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 (Pench & 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, Schuman, & 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 contribute to the research. 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, R²(2, 131) = .3868, p < .001, R²(1) = .2107. 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, R²(1) = .0532. 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.

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 (Mezirow, 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, Schuman, & Britt, 2014). Additional stress for new parents stems from the difference between their expectations of parenthood and the reality (Roy, Schuman, & Britt, 2014). New babies tend to heighten existing tensions between couples, which contradict with their idealistic expectations of parenthood (Tongere, Campbell, & Foster, 2003). Shapiro et al. (2000) and Lawrence et al. (2006) 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 (Doos 2010).

One's ability to recognize their partners' feelings and react in a way that supports their partners is a key feature of humility. Research has found that relational humility is associated with greater humility in romantic relationships (van Tongeren, Davis, & Hook, 2014).

Participants included 69 heterosexual married couples (N = 138) that were expecting their first child. 72% were Caucasian and 28% non-Caucasian. Other measures included Trait Forgiveness Scale (Berry et al., 2013) that were expecting their first child. 72% were Caucasian and 28% non-Caucasian. Other measures included Trait Forgiveness Scale (Berry et al., 2013) that were expecting their first child. 72% were Caucasian and 28% non-Caucasian. Other measures included Trait Forgiveness Scale (Berry et al., 2013) that were expecting their first child. 72% were Caucasian and 28% non-Caucasian.

METHODS

Participants were recruited through classes (e.g., childbirth preparation, labor basics, newparenting, CDR) at 3 local hospitals. Participants were paid $40 if they completed all parts of the study and a prorated amount if they completed a portion of the study.

The behavioral coding was done by three female undergraduate students. Observers obtained 80% or higher 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 (McCallough et al., 2002).

Preliminary results examined correlations between study variables. Relational humility was positively correlated with forgiveness (r = .28) and gratitude (r = .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.

MEASURES

Relational Humility Scale

- Measured the humility of each partner in the study
- Construct 6-item, measure using a 5-point scale
- 5 = completely disagree, 1 = completely agree
- Has three subscales that examine global humility, empathy, and self-awareness

Gratitude Scale

- “He/she is a humble character”
- “He/she has a big heart”
- “He/she has shown humility in his/her behavior”
- “He/she has a big heart”

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 level of humility. The behavioral coding was done by three female undergraduate research assistants. 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 video, 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.”

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