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Author(s): Veteläinen, Anu; Grönholm, Heidi; Holma, Juha

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Discussions of Fatherhood in Male Batterer Treatment Group

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Anu Veteläinen¹, Heidi Grönholm¹ and Juha Holma¹

Abstract

The aim of this study was to examine how men who have perpetrated violence toward their partners and participated in batterer group talked about being a father and how they perceived their own fatherhood. The discussion in the group was analyzed qualitatively by using the methods of content analysis. In traditional fatherhood, they talked about avoidant, passiveness, distant, indifference, and authoritative controlling ways of acting. These men also created an image of themselves as active and caring fathers, thus including empathy and nurture in the concept of fatherhood. This new fatherhood was considered an achieved goal and an objective for the men as being a father. Talking about fatherhood in these groups is important as fatherhood and relations to children are both an important motivator toward nonviolence.

Keywords

fatherhood, intimate partner violence, batterer group

In several studies, the parenting style of men who have perpetrated violence toward their partners has been noted to be of the type known as traditional, that is, authoritarian and controlling. These men are strict, expect to be obeyed unquestionably, and do not take criticism, advice, or any resistance from their family (Adams, 1991; Bancroft & Silverman, 2002). Bancroft and Silverman (2002) considered male entitlement to be the most important attitudinal characteristic of batterers. Such fathers often expect the mother to be responsible for the unpleasant parenting tasks and participate only in the fun activities (Eriksson, 2003), especially those visible to outsiders, thus building a reputation for being a good parent (Bancroft & Silverman, 2002). Mathews (1995) claimed that violent fathers focus more on the control aspects of punishment than on the teaching aspects of discipline. Violence enables the father to maintain control over the other family members and, if his will is not obeyed, possibly to feel justified in committing acts of violence (Ayoub, Grace, Paradise, & Newberger, 1991). In addition, violent fathers may interpret their children's behavior as impulsive, stubborn, mean or hard-headed (Fox & Benson, 2004), and may justify their use of control-based fathering as an attempt to educate or shape the child's character (Perel & Peled, 2008). The studies of Holden and Ritchie (1991) suggested that violent fathers provide less warmth and kindness to their children than do nonviolent fathers. They do not, however, differ from nonbattering men in the amount of time spent with their children, although they are meaner and harsher to their children (Fox & Benson, 2004). According to Sternberg, Lamb, and Dawon-Noursi (1998), violent men are largely unaware of the effects of their violence on their

children, although these are commonly observed by mothers and teachers. Rothman, Mandel, and Silverman (2007) found that many partner-abusive fathers are concerned about the effects of their violence on their children and the children of their partners. Biological fathers were more likely than social fathers to believe that their abuse had negative effects on their children. Perel and Peled (2008) concluded that violent men express diverse attitudes toward the effects of their violence on their children, as sometimes the harmful effects were admitted and even the wish to make compensation for these were expressed, while in other cases total unawareness of the effects was evident. Studies of male batterer's perceptions of their parenting role have been rarely the subject of research. Perel and Peled discovered that violent men whose fathering had been based on authority, control, and power experienced frustration and disappointment with their fathering style. These violent fathers yearned for a deeper connection with their children but at the same time felt that there were shadows and limitations in their efforts to become a "good father." Spouses were considered a constraint on the men's fathering by dominating the "parental space," leaving them only minimal space in which to function, so that the most important role remaining for them is that of the punisher. This maternal gatekeeping role has also been identified in mothers' beliefs and attitudes (Allen & Hawkins, 1999).

¹University of Jyväskylä, Finland

Corresponding Author:

Juha Holma, Department of Psychology, University of Jyväskylä, P.O. Box 35, FIN-40014, Finland.
Email: juha.m.holma@jyu.fi

In batterer intervention programs, activities to address these issues began to emerge in the mid-1990s as a result of work with men's parenting groups. Several programs currently exist on the overlap between fatherhood and intimate partner violence, such as the Restorative Parenting program at the Domestic Abuse Project (DAP) in Minneapolis, Minnesota, and Caring Dads, developed by the Changing Ways abuser education program in London, Ontario (Adams, 2003). Increasingly, batterer intervention programs are developing collaborations with parenting programs and other agencies that address the needs of children. Despite the increasing interest in parenthood in batterer programs, research interest on this issue has been extremely rare.

Råkil (2006) found that men in group treatment have difficulties integrating their own violent behavior and their role as a father. Nevala-Jaakonmaa and Holma (2010) also noticed that for partner-abusive men, it was difficult to integrate the role of a father and the identity of a violent man. Thus, in the men's use of language they separated their position of father from their history of violent behavior. These men understand the contradiction between, on one hand, the fatherhood demands of nurture and participation and, on the other hand, their own violent behavior. When talking about conceptions of fatherhood, the violent men interviewed by Lahti (2001) described a bad father as unfit to provide a model of masculinity and as socially and morally questionable. At the same time, they did not consider the use of physical violence as automatically rendering a man unmoral (Ruckenstein, 2004). Violence can be perceived as a fatherly right and, as such, not in contradiction with the idea of good fatherhood. These utterances about fatherhood reflected both beliefs learned from past generations, that is, traditional fatherhood, and modern cultural views, that is, the new fatherhood.

The New Fatherhood

Today, there is an emphasis on the ability of fathers to take care of and raise children in the same way as mothers do. In the current debate on fatherhood, the term *the new father* is used to describe the more nurturing fathers who develop closer emotional relationships with their children and also share childcare duties with their partners. Dowd (2000) suggested that the new fathers are more active fathers, meaning they are increasingly involved in the care of children as well as in raising them. Nurturing is the core of the new fatherhood, and includes the provision of physical, intellectual and psychological support to their children. The amount of time these fathers spend with their children or what is done with that time is less important than the quality and manner of their behavior around their children. Alongside nurture and participation, the concept of shared parenting and equality of parenting are also addressed in the context of the new fatherhood (Dowd, 2000; Huttunen, 2001). Huttunen (2001)

saw shared parenting as centered on the idea that household chores and childcare are not subject to a gendered division of labor. In shared parenting, both parents are able and willing to participate in all the tasks that belong to everyday family life.

The Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

As already mentioned, the fatherhood of how men who have perpetrated violence toward their partners, especially in the context of batterer programs, has not been sufficiently researched. Furthermore, there is a need for investigations where fatherhood is not perceived through deficits but where the fathers' emotions, capabilities, motivation for child rearing and active taking of responsibility are also taken into account. This study, although bringing the concept of violence into fatherhood, also aims to investigate the possible strengths in the fathering of violent men and their ability for maturation and paternal growth. In addition, we are interested in exploring whether a violent man is able, despite his violence, to perceive himself as a successful parent. This study also investigated whether the men in the group have the capacity to reflect their learned traditional roles as men and fathers, and if they are willing to make the changes needed to become better parents. Thus, the main research questions are as follows:

Research Question 1: How do men participating in group treatment for male batterers talk about fatherhood?

Research Question 2: Is the ideology of the new fatherhood detectable in the talk of intimately violent men?

Research Question 3: How do these men integrate fatherhood and their history of violence?

Data and Participants

The data of this study consist of videotaped group sessions for male batterers. The group sessions were part of the Jyväskylä model for male batterers, established in 1996 (Holma, Partanen, Wahlström, Laitila, & Seikkula, 2006). The program is a joint project of the Mobile Crisis Centre and the Psychotherapy Training and Research Centre at the University of Jyväskylä. The model followed in Jyväskylä has been strongly influenced by a treatment model developed in a Norwegian research and treatment center called "Alternative to Violence" (Alternativ til Vold [ATV]; Raakil, 2002). The treatment is based on the voluntary (as opposed to court-mandated) participation of clients. The male perpetrators have completed individual sessions before entering the group treatment. Treatment groups are open-ended, which means that the men, who commit themselves to at least 15 sessions, can join the group at any time. The group meetings are unstructured, but the group facilitators direct discussion toward specific topics such as past

and present violent behavior, the safety of the victim, violence as a conscious choice, and various characteristics of masculine identity. Thus, the model integrates ideas and practices, such as building awareness of control and power issues, restructuring cognitive processes, and sex role resocialization, that are commonly included in these models (Saunders, 2008). The program draws on ideas from structured psycho-educational methods and supportive therapy approaches focused on individual needs (Holma et al., 2006; Raakil, 2002).

The researchers screened for groups, paying special attention to the number of participants who had children. Finally, a group held at the end of the 1990s was selected based on the highest number of father participants. The group met for 32 group sessions each of 1.5 hr duration, yielding a total of 48 hr of videotaped material. The average age of the men was 33 years (range = 25-52 years). The group comprised 12 men, 9 of whom had children. In total, the men had 27 children, 22 of whom were their biological children. The great majority of the children were below the age of 12, and only one man had children above the age of 18.

Treatment of Data

The data were analyzed using content analysis, which is a method used to analyze transcription data or other data in textual form (Brewerton & Milward, 2001). In qualitative content analysis, the emphasis is not on quantification but rather on meanings.

When watching the videotapes, the first task was to formulate precise criteria for collecting extracts pertaining to the research questions. Talk about fatherhood in general, the role of fathers, the speaker's children, the time spent with the speaker's family or the effects of the speaker's violence on his children was considered talk about fatherhood. Because of the large amount of data, only talk deemed of importance was transcribed. Word-for-word transcription was chosen, as the researchers wanted to preserve the voices of the participants. The final data set comprised 45 pages of transcribed speech.

Coding and Analysis

The transcriptions were read through many times, the purpose being to gain familiarity with and better understand their content. The data were then further analyzed using a more systematic approach and simplified examples were compiled. More than 180 simplified examples were found, and all of them were examined individually. The analysis conducted for the 180 examples condensed the data into 26 different types of fatherhood talk. All of the categories were then examined deeper to find similarities in meanings or content to condense them further. The purpose was to create broader categories that would depict the subcategories comprising them.

After this, a further, deeper, analysis was performed, resulting in a total of four categories (three representing traditional fatherhood and one the new fatherhood). Contradictions were abundant in the men's talk about fatherhood and these aspects were categorized separately in their own section under the heading Ambivalence about the New Fatherhood. An additional section, Violence in Fatherhood Talk, was created, as this was considered an important research question.

Results

Three of the categories constructed, that is, Passive, Avoidant Fatherhood; Distant, Indifferent Fatherhood; and Authoritative, Controlling Fatherhood, clearly reflect what can be termed *the traditional model of fatherhood*. The category of the new fatherhood was constructed according to the characteristics of active and caring fatherhood. Extracts taken from the transcribed data are presented to illustrate the categories. Each extract is prefaced by a code indicating the speaker. The men are coded as M plus a number, for example, M1, M2, and the two therapists are coded T1 and T2, respectively. Sessions are numbered from 1 to 32. Notes on the researcher are given in double brackets (()). The researchers translated the extracts into English from the Finnish original.

Passive, Avoidant Fatherhood

Avoidance of responsibility for keeping up a good relationship with their own children often appeared in the men's talk. The men talked as if their relationship with their children was not primarily theirs. Some of the men, usually those who had walked out on their families, portrayed a total lack of responsibility toward their children. In these utterances, the men laid all of the parental responsibilities on someone else without showing any interest in staying in contact with their children.

Extract 1: Session 29

M5: Well she ((ex-spouse)) got so enormously pissed off, and she said what kind of a coward leaves his children and spouse. Well of course it was true that, in a complicated situation I left them but, well, I explained it to myself that they have a good support system going on, as they had family around and . . . Quite close and strong tight relations with their relatives, they took care of the kids.

Sometimes juridical fatherhood was considered the most important aspect of fatherhood. The father's juridical status obliges him to provide for his family; this in turn may lead to the assumption that the father's primary position in the family is to be the breadwinner. This assumption was observed when they spoke about going to work as more important than being present at home.

Extract 2: Session 11

M3: When my spouse became pregnant for the first time, it was obvious to me that I'll be working 12 to 14 hours a day, a woman is at home pregnant, and that's OK because I'll be make money for her for the future.

When talking about acts of disobedience by their children, some of the men constructed an image of themselves as being forced into a disciplinary and authoritarian role by their spouses, who found it difficult to keep the children in order.

Extract 3: Session 13

M2: I have the unpleasant job, my wife has pushed it on to me, that I maintain the, how to punish . . . She has said to the children: "Wait until dad comes home, then you'll behave." It's not very flattering that I've been made into an ogre who gets to deal with the discipline.

This kind of description of the spouse as responsible for creating the father's role in the family was interpreted as passive, avoidant fatherhood because the father passed the responsibility for shaping his fatherhood to his spouse. Thus, he did not actively shape his own fatherhood or his role in the family, or at least did not admit voluntarily taking the role of punisher.

Distant, Indifferent Fatherhood

The men were able to reflect on their emotional connection with their children, partly as a result of witnessing their spouses' relationship with their children and comparing it with their own corresponding relationship. This comparison forced the men to admit they had been emotionally distant from their children.

Extract 4: Session 19

M2: For example, in a way, I never connected with my children in the same way as my spouse connected with them. Our relationship was, the relationship with my children, it was different . . . Mentally much more distant, emotionally.

This emotional distance was, according to the men, mostly due to them being at work so much or limiting themselves to concrete tasks ("men's work"), like pumping up a bike tire, while the children used their mothers for emotional support. This may indicate that the men feel that the children also uphold the division of roles between the parents by behaving differently with the mother than with the father.

Extract 5: Session 13

M2: But Matti ((the child)) then searched for it ((support)) within the family, from his mother, maybe in a more emotional way, but when it came to sports or anything else or his bike tires blew or something else, then he asked me.

Independence as men, or male entitlement, was considered more important, even heavily emphasized, compared with their duties as a father. The men described being away from home, at work or with friends, and having the right to choose where and with whom to spend their time after work, instead of experiencing an obligation to spend time with their family.

Extract 6: Session 11

M3: I didn't think at all that she was alone ((pregnant and later with the baby)) all the time, and at night the time was pretty scarce and then at the weekend I had the right to drink beer if I wanted to and go out with my friends . . . Like the new year, for example, it was self-evident, that of course I go out, drink beer and let off fireworks.

Becoming a father requires adjustments, and the authors interpreted the above extract as reflecting indifference, as the man is resisting fatherhood and shows no motivation to adapt to his current role as a father.

Authoritative, Controlling Fatherhood

Many of the men described making an effort to be acknowledged as the head of the family, or having this as an ideal, even if some of them also saw themselves as failures in this respect. The role of the highest authority was also related to the responsibility for keeping the family together and making all the important decisions concerning the family.

Extract 7: Session 26

M2: I sort of felt I was the head of the family, or . . . Sort of, in some way, tried to keep the family together and . . .

In addition, the men described how they had adopted authoritarian styles in their child rearing or in their communication with their children.

Extract 8: Session 13

T1: Did the children by their own actions question your methods?

M2: The kids didn't in the last year or a year and a half, they never asked and I didn't need to, the kids knew exactly what I was thinking or no, no, I didn't need to do anything.

T1: But when that happened, then was it that the kids somehow questioned the things that were important to you?

M2: Ummm . . . Well . . . Well it must have been like that, because the talk hasn't, what I've said . . . It ((the actions of the children)) hasn't stopped.

Besides reflecting a position of authority in the family, this kind of talk also included the idea of control over other family members. In discussions concerning control, the men reasoned that this was obligatory for a parent, but in most cases they felt they had gone too far with it. The use of control was often justified by the men by reference to the desire to protect their children from outside harm or from developing bad behaviors. The ultimate goal was to raise their children to become "good adults" although at times they admitted that ability to shape their children's future as adults was limited.

Extract 9: Session 18

T1: What about with the children then, you said you have had the same kind of control, what is the threat there if the children do something if they aren't sort of . . . ?

M1: Well, I probably have in my head that, when the children grow up there won't be any problems, so that I have terrible, terrible worries about raising, in raising good adults.

The New Fatherhood

The men described fatherhood as a positive, delightful, and active part of life. They had assimilated the demands of the new fatherhood and that they found fathering satisfactory and rewarding. As fathers, they emotionally gave their children a lot, but also felt they received a lot in return. Being with their children was pleasurable and even fun at times.

Extract 10: Session 32

M1: Well I have a very, very strong, strong sense of being a father, the interaction is really fantastic with both of the children and, and it goes really well with the children and I have received . . . She ((the daughter)) always puts a smile on my face, and at the weekends.

This kind of new fatherhood contains the idea of shared parenting, where nurturing and participation are not tied to specific gender roles. The concepts of mutual participation in household duties, responsibility, and emotionally close and empathic relationships with their children are also characteristic of the new father.

Extract 11: Session 21

M3: For example yesterday I did the laundry 4 times, and took the washing to dry, and I emptied the dishwasher twice, and stuff like that.

Sometimes becoming a father or the birth of a child automatically increased the desire to help the spouse and participate more. Fathers talked about themselves as the helpers to their spouses or even as equal householders.

Extract 12: Session 8

M4: We have always tried to share them ((household duties)) equally, so that it would be on both our shoulders then, taking care of the house.

The change involved in becoming a parent was considered positive and a valuable learning experience instead of being a deviation from what the fathers regarded as his normal life. The men often described fatherhood as life changing, as constantly altering their former lifestyle and as a unique experience that can never fully be prepared for. Moreover in relation to this life-change, the men mentioned of the making of necessary sacrifices and compromises. The fathers talked about giving up their former lifestyles, hobbies, free-time activities, friends, and even intimate moments with their spouses. Although for the most part such sacrifices were narrated as voluntary, difficulties in or oppositional attitudes toward changing a previously comfortable lifestyle were also voiced.

Extract 13: Session 1

M7: At least I've had to say goodbye to all of . . . After that, for the kinds of . . . My own free-time activities.

Even the giving up of hobbies could be seen as part of the maturation process, and the men pondered the possibility of eventually growing out of them anyway, so that it was not really a question of giving up, but of personal growth. They were also able to acknowledge and admit the mistakes they had made as a father and wished to learn from them. During their development as fathers, the men talked about having improved their self-confidence in relation to coping with their children. They had also thought, analyzed, and evaluated their earlier fatherhood, and were now actively searching for ways to improve and achieve their fatherhood ideals.

Extract 14: Session 23

M1: I don't nowadays anymore really, really somehow, I talk already, I have found my own child, own inner child in a way, I'm able to enjoy the activities with the children and be on the same level as I wanted to,

rather than bossing the others around so much and trying to keep hold of all the strings.

Learning also occurred when the men thought about their childhood and their own fathers: They were not going to repeat their fathers' mistakes and were making efforts to be better than their fathers. Through seeing themselves as a child with a violent father, they were sometimes able to gain a better understanding of their own children's situation and experiences. Showing empathy toward their children appeared when the fathers talked about creating a safe and an open atmosphere and being a tower of strength to their children. In addition, expressions of guilt about failing as a father were also interpreted as taking responsibility. Some fathers also considered it their responsibility to protect their children from the world, while guarding and setting safe boundaries was also considered an important fatherhood task.

Extract 15: Session 18

M1: Well, I've tried to find out what's wrong ((with the children)) and be there to make them feel safe and give support.

Some of the fathers perceived that they had great responsibility for their children's future and some that it was their duty as a father to compensate their children for all the unhappy times they had experienced.

Ambivalence About the New Fatherhood

Fatherhood was interpreted by the men from many, sometimes contradictory, points of view. For all the men, the new fatherhood was the ideal to which they felt they should aspire. However, their ways of pursuing this ideal varied and as individuals the men saw themselves from multiple, possibly conflicting, perspectives when trying to conform to this ideal. They reported finding it a struggle to behave according to the ideals of the new fatherhood, experiencing it as in contradiction with their ideas of manhood, fatherhood, and masculinity, even to the point where achieving the standards of the new fatherhood gives rise to uncomfortable feelings.

Extract 16: Session 2

M6: It comes, the kind of, like I talk about here sometimes . . . That I've been so, I haven't lost my temper or anything, and then I should also kind of "sweet talk" or something. Makes me feel like a doormat! I can't help still feeling like this. For Christ's sake, no! Cleaning at home, doing laundry, cooking and all that kind of stuff, and it hasn't driven me up the wall or anything, and then it becomes sort of, it's like . . . Well . . . Maybe it's part of this thing, but it

feels like I'm a total doormat as a man, I just stay at home and . . .

Fatherhood was sometimes reflected on and compared with society's conceptions or to motherhood. In this process, fatherhood was perceived as an important although different role from motherhood, sometimes merely as a complement to it. Furthermore, mothers were considered to have a more unique relationship with the children due to their different and more intense role in carrying and giving birth to the baby. Sometimes the fathers felt they were more like outsiders and the children were just presented to them as a ready-made package from the maternity hospital.

Extract 17: Session 8

M4: It's a bit like that for the woman, their tummy starts to grow and they've read these baby magazines and online forums and they are thinking more about what to buy, so that I sort of know that for them the preparation is through those things and for the man it's a bit different, when it's just pushed at you, like here you are.

Violence in the Fatherhood Talk

When the men thought about past situations, they were sometimes able to see themselves from their children's point of view, as having been scary, mean and harsh fathers. They described themselves as yelling and using heavy disciplinary methods, some of which were later seen to have been unnecessary.

Extract 18: Session 11

M2: Well sort of, they ((the children)) see me as terribly negative only, and frightening of course, I understand that. And hell I was also afraid of myself!

There were differences between the men in whether they perceived their violence as having an effect on their children's well-being and behavior.

Extract 19: Session 19

M3: Yes, I have somehow underestimated it ((violent behavior towards the children)) . . . Like if you shout or break something, then so, it's really not so terrible.

T1: Is it somehow normal?

M3: Yes, I compare it to my own childhood experiences . . . I somehow think that if a child sees, for example, when we fight, it's not that bad, when it wasn't so for me in my childhood, that now if we fight verbally then, it has been quite, sort of, normal.

The extract illustrates how the father has underestimated the effects of his violent behavior toward his children. For this father, verbal violence or light physical acts, like breaking something, was normal and not harmful for the child. In other cases, fathers were able to understand the long-term effects their violence had had on their children.

Extract 20: Session 11

T1: But the fear still shows then ((in the children))?

M2: Yes definitely and it will show in them for a long time, it will show.

The men also segregated their violence from their fatherhood. For them, their violent behavior was in contradiction with their role as a father. This segregation was done by describing the use of violence as something that had occurred strictly in the past and had been perpetrated by a different person.

Extract 21: Session 26

M2: There are no, no acceptable grounds for, in my opinion, when I look at it nowadays, there are no acceptable grounds for it ((the violent acts)) . . . It is totally difficult to understand. It was a completely different person.

Some men, while expressing regret over their violence toward their children, reported not understanding their own violent behavior. This can also be interpreted as a kind of segregation.

Extract 22: Session 11

M2: Of course I've thought about . . . I never wanted to hurt my own kids in that way, but, umm, when I don't understand myself, why did I act like that . . . I don't get it . . . I will never forgive myself.

The men described their use of violence as something that "runs in the family," that is, learned from their father's behavior, or described having been "forced" to use violence as a means of defending themselves from their father's violent acts.

Extract 23: Session 26

T1: Did you, erm, towards the children when you lived at home and in the family, did you do things you somehow think at this moment were wrong?

M2: Well yes they were, disciplinary measures, I would . . . I would do it differently.

T1: Did you think at the time that they were somehow educational?

M2: Well yes, yes it probably stems from my own childhood and maybe from there . . . Umm, erm, umm, what I had experienced as a child I somehow maybe thought that it is an appropriate things to do.

Violent behavior was also attributed to the men's own lack of understanding or their inability to come up with different styles of discipline or fathering.

Extract 24: Session 13

T1: What were the situations where you had to smack the kids on their behinds?

M2: Umm . . . If, it, I would say, in the sort of situations where even my word didn't, even though I raised my voice, it wasn't enough. It was my own lack of understanding, didn't know how to handle the situation in any other way.

The data also showed men admitting responsibility for their violence. These men saw the use of violence as wrong and wanted in their behavior to change.

Extract 25: Session 9

M1: I have been violent and I don't want to be any more, and through this, change myself as a person, if not to get my family back, then at least for the sake of myself and my children.

Becoming a father may also trigger a change away from violent behavior or the children may act as motivators in the process of becoming a better (nonviolent) father, spouse or, even, person.

Extract 26: Session 10

T2: What is it then that motivates you to join this ((therapy)) group, the marital relationship maybe cannot be saved.

M2: It is that, at least my own children wouldn't turn away from me, and that the relationship (I have) with my children would normalize, and this way, through my own children.

Discussion

The aim of this study was to investigate how men who have perpetrated violence toward their partners talk about fatherhood and how they perceive themselves as fathers. This was done without drawing any conclusions about how they may actually behave in their everyday lives or evaluating what kinds of fathers they are. Fatherhood talk occurred in all the groups of intimately violent men, in some form, in almost every session and was even brought up spontaneously by the

men. The talk was diverse, and the same man might talk about fatherhood from many different, even contradictory, perspectives and often in the same session. Talk on the new fatherhood also occurred in the groups, and in equal measure with the traditional fatherhood talk. The intimately violent men in this study, like most fathers do, were drawing on the traditional and new father discourses.

The notions that violent men are authoritarian and control-oriented in their parenting (Adams, 1991; Bancroft & Silverman, 2002; Mathews, 1995) were supported by the present findings, as the fathers often described themselves as strict and controlling. The teaching aspect of discipline, however, was also mentioned by the men, but usually as a goal in improving their child-upbringing styles. Some of the men felt that their children did not respect their mothers, thereby forcing the men into the role of disciplinarian, as found by Bancroft and Silverman (2002) in their study of men who batter, and by Perel and Peled (2008) in their study of the talk of violent fathers. Perel and Peled suggested, moreover, that control-based fatherhood is sometimes an attempt to shape the children's characteristics; this was also the case in this study, where control was justified as an attempt to manipulate the child's personality development.

The men also justified their violent behavior as the only way to handle difficult parenting situations, and described themselves as unable to resolve conflict situations in a more constructive way. Incapability talk of a similar kind has been noted earlier in the context of explaining violence against children (Nevala-Jaakonmaa & Holma, 2010) and against one's partner (Holma et al., 2006).

In addition, talk where the men showed that they were making an effort to change or had changed their hitherto authoritarian style was found in the data. Adams (1991) examined violent fathers' parenting styles and noticed that they swung inconsistently between authoritarian and neglectful styles. This phenomenon was not clearly observed in the present data. However, various contradictions were found in the men's fatherhood talk that may illustrate inconsistency in their fathering styles.

As also observed by Perel and Peled (2008), the desire to connect at a deeper level with their children became evident in the talk of the men in this study. In Perel and Peled, a controlling role was perceived as an obstacle to this effort, which is in line with the present findings, as the role of disciplinarian or being a scary father created a distance between father and child. The men felt that their spouses were somehow depriving them of their parenthood and children, and some men reported having a more distant relationship with their children than with their spouses. In addition, the men's own violent childhood was seen as "shadowing" their fatherhood, and they experienced the effort to be different from their own fathers and form a deeper connection with their children than they had had with their fathers as a struggle.

Violence was present in the men's fatherhood talk, but less than the present researchers had expected. When

violence was discussed in the groups, most of the time it did not relate to the men's own fatherhood or to their talk about their children. The absence of talk combining fatherhood and violence may indicate that the men themselves do not see the links between their violence toward their spouses and their fatherhood, as also noted by Sternberg et al. (1998). Even if they perceived their violence as in some way related to their fatherhood, they spoke about the use of violence as something that had occurred only in the past, and saw themselves in the present as completely new, nonviolent fathers. This may indicate the same kind of differentiation or segregation between the father position and violent behavior, as was found in the study by Nevala-Jaakonmaa and Holma (2010).

Although the men were often aware of the effects of violence on their children, as noted earlier (Rothman et al., 2007), they perceived violence as a fatherly right and as such not in contradiction with good fatherhood. This notion is important in evaluating whether men who are violent toward their partners can nevertheless be good parents to their children. Moreover, in the interview study by Eriksson (2003), many of the women who had experienced marital violence continued to consider their spouses as good parents, despite their use of violence, if only they played or did other things with the children and took financial responsibility for them. Thus, according to these women, "a good father" did not necessarily have to be a good partner or commit to childcare equally with the mother. According to Eriksson and Hester (2001), even professionals perceived violent fathers as nevertheless capable of providing some benefits to their children, and contact between such a father and a child was supported or even urged by officials. This reflects the larger cultural and social discourses that construct traditional rights of authority and control for fathers, even above the rights of children.

In their traditional fatherhood talk, fatherhood was not seen as the goal of the men's manhood, and their relationship with their children was seen as distant. In addition, the men expressed their desires for their independence and entitlement as men. Traditional male rights were emphasized in custodial disputes through the concept of juridical fatherhood. Divorce was seen to have a great impact on fatherhood or the father-child relationship, as it could increase, or diminish, the effort to be a good father. Biological fatherhood was controversial, as for some it did not possess much significance (the other aspects of fatherhood were seen as more meaningful), while for others it dominated their representation of fatherhood, and for these men paternal rights were due to biology. Furthermore, in some of the talk, it became evident that biological fatherhood was the only remaining aspect of fatherhood, the others all having ceased to exist.

In the new fatherhood talk, fatherhood was seen as a positive, life changing, and constantly evolving position. In addition, psychological fatherhood appeared to be the most important aspect of fatherhood, as manifested in the men's

talk about being a responsible father, caring for their children's well-being and future, being fully aware of their children's personalities, or showing empathy and love toward them. Many of the men expressed the ideology of shared parenting, as noted also by Ruckenstein (2004). The researchers noted that becoming a father increased the men's willingness to help their spouse and participate more. Sometimes, the ideals of the new fatherhood were perceived as in contradiction with their ideas of manhood, fatherhood, and masculinity, causing ambivalent feelings. Social fatherhood was emphasized in talk about sharing everyday life with the children in the family, even if the man was not always their biological or even juridical father. It can be suggested that emphasizing the psychological or social aspects of fatherhood is part of the new fatherhood talk, whereas in traditional fatherhood talk the focus is more on biological or juridical fatherhood.

Limitations and Further Studies

It is not possible to generalize the findings of this study to intimate violent men as a population, as the men came to the group voluntarily and therefore differ from those who are not motivated to change their behavior. Generalizing, however, was not the purpose of the study; instead it was to deepen understanding of the possible constructions of fatherhood that intimately violent men have. In the future, it would be interesting to investigate whether such men's constructions of fatherhood change during the therapy process in general. It would be interesting to evaluate whether traditional fatherhood talk is more common at the beginning of treatment and whether it diminishes toward the end of treatment. As the new fatherhood talk includes the aspects of care and activity as a father, the present authors are left to ponder whether the treatment process could support the new fatherhood and in this way contribute to the development of these men's fatherhood behavior. An interesting continuation of this research would be to study how far the men's perceptions overlap or differ from the perceptions of the other members of their families. Inquiries about the men's actual lives, addressed to their spouses or children, would help to determine if there is any congruence between the men's perceptions and the reality of their families' lives. Further research could also include the rest of the family, and thereby broaden knowledge on batterers' family lives.

The importance of talk about fatherhood in the perpetrator groups. For most of the men in the group, while traditional fatherhood underpinned their previous experiences of fathering and their talk about it, they nevertheless depicted the new fatherhood as superior from the perspective of children and in terms of their conception of what makes a good father. This may mean that the new fatherhood, with its nurturing, caring, and participatory aspects, will continue to be in conflict with the men's idea of masculinity or manhood despite

their efforts to achieve it. Without putting aside the notion that violent fathers lack many skills in their fathering or that they have weaknesses, they often display a considerable motivation for change for the sake of their children. Violent fathers are not without emotions or warm thoughts or without principles toward their children, even if their behavior toward them might sometimes indicate otherwise. Moreover, how violent men perceive their fatherhood cannot be described in terms of a single concept or structure. Instead, violent men are unique and individualistic as fathers and differ from each other in the way they talk about fatherhood.

Dealing with the issue of the men's own childhood, and especially their fathers, seems to be an important part of batterer treatment group discussions. Talk of this kind could be linked to the issue of the men's own fatherhood and children. By thinking about or recalling themselves as a child with a violent father, such men may achieve a better understanding of their own children's situation and experiences. This might facilitate positive changes in the father-child relationship, as there appears to be at least a strong motivation for improving it.

The results of this study, however, point to the need for fathers to discuss their fatherhood in treatment groups, as for many of these men their children are a powerful motivation toward relinquishing violence. Moreover, given that violence toward children is no less important than violence toward a spouse, and as children are affected by the atmosphere of violence alone, it would be important to organize discussions of this kind. Fathering was perceived as part of the process of change for the better for violent men, as Perel and Peled (2008) also concluded in their interview study. The therapeutic group offers a possibility to talk about fatherhood and self-reflect, which is an important factor in male batterers' personal growth toward nonviolence. Thus, discussions on these topics are not to be discouraged but supported in a therapeutic environment.

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Author Biographies

Anu Veteläinen, MA, graduated from the Department of Psychology, University of Jyväskylä. The article is based on master thesis done by her and Heidi Grönholm and supervised by Juha Holma.

Heidi Grönholm, MA, graduated from the Department of Psychology, University of Jyväskylä. The article is based on master thesis done by her and Anu Veteläinen and supervised by Juha Holma.

Juha Holma, PhD, is a lecturer at the Department of Psychology, University of Jyväskylä. He has over 15 year experience as a group facilitator in the treatment groups for men who have battered their partners. He is the responsible researcher in a research on these groups.