



UNIVERSITY
OF OSLO



Becoming Dad

-

Expectant Fathers' Attachment Style and Prenatal Representations of the Unborn Child

-

Svendsrud, Fredriksen, Moe, Smith, Tsotsi, Ullebø, Brean, Kaasen & Bekkhus (2023)

-

hedvig.svendsrud@psykologi.uio.no

Article

Becoming Dad: Expectant Fathers' Attachment Style and Prenatal Representations of the Unborn Child

Hedvig Svendsrud ^{1,2}, Eivor Fredriksen ¹, Vibeke Moe ¹, Lars Smith ¹, Stella Tsotsi ¹, Anne Karin Ullebø ², Gro Vatne Brean ³, Anne Kaasen ⁴ and Mona Bekkhus ^{1,*}

- ¹ Department of Psychology, University of Oslo, 0373 Oslo, Norway; hedvig.svendsrud@psykologi.uio.no (H.S.); eivor.fredriksen@psykologi.uio.no (E.F.); vibeke.moe@psykologi.uio.no (V.M.); lrsmth@gmail.com (L.S.); stella.tsotsi@psykologi.uio.no (S.T.)
² Vestfold Hospital Trust, 3103 Tønsberg, Norway; anne.karin.ullebo@siv.no
³ Center for Child and Adolescent Mental Health, Southern and Eastern Norway, 0484 Oslo, Norway; gro.vatne.brean@r-bup.no
⁴ Department of Nursing and Health Promotion, Oslo Metropolitan University, 0130 Oslo, Norway; annkaa@oslomet.no
* Correspondence: mona.bekkhus@psykologi.uio.no

Abstract: How expectant fathers think and feel about the unborn child (prenatal representations), has shown associations with fathers' postnatal parenting behaviors, observed father–infant interactional quality and child cognitive development. There is limited knowledge about fathers' prenatal representations. The present study examined if fathers' partner-related attachment styles were related to their prenatal representations of the unborn child. In the “Little in Norway Study”, an ongoing prospective, longitudinal population-based study, 396 expectant fathers completed the Experiences in Close Relationships Scale at enrollment (mean gestational week = 23.76, SD = 4.93), and in gestational weeks 27–35 completed three questions assessing prenatal representations. Correlations of attachment style and prenatal representations were reported using logistic regression analyses. We found that an avoidant attachment style by fathers were predicted to have absent or negative representations on all three items (1) “strongest feeling about the unborn child” (CI = 1.19–2.73), (2) “thoughts about child personality” (CI = 1.16–1.87), and (3) “experiences of relationship with the child” (CI = 1.14–1.75). Father anxious attachment style was not significantly associated with absent or negative prenatal representations. Results suggest that expectant fathers with a partner related avoidant attachment style have an increased risk of having absent or negative prenatal representations of the unborn child.



Citation: Svendsrud, H.; Fredriksen, E.; Moe, V.; Smith, L.; Tsotsi, S.; Ullebø, A.K.; Brean, G.V.; Kaasen, A.; Bekkhus, M. Becoming Dad: Expectant Fathers' Attachment Style and Prenatal Representations of the Unborn Child. *Children* **2023**, *10*, 1187.

Svendsrud, H.; Fredriksen, E.; Moe, V.; Smith, L.; Tsotsi, S.; Ullebø, A.K.; Brean, G.V.; Kaasen, A.; Bekkhus, M. Becoming Dad: Expectant Fathers' Attachment Style and Prenatal Representations of the Unborn Child. *Children* **2023**, *10*, 1187. <https://doi.org/10.3390/children10071187>



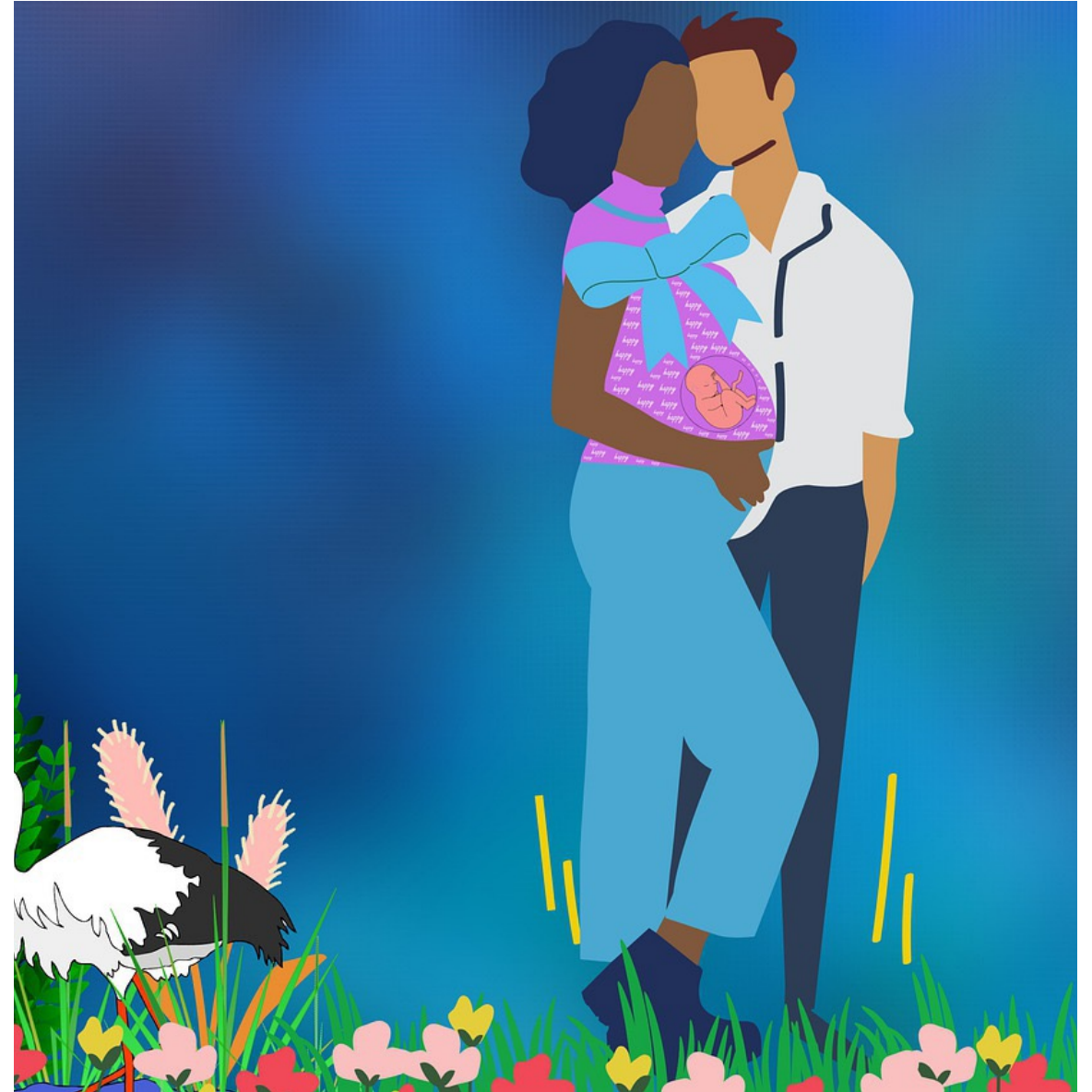
Expectant Fathers- do their **involvement** and **behavior** during pregnancy matter?



When does the
**transition to
fatherhood**
begin?



What do we know about
how expectant fathers
think and feel
about his unborn child
and his relationship with
the child?



What may be the
antecedents of
Fathers' Prenatal
Representations?

(And why may this be important to understand?)



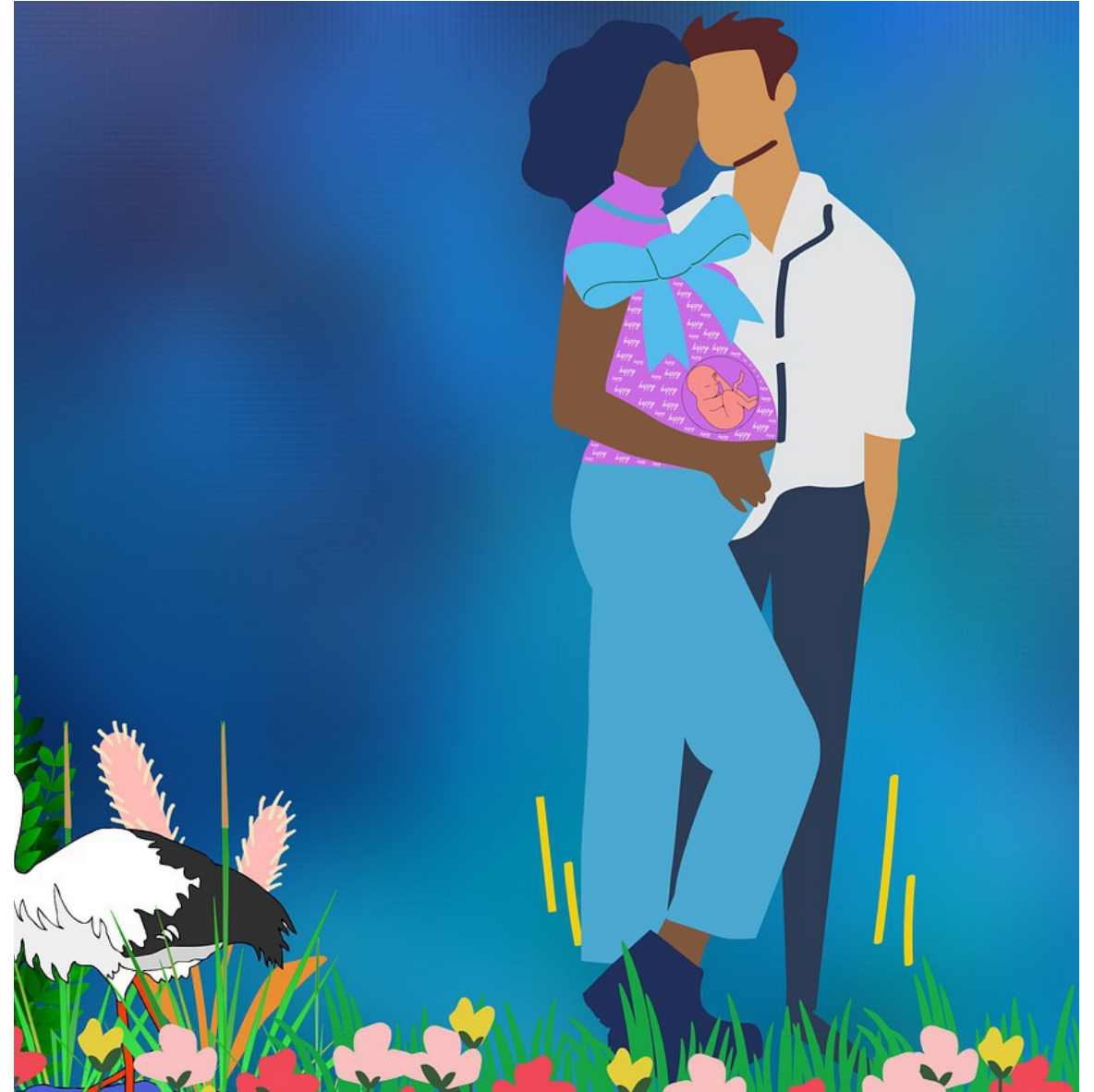
Fathers' Attachment Style in relation to his partner – does it predict the quality of his Prenatal Representations of the unborn child?



396 Expectant Fathers from the Little in Norway (LIN)

Experiences in Close
Relationships (ECR)
(enrollment)

Thoughts and Feelings
about the Unborn Child
Questionnaire (gweek:
27-35)



1) «In one word, describe you strongest feeling about the child at the moment».

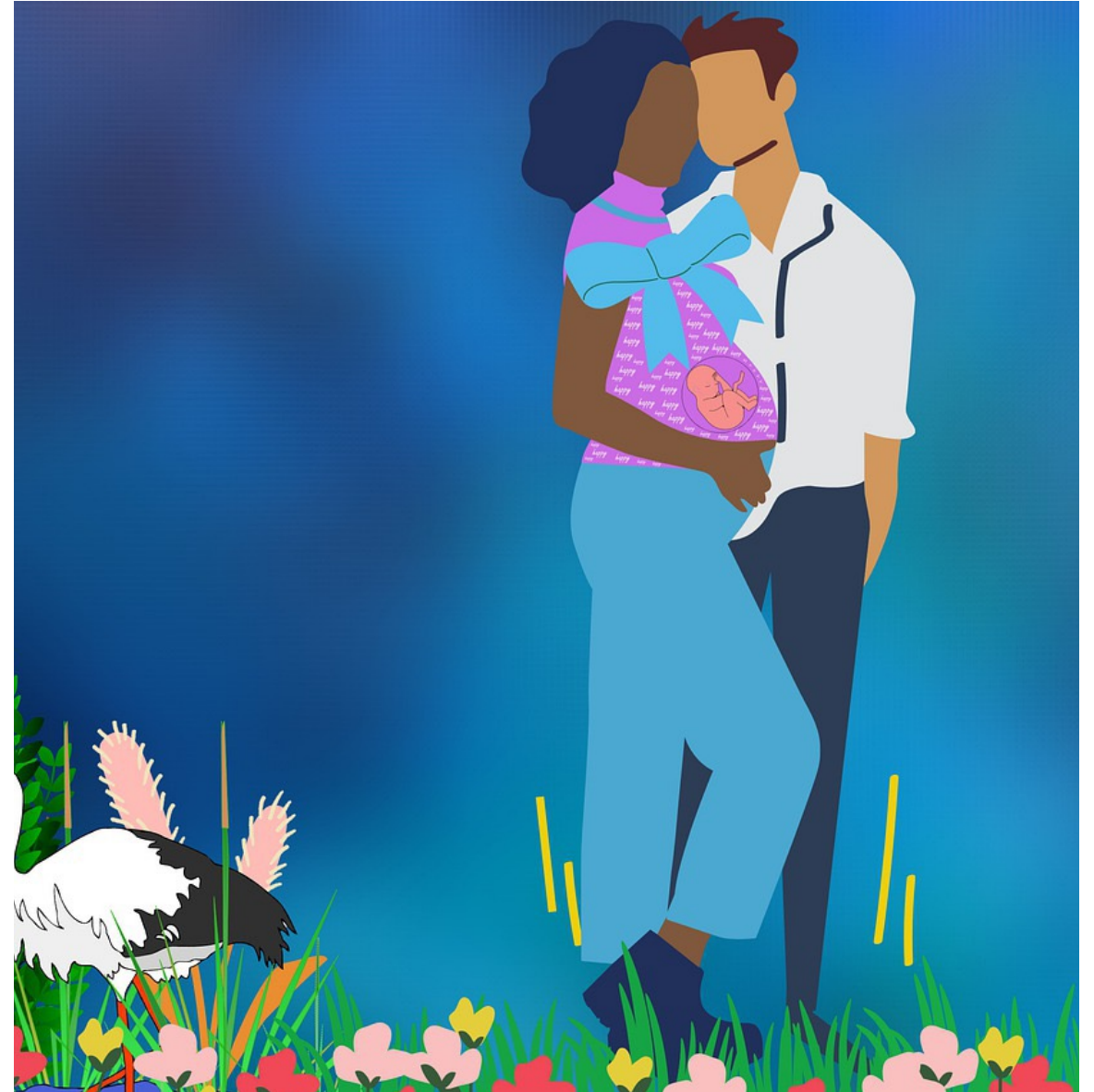
(a) happiness, (b) joy, (c) sadness, (d) fear, (e) anxiety, (f) hatred, (g) cannot describe it.

2) “Can you describe your perception about your child’s personality, in one word?”

(a) calm, (b) active, (c) harmonious, (d) demanding, (e) angry, (f) do not have any meaning of the child’s personality yet.

3) “Which of the following words describes your relationship to your child best?”

(a) close, (b) warm, (c) neutral, (d) distant, (e) hostile, (f) cannot yet describe the relationship.





What did we find?

Attachment Avoidance was significantly positively related to absent or negative Prenatal Representations on all three questions

Attachment Anxiety was not significantly related to absent or negative prenatal representations

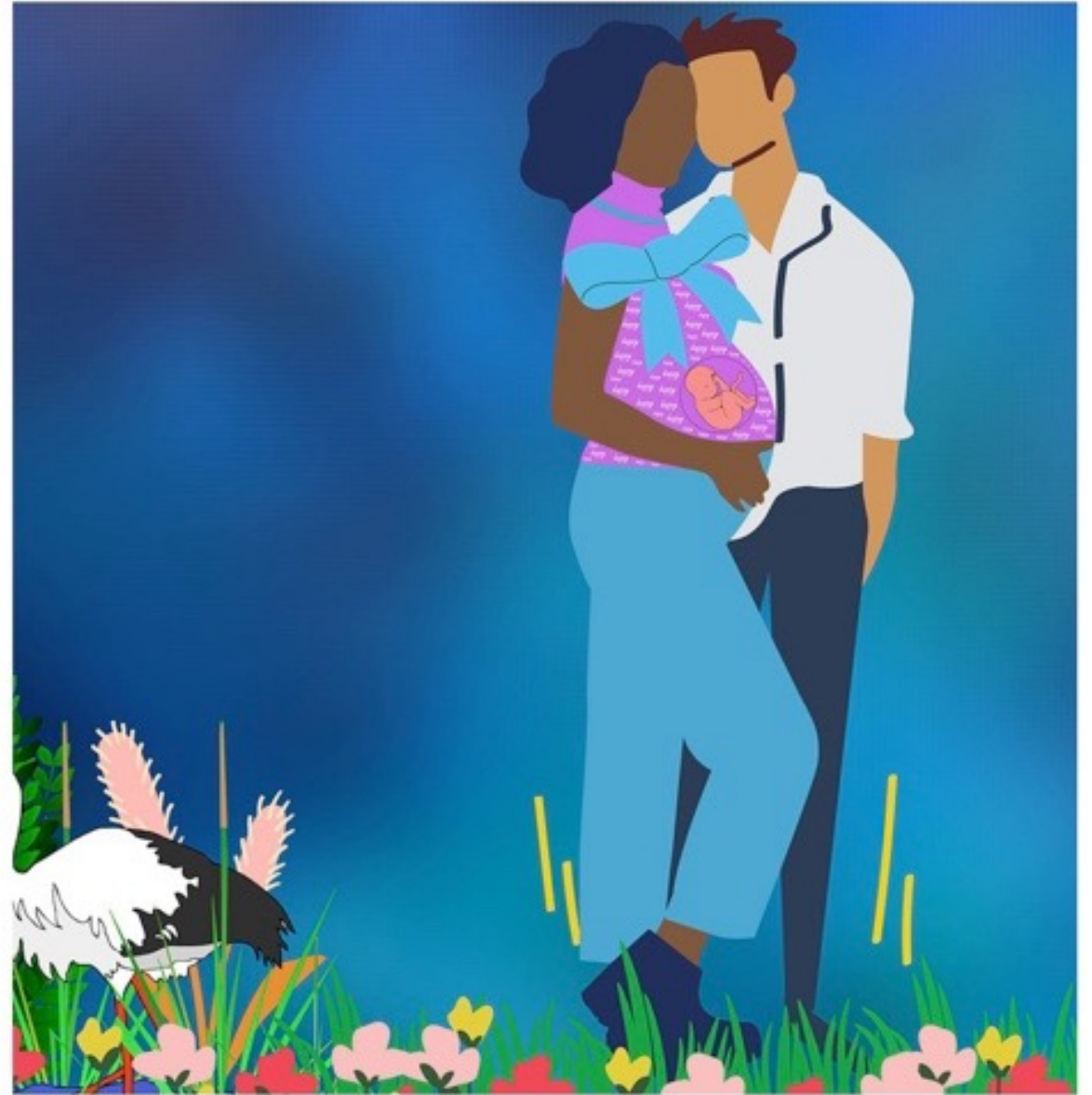
Does Attachment Avoidance predict Prenatal Representations?

Yes!

Table 2. Logistic regression analyses for fathers' avoidant attachment and prenatal representations.

(Q1) Strongest Feeling about the Child								
	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp (B)	95% CI for EXP (B)	
							Lower	upper
ECR avoidance	0.59	0.20	7.86	1	0.01	1.80	1.19	2.73
Previous children	1.02	0.47	4.75	1	0.03	2.78	1.11	6.97
Education	-0.13	0.25	0.30	1	0.58	0.87	0.54	1.41
(Q2) Childs personality								
	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp (B)	95% CI for EXP (B)	
							Lower	upper
ECR avoidance	0.39	0.12	10.30	1	0.01	1.48	1.16	1.87
Previous children	0.19	0.25	0.59	1	0.44	1.21	1.2	1.96
Education	0.12	0.14	0.73	1	0.39	1.12	0.86	1.46
(Q3) Thoughts and feelings about relationship								
	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp (B)	95% CI for EXP (B)	
							Lower	upper
ECR avoidance	0.35	0.11	9.82	1	0.02	1.42	1.14	1.75
Previous children	0.62	0.21	8.33	1	0.04	1.85	1.22	2.81
Education	-0.09	0.12	0.56	1	0.42	0.92	0.73	1.15

Note. Father's education, and parity, are included as covariates in all analyses. ECR avoidance has been z-transformed in order to be more readily interpreted. B = Beta; S.E. = Standard error; df = degrees of freedom; Exp (B) = Expected beta; C.I. = Confidence interval.



How can we
understand our
findings?



Suggestions for future work

Please feel free to get in touch!
hedvig.svendsrud@psykologi.uio.no

