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## The Transition to Parenthood: The Role of Humility, Gratitude and Forgiveness

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## ABSTRACT

The transition to parenthood, while an exciting time to celebrate the life of their child, causes parents to face new challenges such as physical exhaustion (Petch & Halford, 2008), role overload (Perry-Jenkins, Goldberg, Pierce, & Sayer, 2007), and less time for themselves and their partners (Feeney, Hohaus, Noller, & Alexander, 2001). Today in the United States, 85% of women and 76% of men will have parented a child by the time they are forty (Roy, Schumm, & Britt, 2014), making this an important developmental transition to examine. Humility has been found to have numerous social benefits, among them the initiation and maintenance of romantic relationships (van Tongeren, Davis, & Hook, 2014). Prior studies have found that greater humility in romantic relationships increases relationship satisfaction and forgiveness (Farrell et al., 2015). Gratitude may also increase relationship satisfaction and commitment (Joel et al., 2013), and humility and gratitude may be related (Kruse et al., 2014). The current study sought to examine how humility is related to other virtues (i.e., gratitude and forgiveness) during the transition to parenthood.

Participants included 69 heterosexual married couples ( $N = 138$ ) that were expecting their first child. 72% were Caucasian and ranged in age from 22 to 48 ( $M = 30.8$ ,  $SD = 4.76$ ). Relational humility was assessed through behavioral coding with three observers who were female undergraduate research assistants. Observers obtained 80% or higher in reliability. The Relational Humility Scale (RHS; Davis et al., 2011) was used to measure humility in relationship partners. Other measures included Trait Forgiveness Scale (Berry et al., 2005) and the Gratitude Questionnaire (McCullough et al., 2002).

Preliminary results examined correlations between study variables. Relational humility was positively correlated with forgiveness ( $r = 0.28$ ) and gratitude ( $r = 0.33$ ). A multiple regression analysis will be run to see if relational humility is associated with higher levels of forgiveness and gratitude. Additionally, analyses will be run to compare results according measurements of relational humility (i.e., self-report versus behavioral coding). Implications of this work would benefit new parents by promoting the virtues that support healthy and successful relationships during the transition to parenthood.



## INTRODUCTION

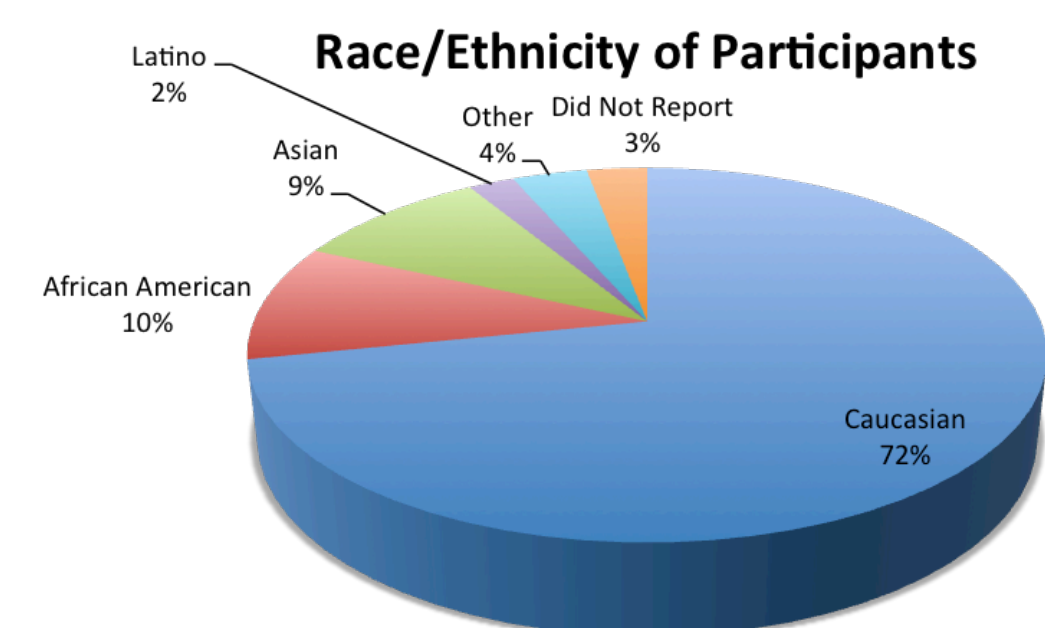
- In the United States today, the average age at which women and men are having their first child is 23 and 25 respectively, with 85% of women and 76% of men having a child by the age of 40 (Martinez, Daniels, & Chandra, 2012).
- The transition to parenthood requires modifications at both the individual level (i.e., mother and father) and dyadic level (i.e., parental unit) which cause stress (Roy, Schumm, & Britt, 2014).
- Additional stress for new parents stems from the difference between their expectations of parenthood and the reality (Roy, Schumm, & Britt, 2014).
  - New babies tend to heighten existing tensions between couples, which contradict with their idealistic expectations of parenthood (Twenge, Campbell, & Foster, 2003).
- Shapiro et al. (2000) and Lawrence et al. (2008) conducted research suggesting that the decline of relationship satisfaction occurs faster in couples with children when compared to childless couples.
- Parents showed sudden deterioration following birth on observed and self-reported measures of positive and negative aspects of relationship functioning (Doss 2010).
- Humility has many social benefits including the initiation and maintenance of romantic relationships (van Tongeren, Davis, & Hook, 2014).
- Greater humility in romantic relationships increases relationship satisfaction and forgiveness (Farrell et al., 2015).
- Thus, it is important to study virtues involved in marital conflict and relationship maintenance during the transition to parenthood.

## METHODS

### Participants

Number of people in the study	Number of couples in the study	Average age of people in the study	Standard deviation of age of people inn the study
138	69	30.8	4.76

- All of the couples in the study were heterosexual.
- The participants were recruited through classes (e.g., childbirth preparation, labor basics, newborn parenting, CPR) at three local hospitals.
- Participants were paid \$450 if they completed all parts of the study and a prorated amount if they completed a portion of the study.



## PROCEDURE

- This study was a portion of a larger study regarding the relationship process of couples transitioning into parenthood for the first time. Part of the investigation included:
  - A session during the wife's third trimester of pregnancy.
    - During this session, participants were videotaped and asked to describe their top five areas of disagreement and discuss them for about 10 minutes.
  - Weekly questionnaires until the birth of the child.
  - Two home-visits approximately three and nine months after the child's birth.
  - An online follow up questionnaire approximately 21 months after the child's birth.
- The first laboratory visit during the wife's third trimester of pregnancy was the only session that was coded for this study. They were given the following instructions:
  - "All couples find themselves having disagreements with each other. What strategies do you and your spouse use as a couple when you have disagreements with each other?"
- During this session, the couples also completed questionnaires assessing their spouse's levels of humility.
- The behavioral coding was done by three female undergraduate research assistances.
- The research assistants were trained in behavioral coding before contributing to the research.
- The three observers achieved 80% or higher reliability across all three raters., and were instructed:
  - "You will provide ratings for both the husband and wife. When watching the video, respond as if you were the individual's spouse. In other words, when rating the husband place yourself in the position of the wife and respond as you think she would respond to her husband. After you watch the videotape, circle the description for each item on the worksheet that matched your reaction. Then, watch the video again and fill out the worksheet for the other partner. Please randomly select who you will rate first – do not always rate the husband first and do not always rate the wife first."

### Measures

Scale	Description	Example of an Item
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Relational Humility Scale</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Measured the humility of each partner in the study.</li> <li>Contain 16 items; measure using a 5-point scale.</li> <li>1 = <i>completely disagree</i> to 5 = <i>completely disagree</i>.</li> <li>Has three subscales that examine global humility, superiority, and self-awareness.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>"He/she has a humble character."</li> <li>"He/she knows him/herself well."</li> <li>"He/she has a big ego."</li> </ul>

## RESULTS

A multiple regression analysis was conducted to examine the predictors of gratitude and forgiveness. Two predictors were simultaneously entered into the model: gender and relational humility. The overall model significantly predicted gratitude,  $F(2, 131) = 7.868$ ,  $p < .001$ ;  $R^2 = 0.107$ . Together, these predictors accounted for 10.7% of the variance in gratitude. When examining gratitude, relational humility,  $B = .546$ ,  $p < .001$ , was a significant predictor; however, gender was not a significant predictor,  $B = .051$ ,  $p = .681$ . The overall model also significantly predicted forgiveness,  $F(2, 131) = 9.977$ ,  $p < .000$ ;  $R^2 = 0.132$ . Together, these predictors accounted for 13.2% of the variance in forgiveness. When examining forgiveness, relational humility,  $B = .373$ ,  $p = .001$ , was a significant predictor of forgiveness; however, gender was not a significant predictor,  $B = -.304$ ,  $p = .004$ .

## CONCLUSIONS

- Relational humility is a significant predictor of gratitude and forgiveness.**
- This parallels with previous research but extends to a new sample of parents transitioning to parenthood for the first time.
- Important step forward in investigating virtues involved in the transition to parenthood.

### Limitations

- Generalizability
- Family structure

### Future Directions

- Examine variables longitudinally
- Other relationship variables



## REFERENCES UPON REQUEST, CONTACT:

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