

Rethinking the fatherhood trilogy: Towards a formulation of the fatherhood constellation

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Abstract

Like motherhood, fatherhood brings about a reorganisation of the father's representational world, and it presents an opportunity for the father to focus on particular sets of relationships in his development of himself as a father. If one were to try to map these relationships for the father, using Daniel Stern's analogous conceptualisation of the motherhood trilogy, it could be expected that the fatherhood trilogy would depict a new father who is pre-occupied with his own father, himself-as-a-father and his baby. However, the data obtained from in-depth psychoanalytic research interviews with South African fathers of infants indicates that there may be various, overlapping trilogies involved in emergent fatherhood. These trilogies can take multiple forms, reflecting both conscious and unconscious intergenerational, intragenerational, matrilineal, patrilineal, Oedipal, social, cultural and historical facets of emergent fatherhood. Subsequently, this paper argues that fatherhood may be overdetermined and that, for the fathers in this study, the fatherhood trilogy might be more accurately framed as the fatherhood trilogies. Three case studies, compiled using the data that emerged from research interviews, will be used to explore the fatherhood trilogies and their contribution to the fatherhood constellation, specifically the representation of the self as a father.