Notice of the Final Oral Examination
for the Degree of Master of Science

of

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BASc (University of Guelph, 2015)

“Predictors of Hostile Attributions during the Transition to Parenthood”

Department of Psychology

Thursday, July 26, 2018
10:00AM
Cornett Building
Room A228

Supervisory Committee:
Dr. Erica Woodin, Department of Psychology, University of Victoria (Supervisor)
Dr. Catherine Costigan, Department of Psychology, UVic (Member)

External Examiner:
Dr. Karen MacKinnon, School of Nursing, UVic

Chair of Oral Examination:
Dr. Sabine Lehr, School of Public Administration, UVic

Dr. David Capson, Dean, Faculty of Graduate Studies
Abstract

The transition to parenthood is arguably one of the most stressful developmental periods in the lifespan, with couples often experiencing increased levels of conflict and relationship distress. It is possible that deteriorating relationship functioning may be due to increases in hostile attributions made towards partners during this time period. In order to better understand how changes in hostile attributions occur within the partner relationship, this study investigated the extent to which hostile attributions made toward a partner increased during the transition to parenthood, as well as identified stable and fluctuating factors that influenced changes in hostile attributions (life stress, parenting stress, trait hostility, and depressive symptoms). In addition, gender differences of these factors influencing hostile attributions were explored. Ninety-eight heterosexual couples were included in the study, all of whom completed online self-report questionnaires during pregnancy, 1-year postpartum, and 2 years postpartum. Hierarchical Linear Modelling was used to examine how changes in stress predicted changes in hostile attributions, and whether these relations were moderated by trait hostility or mediated by depressive symptoms. More specifically, investigations included how increases in life stress and parenting stress influenced increases in hostile attributions over the transition to parenthood, whether increased stress levels interacted with high trait hostility to further increase risk of hostile attributions, as well as whether increased depressive symptoms longitudinally mediated the link between increased stress and increased hostile attributions. Results showed that increases in both life stress and parenting stress significantly predicted increases in hostile attributions for both men and women over the transition to parenthood. Trait hostility was not a significant moderator of hostile attributions for women. For men, increases in life stress were associated with increases in hostile attributions, but only for men who were low in trait hostility. Increases in parenting stress were associated with increases in hostile attributions for men who had low and average trait hostility. Regardless of changes in stress levels, men who were high in trait hostility had high levels of hostile attributions over time. Depressive symptoms did not mediate the relations between stress and hostile attributions, and were a direct predictor of hostile attributions for men but not for women. This study adds to the growing body of literature on mechanisms of change in relationship functioning over the transition to parenthood. Future research should explore other factors that address why relationship functioning changes for women over the transition to parenthood, and should examine depressive symptoms in men and their subsequent effects on family systems. Future longitudinal research should examine child outcomes as well as conflict management between partners in order to ascertain the effect of hostile attributions on family functioning. Changes in hostile attributions also have important clinical implications, and health professionals should screen for high levels of stress, trait hostility, and hostile attributions in order to prevent possible relationship deterioration during the transition to parenthood.