```

In extract 10 Ben compares the experience of his daughter (his second child) leaving with the experience of 'launching' his son (first child) (lines 5-9). He constructs his son's leaving as 'much harder' (line 8-9) than his daughter's leaving because of the novelty of the experience, which in the case of the first child is presented as making the experience 'strange' (line 11). On the other hand the second child leaving is constructed as a very normative event: 'but then the subsequent ones you think well that's what people do' (lines 12-13). Through the use of 'you' and 'people' Ben's construction achieves a meaning of normativity and universality.

Extract 11, interview Bill 05.10.07

```
1      Justyna:    this you know it's different in every case
2                  I think .hh and
3      Bill:       [ well I think in that case I point ]
4      Justyna:    [(depending) on the situation]
5      Bill:       to continuity of having a daughter=
6      Justyna:    =exactly, yeah maybe the case so do you
7                  think that erm  most people (   ) kind of
8                  leaving of your first child this kind o first
9                  erm experience of=
10     Bill:       =I think that was that was quite- that was
11                 mildly traumatic
12     Justyna:    mhm
13     Bill:       yes it was quite (.) a blow and I felt very
14                 sad
```

In the discussion of possible circumstances making the event of children leaving home 'easy' or 'difficult', the interviewer introduces the concept of 'leaving of your first child' (lines 7-8), which is constructed by Bill as 'mildly traumatic' (line 11) and 'quite a blow' (line 13). Bill then moves on to present himself as 'very sad' (lines 13-14) as a consequence of his first son leaving. In contrast to the previous extract, Bill constructs the experience of the first child leaving as much more emotionally moving than Ben. However, both present this experience as more difficult than the leaving of subsequent children. It could be argued that such constructions fulfil a strategy of presenting oneself as a sensitive person.

Professional involvement

Another 'factor' often discussed in the existing literature on 'empty nest' is that of a professional career as facilitating or hindering the process of coping with the children leaving (DeVries, 1991; Rubin, 1979; Lerner and Hultsch, 1983; Williams, 1977 and Adelmann et al., 1989). During the general discussion about the changes that happened after his daughter leaving Malcolm introduces the idea of his wife's new 'permanent part time job' (lines 2-4) making the transition more manageable.

Extract 12, interview, Malcolm 16.07.07

```
1    Malcolm:    She always said and still does (   ) you know
2                that having sort of a permanent part time (.)
3    Justyna:    yeah
4    Malcolm:    job three days a week
5    Justyna:    mhm
6    Malcolm:    had to be one of the best jobs in in
7                Nottinghamshire schools
8    Justyna:    mm
9    Malcolm:    .hh erm it's a nice school
10   Justyna:    oh that's great
11   Malcolm:    it's a bit of a drive away but otherwise you
12               know not too bad (.) erm an until quite
13               recently she's always been quite happy sort
14               of doing that  (…)  So in a
15               way that that's sort of helped us suppose
```

```
16                      because erm (1.0) she- yu know- took her sort
17                      of mind off things perhaps a bit more because
18                      she had other things other things to think
19        Justyna:      mhm
20        Malcolm:      [about]
21        Justyna:      [mhm] as well.
22        Malcolm:      so erm .hh that probably worked out quite
23                      well
24        Justyna:      so do you think that erm your job also helped
25                      [you]
26        Malcolm:      [.hh]
27        Justyna:      a little bit in the transition?
28        Malcolm:      erm I suppose it does in that when you come
29                      to work you don't
30        Justyna:      yeah
31        Malcolm:      you know you surprise yourself sometimes of
32                      how you can sort of forget about things
33        Justyna:      [mhm]
34        Malcolm:      [even] if you have got real sort of you know
35                      (.) major problems (.) .hh sort of buzzing
36                      around your head you have still got to come
37                      to work and concentrate on work
38        Justyna:      sure
39        Malcolm:      haven't you
```

Malcolm constructs both his wife's as well as his own job as 'helping' during the time when their daughter was leaving home (line 15). He presents the effect that their respective jobs had on both himself and his wife as 'helping to take her mind of things' (lines 16-17) and providing 'other things to think about' (lines 18-20). When asked to describe the effect that his own job had on his perception of the transition, Malcolm infers a generalisation from his own experience and presents a job as requiring any person to 'concentrate on work' (lines 36-37) despite 'major problems (…) buzzing around your head' (lines 35-36). The universal meaning of the construction is again achieved through the use of impersonal pronouns 'you' (line 31, 34 and 39) and 'your' (line 36).

In extract 13 the participant instead of a 'job' refers to a category 'career' (line 2) and presents it as making the experience of children leaving home 'easy' (lines 1 and 5).

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Extract 13, interview, Richard 08.02.07.

```
1        Richard: (…)    It's easy for me and Coleen to say cause
2                        I've got career as a designer- she's got a
3                        career as a nurse
4        Justyna:        yeah
5        Richard:        it's (.) relatively easy for us innit (.) but
6                        what if you're (.) .hh a single mother who's
7                        living on on on on benefits
8        Justyna:        mhm
9        Richard:        and then (.) your child leaves (.) you have
10                       no reason for living
11       Justyna:        yeah
12       Richard:        you've gotta look in the mirror and think
13                       well what the bloody hell do I do now you
14                       know
15       Justyna:        yeah
```

Richard contrasts his own and his wife's perception of the event of children leaving home with that of a 'single mother who's living on benefits' (lines 6-7). In this construction having a career is presented as a factor distinguishing between a 'relatively easy' (line 5) transition and utter despair represented by the lack of 'reason for living' (line 10) and uncertainty about the future: 'what the bloody hell do I do now' (line 13). In Richard's view the career has a potential to protect a parent from the extremely negative consequences of children leaving home.

In both extracts analysed above the importance of a professional career during the 'empty nest transition' is emphasised. Having a job is presented as helpful and making the experience easier not only for the fathers themselves but also for their wives and parents in general. This finding represents a common ground with the work of Lerner and Hultsch (1983), Williams (1977) and Adelmann et al. (1989) who also present a professional career as beneficial for parents during the time when children leave home. From a discursive point of view the talk about jobs and professional career adds an important dimension in construction of participants' identity. By presenting a career as a 'factor' facilitating coping with the children leaving and at the same time

ascribing to the professional membership category, the fathers construct their identity as not dominated by their parenting duties.

Marital relationship and support

The final 'factor' presented in the existing literature as influencing parents' perception and reactions to the event of children leaving home is the quality of marital relationship and the marital support. The issue of support was already apparent in the mothers' Internet conversations (discussed in Chapter V), however in that setting it was not constructed as influencing the process of dealing with empty nest. In chat-room discussion mothers formulated support as an unmet expectation towards men, who were presented as not capable of providing support in an effective way. From this point of view it may come as a surprise that here, in an interview settings fathers recognise the importance of marital support in the 'empty nest transition'. For instance, during the discussion about the ways in which parents in general deal with the event of children leaving home, Craig orients to the issue of the marital relationship.

Extract 14, interview, Craig 11.09.07

```
1        Craig:     So I think some people are:: (.) er very
2                   affected by their children moving and some
3                   some people er:: less so
4        Justyna:   mhm (.) .hh what- what do you think is the
5                   main factor determining whether (.) a person
6                   is very kind of
7                   distressed by er:: the children leaving and
8                   some of them look at it more positively
9        Craig:     (1.0) m:: (2.0).hhhh hh eh he that's a good
10                  question but I would s::- (.) I would say
11                  sometimes (.) what could be the problem erm:
12                  (.) with certain couples is it (.) erm .hh
13                  their lives become their own again
14       Justyna:   mhm
15       Craig:     (.) and they have to deal with that change
16                  (.) erm  with all the emotional upheaval that
17                  goes with that
18       Justyna:   mhm
19       Craig:     and (.) I think (1.0) in certain instances
```

```
20                          with certain people it can bring them closer
21                          together .hh and with others it can actually
22                          (0.5)
23          Justyna:        mhm
24          Craig:          move them apart a bit
25          Justyna:        yeah
26          Craig:          or or even more than a bit erm (.) and I
27                          think it depends upon their own support
28                          systems
29          Justyna:        mhm
30          Craig:          if they're able to support- if if they've
31                          been part of a caring supportive family .hh
32                          before their child has left to go away to
33                          university .hh erm (1.0) and I
34                          think that supportiveness will often continue
35                          but I think when that supportiveness .hh
36                          hasn't been there to the same extent
37          Justyna:        mhm
38          Craig:          with a couple erm: (.) and they haven't been
39                          perhaps erm (1.0) tch .hhh (1.2) what should
40                          I say er:: (2.0) aware of each other's (.)
41                          emotional needs
42          Justyna:        mhm
43          Craig:          I think that's p- perhaps where there could
44                          be perhaps more difficulty (.) when their
45                          child moves away
```

The construction of the 'factor' influencing parents' perception of the transition of children leaving home (lines 4-8) is created by Craig in a very subtle and tentative way. Even though it is the interviewee who constructs certain people as 'very affected' (lines 1-2) and some as 'less so' (lines 2-3), the task of pinpointing the reason behind this constructed difference proves problematic, which is exhibited in the two significant pauses and in-breaths in line 9. Moreover, the explanation is constructed in a 'step-by-step' manner, with many pauses in-between every element, which can suggest a difficulty in constructing the account. The participant also uses impersonal and generalising devices such as 'certain couples/instances/people' (lines 12/19/20 respectively), which helps to avoid providing definite and direct explanation.

In line 10, Craig identifies the factor 'determining whether a person is (…) distressed' (lines 5-7) when children leave home as related to 'certain couples' (line 12). The 'problem' (line 12) is further specified as related to the couple's 'support systems' (line 27-28) and awareness of 'each others' emotional needs' (line 40-41), which when they are both utilised 'before their child has left' (line 32) are presented as

continuing after the event (lines 34) and therefore facilitating parents' coping with the transition. On the other hand, when 'supportiveness' (line 34, 35) is absent before children leaving, it is presented by the participant as leading to 'more difficulty when the child moves away' (line 44-45).

Craig's account is consistent with the existing literature as both those sources construct marital/couple support as a factor influencing parental coping with the transition of children leaving home. Also, Craig's 'awareness of each others' emotional needs' (line 40-41) could be seen as corresponding with the concept mentioned in the research as 'marital satisfaction' (e.g. Aldous, 1978). On the other hand, from discursive analytical position, through orienting to the spouses' emotional needs Craig is doing 'being a good husband/partner'. Interestingly, the issue of marital support during the time of children leaving home was also oriented to by mothers in their Internet chat-room conversations. They also constructed partners' emotional awareness as important for successful 'children leaving home transition'; however they also presented fathers' as unable to provide this kind of support effectively. Taking this finding into account supports even further the reading of Craig's emotional awareness account as building up an identity of a 'good husband'.

Interview findings enriching the existing literature

So far in this chapter I focused on the 'factors' presented as hindering or facilitating the parents' coping with the event of children leaving home, which were reported in existing research. My analysis focused on what talk about those 'factors' achieves discursively. The following part of the chapter focuses on the circumstances not mentioned in the available literature but oriented to by participants in my research. By focusing on the 'factors' presented by fathers themselves as relevant and influential

in reference to the adaptation to children leaving I intend to enrich the already existing field of the 'empty nest' research. Furthermore, the use of discursive psychology as an analytic method shifts the existing research into the direction of the functionality of 'factors' talk'

Other events happening at a time of children leaving

A 'factor' presented by one of the fathers as facilitating the process of coping with the children leaving home could be categorised as 'other coinciding events'.

Extract 15, interview, Steven: 06.08.07

```
1      Justyna:    so erm (.) how was it (.) how different was
2                  leaving home of your next son
3                  (…)
4      Steven:     so Mark was taking his A levels and <he was
5                  very busy doing that (.) I was disconnecting>
6                  myself from the college- we we'd lived in
7                  Middlesborough at the time
8      Justyna:    [mhm]
9      Steven:     [that's] where the college was at the time
10                 that I was principle of erm (.) and then (.)
11                 the summer of 2002 therefore I had a new job
12                 (.) in a new town (.)
13     Justyna:    yeah
14     Steven:     and I had to s- sell the house in (.)
15                 Middlesborough and buy one here in in (
16                 (.)Northampton so there were all=
17     Justyna:    =sorts of things
18     Steven:     yeah and the fact that Mark was leaving home
19                 in the middle of [all this]
20     Justyna:                     [hehehe]
21     Steven:     was well (.) just another one of the things
22                 that was that was there
```

In lines 1-2 Steven oriented to other important transition which were happening in his life at the time of hs children leaving. Those included 'disconnecting' from an old job (lines 5-6) and starting the new one (line 11), moving to 'a new town' (line 12), which involved selling the old house (line 14) and buying a new one (lines 15-16). Taking into

account this particular context, Steven constructs his son's leaving as 'just another one of the things that was there' (lines 21-22), therefore not presenting this event as of any greater significance than the other events. From the discursive point of view the construction of children leaving home as no more significant than other events in his life could be used as a strategy of presenting oneself as a person not particularly affected by the 'transition to empty nest'.

It could be concluded that having other important changes happening in life at the same time as the children leaving could be seen as a 'factor' that decreases the perceived importance of the transition and therefore making it more manageable. However, this may not be the case for other important changes that can take place along side the 'empty nest transition'. For instance, Craig, in extract 16, reports the case of a friend who is presented as struggling with the event of a child leaving home because of the other transitions happening at the same time.

Extract 16, interview, Craig 11.09.07

```
1      Justyna:     so based on maybe this experience or or the
2                   experience  that maybe- of people that you
3                   see around yourself (.) how do you think
4                   parents generally deal with this transition
5      Craig:       (5.0) .hh I think a lot of people (.) perhaps
6                   (.) don't cope very well w- well we had one
7                   friend (.) w- sorry one pair of friends
8                   who::se (.) again they had a daughter- she
9                   was the only child
10     Justyna:     mhm
11     Craig:       and when their daughter left home to go to
12                  university (.) err:: the girl's mother
13                  particularly
14     Justyna:     mhm
15     Craig:       found that very, very, [very difficult]
16     Justyna:                           [ mhm mhm mhm]
17     Craig:       erm: I think (.) the fact that there was that
18                  change in her life was also coupled with (.)
19                  other changes ie with aging parents
20     Justyna:     mhm
21     Craig:       and and the consequent ill health that went
22                  with that
23     Justyna:     mhm
24     Craig:       so as well as their daughter moving away they
25                  had other things as well (.) er::
```

```
26        Justyna:      °rather difficult°
27        Craig:        yeah they had a lot of things happening in
28                      their life at the same time but they er: the
29                      mother particularly was very very upset about
30                      her daughter moving away
```

Craig presents his friend's wife as 'very very upset about her daughter moving away' (lines 29-30) and constructs this difficulty of dealing with the transition as related to 'other changes' (line 19) 'happening in their life at the same time (lines 27-28). Those changes are presented as related to 'aging parents' (line 19) 'and the consequent ill health that went with that' (lines 21-22).

Other events, which fathers present as influencing the perception of children leaving home as more difficult include death of other family members.

Extract 17, interview, Steven: 06.08.07

```
1         Justyna:      Could you tell me a little bit about the:
2                       time when er: when Edmund left home and (.)
3                       what was the reason behind it and how did you
4                       feel about it-
5         Steven:       .hh ok well he er: I mean he left home to go
6                       to university
7         Justyna:      mhm
8         Steven:       I mean that's (.) er:: that's- we'd known all
9                       along he was going to do that
10        Justyna:      hehe
11        Steven:       so that wasn't terribly surprising .hh of
12                      course it was a very emotional time because
13                      it wasn't that long after his mother had died
14        Justyna:      yeah yeah
15        Steven:       erm: and so it was- ef at the time I felt
16                      absolutely (.) wretched
17        Justyna:      [m::]
18        Steven:       [about] it
```

In extract 17, Steven constructs the event of his son leaving home as 'a very emotional time' (line 12) because of it's coinciding with his wife's death (lines 12-13). The concurrence of those two events in close proximity is constructed by Steven as the reason for his very difficult emotional reaction: 'I felt absolutely wretched' (lines 15-16). Such construction of intensive emotional reaction builds an identity of a 'sensitive person'.

Similar experiences are presented in extract 18, where Ben views his father's death coinciding with his son's leaving as making the transition more difficult.

Extract 18, interview, Ben 26.07.06

```
1     Justyna:        could you describe a bit your reaction then
2                     erm(.) when your first, with first child
3                     leaving?
4     Ben:            Well it a it was very strange it was (.) it
5                     was (.) ah the other thing about these things
6                     (.) is that they're often emotionally, they
7                     don't stand on their own (.) you think they
8                     do but they don't (.) cause actually I'm
9                     kinda- I'm just aware that I'm in danger of
10                    crying [now]
11    Justyna:               [o::h]
12    Ben:            I- (.) just briefly because my son's going
13                    also coincided with erm (.) my father dying
14                    and that was really kindo strange (.) cause
15                    you really kinda like think you're in the
16                    middle and you've got this kinda male
17                    line then and you lose both ends at the same
18                    time
19    Justyna:        mhm
20                    (…)
21    Ben:            and of course my dad- (.) <I didn't live with
22                    him he lived in London> (.) but it was this
23                    uhm that kind of that (.) so (.) I think so
24                    you can't separate those things out so that
25                    (.) that that was kinda (.) ha::rder really
```

When asked about his reaction to his first child leaving home (lines 1-3), Ben presents the event as emotionally connected to other contiguous events (line 6-7). In this way he constructs his emotional reaction to his son leaving as inseparable from his emotional reaction to his father's death. Ben constructs the connection of those two events and his perception of them as 'very strange' (line 4), 'really kindo strange' (line 14) and 'kinda harder really' (line 25). The use of extreme case formulations in all of those instances focuses the account on the intensity of the difficulty related to experiencing the son's leaving and the father's death in a short space of time. The use of systematic vagueness (Potter, 1996) ('kindo' and 'kinda') could be interpreted in this particular context as presenting emotions surrounding those events as a troublesome topic, something it is difficult to finds words for. At the same time the use of this particular discursive device

achieves another interactional goal. It presents the interviewee as a person unaccustomed to speaking about emotions.

From the analysis of the extracts above it could be concluded that the fathers construct other important events coinciding with the transition of children leaving home as influencing their perception of the 'empty nest'. Some events, such as changing jobs or moving, are presented as making the event of children leaving home seem less significant and therefore more manageable. Other transitions, such as dealing with aging parents, health problems and death of close family members, are constructed as hindering the process of coping with the 'empty nest transition'. From the point of view of discursive psychology, these constructions play an important part in interviewees' identity work, such as presenting oneself as a sensitive person, a rational, unaffected preson or someone not used to talking about emotions.

Conflict in the relationship between parents and children

Another 'factor' oriented to by the fathers as making the transition of children leaving home more difficult is a conflict in the relationship with the children. In the literature on the transition of children leaving home the conflicts between parents and children were only presented as related to the non-normatively early timing of the children leaving (Cooney and Mortimer, 1999; Steen and Peterson, 2003; Aquilino and Supple, 1991; Stattin and Magnusson, 1996). However, the research so far has not looked at the influence of conflict on the normatively timed leaving home transition. It also did not take into account the fathers' constructions of the effect that conflict may have on the process of dealing with the children's departure. The analysis here focuses on those previously unaddressed issues, also looking at the discursive functions fulfilled by the fathers' accounts.

Extract 19, interview, Mark 19.07.06

```
1     Mark:      we had we've had good relations with our children
2                (1.3) which have been I think quite respectful on
3                both sides (.) and although at early stage, you
4                know
5     Justyna:   [yeah]
6     Mark:      [early] adulthood when they were (.) provisional
7                problems there hasn't been a lot of conflict (.) so
8                then (.)they're not moving out to get away from
9                difficult situation ehm
10               (1.3)
11    Justyna:   yeah
12    Mark:      we're although regretfully (.) quite positive about
13               what they are doing and (.) probably uhm, you know,
14               it's more pleasant (.) more comfortable not to live
15               with us but and and <have their own highs> (.) it's
16               not come out conflict it's not particularly come
17               out of rejection and (.) I think all those things
18               would make it more difficult
```

In the extract 19 Mark presents his own and his wife's relationship with the children as 'good' (line 1), 'quite respectful' (line 2) and not ridden with conflicts despite 'provisional problems' in early adulthood' (lines 6-7). This account is used to construct the children's motivation to leave home as not related to any 'difficult situation' (line 9), 'conflict' or 'rejection' (line 16-17) in a family setting. Those circumstances are then presented as 'things' that 'would make it more difficult' (line 18). In this account the conflict between children and parents is presented as having a potential to influence the children's decision to leave home. Mark's construction suggests that the event of children leaving under those circumstances would be more difficult to deal with. By orienting to the disagreements with his offspring as having a capacity to hinder the process of dealing with 'empty nest', Mark presents himself as a good and sensitive parent, valuing the relationship with his children.

A very similar account is created by Julian in extract 20.

```
1       Justyna:        How do you think (.) other people erm (.)
2                       deal with erm (.5) the whole transition
3                       of children leaving home h do you maybe
4                       have some friends or family who (.) done
5                       (.) gone through it?
6       Julian:         Erm .hhh (3.0) A few er:: (8.0) I think
7                       most of the people have probably found it
8                       harder than we have
9       Justyna:        mhm (.) why do [you think that?]
10      Julian:                        [Some of them  ] as
11                      [I say]
12      Justyna:        [yeah]
13      Julian:         their children they've left home in (.)
14      Justyna:        ah::
15      Julian:         unfortunate circumstances there've been
16                      arguments and things like this erm (4.0)
17                      it's probably because we- as I say as I
18                      say I believe we have got a very good
19                      relationship with our children we we've
20                      kept very close and
21      Justyna:        mhm
22      Julian:         supported them .hhh (.) personally as
23                      well as financially hehe
```

Here Julian constructs his relationship with the children as 'very good' (lines 18-19), 'very close' (line 20) and supportive (lines 22-23). This account is contrasted with a situation of 'most of the people' (line 7), who are presented as 'probably finding it harder than we have' (lines 7-8) due to 'unfortunate circumstances (…) arguments and things like this' (lines 15-16). The use of the contrast helps the interviewee to present himself as a good father, who has a positive relationship with his children. Interestingly, the use of indistinct device 'things like this' is designed to complete as three part list and in this way strengthen the argument. Therefore, the quality of relationship with the leaving children is constructed by the fathers as an important 'factor' in determining parents' perception of the transition and the process of coping with it. However, from a discursively analytical position those accounts enable also important identity construction, such as doing 'being a good parent', which was also common practice in many previous extracts analysed in this chapter.

Children's choices in life

The final 'factor' which fathers in my interviews constructed as influencing coping with the children leaving could be categorised as children's choices in life.

Extract 21, interview, Richard 08.02.07.

```
1      Richard:          (…) And I do think that whilst for us it's
2                        been reasonably easy I think some parents
3                        have °the devil of a time when the kids leave
4                        home° [you know]
5      Justyna:                [oh yeah]
6      Richard:          because .hhh (2.0) if they are going to a
7                        partner that really scares you for example
8      Justyna:          mhm
9      Richard:          I mean like we've got a friend whose (.)
10                       whose erm daughter moved into the:: em: (.)
11                       gangster culture of Leeds
12     Justyna:          o:h
13     Richard:          yeah (.) of professional crime
14     Justyna:          mhm
15     Richard:          well I mean that could be horrifying
16     Justyna:          exactly
17     Richard:          you know .hhh my (.) niece did the same thing
18     Justyna:          [mhm]
19     Richard:          [yeah]  erm (.) my other niece made bad- you
20                       know if you- my daughters haven't made (.)
21                       bad choices
22     Justyna:          mhm
23     Richard:          but that's not down to me that's down to them
```

In extract 21, Richard constructs his and his wife's experience of children leaving home as 'reasonably easy' (line 2) and contrasts it with the experience of 'some parents' (line 2), whose experience is categorised as 'the devil of a time' (line 3). This metaphor is designed to emphasise the negativity of the experience, which is presented as being down to children's 'bad choices' (line 21). Richard constructs bad choices as for instance: 'going to a partner that really scares you' (lines 6-7) or moving into the 'gangster culture' (line 11) and categorises them as possibly 'horrifying' (line 15). Another contrast is developed between Richard's nieces (lines 17 and 19), who are presented as 'making a bad choice', and his daughters, categorised as not having made 'bad choices' (line 21). The contrasts employed in this account are designed to

emphasise the negativity of the experience of children leaving home, in the situation when their choices are viewed by the parents as 'wrong'. Also through orienting to the importance of the children's choices in life Richard presents himself as a good parent, who cares about his children's future.

A different category of 'wrong' choices is reported by Bill in extract 22.

Extract 22, interview, Bill 05.10.07

```
1      Justyna:        I was thinking (.) erm (.) what did you think
2                      about your first son living erm leaving home
3                      and erm and at quite an early age
4                      (…)
5      Bill:           he:: had a place to go to:: university of
6                      oxford to read physics which is very
7                      prestigious thing to do
8      Justyna:        yeah it is
9      Bill:           uhm and I was unhappy on two accounts so was
10                     my partner cause I went to the same college I
11                     know that college
12     Justyna:        mhm
13     Bill:           in fact I know the physicians and they're
14                     crazy
15     Justyna:        ((laughter))
16     Bill:           and I was very unhappy about him going to
17                     university at the age of seventeen anyway
18     Justyna:        mhm
19     Bill:           because I felt he was too young and a
20                     socially he:: em:: (.) was never (.)
21                     terrifihehecally er::
22     Justyna:        ((laughter))
23     Bill:           skilled (.) (…) so how did I feel about him
24                     going (.) I wanted him to take a year out
25                     er::m and I was very sorry as my partner was
26                     (.) when he left
```

Bill presents his son as facing the choices which are much more socially acceptable than the choices described by Richard in extract 21. Despite this, Bill presents himself as 'unhappy' (line 9 and 16) about his son going to 'university of oxford to read physics' (lines 5-6). He constructs the reasons behind those feelings as stemming from his conviction about the inappropriateness of this university environment (lines 10-14) and about his son's lack of social skills due to his young age (lines 19-23). Bill presents himself as seeing his son's choice as wrong by mentioning that he 'wanted him to take

a year out' (line 24). The son's decision to leave home to go to university is presented as making Bill and his 'partner' feel 'very sorry' (lines 25).

From the analysis of these two extracts it could be concluded that viewing the children's choices as negative is presented by fathers as making the 'empty nest transition' more difficult. Similarly to previous extracts the constructed concerns about the 'rightness' of the children life choices could be seen as a way of doing 'being a good parent'.

Conclusions

This chapter addressed the fathers' constructions of circumstances presented as influencing their perception and the process of coping with the event of children leaving home. The fathers in my interview data identified most of the 'factors' already reported by the 'empty nest' literature. Those were the timing of children leaving, the number of children, their sex, parents' professional involvement, marital satisfaction and support. Also in line with the earlier research, my analysis concluded that the fathers' construct the leaving of the eldest child as more difficult than leaving of the subsequent children. Moreover, the participants in my research presented the effects of maintaining the contact and the involvement in their children lives as beneficial. In addition to confirming the relevance of the 'factors' described by already existing research the discursive approach used for the analysis drew out the complexity of the issues described above. In the case of early homeleaving, it was not the actual timing of the event that the fathers presented as disturbing, but the related to it lack of social and life skills which was presented as worrying. The fathers also viewed the number of children as relevant to the perception of the 'empty nest transition'; however they constructed the gradual character of children leaving or the ability to maintain the

family life routines as the elements facilitating the process of coping with the children leaving home. In the fathers constructions the quantity of the children itself was not identified as affecting the process as much. The fathers also oriented to the role of the children's sex in the process of coping with their departure. However, there was only one account taking a similar stance as the literature, which presented daughters' leaving as more difficult than sons'. Interestingly, it was created by a father whose all children were male. The fathers who have children of both sexes focused on their offspring's personality, age and their relationship with them as influencing their response to a greater extent than the sex itself. The differences in the constructions of the children's sex developed by the fathers with only sons and those with the children of both sexes points towards the importance of context in representation of this particular 'factor'. It appears that the fathers who only have sons construct the idea that the children's sex affects the process of coping as 'theoretically viable'. However, the practical experience of dealing with the departure of both male and female offspring is presented as providing the grounds, or evidence, to challenge such claim. This is a very important finding as it provides evidence that the fathers have inclinations to move away from gender dominated way of representing the relationship with their offspring.

Although the 'factors' described above were also identified in the existing literature, the in-depth analysis of the fathers' talk about their 'transition to empty nest' experiences resulted in uncovering a much more complex picture of the circumstances portrayed as affecting the process of dealing with the departure of children. It appears that the fathers construct their experiences of coping as affected by not a few independent 'factors' but as influenced by a group of interrelated and context specific circumstances.

Another way in which this research enriches the existing literature is a discovery of a number of new circumstances which the fathers present as influencing

their perception and the process of dealing with the children leaving home. Certain significant events taking place around the children's departure such as moving home, starting a new job or losing a loved one were presented as affecting the reaction to the children's leaving. Those surrounding circumstances again emphasise the importance of the context in which the 'transition to empty nest' occurs. It also suggests that the fathers view this process not as a separate event but as related and/or affected by the wider context of their professional and social lives.

The fathers also presented the conflict between the parents and the children as having a potential to make the transition even more problematic. The same effect has been ascribed to the fathers' perception of their children's life choices as wrong. Those two difficult situations were constructed as leading to an anxiety and worry about the relationship with the children and their future. From the discursive perspective presenting oneself as worried about one's relationship with the children and their life choices could be seen as a strategy used to construct one's identity as a 'good father'. The basis of this strategy lies in a traditional representation of parental duties, which include maintaining a good relationship with the offspring and ensuring their safe future (Bozett, 1985). From this point of view the care and protection of one's children is a major role ascribed to fathers. Most importantly the fathers have been presented as striving to maintain their protecting roles even when their children leave home and are on the way to achieving independence (Nydegger & Mitteness, 1996). Therefore, by presenting themselves as maintaining their involvement in their children's lives and being affected by their children's choices in life as well as potential conflicts with them the fathers strive to maintain their identity as fathers.

However, it could be argued that by orienting towards the traditional and normative fathering roles, the men in my research are doing 'being a *good* father'. However, a question that could be asked at this stage is why the participants strive to

present themselves as '*good* fathers'? The answer could be found in a wider interactional context in which the data was collected (Potter and Hepburn, 2005). Because the participants were recruited under a category 'father', their use of strategies building up the identity of a 'good father' may be interpreted as stemming from trying to be seen as good incumbents of this category. It is important to interpret the data within the context in which it was created, therefore it could be said that in the context of an interview about fatherhood, the participants' main interactional goal was to create an appropriate identity, in this case one of a 'good father'.

In conclusion, the analysis of the interviews with men, whose children have left home, reveals that the participants construct their experiences as deeply embedded in a local, interactional context as well as a wider, social one. The participants referred to the local context of the interview by using strategies positioning them as good incumbents of the category under which they were recruited, namely 'fathers'. The men referred to traditional fathering activities such as protecting ones children and worrying about their future and presented themselves as fulfilling those 'requirements' of a 'good father'. At the same time, the participants viewed their experiences of children leaving home as embedded in a wider social context. The men construct their reactions to approaching 'empty nest' not in the isolation, but in reference to other important life changes such as starting a new job, moving or a loss of a family member or spouse. Moreover, the fathers present their transition to 'empty nest' as closely linked to a range of social and personal circumstances such as the quality of relationships with their partners and children. Finally, the participants emphasise the importance of the perception of their offspring readiness for independence. It is that very subjective element that is seen by the fathers as affecting their responses to their children leaving home rather than more 'objective' variables such as age and gender presented by the established research as influential.

Chapter VIII. Empirical and methodological discussion

This project was inspired by a certain neglect of fathers in the existing literature on the subject of the 'empty nest'. The process of letting the child go was constructed as much more difficult for the mother than the father (Karp et al, 2004; Lewis et al., 1979; Hartocollis, 2005; Ryff and Seltzer 1996). Few researchers presented fathers as influenced by the event of their child leaving home; when they were it was usually associated with very particular qualities such as having fewer children, being significantly involved in parental duties and/or deriving more satisfaction from the parental rather then marital relationship (Lewis et al., 1979). Overall it could be said that the existing research painted a very restricted image of fathers during the 'empty nest transition'.

By collecting the data from a variety of settings I was able to investigate whether similar depictions of fathers whose children have left home were prevalent in different contexts. Therefore, in the study I focused on the ways in which fathers themselves, mothers and parenting 'experts' constructed fatherhood in the 'empty nest transition'. Contextual diversity of the project was achieved through collecting three different types of data: Internet articles written by figures considered to be parenting 'experts', parents' Internet chat-room conversations and interviews with fathers. Through employment of analytical techniques of discursive psychology a variety of empirical and methodological findings were generated. In the first instance the chapter outlines the main empirical findings. Then methodological and theoretical contributions of the thesis are discussed.

Summary of empirical findings

'Expert' constructions of 'empty-nest' fatherhood

There are three distinctive ways in which 'parenting experts' construct fatherhood in on-line articles. Firstly, fathers are pictured in opposition to motherhood. Here fathers are presented as less effective in dealing with children leaving home than mothers and their reactions to this event are presented as more negative than those of women. Fathers' lack of effectiveness in dealing with children leaving is attributed to their gender specific qualities such as unwillingness to talk about emotions, preoccupation with professional life and lack of involvement in hands-on parenting duties. Such focus on explaining parenting behaviour in reference to gender suggests that fatherhood is constructed by experts in close relation to masculinity.

Secondly, fathers are constructed as unacknowledged in the process of transition to 'empty nest'. Experts orient to mothers as most important in the context of children leaving home and therefore identify parenting with mothering. Mothers are presented as negatively affected by children leaving home. Experts see them as disadvantaged in comparison to fathers due to their gender-related qualities such as commitment to parenting duties, emotionality and focus on children. Parents are similarly depicted by the majority of the existing academic literature on the 'empty nest' (Robinson and Barret, 1986; Carter and McGoldrick, 1989; Karp et al, 2004; Lewis et al., 1979; Hartocollis, 2005; Ryff and Seltzer 1996; Norman and Scaramella, 1980; Bovey, 1995; Kahana & Kahana, 1982; Borland, 1982).

In the two constructions discussed above, 'experts' utilise the concept of gender and the qualities presented as deriving from it. In this way they endorse the vision of gendered parenting, which adheres to a stereotypical view of fathers who are

not involved in day-to-day raising of children and mothers as primary caregivers. However, some 'expert' fatherhood constructions found in the on-line articles do not conform to those stereotypes. Some parenting 'experts' portray fatherhood as 'gender neutral' in that in their view mothers and fathers hold an equivalent position in the process of children leaving home. In this group of constructions there is no distinction between emotional reactions of mothers and fathers and parenting is not perceived through the prism of masculinity and/or femininity.

The most important aspect of the above findings is the uncovered variability in the ways parenting 'experts' construct fatherhood. In contrast with the existing academic literature family specialist portray fathers using a selection of different discursive strategies leading to certain diversity in developed accounts. Fathers are not only presented as unaffected by the event of children leaving home (Lewis et al., 1979; Hartocollis, 2005; Ryff and Seltzer 1996; Norman and Scaramella, 1980; Bovey, 1995; Kahana & Kahana, 1982; Borland, 1982) but also as disadvantaged in the context of children leaving home due to their gender-related qualities or as performing the same roles during this transition as mothers. Overall, it could be said that analysis of the 'expert' Internet articles plays the role of setting out wider context in reference to which parents create their own constructions of fatherhood during 'empty nest transition'.

Problematic fatherhood: mothers accounts of their husbands when children leave home

Another context in which fatherhood constructions were investigated was mothers' Internet chat-room conversations. In these circumstances mothers construct fatherhood as qualitatively different from motherhood, in line with one of the expert constructions, positioning fatherhood in opposition to motherhood. At the same time

mothers' problematise fathers' reactions to children leaving home and their behaviours during this time such as lack of support for the wife in the situation of launching children, lack of practical involvement in the process of 'transition to the empty nest' and in some deviant cases a need for support from the wife. Interestingly, fathers are presented as not accountable for their inability to provide effective support for their partners and therefore not expected to be successful in this domain. Such ineffectiveness is attributed by mothers to fathers 'gender-related' qualities such as being raised not to show emotion. Because fathers are in women's views unlikely to provide satisfying support during the 'empty nest' transition, mothers construct other women with similar experiences as more desired source of support.

In mothers' accounts of fatherhood there are evident influences of the contradicting expectations stemming from the co-existence of the culturally 'old' and 'new' ideals of fatherhood and masculinity. Mothers present themselves as wanting the fathers' to be strong, protective and supportive towards them, which are the qualities characteristic of traditional norms of masculinity. At the same time, women voice other expectations such as an ability to express emotions and deal with them effectively or being involved in their children lives, which stem from the norms of 'New Fatherhood'.

In conclusion, other parties: parenting experts and mothers, create rather critical accounts of fatherhood. Despite one construction found to acknowledge the fathers' equality in reference to the event of children leaving home, the majority of the accounts portray fathers as unprepared for this transition and ineffective in dealing with its challenges. Taking this into account it is crucial to investigate how fathers themselves construe their place and role in the 'empty nest' transition.

Fathers' accounts of their 'empty nest' experiences

In contrast to some of the constructions created by experts and mothers, fathers present themselves as negatively affected by the event of children leaving home and unprepared for experiencing intensive negative emotions during the time of this transition. However, when talking about difficult emotions fathers also perform other discursive tasks such as management of their masculinity by mitigating their accountability for experiencing intensive emotions, which are presented as beyond their control. Such a strategy of assigning extreme qualities to emotional experiences provides explanation and justification for giving in to those feelings (Edwards, 1992) and at the same time helps to maintain a sense of masculinity.

Fathers in both the chat-room conversations and the interviews attend to contradicting ideals of masculinity and fatherhood. By talking about emotions in a way maintaining their sense of masculinity they orient to the contradicting expectations that modern culture puts on them. Through the discursive practices of fathers' emotion talk, such as mitigation of accountability, we can observe subtle balancing acts that men perform in order to present themselves as keeping-up with those two sets of contradicting expectations.

At the same time it is important to mention few deviant cases of positive accounts of effects of children leaving home on fathers. Constructions presenting the event of children leaving home as a welcome and liberating experience deepen our understanding of how the 'empty nest' is construed and emphasise the incredible variability of fatherhood representations during this time.

'Factors talk': constructing circumstances influencing the process of

dealing with children leaving home

One of the incentives behind collecting a variety of data (Internet records as well as interviews) was to establish whether the constructions of fatherhood developed in different contexts vary. The investigation of the interviews with fathers revealed a number of novel interpretative threads. Fathers constructed certain circumstances surrounding the event of children leaving home as facilitating or hindering the process of coping with this event. I have found that fathers' accounts of those 'factors' occupy a certain common ground with the existing academic literature on 'empty nest'. The circumstances constructed by both the fathers and the literature as influencing the process of coping with the 'empty nest transition' are the timing of children leaving, the number of children, their gender, birth order, professional involvement and marital satisfaction and support (Cooney and Mortimer, 1999; Neugarten, 1976; Harkins, 1978; McLanahan and Sorensen, 1985; Aldous, 1978; DeVries, 1991; Lewis et al., 1979; Suitor and Pillemer, 1988; White and Edwards, 1990; Anderson, 1990; DeVries, 1991; Lewis et. al., 1989; Rubin, 1979; Lerner and Hultsch, 1983; Williams, 1977; Adelmann et al.,1989.

However, discursive psychological analysis of the interviews enriches significantly the existing research findings in two ways. Firstly, the fathers in the interview setting identify also other 'factors' affecting parents' reactions to children leaving, not mentioned earlier in the literature. These are continual involvement in their children's lives, other important transitions happening at the time of children leaving, conflict within the parent-child relationship and parents' perception of their children's life choices as wrong. Secondly, in the process of construction of those circumstances

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fathers also achieve a discursive goal of identity construction as a good father/parent as well as good husband/partner.

Methodological contributions of the thesis

There is tension within the field of qualitative psychological research regarding the use of interviews as a method of data collection. Researchers working in the tradition of discursive psychology informed strongly by conversation analysis view qualitative interviews critically (Potter and Hepburn, 2005; Widdicombe and Woofitt, 1995) and strive to challenge the dominant position of this method in qualitative psychological research (Potter and Hepburn, 2005). Instead of utilizing data collected through interviews, Potter and Hepburn (2005) advocate the use of 'naturally occurring' data or 'naturalistic' records, which they present as immune to the problems attributed to interviews. This is because 'naturally occurring data' are gathered without the potentially distorting influence of a researcher on participants (Woofitt, 2005). Potter and Hepburn (2005) promote also a discursive method of analysis derived from conversation analysis as a most suitable for 'naturally occurring' and interactional data. They argue that an analytical method which orients to all interactional features of the data is able to develop richer and more grounded understanding of the data. Such endorsement of one method of data collection and analytical position over others was received critically by researchers working within different philosophical, epistemological and political frameworks (Griffin, 2007a; Henwood, 2007; Hollway, 2005a; Mishler, 2005; Smith, 2005) and will be discussed later in the chapter.

The aim of this section of the chapter is to present Potter and Hepburn's (2005) arguments discouraging widespread use of interviews in qualitative research as well as the existing counterarguments to their position. I discuss problems that Potter

and Hepburn (2005) attach to the interview data together with their solutions to some of those problems. Secondly, drawing on my analytical findings I propose some additional ways in which problems categorised by Potter and Hepburn (2005) as 'necessary' and therefore not possible to resolve, can be overcome. Thirdly, by drawing on the findings from the previous chapters I argue that even from the 'bottom-up' type of analytical position both types of records produce congruent findings. The overall aim is to develop a way of conceptualising different types of data not as a hierarchy but focusing on utilising their potential.

The debate: Interviews versus 'naturally occurring' data

Potter and Hepburn (2005) developed their critique of interviews as a method of data collection from the position of discursive psychologists informed strongly by conversation analysis. I emphasise this point because their arguments, based on this theoretical and analytical framework are directed not only at the analysts working in similar traditions but also at those advocating broader methods of data analysis. Naturally, many of the propositions made by Potter and Hepburn (2005) were met with a significant criticism from the qualitative community. Not least because the interviews are of the most popular methods of data collection used by researchers from a variety of methodological schools. One of Potter and Hepburn's (2005) criticisms refers to the style of transcription that should be employed to present interview data. Potter and Hepburn (2005) endorse a full Jeffersonian transcript, which is said to capture the elements of talk that are relevant to the interaction in the data. Those features of talk include pauses (measured in tenths of seconds), intonation, volume and pace of speech, vocal emphasis, overlapping speech, repair etc. The argument for the inclusion of those features of speech delivery in the transcript emphasises the interactional character of the

data as well as the fact that a lot of accounts within the data are jointly constructed by all members of the interaction (Potter and Hepburn, 2005).

However, this view is not shared by other qualitative and even some discursive researchers, whose methodological frameworks are not focused on fine-grained interactional details, but on broader, ideological patterns in talk. They note that even a Jeffersonian transcript is a certain interpretation of the data and as a system needs to choose which interactional features to include (Smith, 2005; Mishler, 2005). Hollway (2005a) also suggests that a full Jeffersonian transcript can actually hinder the understanding of the interaction, by focusing sometimes on minuscule and irrelevant details of the delivery of speech. However, it is important to note that such arguments are formulated from the point of view of a methodological position used by those researchers. For instance in her work Hollway (2005b) is more interested in wide-ranging analysis focusing on theorisation of subjectivity and researcher's reflexivity, often introducing psychoanalytic principles in data interpretation, however without using a reductionist approach. Context is also extremely relevant in Hollway's work; however it is understood much wider than speaker's preceding turn in conversation.

In conclusion, the level of transcription detail should be complementary to the analytical position used by the researcher. The position that was employed in this study is based on fine-grained analysis of the data, similarly to Potter and Hepburn (2005), and takes into account interactional features of talk. This is to emphasise the jointly constructed character of the data. However, in my analysis I have shown that analysing data closely and in detail does not have to mean focusing on 'every' little element of the speech delivery. Instead, I would argue that the full Jeffersonian transcript is not always necessary and that the details included in the transcription are there to fuel the analysis and therefore be utilised to answer the research question. Adopting such a methodological stance is congruent with requirements being established within the field

of qualitative research, which emphasises the need for research strategies that are able to answer the research question and therefore are defensible in design (Henwood and Lang, 2005). That is why, in my transcription, I included some interactional features such as repair or pauses, which were then incorporated into my analysis but left out elements such as pitch, intonation or pace of talk, which are believed to contribute much less to the type of analysis and the research question of this study.

Another practice criticised by Potter and Hepburn (2005) is a failure to present the interview as an interaction in its own right. For instance, a common mistake, they argue, is for researchers not to take into account the interviewer's input into the conversation, which can lead to the presentation of the interviewee's talk out of context. One such example is not including in the extract the interviewer's question prior to the participant's response. Negligence in providing the interviewer's turns or some preceding talk of the interviewee may have important analytical consequences. For instance, some views expressed by the participant could be wrongly interpreted as their individual construction, whereas they may be a co-constructed account resulting from the interaction with the interviewer. This is particularly relevant when the interviewer introduces a certain category, such as gender into his or her question, which is then reproduced in the interviewee's answer. However, because the interviewer's question is not included in the extract, the gender category is treated as being introduced by the interviewee.

Hollway (2005b), who works using wider methodological positions such as psychoanalytically inspired discursive psychology suggests that analysts should also appreciate that the extracts can only ever function as a part of the evidence and the context of the whole interview needs to be taken into account to fully represent the interaction taking place in the interview (Hollway, 2005 a). This argument attempts to challenge the views of Potter and Hepburn (2005) by implying that the context of

participant's talk is actually a much broader issue and should not be over-simplified by being represented in a single sentence of an interviewer's turn. Viewing context in much extensive sense facilitates broader analysis concerned more with ideological constructs rather than small interactional details. Again, my argument is that the extent to which context is represented in the extracts (or in the analysis) should be adjusted to the methodological position employed in a given study. In my research I included the interviewer's questions in the extracts of analysed talk and analysed the interviewer's speech (see Chapter VI and VII). Moreover, in the situations where a wider context was considered as important for the analysis of an extract I described briefly the conversation happening before the analysed extract.

The issues described above are categorised by Potter and Hepburn (2005) as 'contingent'. This means that it is possible to overcome those problems by following the authors' recommendations for improvement of the research practice. Another issue within this category are global observations, which concerns 'the way in which analytic observations (…) are linked to the interview transcript' (2005: 289). Potter and Hepburn (2005) suggest that researchers should specify the lines of the transcript to which their observation or inference refers. Their argument is that more general observations or conclusions should be rooted in the details of the transcript. This suggestion is certainly compatible with the methodological position employed in this study, which is very close to the data and positions them in the core of the analytical process. Whether it is also relevant for broader approaches is debatable, however it could definitely be seen as a part of good practice, improving transparency of the analytical process, which is another standard required of modern qualitative research methods (Henwood and Lang, 2005)

Some of the recommendations made by Potter and Hepburn (2005) to overcome the 'contingent problems' assigned by them to the interviews are made from

the position of discursive psychology influenced by conversation analysis and therefore not entirely applicable to other qualitative methods of research or other schools of discursive psychology. Although some could be viewed as encouraging transparency of the analytical process, and I thoroughly support those, a lot of the recommendations seem to be designed to endorse one methodological position, namely discursive psychology influenced by conversation analysis. This is problematic, especially from the point of view of early discursive psychology (for instance Potter and Wetherell, 1987), which encouraged diversity in observations, constructions and interpretations of any given discursive phenomenon. Another worry is the rejection of interviews as an acceptable method of data collection, evident in Potter and Hepburn's (2005) collection of 'problems' with interviews categorised by the authors as 'necessary', that is those that are not 'easily dealt with' (2005: p. 291). This group of issues indicated by the authors is presented as inherent to the interview data and therefore making the use of them in the qualitative research more problematic than the use of, for instance, 'naturally occurring data'. Such approach towards interviews as a method of data collection seems to be disjointed from the earlier tradition of discursive psychology, where interviews were widely utilised (Henwood, 2007). From this perspective, the move to a single school of analysis and single method of data collection is worrying because it organises the research strategies into a hierarchy. Below, the 'necessary' issues looking at the possibilities of overcoming those problems are presented.

A positive interpretation of 'necessary problems' in the interviews

Potter and Hepburn (2005) indicated a number of shortcomings that present interviews as an inherently flawed method of collecting data. They are: the overuse of social science categories; the reproduction of cognitivism; complexities of interviewee

and interviewer footing positions; and complexities of interviewee's and interviewer's stake and interest. The soundness of those arguments is discussed one at a time drawing on the analytical findings from my interview data.

Potter and Hepburn (2005) argue that the introduction of social science categories and agendas by the interviewer puts the research in danger of 'chasing its own tail' (2005: 293). This means that through the introduction of social science categories in, for instance, interviewer's questions, the researcher positions the interviewee in a way which requires him/her to respond, engage in some way with the introduced categorisation. This argument also implies that these researcher introduced categories might not be oriented to by participants in naturalistic data. Worse still, they are thrust upon participants as a useful way to prioritise social science concerns. In consequence, the authors suggest, the agency and control over topics discussed in the interview is taken away from the participant by the interviewer (Potter and Hepburn, 2005).

From Potter and Hepburn's (2005) point of view some constructions developed collaboratively by the interviewee and the interviewer (i.e. extract 11 in Chapter VI), could be seen as problematic because of the researcher introducing certain accounts such as men as experiencing problems in expressing emotions. However, it could be argued that this potential problem is analytically justifiable and raises many interesting points. Firstly, this strategy of introducing such representations of men into the interview encourages participants to engage with broader debates relevant to the discussed problem. Secondly, those constructions can be formulated in a way which presents the interviewer's input as external to the immediate context of the interview (for instance as constructed by 'other people'). This strategy helps to avoid attributing the argument to the interviewer and minimises the chances of the interviewee complying with the construction in order to fulfil their role as a 'good interviewee'.

What is important in an interview interaction is not the fact that men are presented by the interviewer as having difficulty expressing emotion, but the participants' cultural competence and capability of engaging with the introduced construction in a way that is relevant and appropriate for them. Finally, and principally, the construction of men as not expressing emotions is prevalent also in the 'naturally occurring' data, which was discussed in earlier chapters. Thus, participants have shown that presenting men as emotionally inarticulate is a common, everyday discursive activity. Through the use of this categorisation the interviewer engages in a common discursive practice, relevant to the discussed topic. Therefore, I would argue that this practice is not as problematic as Potter and Hepburn (2005) would assume, especially as the researcher's categorisation is analytically acknowledged. Reflexivity has already been widely utilised in the qualitative research to prevent their theoretical and/or methodological stance dominating the research process (Henwood, 2008). It could therefore be suggested that adopting the reflexive stance in the process of analysis has a potential to alleviate the consequences of introduction of some social science categories.

In the analysis of the interview data I have shown that the participants actively manage and transform categories such as masculinity and gender, adding other concepts or constructing them as more relevant to the issue in question. In these ways interviewees demonstrated their cultural and interactional competency, which enabled them to approach the introduced categorisations critically and in ways that are most relevant for them. For instance, when the interviewer introduced the category of gender as explaining fathers' difficulty with expressing or managing emotions when children leave home (extract 12, Chapter VI) the participant challenged them with a number of alternative explanations including new categories such as personality, age or experience. The fathers constructed their expression of emotions as influenced by those factors rather that just 'being a man'. Most importantly, many generalised

categorisations were also apparent in 'naturally occurring' data, as demonstrated in earlier chapters. This ascertains that the use of such generalised categorisations is a common and culturally acceptable discursive practice, and therefore when acknowledged and analysed by the researcher should not be treated as specific to the interview setting and therefore problematic.

A further potential problem identified by Potter and Hepburn (2005) is the reproduction of cognitivism, which is apparent in the treatment of cognitive language as descriptive. The argument here refers to the way in which the participants are treated as reporting their internal states or developing quasi-scientific hypotheses about more general categories using 'cognitive' words. However, it has been shown that the use of cognitive categories such as 'feel', 'think' or 'imagine' are inherent to any type of talk (for instance Edwards, 1999). Therefore, this is only the issue of one's analytic position as to whether or not to treat those categories as describing certain cognitive phenomena or whether we see them as constructing a certain account.

In a number of extracts in Chapters VI and VII a variety of cognitive categories were used to describe fathers' and mothers' responses to children leaving home. For instance, in extract 14 in Chapter VI the participant constructed his as well as his wife's reaction in emotional terms, using categories such as 'upset', 'concern' and 'feeling'. By the use of those particular categories the interviewee achieved a construction of himself and his wife as emotionally affected by their children leaving and feeling responsible for them. In this way he was doing 'being a good parent' as those activities are associated in our culture to the image of a 'good parent'. This type of analytical interpretation is characteristic of discourse analysis as it does not view language as a 'mirror of reality'. By focusing on the action performed by participants in their words, the analysts can dissociate themselves from treating language as providing insights into participant's emotional life.

In conclusion, whether the terms describing cognitive actions are treated as descriptive or constructive is not dependent on the type of data they appear in, but the type of analysis they are subjected to. For the sake of the argument in question, it is unnecessary to discuss which methodological or analytical position deals with the issue of cognitive language better. What I want to stress here is that the same 'problem' is relevant to any type of data, being it interviews or 'naturally occurring' data. Cognitive terms such as 'feel' and 'think' are used by people on an everyday basis and therefore the issue of properly analysing those categories is not exclusive to interview data.

The example of the extract 14 from Chapter VI can also be used to illustrate another argument introduced by Potter and Hepburn (2005) referring to the complexities of footing, which the authors ascribe to the interview data. The term 'footing' refers to the speaking position from which a certain account is constructed (Goffman, 1981). Potter and Hepburn (2005) suggest that it is particularly challenging to discern whether a participant is constructing a certain account as an individual or as a category member, under which s/he was recruited or is referred to (implicitly or explicitly) by the interviewer. If we assume that the participant answers the question from a position of a category member, it is often difficult to specify what the category in question is.

For instance, in the case of my research, participants were recruited under the category 'father' and a lot of questions that were asked referred to them as incumbents of this category. However, it cannot be said for certain whether the answers were constructed from the position of a 'father' or maybe simply 'man' or 'husband'. In extract 14 (Chapter VI), the interviewer is indexing the membership category 'father' (implicit), however the interviewee shifts the footing from individual 'I think' to categorical 'us chaps'. It can be noticed that certain issues such as the wife's reaction are constructed from the individual's perspective, whereas others such as interviewee's

reaction is presented from the point of view of men in general. This shift in footing has important analytical consequences. It is designed to provide a generalised account of the way emotions are managed by men. Also, through the use of second person personal pronoun (you) a tendency to avoid expressing emotions is presented as applicable to men in general, rather that the participant himself. This device could be interpreted as a type of avoidance strategy, employed by interviewee to remove the focus from himself in response to possibly threatening or sensitive question. Instead, the account of a common way in which men react to similar, emotional events is constructed.

In the course of the analysis of my interviews I noticed frequent shifts in footing similar to this discussed above and I have used them in my analysis. Overall I do agree with Potter and Hepburn (2005) that the issue of footing can complicate the process of analysis of the interview data; however I do not agree that such complexities cannot be dealt with through careful analysis and reflexivity. Moreover, the shifts in footing can produce discursively important findings. As in the examples above, analysis of the change in the speaking position enriches the understanding of ways in which questions regarding emotions can be managed by men.

The final issue identified by Potter and Hepburn (2005) as particularly prevalent in the interview data concerns complexities of interviewee's and interviewer's stake and interest. Starting with an interviewee, the authors argue that s/he is often recruited for the research as a member of a certain category and it is possible that they have a stake in this category. For instance, the interviewee may have some expectations towards the study and/or the researcher and may orient to those interests in the course of the interview. At the same time, Potter and Hepburn note, the interviewee is often treated as a 'neutral informant of their own practices' (2005: p.295). This is said to lead to a kind of analytical neglect of the stake and interest issues on the part of interviewee.

However, this again seems to be a problem related more to the epistemological position of the analyst treating language as a transparent medium. If the analyst regards the interviewee's words as reporting his or her 'actual' practices than it is not an issue attributed to the data but again to the method of analysis and the application of realist methodological position treating the language as a transparent medium.

The case seems to be more complicated with the problem of stake and interest of the interviewer. Potter and Hepburn (2005) imply that the interviewer's investment in the investigated topic and/or research project can influence or in a way confound the data and therefore make the process of analysis of such records much more complicated. The authors advocate the model in which the researcher is neutral, not involved in the process of data generation, which eliminates the issue of the interviewer's stake and interest. Despite this argumentation, other researchers view the issue of investment and interviewer's influence on the data as potentially beneficial in the research process. For instance, Griffin (2007a) suggests that thanks to the researcher's engagement with the participants and their involvement in the process of data collection, unique records, otherwise unobtainable are generated for analysis (Griffin, 2007a; Henwood, 2007; Henwood, 2008). Griffin (2007a) in her study of young consumers voiced her observation of what she referred to as a 'hand cream moment' during which one of the young girls in the focus group extracted a bottle of hand cream from her bag and shared it with the other girls. By being a part of the interaction and referring to this activity, the researcher inspired a valuable talk about which brands are considered 'proper' and why. Also, instead of treating data collected through interviews as artificial and flawed, it could and should be regarded as being 'a part of *everyday life*, but produced in a specific context' (Griffin, 2007: p. 265). What I mean by that is that in modern cultures interviews are a common occurrence in the media and also everyday life (for instance a street poll), therefore should not be treated

as artificial. Even though it is possible that the researcher's agenda influences participants to produce the data, it would be controversial to dismiss such records simply on the grounds of researcher's involvement (Griffin, 2007; 2007a). This is because in many contexts treated as 'natural' people are influenced by agendas of other people and are used to dealing with such situations. Therefore, this is a common occurrence, not specific to the situation of an interview. Moreover, many studies, including my own, aim to investigate the subject of the research in a variety of contexts. The aim in the case of this project was to investigate whether and if so how constructions change in reference to different circumstances in which they are produced. This is one of the ways in which the individuality of the interviewing context can be utilised and its use in the research projects justified. My position is that when the context of the data is acknowledged in the process of analysis, the issues of stake and interest of the interviewer are not as problematic and should not lead to abandonment of the interview data, especially when we take into account the analytical advantages of this interactional context.

So far I have discussed the 'contingent' and 'necessary' problems, which Potter and Hepburn (2005) present as inherent to the interview data, significantly complicating the process of the analysis of such data. In the case of the 'contingent' problems, that are those which could be resolved be employing the authors' recommendations, I have argued that many of them are formulated from the position of discursive psychology influenced by conversation analysis. They, therefore, are not applicable to all the epistemological and methodological positions in which qualitative researchers work. Moreover, the endorsement of just one way of representing data or making analytical observations seems to significantly limit the variability in the field of qualitative research, discourse analysis or even discursive psychology.

In the case of the problems dubbed by Potter and Hepburn (2005) as 'necessary' I have argued that many of those issues such as the reproduction of cognitivism derive not from the type of the data, but the method of analysis employed. Other problems such as 'flooding of the interview with social science categories' (2005: p. 291) are viewed over-simplistically. For instance, in the Potter and Hepburn (2005) argumentation interviewees are not afforded agency, with which to challenge, re-construct or simply ignore introduced by the interviewer categories. Also, by referring to the analysis from the previous chapters I have demonstrated that through careful analysis and reflexive stance problems such as those can be overcome and even employed in order to unearth new and original findings.

'Fundamental' similarity –a new argument?

So far I have discussed arguments formulated by Potter and Hepburn (2005) against the use of interviews as a method of data collection. The authors presented the data derived from interviews as analytically problematic in a variety of ways, suggesting that researchers from a number of different methodological perspectives would be better off using the 'naturally occurring' or 'naturalistic' data. In my interpretation the problems which Potter and Hepburn (2005) dub 'necessary' may not be as unavoidable after all. However, from now on I want to add an absolutely new argument to this debate.

In the course of this research project I have collected and analysed both interview and 'naturally occurring' data in order to investigate constructions of fatherhood in a variety of settings. What I found was that the findings from both of these types of data were compatible. In the light of the debate between supporters of interviews and 'naturally occurring data' this compatibility can be viewed as an

important argument adding a brand new point of view to the table. I found that the fatherhood constructions evident in the 'naturally occurring' records are also prevalent in the data collected through interviews. It is therefore possible that in terms of the findings interviews and 'naturally occurring' data provide similar results. I therefore suggest that instead of focusing on differences between those two types of data, qualitative researchers could look at their similarities and the ways in which they inform methodological arguments within the field of qualitative psychological research.

Constructions of fathers' emotionality in the context of children leaving home have been found to be a common analytical thread across all types of data analysed in the chapters based on 'naturally occurring' data. Therefore, not only is there a similarity across 'naturally occurring data' and the interview data but across different types of 'naturally occurring data. 'Experts' in their articles and 'mothers' in Internet chat room conversations largely constructed fathers as emotionally incompetent. The 'third parties' presented dads as not prepared for the constructed emotional turmoil of the 'empty nest transition' and reacting problematically to the challenges, such as being supportive towards a female partner. The expert articles' authors as well as mothers oriented to fathers' gender and characteristics traditionally constructed as stemming from it as responsible for men's incapability of dealing with emotions. For instance, they constructed an account of fathers' as reluctant to talk about their feelings and not involved in 'hands-on' parental duties. Those gendered qualities were then in turn presented as decreasing the expectations towards the fathers in terms of their dealing with emotions.

Fathers themselves also oriented to emotions during the time of children leaving in their 'naturally occurring' Internet chat-room conversations. Interestingly, whilst talking about emotions men focused on the intensity and overwhelming quality of emotions, which seems to be in contrast with earlier research which presented ability

to control emotions as highly desirable and common among men (Seidler, 1997). However, by analysing the functional aspects of those constructions I have found that presenting emotions as intensive and overwhelming is a strategy employed to decrease fathers' accountability for experiencing such strong emotions. This in turn is utilized to maintain a strong, masculine identity. Similarly to the accounts created by 'experts' and mothers, fathers also presented themselves as not prepared for the intensity of emotions related to children leaving home. Interestingly, fathers in the interview setting developed corresponding accounts of emotions.

The fathers' interviewed for the project also presented themselves as experiencing strong emotions in relation to their children leaving home. The fathers presented themselves as surprised and overwhelmed by the sudden and intensive feelings stemming from the 'transition to empty nest'. This particular finding is surprising taking into account existing literature into 'empty nest', which presents mothers as those affected emotionally by children leaving home (Lomrantz et al., 1996; Karp et al, 2004; Lewis et al., 1979; Hartocollis, 2005; Ryff and Seltzer 1996; Norman and Scaramella, 1980; Bovey, 1995).

At the same time they positioned themselves as in difficulty when expressing those emotions. Similarly to the fathers from the Internet setting, interviewees viewed themselves as constrained in their expression of emotions by the expectations placed on men in general to appear strong and in control. Constructions created by the research participants involved the use of similar discursive strategies minimising men's accountability for experiencing unexpected and overwhelming emotions as in the accounts created in the naturalistic data. The observed compatibility of constructions created in both types of data (interview and naturalistic) is extremely important in terms of supporting the findings and presenting them as not context specific and existent among a variety of groups of people. The construction of emotions and mitigation of

accountability for them is common to all three types of naturalistic data analysed so far. It is also a strategy used by people in a variety of settings, not necessarily characteristic to the context of children leaving home. For instance Edwards (2000) reports strategies of mitigating accountability in the marriage counselling sessions. What I mean by that is that the reported ways of construction of emotionality apparent across the variety of contexts, including both interviews and 'naturalistic' interactions.

Another case of compatibility between interview and naturally occurring data is apparent in deviant cases of positive constructions of fathers' emotional reaction after children leaving home. In the Internet chat room conversations some fathers presented the event of children leaving home as not emotionally overwhelming but as an expected and natural event. Overall, as in the 'naturally occurring' data, in the interviews there are also deviant cases of accounts constructing fathers' reaction to children leaving home as not emotional, but rational and rather positive. Some fathers present the event of leaving home as potentially more stressful for the child and some view it as a 'natural' step in life development. Most importantly, in those particular constructions (for instance extract 15 and 16 in chapter VI) the fathers do not focus on their emotions and feelings but rather on constructing their cognitive responses to the event of children leaving. This strategy presents them as rational and focused on practical rather than emotional aspects of life. Those deviant cases add to the sensation of variability and depth in the construction of emotionality after children leaving.

Another analytical thread common among my Internet data is construction of fathers' reaction to children leaving in opposition to mothers' responses. Experts in their articles presented mothers as better prepared to deal with emotional challenges of the 'empty nest' than fathers. Also, mothers in their Internet chat-room conversations oriented strongly to the issue of difference between men's and women's experiences in relation to children leaving home. Interestingly, also fathers in their chat-room

conversations constructed their own reactions to the 'empty nest' in opposition to those of mothers'. The same contrasting strategy was also prevalent in the interviews with fathers. In most of the cases mothers are presented as more emotionally affected than fathers, whose reactions are constructed as more rational and justified. Despite this, there are also deviant cases presenting an opposite account, where the mother is presented as 'the strong one' and avoiding expression of emotion. Most importantly the strategy of contrast is employed in both of those cases and parents' reactions are presented as juxtaposed. This finding suggests that the concept of 'differences' between ways in which men and women react to emotional transitions is widely utilised by mothers and fathers alike in a variety of contexts. These findings also create a similar account to these developed in the existing research in the field of the' empty nest' which presents mothers as more affected than fathers by children leaving (Lomrantz et al., 1996; Karp et al, 2004; Lewis et al., 1979; Hartocollis, 2005; Ryff and Seltzer 1996; Norman and Scaramella, 1980; Bovey, 1995) and in this way utilises the account of contrast between men and women.

In conclusion, I believe that my analysis of the interviews with fathers, whose children have left home, enriched not only the literature in the field of 'empty nest', but also contributed to the methodological debate regarding the use of interview and 'naturally occurring' data. Earlier in the chapter I discussed arguments of critics and supporters of the interview data. I confronted many of Potter and Hepburn (2005) recommendations to 'improve' the practice of interview research and presented them as relevant only for researchers working within methodological framework of discourse analysis influenced by conversation analysis (Griffin, 2007). I also noted that many of Potter and Hepburn (2005) problems with interviews such as treatment of language referring to cognitive processes as descriptive do not stem from the nature of the data but the epistemological framework of analysis method employed to examine this data. I

have also argued and illustrated with examples from my data that the problems that Potter and Hepburn (2005) see as unavoidable, can be overcome through careful analysis and often utilised to produce important findings. Finally, I have argued that by encouraging other researchers to focus on analysis 'naturalistic' data and endorsing only one way of presenting and interpreting the data Potter and Hepburn (2005) develop an unhealthy hierarchy of data and methods of analysis.

By comparing the findings from 'naturally occurring' and interview data available in my study I managed to enrich the existing debate by conceptualising it not in terms of the differences between the types of data but in reference to their similarities. I have found that many discursive practices such as construction of emotions when children leave home or contrasting fathers' and mothers' reactions to their children leaving are not context specific, but persist across the range of data regardless of the method of data collection. Taking this into account I suggest that both 'naturally occurring' data and interviews may be more essentially alike than it is currently viewed in the field of qualitative psychological research. This means that for answering many of qualitative research questions either naturalistic or interview data may be successfully used.

Universality of findings

As it was mentioned before, one of the aims of this project was to investigate constructions of fatherhood in reference to changing context of data production. In the section above I noted the novel analytical threads introduced in interviews in comparison to earlier discussed Internet records. However, it is important to note that in the interviews there were also found constructions compatible to those developed in the Internet data. Participants in both of those types of data present emotions surrounding the event of children leaving home as unexpected and overwhelming and construct

mothers and fathers reactions as contrasting. This suggests that fatherhood is often constructed in reference to motherhood, mirroring the masculinity/femininity dichotomy. Furthermore, qualities attributed to gender are often used by participants as a device to explain behaviour, orienting to gender as a certain discursive 'trump card'.

Taking into account the above observations, it could be said that the project produced non-specific findings, which are prevalent in both interview and Internet data. This category incorporates a construction of fathers as surprised and overwhelmed by emotions during the time when children leave home, a construction of emotionality as a strategy for management of masculinity and orienting to gender qualities as a resource helping in mitigation of fathers' accountability for their ineffectiveness with dealing with 'empty nest' challenges. Findings prevalent regardless of the context in which the data was produced include also contrasting accounts of mothers and fathers reactions to children leaving. Finally, a common discursive activity performed by participants in all types of data is 'being a good parent/partner'.

Context specific findings

Aside from the common findings, the project also produced findings which are context specific, which means that they only appear in one particular type of data. The construction of fatherhood as unacknowledged was only apparent in the Internet data produced by 'third parties' that is mothers and parenting 'experts'.

Constructions specific to the interview context refer to a set of specific circumstances as influencing the process of coping with children leaving home. However, in this case in is important to acknowledge the role of the interviewer in developing those findings by orienting to some of the 'factors' such as for instance the gender of children leaving.

Limitations of the study and potential for future research

An important feature of this study, which needs to be acknowledged, is the issue of validity of the Internet data, particularly parents' chat-room conversations. This data may be particularly challenging to interpret because it was collected from the chat-room archives and therefore it did not allow for any follow-up or verification of the contributors identity. At the same time it is important to note, that discursive psychology as a method of analysis is more interested in what is being done in the data and how than by whom. The fact that the contributors present themselves as fathers or mothers is most important piece of information for me as a discursive researcher.

Finally, one of the limitations of the study but also an opportunity for future research is the focus of the current study on heterosexual fathers from Western culture. It is possible that in the contexts of same sex parents and/or living in different cultural circumstances, the fatherhood constructions will differ. However, until such research is conducted it can only be hypothesised.

Original contribution to knowledge

The project resulted in a number of insights enriching the existing academic research in the field of 'empty nest' as well as qualitative psychological research in general. Firstly, the data collected in the course of my investigations focused on fathers' emotions during the 'empty nest transition'. It is a novel topic, as existing literature presents mothers as more emotionally affected by the event of children leaving. Secondly, it was found that management of balance between fatherhood and masculinity is as a common discursive activity done by fathers. I have also shown how through such discursive activities men orient to and try to satisfy contradicting expectations stemming from ever changing standards of masculinity and fatherhood. I

emphasised there the conflicting expectations and norms that the concepts of the 'New Fatherhood' and traditional ideals of masculinity represent. Having this issue in mind I suggest that through talking about emotions but at the same time using discursive strategies to maintain the sense of masculine identity, the fathers orient to those conflicting expectations and try to manage them even on the 'micro-scale' of an interactional context. These findings emphasise that the fathers see their role during the time of children leaving as confusing, internally conflicted and requiring careful navigation through the treacherous world of emotions.

On the basis of those findings I have shown the emergence of a concept of a 'New Empty Nester Dad' akin to already existing in the literature ideal of a 'New Father' (Robinson and Barret, 1986; Parke, 1996; Swedin, 1996). 'New Empty Nester Dad' is in touch with his emotional experiences but at the same time aware of the limitations in expressing those emotions which stem from existing ideals of traditional masculinity. It could therefore be argued that existing 'empty nest' literature presenting fathers as not affected and largely absent from the event of children leaving home (for instance Bart, 1971; Phillips, 1957; Curlee, 1969; Karp et al, 2004; Hartocollis, 2005; Ryff and Seltzer 1996) is disjointed from the literature on earlier stages of fatherhood, which construct fathers as much more emotionally and practically involved (Cabrera, 2000; Parke, 1996; Huttunen, 1996). Partly it might be due to the historical positioning of the research on those two different stages of fatherhood. The literature on 'New Fatherhood' is generally more modern than that on the 'empty nest' and the men representing 'New Fatherhood' are younger to those researched in reference to 'empty nest'. It might be that with time we will see more research on 'empty nest' showing fathers focus on experiencing and expressing emotions.

Another original finding is a notable convergence of fathers' constructions of themselves as unprepared and unable to deal with the emotional challenges of children

leaving home with the constructions that emerged in the analysis of 'experts' and mothers' accounts of fatherhood. Those are discussed in a greater detail in the Chapters IV and V. The main noticeable difference between the other parties' accounts and those developed by fathers themselves is that the latter's discursive work is designed to 'fight' for men's right to express emotions. On the other hand, 'experts'' and mothers' constructions present men as unable and unwilling to talk about feelings. Therefore, even though the constructions of fatherhood in the Internet setting are similar in terms of the picture they portray, discursively they achieve two very different goals.

However, what is particularly interesting is that the gendered behaviours are presented as disadvantageous for both mothers and fathers. The mothers are constructed as struggling with the acceptance of the 'empty nest' because of the sacrifices they made for the children and the family. At the same time fathers' gendered behaviours such as concentrating on their working life is presented as leading to regret and unpreparedness for 'empty nest transition'. Overall, conforming to gender stereotypes is constructed by 'experts' as having a detrimental effect on parents.

Finally, the project challenged the prevalent assumption that there are essential differences between interview and 'naturally occurring' data and developed a solution of 'necessary problems' identified in the interviews of Potter and Hepburn (2005). This suggests that the context in which data is produced is only important to a certain degree and provides evidence for existence of certain universal fatherhood constructions.

In conclusion, this thesis enriched the existing knowledge of how fathers', whose children have left home are portrayed in our culture. I hope that it will be useful for future researchers investigating the subject.

Reflection on methodology and research journey

Looking back on the last three years it can be said that this piece of research and I have undergone a tremendous journey. I started as quite an inexperienced qualitative researcher, with more quantitive research methods knowledge, however at the same time dissuaded with their limitations, especially in relation to their ability to explore new, previously understudied topics. The experience of doing my MSc thesis, where I investigated the relationship between the preparedness for fatherhood among young men and the quality of the relationship with their own father gave me a lot of research expertise in the area of literature reviewing, data collection and quantitive analysis. However, the results of this piece of research were inconclusive and I felt that they have not provided enough depth of knowledge. Therefore I decided that in my PhD project I would also focus on quite an un-researched topic and use the qualitative methods instead. When learning about qualitative research I was fascinated by its flexibility and potential, especially of the social constructionist approaches. What was most appealing about this school of research was what I considered then a lack of arrogance. What I mean by that is that schools such as discursive psychology seemed to thrive on variability of explanations of certain phenomena, never set on just one interpretation, but open to possibility of infinite realities depending on widely and specifically defined context. In the course of my research I was trying to stay true to this view of research, even though as discussed earlier in this chapter I have learnt that it may not always be the case. The early stages of the research, where I was learning about the literature and methodology, where one of the most enjoyable ones. At that point I was still quite open about the methodology I was going to use, however deciding quite early to focus on 'bottom-up' approaches, which would start with the data and treat it as the most important element of the research.

The process of data collection was definitely a 'rollercoaster ride'. In line with the value of variability and the modern trends in qualitative research I have decided to use different types of data. Collecting Internet data was fascinating for me as I was engrossed in its breadth and diversity. However, one of the lowest points of the research was recruitment of the participants for interviews, mainly because of being shrouded in frustration at the difficulty of finding willing fathers, whose children have left home. I have described details of this process in Chapter III. After the challenges of recruitment, the interviewing process was one of the highest points of the whole research process. I approached the task with vigour and fascination, ready to hear the stories of my participants. As mentioned above, I did not have a lot of interviewing experience; therefore this process was a learning curve. Even though my interviewing was not perfect to start with I found a place in the analysis of the data to orient to my own input into the interviews, which I believe improved greatly the transparency and richness of the findings.

Finishing the collection of the data was an important milestone in my research. From this point on I knew that the completion of all the remaining stages depended on me. Finalising the analytical methods was a fascinating process, which started with familiarisation with the collected data and choosing which was most appropriate. During this time I often had a metaphor of a 'toolbox' in mind, comparing the variety of analytical methods to a range of tools, from which we can choose those which are most suitable to the job at hand. Because of the great variety in my data I felt it was impossible to choose only one tool, and therefore I ended up with an analytical method drawing from a few different schools, however being united under the principle of orienting towards participants' constructions rather than approaching the data with already existing assumptions. This process of choosing appropriate methods was difficult as I was aware of the tensions within the field of qualitative research and

certain reluctance towards combining different techniques. I described those challenges above in this chapter. The analysis of the data was then a very satisfying process, enabling me to make sense of the vast body of data collected. I was satisfied with the methods I have chosen as they were congruent with the nature of the data they were dealing with and the objectives of the project.

The final stages of research process, the writing up and editing were difficult ones. On one hand I struggled with writing in my second language and secondly with devising a structure of the thesis that would achieve balance between the theoretical, methodological, analytical and reflexive components. I have learnt then that I had a tendency to focus on the analysis of the data at the expense of critical discussion of the findings and their position within wider literature on the topic. This was the element I had to work on the hardest.

In conclusion, through this journey I have learnt that sticking to my research values, being open to different interpretations and hard work are most important qualities in conducting a piece of research.

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Appendix 1. Interview schedule

1. Background information

Firstly, I'd like to ask you a few questions about you and your family:

- How old are you?

- How old is your wife/partner?

- What work do you and your partner do?

- How many children do you have/what are their names

- How old are your children?

- How many children still live at home?

2. The child

- Let's talk a bit about your son/daughter, who has left home recently/ most recently if more than one…

- When did your son/daughter leave home? How long ago?

- How would you describe your relationship with him/her before he/she left home?

Prompt: did you have good contact, talked a lot, share experiences, do you think he/she trusted you

- Could you tell me about your involvement as a father when your son/daughter/children was still at home?

- Now, could you tell me a bit about the reasons why your child has left home?

- What was your <u>first reaction</u> to your child's decision to leave home?

- What did you think about the timing, did you think she/he was ready?

- What was your partner's reaction to your child's decision to leave home?

  - How did you all prepare for his/her leaving home?

- When your child was about to live could you see any positive aspects of it? How did it change with time?

Now let's talk a bit about the time when your child was leaving home…

- What would you say that your role was during the time when your child left home?

Prompt: were you involved in actual moving, emotional support, worrying

- Did you help your son/daughter move homes?

- How was your partner/wife involved in this operation?

- What was her role?

- How do you think did your child handle leaving home?

Prompt: were they happy to leave or nervous

3. Launching and emotions

- How did you feel when your child was leaving home?

- How did your wife/partner feel when your child was leaving?

- What did you think about your partner's emotional reaction?

- How do you think you both coped with your child leaving?

  - What about your other children? How do you think it affected them?

- Some people say that it is more difficult for men to show their emotions and talk about them. Do you think it is true in your case?

- Have you talked with your partner/wife or children about your feelings related to son/daughter's leaving?

- What in your view did your wife/partner and children think about your reaction to son/daughter leaving?

- Do you think that your reaction and feelings were the way they were because of your child's gender?/ (if couple of them left: were they different)

Prompt: Do you think your reaction would be the same if it was your son/daughter leaving (other way round?)

- ➢ If this wasn't your first child leaving home can you tell me a bit about your first experience of this?
- ➢ Was the experience similar for you with both children?
- ➢ If it was different this time can you perhaps explain why?

4. After leaving

- Do you think anything changed when your child left home? Can you tell me about the changes?
- Was any part of this difficult for you? What was it?
- How about your wife/partner… what was the most difficult aspect for them?
    - How did you get used to him/her not being around any more?

- Has your relationship with your child changed in any way after he/she left home?
- Has your involvement with your son/daughter changed since he/she left home?
- What about the relationship with your partner/wife?

Prompt: do you spend more or less time with each other; has the way in which you spend your time together changed? Do you talk as much as before? Have the feelings you have for each other changed?

> ➢ Do you think that the relationship with the children who are still at home changed after your son/daughter left home?

Prompt: If yes, in what way

- How do you feel about this change?

- When did you start noticing these changes? How did these changes evolved?

- How does all these changes in your family life affect the way you see yourself now?

Prompt: what are the main characteristics that could describe you now? What characteristics were most suitable to describe you when your son/daughter was still at home?

- Would you say that the fact that your children don't live with you any more changed the way you perceive yourself?

- What would you say is your most important role in your life now? Why?

- Do you think your partner/wife sees you differently now your son/daughter has left home?

- How do you think your partner/wife changed since your son/daughter has left home?

Reflection

- How do you think parents generally deal with their children leaving home?

- Would you consider sharing your experience in internet forums for 'empty nest' parents? Why???

- What advice would you give to somebody, whose children are leaving?

Appendix 2. Transcription notation

The form of notation used in this project is based on the system developed by Jefferson (2004).

[A left bracket indicates the point of overlap onset.

]   A right bracket indicates a point where two overlapping utterances end.

=   Equal sign indicates no break or gap.

(0.0)   Numbers in parentheses indicate elapsed time in tens of seconds.

(.)   A dot in parentheses indicates a brief interval, less then one tenth of a second.

_   Underscoring indicates some sort of a stress, through pitch and/or amplitude.

::   Colons indicate prolongation of the immediately prior sound.

↑↓   Arrows indicate shifts into especially high or low pitch

∘word∘   Degree signs bracketing the utterance indicate that the sound is softer than the surrounding talk

> <   Right/left carats bracketing an utterance indicate that the bracketed material is speeded up, compared to the surrounding talk.

< >   Left/right carats bracketing an utterance indicate that the bracketed material is slowed down.

.hhh   A dot prefixed a row of 'h's indicates an audible inbreath.

wohhrd   A row of 'h's within a word indicates breathiness

( )   Empty parentheses indicate that the transcriber was unable to decipher the word.

(…)   A row of three dots in parentheses indicates omitted material.

(( ))   Double parentheses indicate transcriber's description.

WORD   Utterance in capital letters indicates the material is audibly louder than surrounding talk.

Appendix 3. Participant Information Sheet

1. Study title: Research project on fathers whose children have left home.

2. Invitation paragraph.

You are invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully. Please ask if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take your time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. Thank you for reading this.

3. **What is the purpose of the study?**

There are a number of studies regarding the experience of being a father, however only a fraction of them concerns fathers of children who have left home either for further education, work or marriage. From the studies that do attend to this stage of life, many focus on the experience of mothers rather than fathers or present this stage of life in negative terms. Apart from this these studies present point of view of scientists and researchers rather than fathers themselves. Therefore this study aims to provide thorough understanding of experience of fathers and their partners, whose children have left home, focusing on their own point of view.

4. Do I have to take part?

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form. If you decide to take part you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason.

5. What will happen to me if I take part?

Should you agree to take part in the study the time you will be interviewed by the researcher. The questions will focus on fathers' experiences of dealing with the child's leaving, adjusting to new fathering role, changes in relationship with children.

The interview will last any time between twenty minutes to an hour or perhaps longer. This will depend on how much you want to say at the time. You are free to stop at any point and do not have to answer any questions that you find uncomfortable. The interviews will be digitally recorded so that they can be transcribed and analysed at a later date. The interviews will take place at Nottingham Trent University at a time and date convenient for you. Arrangements could be made for the interview to take place elsewhere if you prefer.

6. What are the possible benefits of taking part?

There are no direct benefits to participants but findings of the study will contribute to debates in family and developmental psychology about parenting and especially fathering in later stages of family life cycle.

7. What if something goes wrong?

Any concerns raised during the interviews will be discussed with you. If any issues of sensitive nature will be raised you may want to discuss them further on professional basis with a counsellor. In this eventuality the researcher will help you to make appropriate contacts. Ethical protocols developed by the British Psychological Society will be adhered to.

8. Will my taking part in this study be kept confidential?

If you consent to take part in the research the interviews will be digitally-recorded. All information which is collected about you during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential. Any information about you will have your name removed so that you cannot be recognised from it. However, you need to be prepared that your words may be used directly in the report from the study. The recordings will be transcribed (a written record is made of the recorded material) and then studied. The recordings will be destroyed after a period of five years.

9. What will happen to the results of the research study?

The results of the research are likely to be published in a variety of psychology journals and research seminars. Your anonymity and confidentiality will be protected at all times. The results are likely to be published from a year to six years after the interviews. You can obtain a copy of the published results by contacting the researcher.

10. Contact for further information.

Further information can be obtained from the research team:

Justyna Ruszkowska (research student at Nottingham Trent University)

Division of Psychology, School of Social Sciences, Nottingham Trent University, Burton Street, Nottingham NG1 5BU. Tel. 07763125115 E-mail: justyna.ruszkowska@ntu.ac.uk

Dr Sarah Seymour-Smith (Director of studies and senior lecturer at Nottingham Trent University)

Division of Psychology, School of Social Sciences, Nottingham Trent University, Burton Street, Nottingham

Dr Simon Watts (Project supervisor and senior lecturer at Nottingham Trent University)

Division of Psychology, School of Social Sciences, Nottingham Trent University, Burton Street, Nottingham

Prof. Jean Underwood (project supervisor and professor of psychology at Nottingham Trent University)

Division of Psychology, School of Social Sciences, Nottingham Trent University, Burton Street, Nottingham

Thank-you for taking the time to read this sheet. *We hope that you will feel able to take part in the study.* Please feel free to ask further questions (*ring Justyna on 07763125115 or e-mail justyna.ruszkowska@ntu.ac.uk).* If you decide to take part

then you will be asked to sign a consent form but you are still free to withdraw at any point. A copy of the signed consent form will be given to you to keep. If you do not wish to take part then no further action is necessary.

Appendix 4. Consent form

Title of Project: Research project on being a father of children who have left home.

Name of the researcher: Justyna Ruszkowska (tel: 0115 8485631,

justyna.ruszkowska@ntu.ac.uk)

1.   I confirm that I have read and understood the participant information sheet for

the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

Please tick box □

2.   I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at

any time, without giving any reason.

Please tick box □

3.   I agree to take part in the above study.

Please tick box □

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---Name of Participant   Date

Signature

-------------------------------   ---------------

Name of researcher   Date   Signature

One copy for the participant; one copy for the researcher.

Appendix 5 Data samples

Example of an Internet 'expert' article

Family First: Surviving Your Empty Nest

Family First: Surviving Your Empty Nest

Carrie Hutton

Max Fronek is following his dreams, leaving his Rothschild home for a musical future in Boston. His parents Amy and Steve already said goodbye to their daughter in 2000, but now their nest will truly be empty without Max.

The college freshman will study at the well respected Berkeley School of Music.

"I gotta try it now, otherwise I'm never gonna have the chance again," says Fronek.

No matter how close or far away their son went to school, Max's absence will have an impact on the Froneks, but they've already made the transition easier on themselves by putting time into their marriage over the years.

Amy and Steve Fronek have been married for 27 years.

"We've always been really good friends," says Fronek, "I think we'll continue that and maybe it'll get better, spending more time together without the kids intervening."

The parents who suffer the most depression when the kids move away typically have some marital problems that have been neglected, don't have their own hobbies and interests and maybe have lost touch with adult friends. Experts suggest you look at their leaving as an opportunity to focus on personal goals, perhaps taking a trip together.

For the Froneks, the trip out east with Max will be bittersweet.

Max says, "She's gonna cry a lot the first days, that's how she is, but she's a well adjusted person so I think she'll do fine."

If feelings of sadness prevent you from working or mixing with friends, you may want to seek out some professional counseling to deal with your empty nest. Fronek will be performing Thursday night (08/25/05) at the Gelato Cafe in Wausau from 7 p.m. to 9 p.m. He heads off to college with his parents on Monday and they've decided to turn it into a road trip stopping at the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in Cleveland.

The Web is a great source for empty nesters, including the site www.emptynestsupport.com.

Example of Internet chat room conversations

http://www.atomicboards.com/board.pl?
user=natalie&board=4097&sid=&mode=read&action=157741

Dad's really hurtng right now, but his son is very happy.

      Posted by Dad on October 14 2005, 11:53:50

Hello all,

First of all, I'm glad I found this site. I've been reading all the posts, and truly feel I'm not alone in this now.

My 1st wife and I divorced after 15 years of marriage and an only child, she left us both...I have had the priveledge of raising the best son a father could have. But now he's 23..going to school part time and working full time, and has just moved out into an apartment. It really hurts to let go...My 2nd wife isn't giving much support though. She's been waiting for him to leave, I told her he could stay as long as he wanted. If it came to it, she would have to leave before I forced him out. She also has 2 sons, which left home at 19 before we met. She says that's the way she was raised. Oh well...I knew this day would come, but I was in no way prepared for these feelings, and I'm not sure

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any amount of preparation would have helped. But at least he's leaving on his own. It was very important to me that he knew he didn't have to leave untill he was ready. Anyways, It really hurts..this empty nest stuff.., I find myself crying in the morning usually, also at various times of the day...yes some men do cry... But I can see he's very happy and experiencing life on his own. I'm also very lucky that so far he's still close to home and we can keep our relationship going. I feel for those who's are away for long periods, I would be a basket case. I'm actually hoping it will be better than before, as I will charish the time with him. Where as I may have taken him for granted in the past. I just keep telling myself..he's still my son, he just doesn't live with me anymore, and he's happy...which to me, is most important.

I can't help or stop thinking of him growing up though...didn't he just graduate grade school? This gonna take a long time to get over isn't it?

Thanks for listening,

Dad

Posted by Nella on October 14 2005, 12:43:11

Hi Dad;

Welcome to the e.n. support. You will find lots of mom's here who feel the same - sometimes there are Dad's, too. So, don't let that stop you from sharing your feelings. It sounds like you and your son have a great relationship and emotional bond. I'm sure alot of men feel the same, but are afraid to express their feelings. Good for you for being here. You'll find comfort and answers on how to work with your feelings by reading these posts. I wish you well-

Nella

Posted by Mags on October 14 2005, 13:40:15

Dear DAD .... yes it is terribly hard. And you have to let yourself feel the feelings. But not only will you not take him for granted anymore, you will find that he is going to cherish you even more.

Things will change and he will continue to grow and be a healthy adult, but I can guarantee you .... he will need and want you in his life for a long time to come !!! I know this from letting go of my three sons . You are blessed, even though it doesn't feel like it now. Hang in there Dad.

Mags

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The Best Facelift is a smile !!!

Posted by hurlsenm on October 14 2005, 14:19:52

Hey Dad.. welcome. Now you know you are not alone. You are in good company. It sounds like you have formed a great relationship with your son. Now he is establishing himself. What a comfort it is that he lives close by. Take advantage of that. Set aside some time to do father/son things on a regular basis. You will feel the affects of this transition for awhile. I find that talking to my daughter by phone frequently helps me. It doesn't have to be a long conversation. You will experience ups and downs with the downs becoming more manageable over time,thank God. As Mags said ...you are blessed. Just hang in there...and when you feel down... come here and vent out...it really does help.

Hurls

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God Bless Your Day Today!

Welcome, Dad, yes, it's true that some of the guys out there feel the same. I have a friend whose only daughter went off to college a year ago. His wife actually kind of liked the freedom - you can relate to that huh?? But, he was devastated. He told me it took a good 4 months to get over the sinking, sad, hurtful period.

Then, each time his daughter came home for a visit he had to readjust all over again. But, each time, it got better. He told me that this is what we spent our lives doing - raising our child to eventually become independent, a man or woman, able to function well in that big old world out there. So, I should be happy & pleased for my son (who left for college 6 hrs away in August).

He is right & I do feel proud that my son is becoming the man I hoped he would, taking on new responsibilities and consequences all by himself. Some how,I was doubtful he could do it, but soon realized I did do a good job of raising a responsible, well adjusted son who now has his time, just as I had my time.

Too bad your wife feels the way she does. Don't know if you ever listen to "Dr. Laura" on AM radio, but she often gets very angry at 2nd wives who can't wait till their step kids are out of the picture. Her advice is to always put your child first. She even recommends waiting to get married until the child is 18 or on his own.

I used to think that was ridiculous until I began to see all the problems some kids have with their selfish stepmoms/or stepdads. You did the right thing putting your son first. Too bad you didn't marry a more generous woman. This could make your home

environment even more lonely as you will resent her happiness about your son being gone. You might need counseling - she would probably say you were nuts though!

Do what you need to to stay healthy and available for your son.

Keep posting!

bsmom

Posted by oldmom on October 14 2005, 23:04:49

Dad - its nice to hear from a man and welcome to the site. My husband misses our son terribly, though he tries not to show it. They call each other frequently, and it helps my husband. Keep up the father/son relationship.

Posted by monz630 on October 15 2005, 09:52:45

Hi Dad--

Happy to see that all of the nice ladies here have given you a wealth of info and support...wouldn't have expected anything less. I am thrilled that you let your new wife know that she would leave the house before your son was forced out, although I am sure she was not thrilled about it. We are the ones who brought these dear, sweet souls into this world and it is our duty and God-given right to make sure they know they are loved and will always have a place to call "home" no matter where we live or who we live with as long as they follow the rules and guidelines. This is a new time for all of us...adult children as well as us...yes, it is very difficult at times, almost unbearable, but

you hit the nail on the head when you said that ,"he's happy and that's what is most important." I imagine the hard part for you is that you probably don't find too many men out there willing to voice their feelings like you have...I applaud you. I know many dads are feeling the same, but just don't feel comfortable expressing it. Not so great for you, but at least you felt safe enough to come here and seek support. I will keep you in my prayers and come and join in on the teleseminar and/or even the chatroom. We have fun sometimes--even through the tears.

Take care and keep reading and posting--you will feel better down the road a bit.

Monz

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Smile...it's contagious!!

Example of an interview transcript

Mark 19.07.06

1. J: so mhm at the beginning I would like ask you some just a basic information
2. like how old are you.?.
3. M: fifty nine
4. J: fifty nine. and are you married
5. M: yes
6. J: And how old is your wife?
7. M: fifty eight
8. J: fifty eight, mm and how many children do you have
9. M: Three
10. J: and how old are they
11. M: twenty eight (sigh), twenty and eighteen
12. J: ok, and could you tell me their names (.) mhm (.) (laughter)
13. M: Nathan is the oldest, ehh Ronan is twenty and Amy is eighteen
14. J: Ehm .. and is any of them is still living at home?

15. M: Mhmm… (.) N::o:: (1) we might talk about this later cause Amy's status is

16. a bit (.) unclear.. but basically no

17. J: Mhmm (.) Ok. umm Maybe let's talk about (.) your daughter, that mhm

18. who have mhm left home [quite recently]..hasn't she (.) yeah,

19. M: (1.0)   [yeah]

20. mhm so how long ago was it

21. (3.0) mhm really.. in the last s::ix weeks between two and three months

22. ago

23. J: [mhm so quite recently]

24. M: [mhmm rea::lly} in last couple of weeks

25. J: Um.. how could you describe the relationship with her before ..she uh she

26. left home?

27. M: (0.8) Uhm Goo::d , I think, uhm she:: was: (2.0) she has um a lot of

28. involvement in (1.0)various things outside her home so she was spending (0.8)

29. a:: number of weekends away she would stay with friends quite a lot during

30. the week she would also have people visiting and staying in our house so

31. although living with us she was living quite an independent existence but you

32. know this relationships were friendly and pleasant I think?

33. J: mhm what about your involvement with her before she left home (.) did

34. you help her a lot..

35. M: (.) Umh well (3.0) I I guess I did (.) quite a lot practical things to help in

36. her outside activities in terms of (.) ferrying her and other people, picking

37. things up and so on. Umh Her outside involvement was largely religious

38. and… it's a different religion than [mine]

39. J: [aha::]

40. M: so I didn't really have any involvement in what she was doing…

41. J: I see, aha

42. M: but.. I suspect it's quite common with various teenagers… I was doing

43. quite a lot of… school stuff. she's also she's just finished doing A levels and

44. all 3 of the subjects in which she was doing A levels the subjects I have

45. expertise in (2.0)

46. J: aha

47. M: and she wasn't really prepared to have any help from me at all

48. J: aha

49. M: lend me her books and uhm you know (.) offering stuff and so on but that

50. was something she didn't (.)really want

51. J: Mhm

52. you know in in practical day to day terms there were things like to help and

53. that was quite comfortable

54. J: Now could you tell me a bit about the reasons why she left home

55. M: ….(sigh) (3.0) I don't know really.. she hasn't (.) directly discussed it (.)

56. with us. It just became a .. a a faze of conflict as I said that uhm she was

57. spending quite a lot of time travelling and staying with other people in the

58. Nottingham area for various you know because of meetings and so on and it

59. just got to the point where (1.0) she wasn't coming back uhm when she was

60. you know she still had meetings in the house with lots of people cooked food

61. for them, then she would go you know somewhere else. Only that's three or

62. four weeks ago only was clear what you know really happened three or four

63. weeks ago she was (.) round our house I think after meeting and she said:

64. could you give me a lift home? Hmhm…(laughter)

65. J: ah::a

Appendix 6 Recruitment letter to Parentline

Justyna Ruszkowska, MSc
Postgraduate Researcher
Nottingham Trent University
Room 310 York House
Mansfield Road
Nottingham
NG1 3JA

Dear Sir/Madam,

I am a PhD psychology student at Nottingham Trent University and at present I am working on a project about fathers, whose children have left home for instance to go to university, get married, go travelling etc.

At the moment I am at the stage of recruiting participants for my study and therefore I would like to ask if it was possible to market my research to parents through your organisation.

All I would ask you is to distribute the materials about my study to parents and anybody who would be interested in taking part in the project. Then they could contact me if they are willing to contribute to the study. Participation involves an interview about experience of children leaving home.

Please find the Participant Information Sheet with all information about the study and a short advert that could be used for marketing attached.

Thank you very much for your help,

I look forward to hearing from you,
Sincerely,

Justyna Ruszkowska

FATHERS-YOUR OPINIONS COUNT!

Nottingham Trent University are currently seeking fathers whose grown-up children have left home for instance to go to university to participate in a research project.

We are looking for fathers, whose children have left home within last 3-4 years and who would be prepared to talk about their experiences in an informal interview.

Call today to volunteer or for further information please contact Justyna Ruszkowska on tel: 07763125115 or email: justyna.ruszkowska@ntu.ac.uk.