

## Examination of Metaphorical Perceptions of Fathers with 0-6 Years Old Children about the Experience of Being a Father

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### Abstract

The current study aims to determine the metaphors expressed by fathers regarding their "becoming a father" experiences and to explore the underlying elements of these metaphors. Thus, the study was carried out using the phenomenological method, one of the qualitative research methods. The study group for the research consisted of 82 fathers with children aged between 2 and 72 months. The data for the research were collected both online and face-to-face. The data on the experience of "becoming a father" was "becoming a father .... like/similar; Because..." were obtained by filling in the blanks of the expression. The content analysis method, frequently used in qualitative research methods, was utilized, and the data were analyzed via the MAXQDA (20.2.2) program. For the data's reliability, the encoders' mean reliability index was checked, and the reliability index in this study was 81%. Fathers stated a total of 96 metaphors, and the metaphors they expressed the most were listed as "being a superhero," "great plane tree," "good news," "school," "rainbow," "being a cloud," "rebirth" and "gift." These metaphors were emphasized as positive expressions. According to the analysis of the generated metaphors, three themes (Interaction with the Child, Contributing to the Well-Being of the Fathers, and Perceived Fatherhood Duties) were determined. A total of two categories were analyzed in the theme of Interaction with the Child: The learning-teaching process and gamification. There are three categories in the theme of contributing to the father's well-being: Relaxing metaphors, metaphors about positive life events, and metaphors indicating a basic need. Two categories were analyzed in the theme of perceived paternity duties: "Responsibility and Accessibility" and "Being a Role Model."

**Keywords:** Fathers, fatherhood, metaphor, fathering, father involvement.

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## Introduction

While it is the beginning of a significant and impressive process for a baby to join the family system, it is a critical turning point, especially for the family. It indicates that essential experiences can be experienced. Venning et al. (2020) also state that an exciting but at the same time frightening process has begun for families. It is emphasized in the literature that it has a side defined as the "new normal" (Vidaurreta et al., 2021). With this new normal process, there is a severe change in dads' lives (Volling & Palkovitz, 2021). Fatherhood stands out as a concept with many dimensions and is explained in terms of family systems based on many theories (Attachment Theory, Ecological Approach, Essential Father Theory) (Pleck, 2007). In Bronfenbrenner's ecological approach, the child's relationship with their parents can be seen as the first system that the child encounters in their life, which starts with their own family of origin and progresses in a context that affects the whole culture. Therefore, the father's presence at an essential point in the system is critical (Pleck, 2007). Attachment theory and essential father theory also emphasize the importance of the presence of fathers through their effects on childhood and subsequent personality/identity development. The psychological dimensions of father involvement are a more complex and contextualized structure (Petts & Knoester, 2018). Emotional interaction, accessibility, and responsibility dimensions have been proposed (Lamb et al., 1985). The accessibility and responsibility dimensions in this model were re-examined, and the importance of warmth, support, control/monitoring, other cognitive aspects, and emotional effects in fathering tasks were emphasized (Pleck & Stueve, 2001). Another contextual model of father involvement suggests that gender-related variables, family policies regarding childcare culture, and work culture affect the concept of fatherhood, affecting fathers' father involvement (Adler & Lenz, 2017). Kuzucu (2011), while emphasizing the changing roles of fatherhood, also emphasizes the child's development. It is already seen that paternity (father involvement) plays a vital role in the positive outcomes of the child's developmental processes, the harmony of the family, and the well-being of the parents (Blanco Castro et al., 2022; Diniz et al., 2021; Wilson & Prior, 2011). When father involvement is seen as positive and healthy, it is not difficult to say that it benefits both parents (Cummings et al., 2010). Healthy father involvement in a child's growth improves a mother's well-being and marital satisfaction (Tikotzky et al., 2015; Cummings et al., 2010).

Furthermore, fathers' self-confidence and self-image are positively impacted (Allport et al., 2018). However, the birth process of a baby can bring with it compelling and wearing thoughts (Huang et al., 2018). Michelic et al. (2018) explained these difficulties as being able to adapt to the changes in the couple's relationship with being a parent and incompatibilities that can be experienced in the transition to parenthood. From this point of view, we can define being a father as a phenomenon that affects the developmental trajectory of the baby, can change the family dynamics (Pilkington et al., 2015), and enters another normal process (Vidaurreta et al., 2021). Thus, in Freud's theory, the father's role in the individual's development is significant and fundamental. It is known that the role and function of the father are especially crucial in the provision of impulse control, the development of the superego in the child, and the transition to the social and symbolic order, such as the sense of conscience (Erdem, 2014). In the literature, fathers' relationships with their children have a significant relationship with children's cognitive and academic abilities (Diniz et al., 2021; Grossman et al., 2002; Jeynes, 2007; McBride et al., 2013; Rollè et al., 2019; Varghese & Wachen, 2016). It is also essential to consider fathers' views on fatherhood and father involvement, the most important stakeholders with a significant share in children's development.

### Fatherhood and Father Involvement

When studies on fatherhood are examined, it is helpful to read them regarding masculinity and gender roles (Cherry & Gerstein, 2021; Hauari & Hollingworth, 2009; Johnson, 2022; Shafer et al., 2021; Williams, 2009). In addition, when the studies conducted in the last quarter century are examined, changes in paternal attitude and paternal involvement may also be the reason for the scientific interest in fathers (Schoppe-Sullivan & Fagan, 2020). Although there are improvements in paternity leave and fathers in many countries (Huerta et al., 2014), it is clear that there is a need for studies that will increase father involvement and reduce the obstacles to father involvement (Shafer et al., 2021).

Although there has been an increase in studies on fathers, a desired level of father involvement has not been reached.

Considering the studies examining the variables that may affect father involvement, the literature generally focus on the father's education level (Yeung et al., 2001; Uzun & Baran, 2019), father's age (Baxter & Smart, 2011; Maume, 2011; Uzun & Baran, 2019), whether the father is married or not (Baxter & Smart, 2011; Wiik et al., 2009), and the child's age (Baxter & Smart, 2011; Lamb, 2010; Uzun & Baran, 2019). Huerta et al. (2014) also stated in their study that fathers who take leave from their work during childbirth show higher father involvement than those who do not. In addition, in all OECD countries except Denmark, there is a significant socio-economic difference between fathers who take leave and those who do not. When studies on fatherhood are examined, it is seen that fathers with high masculine representation also show higher father involvement (Schoppe-Sullivan et al., 2021; Shafer et al., 2021). Here, too, the responsibility associated with masculinity and the behaviors of caring for the child and home may have been exhibited in the experiences of fatherhood. In fact, the paternal role also presents a complexity of beliefs and behaviors. Therefore, obtaining latent beliefs and information about the paternity experience through metaphor may lead to a richer pattern.

At this point, the concept of metaphor is seen as a way of obtaining the opinions and beliefs of people about their experiences (Lakoff & Johnson, 2005; Moser, 2000). Metaphor plays a functional exploratory role, especially in reaching latent meanings and obtaining socially and culturally meaningful information (Moser, 2000). Since fatherhood and father involvement are also part of a social and social construction process (Coltrane, 2020; Lamb, 1997), it is possible to make an exploratory definition through metaphors regarding fathers' experiences of fatherhood.

The literature shows that fathers have little information on fatherhood and involvement (Lemay et al., 2010). Barlett (2004) makes a similar statement and states the ambiguity of fathers' experiences and views. Especially in Turkey, studies on fathers are also increasing. Scoping review (Kuzucu, 2011; Mercan & Tezel Şahin, 2017) and descriptive studies (Uzun & Baran, 2019), scale adaptation (Kuzucu & Özdemir, 2013; Uzun, 2020), and developmental studies (Simsıkı & Şendil, 2014; Uzun & Baran, 2015), and experimental studies (Uzun & Baran, 2022) stand out. On the other hand, it is significant that fathers' views on their fathering role and engagement are examined and addressed in a contextual framework. Thus, it is crucial to examine the views of fathers living in Turkey on the experience of fatherhood. It is also essential that "being a father" occur as a cultural and social process, and fatherhood experiences result in the construction of this process (Coltrane, 2010). The perspectives and beliefs of fathers, the subjects of this structured process, are also critical. Therefore, this study aims to obtain the views of fathers living in Turkey on fatherhood experience and father involvement by asking them to describe them metaphorically. For this purpose, answers to the following questions were sought:

1. What are the metaphors expressed by fathers regarding their "fatherhood" experiences?
2. Under which conceptual categories are the metaphors developed by fathers regarding their fatherhood experiences?

## Method

### Research Model

In this study, the meanings that fathers attribute to their views on their fatherhood experiences were examined in depth and phenomenological design, one of the qualitative research methods, was used. Phenomenology research is the in-depth exploration and emergence of individuals' experiences, perceptions, attitudes, and meanings regarding a phenomenon (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013). To discover the common meanings underlying the phenomenon, it tries to describe the experiences experienced by people and explain the essence of these experiences (Rose et al., 1995). How they attribute meaning to the phenomenon they have experienced, what they describe and remember, and the language they use while sharing their experiences about this phenomenon with others is also fundamental (Patton, 2014). The language in which fathers who have experienced fatherhood describe their own experiences has also been examined metaphorically. A mental framework of the phenomenon is presented by trying to reveal hidden knowledge through metaphors (Shuell, 1990). In this study, too, to reveal hidden

information (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980), metaphorical perceptions of fathers were made using content analysis, one of the qualitative data analysis methods.

### Study Group

The study group of this research was formed with the maximum variation sampling technique, one of the purposive sampling methods. For this purpose, it is aimed to understand the shared experiences of fathers as much as possible (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013). While forming the working group, inclusion-exclusion criteria were determined. These criteria are stated below:

- At least 2 months of experience as a father
- The child will be at most 72 months old
- Being currently married
- Living in the same house with your child (as resident fathers)

Data were obtained from 82 fathers who met these criteria, both face-to-face and online. Detailed information about the children of fathers in the study group is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic information about the children of the participants

Variables	f
Child's Age	82
2 – 12 months	9
13 – 36 months	18
37 – 48 months	19
49 – 72 months	36
Child's gender	82
Boy	36
Girl	46
Child's Birth Order	82
First child	43
Not first child	39

The mean age of the fathers was analyzed as 36.41 ( $SD= 6.16$ ). In addition, 32 of the participants work in the private sector and 50 in government institutions.

### Data Collection

Before beginning the data collection, the researchers applied to Hacettepe University Ethics Committee to start the study and obtained permission no. E-51944218-300-00001900116. Afterward, the data of the study were obtained by giving both online and face-to-face forms to the participants. While thinking about their metaphors, it was assumed that they would have richer data by thinking on their own and writing them down. Opinions of fathers with children between the ages of 0-6 on the experiences of "fatherhood" and "father involvement" were obtained through metaphor. It is aimed to reach the experiences, views, beliefs, and values in the background of the phenomenon through metaphor (see Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Moser, 2000; Shuell, 1990). In line with this purpose, fathers are told "Being a father is like ...; because..." and were asked to complete the statement. It was stated to the fathers that they needed as much time as they wanted in order to make this metaphorical definition. The relationship between the metaphor topic and the source of the metaphor of the metaphors produced by fathers on fatherhood experience and father participation was revealed with the preposition "like", and the meaning and context attributed to the metaphors with the conjunction "because" (e.g., Akgün, 2016). With the word "because", it was possible to obtain the explanation of the metaphor, that is, the source of the metaphor. Yıldırım and Şimşek (2013) also suggest that after the participants convey the metaphor, they reach its source by asking "why" or "how".

### Data Analysis

Initially, the steps of the metaphor analysis methods suggested by Saban (2008) and Armstrong, Davis, and Paulson (2011) below were followed for the analysis of the data:

- 1- Taking the statements produced by the participants as metaphors into the text
- 2- Examining the statements that were converted into text and eliminating the answers that were not expressed as metaphors
- 3- Researchers review the eliminated and preserved responses
- 4- Meaning and coding of metaphors according to the source of the metaphor
- 5- Categorizing metaphors
- 6- Thematization of categories
- 7- Carrying out validity and reliability studies of the analysis.

Therefore, the answer sheets were numbered from 1 to 82. In this study, content analysis, one of the data evaluation methods used in qualitative research in social sciences, was used (Krippendorff, 2018). Content analysis is a scientific approach that allows verbal, written, and other materials to be examined in an objective and systematic way and organized according to certain categories (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). In short, content analysis is to gather similar data within the framework of certain concepts and categories and to interpret them in a way that the reader can understand (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013). The metaphors stated by the fathers in a total of 82 papers filled by the research were analyzed with the metaphor source. Firstly, the expressions are codes; codes are divided into categories and categories into themes. Afterward, the validity and reliability studies of the analyzes were started and information was given about this part below.

### ***Trustworthiness***

During the data collection process, the first researcher was prepared and aimed to enable the participant to provide information efficiently and in-depth. The independent status of the researchers is a factor that the researchers pay attention to. In addition, the participants' demographic information was hidden from the data analysis to prevent any possible bias. To ensure accurate data analysis and transferability of the results, the researchers explained the research process to the participants in detail from the beginning with the informed consent form (Moretti et al., 2011). In this way, the concept of credibility was tried to be achieved by ensuring that the participants' metaphors about their experiences were conveyed more accurately and understandably (Guba, 1981; Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). Thus, each statement in each answer given to the question trying to reveal the metaphorical perception formed the analysis unit of the research. After this coding, the codes and themes created to ensure consistency were evaluated separately by both researchers and then evaluated over the codes and themes that were agreed upon. Creswell (2003) also recommends getting an expert opinion on the codes and themes determined as one of the credibility measures. This research was carried out in light of this information. Miles and Huberman (1994) suggested that the reliability ratio between coders should be calculated by dividing the number of agreed codes by the total number of agreed and non-agreed codes, and this ratio should be close to 80%. In this regard, their suggested formula [Confidence coefficient = Number of cases on which consensus was reached/ (Number of cases on which consensus was reached + Number of cases on which no consensus was reached) X 100] was used. The reliability coefficient of this study was calculated as 81% [(75/93) \* 100] and it was concluded that the categories determined in line with the opinions of the experts were highly consistent. The intercoder confidence ratio is also within the recommended range. By using the MAXQDA package program for reliability analysis of the data, it is aimed at preventing being lost in the analysis over time and ensuring consistency.

### **Findings**

In this section, the metaphors that fathers stated about the experience of “being a father” were presented in the form of evaluating these metaphors under the relevant categories and arranging the explanations specified for the related metaphors.

Table 2.  
Metaphors developed by fathers for the experience of "being a father"

Metaphors	f	Metaphors	f
Gate	1	Play	1
Growing the tree	1	Playing in the amusement park	1
Book (Immersive)	1	Being a student	1
Patience stone	1	Kitchen	1
Childhood	1	House	2
School	4	Blessing	2
Laboratory	1	Bread and water	1
The blue of the sky	2	To be like cotton	1
Being a cloud	3	Traveling along the coastline	1
Rainbow	3	Listening to music	1
Rain	1	Rebirth	3
Sun which is a shadow	1	Waterfall of emotions	1
A bright star	1	Bottomless pit	1
Water	1	Tranquility	1
Sea	1	Source	2
Owning the 3 most important things	1	Color that gives meaning to life	1
Spring	2	Gospel	4
Shore (calm)	1	Opportunity	2
Heaven ticket	2	Gift	3
Reward	1	Starting a new life	1
Space infinity	1	Turtle	1
Camellia	1	Cloudy weather	1
Mountain	2	Great plane tree	5
Tree	1	Being a rock star	1
Hiking	1	Kingdom	1
Piggy bank	1	Being a pilot	1
Being a roof	1	Basket	1
Life itself	1	Building a world	1
Endless road	1	Being a soldier	1
Running a marathon	1	Candle	1
The test of life	1	Being a stove	1
Being a superhero	5	Compass	1
Windows (opening to the outside World)	1	Being a role model	1
Total			96

According to Table 1, fathers produced a total of 66 types of metaphors for the experiences of "being a father" and expressed 96 opinions for this. The metaphors that fathers stated the most in the top ten about the concept of fatherhood; are "being a superhero", "great plane tree", "good news", "school", "rainbow", "being a cloud", "rebirth" and "gift". Metaphors were generally created to emphasize the father and child relationship, the contribution of fatherhood to their well-being, and the fatherhood process. While it was determined that a total of eight metaphors were repeated 3 to 5 times, it was determined that a total of 53 metaphors were expressed once. It has been determined that fathers mostly produce the metaphors of "being a superhero" and "great plane tree" for fatherhood. Tables 2, 3, and 4 show the themes that the fathers differ from in terms of the common features of the metaphors they stated about the concept of "being a father", and the distribution of the themes according to the categories. The first theme, interaction with the child, and its categories are presented in Table 3.

Table 3.

Distribution of the metaphors developed by fathers for the concept of fatherhood according to the categories related to the theme of interaction with the child

Categories	f
1. Metaphors Related to the Learning–Teaching Process	11
Gate	1
Growing the tree	1
Book (immersive)	1
Patience stone	1
Childhood	1
School	4
Laboratory	1
Building a world	1
2. Metaphors Related to the Gamification	3
Play	1
Playing in the amusement park	1
Being a student	1

According to Table 3, the metaphors developed by fathers for the experience of “being a father” are grouped under two categories regarding their interactions with their children. These categories are listed as “Metaphors related to the learning-teaching process” and “Metaphors related to gamification” in terms of their metaphor coverage. Different numbers of metaphors are specified in each of these categories. The category in which the most metaphors appear is in the category of "Metaphors related to the learning-teaching process". Examples of each of the metaphors in these categories are given below, with the expressions of the participants.

1. Metaphors in the category of “Metaphors related to the learning-teaching process” and examples given by fathers of their explanations [metaphors’ sources]

A total of eight metaphors were stated in this category by the fathers. The explanations of these metaphors are given below in Table 4.

Table 4.

The respondents’ metaphors and metaphors sources about the category of “Metaphors related to the learning-teaching process”

Metaphors	Fathers’ Statements
Gate	I should be a door that can see what's coming in and out of their life, not a locked door to check in. (K2)
Growing the tree	Being a father is like growing a tree for me. It takes care and watering. Protect from the cold when appropriate (K70)
Book (immersive)	It's like a gripping book. Because my child has an inquisitive personality that likes to explore, and I like it. (K145)
Patience stone	Being a father is like a stone of patience to me. Because normally, if my brother did it, I would shout and get angry, I try to be patient and not react to his behavior. (K19)
Childhood	It's like going back to my childhood... I see myself in it, trying to turn things wrong into right. (K27)
School	It's like school because I learn something new every day (K31)
Laboratory	Being a father is like a laboratory for me. Because it allows for new learning through trial and error. (K37)
Building a world	Being a father is like building a whole new world for me. Because I have a child who is hungry for all kinds of information, wants to learn, researches, and asks. I am constantly trying to improve myself for his development. And I create a whole new world with my child. (K15)

2. Metaphors in the category of “Metaphors related to gamification” and its examples given by fathers of their explanations

A total of three metaphors were stated by the fathers in this category. The explanations of these metaphors are given below in Table 5.

Table 5.

The respondents' metaphors and sources of metaphors about the category of "Metaphors related to gamification"

Metaphors	Fathers' Statements
Play	Being a father is "like a game" for me. Because as my child gets older, I seem to level up in the game, and the difficulty increases. (K156)
Playing in the amusement park	Being a dad is "like playing in an amusement park" for me. Because being a father is risky and dangerous, but it's fun and happy, nonetheless. (K148)
Being a student	Being a father is like "being a student again" for me. Because I re-learn, discover, and interpret my own childhood by reading my own child. I am tasting the real value of the concept of mother, father, and family in all the flavors of life. (K166)

The metaphors that fathers developed for the experiences of fatherhood were grouped under three categories of the second theme "Contributing to the well-being of the fathers". These categories are listed as "Relaxing metaphors", "Metaphors about positive life events", and "Metaphors indicating a basic need" in terms of their metaphor coverage. The information about the theme is presented in Table 6.

Table 6.

Distribution of the metaphors developed by fathers for the concept of fatherhood according to the categories related to the theme of "contributing to the wellbeing of the fathers"

Categories	f
1. Relaxing Metaphors	30
The blue of the sky	2
Rainbow	3
Rain	1
Sun which is a shadow	1
A bright star	1
Water	1
Being a cloud	3
Sea	1
Owning the 3 most important things	1
Spring	2
Shore (calm)	1
To be like cotton	1
Traveling along the coastline	1
Listening to music	1
Rebirth	3
Waterfall of emotions	1
Bottomless pit	1
Tranquility	1
Source	2
Endless road	1
Running a marathon	1
2. Metaphors about positive life events	14
Color that gives meaning the life	1
Gospel	4
Opportunity	2
Heaven ticket	2
Gift	3
Reward	1



Table 6 continuing

Starting a new	1
3. Metaphors indicating a basic need	6
Kitchen	1
House	2
Blessing	2
Bread and water	1
Total	50

According to Table 3, different numbers of metaphors are specified in each of these categories. The category in which the most metaphors appear is in the category of “Relaxing metaphors”. Examples of each of the metaphors in these categories are given below, with the expressions of the participants. The category with the highest number of metaphors is "Relaxing metaphors". Below, examples of each of the metaphors in these categories are given with the participants' statements and explanations.

1. Examples of the metaphors in the category "Relaxing metaphors" and their explanations provided by the fathers

A total of twenty-one metaphors were mentioned by the fathers in this category. Explanations of these metaphors are given beneath in Table 7.

Table 7.

The respondents’ metaphors and sources of metaphors about the category of “Relaxing metaphors”

Metaphors	Fathers’ Statements
The blue of the sky	For me, being a father is "like the blue sky", because I feel that I am living with an infinite peace of mind. (K160)
Rainbow	Being a father is like a rainbow for me. Every moment with my son is colorful; yellow when he laughs, blue when he cries, red when he is sick, pink when I miss him, and purple when he misbehaves... (K188)
Rain	It is like rain because it brings life to barren lands... (K30)
Sun which is a shadow	For me, being a father means "being a shadow and a sun for my children". Because being a father means giving up on yourself for the sake of your children's happiness and peace of mind... (K117)
A bright star	Being a father is "like a bright star" for me. Because fatherhood is like a miracle, having a child made me a little emotional, to be honest, nothing is as beautiful as a child, he is the joy of my home, and I am glad I became a father. (K124)
Water	For me, being a father is "like water" because it is the purest form of love and without it, I think there is no life. (K118)
Being a cloud	Being a father is for me "like clouds" because when I see them, I am light and relaxed like clouds ... (K90)
Sea	For me, a sea... It relaxes you; it teaches you different things, it is very beautiful, it is pure and clean, and its feeling is clear and real. (K205)
Owning the 3 most important things	Being a father to me is like being in a deserted forest with 3 things I love. Because it is a phenomenon that I am happy with its existence, that I love unconditionally, and that I would do anything for it. (K66)
Spring	Being a father is "like spring" for me because I love spring very much, I love green very much, and when I see my children, it fills me with peace, just like spring, it fills me with peace, and I love my children very much, and I am very happy to be a father. (K164)
Shore (calm)	A serene beach, because I can escape from the stress and hustle and bustle of life with my son's smile and find peace. (K73)
To be like cotton	Being a father means being like cotton wool for me. Because every time I hold my daughter, I forget everything. She calms me, her smile gives me strength. (K191)
Traveling along the coastline	For me, being a father is like going on a long car journey along the coastline, because on such a journey you feel a sense of peace, and happiness, on the one hand... (K43)

Table 7 continuing

Listening to music	Being a father is like listening to music for me. Because I want to hear your laughter over and over again, just like the music I love. (K190)
Rebirth	Being a father is like being born again for me, to grow up with a new life in my hands... (K18)
Waterfall of emotions	A waterfall of emotions because I experience each emotion much more intensely ... (K71)
Bottomless pit	Being a father is a bottomless pit for me because my son is my constant source of happiness. (K49)
Tranquility	... a peaceful time, because when I am with my children I forget my stresses, and I ignore my troubles in their laughter. (K7)
Source	Being a father is a "source of pride" for me because it is a very beautiful feeling, a source of happiness. (K136)
Endless road	For me, being a father is "like a road with no end". Because I feel happy on that road, because I feel safe, I never want that road to end. For me, that road is the line of peace, happiness, and life. (K111)
Running a marathon	It's like running a marathon because the running time is hard and tiring and the happiness of winning at the finish ... (K39)

## 2. Examples of the metaphors in the category "Metaphors related to positive life events" and their explanations provided by the fathers

A total of seven metaphors were mentioned by the fathers in this category. Explanations of these metaphors are given in Table 8.

Table 8.

The respondents' metaphors and sources of metaphors about the category of "Metaphors related to positive life events"

Metaphors	Fathers' Statements
Color that gives meaning the life	Because, of having children, I felt that my perspective changed, and my responsibility and fear increased more. (K112)
Gospel	Being a father is a "gift or a miracle" for me because I see my child as a source of peace for my wife and myself. (K107)
Opportunity	Being a father means a world of responsibility for me, an opportunity to improve myself. Because there is a brand new, fresh sprout that follows and imitates me and shapes its personality by looking at me. (K6)
Heaven ticket	It looks like heaven on earth. It's like a phenomenon that encompasses all concepts such as compassion, conscience, peace, and happiness. (K24)
Gift	The greatest gift and happiness in the world. Because I don't feel the love that my children make me feel in anything. I believe that they are the miracle of the world. (K208)
Reward	Because I am happy when I love children ... (K103)
Starting a new	Being a father is "starting a new life" for me. Because... You are starting a new life, every smile of your child... (K116)

## 3. Metaphors in the category of "Metaphors indicating a basic need" and examples of fathers regarding their explanations

A total of four metaphors were stated in this category by the fathers. The explanations of these metaphors are given in Table 9.

Table 9.

The respondents' metaphors and sources of metaphors about the category of "Metaphors indicating a basic need"

Metaphors	Fathers' Statements
Kitchen	... a kitchen where she can have a snack when she's hungry... (K2)
House	Being a father is like being a house. First, I have to make sure that the ground you put your child on is solid... (K2)

Table 9 continuing

Blessing	It's a blessing. My child is my most valuable asset ever and, in the future... (K196)
Bread and water	Being a father is for me "a basic need like bread and water" because you can't live without them. You need them every moment. You must always be there for me. (K108)

As a result of the content analysis, "perceived fatherhood duties" were determined as the last theme of the metaphors produced by the participants. Below, the results regarding the theme and the categories and codes of the theme are presented in Table 10.

Table 10.

Distribution of metaphors developed by fathers for the concept of "being a father" according to categories related to the theme of "Perceived fatherhood duties"

Categories	f
1. Metaphors related to "Accessibility and responsibility"	32
Space infinity	1
Turtle	1
Camellia	1
Mountain	2
Cloudy weather	1
Great plane tree	5
Tree	1
Hiking	1
Kingdom	1
Being a pilot	1
Basket	1
Being a roof	1
Candle	1
Being a superhero	5
2. Metaphors related to the "Role model"	9
Being a stove	1
Piggy bank	1
Being a bright star	1
Compass	1
Windows (opening to the outside world)	1
Being a role model	1
Life itself	1
Being a soldier	1
The test of life	1
Total	32

According to Table 4, the metaphors developed by the fathers for the experience of "being a father" were grouped under two categories related to their interactions with the child. These categories in the theme of "Perceived fatherhood duties" are listed as "Metaphors related to accessibility and responsibility" and "Metaphors related to being a role model" in terms of including the most metaphors. Different numbers of metaphors were mentioned in each of these categories. The category with the highest number of metaphors is "Metaphors related to accessibility". Below, examples of each of the metaphors in these categories are given with the statements of the participants with explanations.

1. Examples of the metaphors in the category "Metaphors related to Accessibility and Responsibility" and their explanations provided by the fathers

A total of fourteen metaphors were mentioned by the fathers in this category. Explanations of these metaphors are given beneath in Table 11.

Table 11.

The respondents' metaphors and sources of metaphors about the category of "Metaphors related to Accessibility and Responsibility"

Metaphors	Fathers' Statements
Space infinity	For me, being a father is "like the infinity of space". Because I feel an endless love for my children. (K101)
Turtle	Being a father is like being a turtle for me. I want to carry it all on my back. I'm aware of the responsibility but don't take it as a burden. (K67)
Camellia	It's like a camellia because even in the best of weather you strive to make it better... (K82)
Mountain	Being a father for me is like being a mountain, a hill because I want to protect my child, love him, and be safe. I want to be with him in difficult moments. (K157)
Cloudy weather	Cloudy because sometimes mercy is eerie but also easy to reach when they want to... (K68)
Great plane tree	... looks like a mighty sycamore. Because my son shades in my shadow. (K59)
Tree	I feel my tree/arms expanding and a sapling growing in the shade ... (K48)
Hiking	It looks like a nature walk. The path is sometimes flat and bumpy... but always close to my child... a very beautiful and unstable experience for such a feeling... (K174)
Kingdom	It's like a kingdom because I have a lot of responsibilities and I have to be with my children all the time, I have to support them. (K203)
Being a pilot	For me, being a father is similar to being an airplane pilot, both very enjoyable and stimulating, but also a heavy responsibility... (K35)
Basket	It looks like a basket because it brought the burden of responsibility... (K12,)
Being a roof	Being a father for me is "like being a roof" because I am there for him against all outside influences and prevent him from being harmed. (K158)
Candle	Being a father is a candle for me. Because as I melt, my children light up. (K38,)
Being a superhero	It's like being a superhero because I'm there for my child whenever they need me. (K10)

2. Examples of the metaphors in the category "Metaphors related to being a role model" and their explanations provided by the fathers

A total of nine metaphors were mentioned by the fathers in this category. Explanations of these metaphors are given in Table 12.

Table 12.

The respondents' metaphors and sources of metaphors about the category of "Metaphors related to the Role Model"

Metaphors	Fathers' Statements
Being a stove	"It's like being a stove" because, while my insides are on fire to protect him, my behavior towards him and what I teach him about life is so that he learns everything without the slightest harm. To make him stronger. (K51)
Piggy bank	It is like a piggy bank. Because a person fills the piggy bank by taking it as a debt to tell the right and wrong, the good and the bad, the homeland, the past, what he expects from himself in the future, his faith, his temple, and his ancestors. (K248)
Being a bright star	For me, being a father is "being a rock star". Because I feel the responsibility and excitement of being a role model... (K142)
Compass	A compass because it is the host that tells the truth about the good and the right in an unknown world... (K3)
Windows (opening to the outside world)	... I have to be her window to the outside world, a window through which she can open the curtains herself, turn her arm, and breathe when she opens it so that I can show her the world outside her... (K2)
Being a role model	To be a role model. Because raising quality people ... (K9)

Table 12 continuing

Life itself	Being a father means life itself for me. Because from the moment you start shaping another human being, you realize that you are alive. (K11)
Being a soldier	Being a father is like being a soldier. Because it gives me unique feelings. I consider it my duty to protect him from everything and raise him in the best way. (K41)
The test of life	"The test of my life" If I prepare him for life in a happy and good way, I will consider that I have passed this test... (K65)

Considering the metaphors coded in the categories belonging to the themes, fathers generally expressed the experience of being a father with positive characteristics. In this respect, figure 1 shows a diagram of the metaphors explained by the fathers according to the frequency of emphasis. As can be understood from this figure, the fathers' concepts of their responsibilities and being a phenomenon that is good for them were explained primarily with the metaphors of being a superhero, great plane tree, good news, rainbow, school, and cloud, it is noteworthy that a total of 53 metaphors expressed with equal font size were the metaphors expressed once. It is noteworthy that other high-frequency metaphors such as superhero, great-sycamore, good news, rainbow, school, being a cloud, rebirth, gift, resource, etc. are also included in the diagram in different size fonts according to their frequency values.

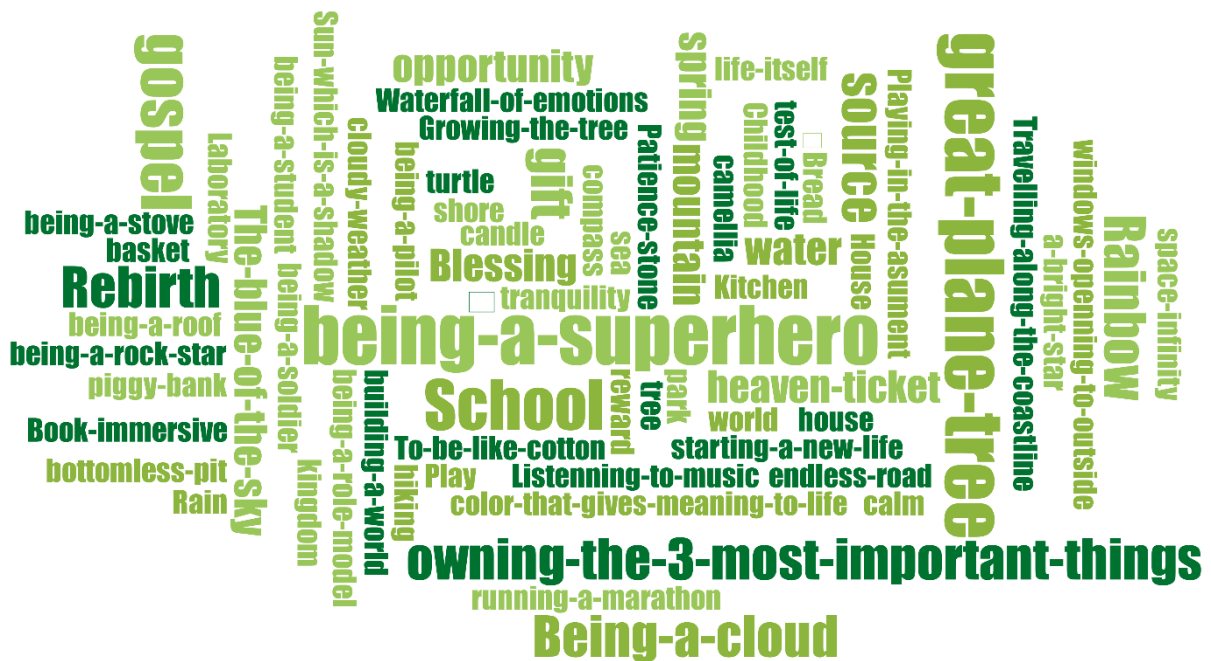


Figure 1. Word cloud of the fathers' metaphors about the experience of “being a father”

Categories and themes related to metaphors are seen above. Regarding the source of the metaphor, the participants provided 128 different coded explanations (metaphors’ source). As a result of analyzing these explanations, three different categories emerged, and are shown in Figure 2.

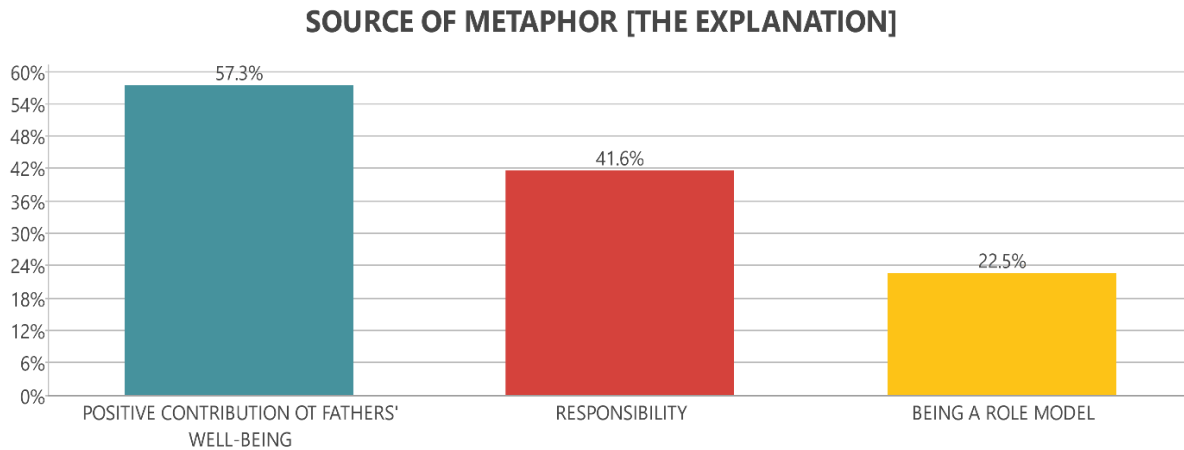


Figure 2. The father's source of metaphor about the experience of "being a father"

When the explanations regarding the source of the metaphors were analyzed, the most frequently expressed category was fatherhood's "positive contribution to fathers' well-being": 57 views, representing 57.30% of all views, and the participant views on these expressions are exemplified below. When the source of the metaphor is examined, K191's statement "... Because every time I hold my daughter, I forget everything, she calms me, her smile gives me strength." and K111's statement "... Because I feel happy on that road because I feel safe, I never want that road to the end. For me, that road is the line of peace, happiness, and life." show the contribution of fatherhood to the life energy of individuals. Furthermore, according to the source of the metaphor, the other most frequently expressed category was "responsibility" with 46 statements, representing 41.60% of all statements. The explanations of the fathers regarding the statements in this category are exemplified below. K10's statement "... because I am with my children whenever they need me ..." and K24's statement "... The answer to the question of what responsibility means and how it should be, I can express it as being a father ..." indicate that fathers were willing to take responsibility and understood the importance of taking responsibility along with having children. Lastly, according to the source of the metaphor, the least expressed category was "being a role model," with 25 statements, 19.50% of all statements. The explanations of the fathers regarding the statements in this category are exemplified below. K10's statement "... because there is a brand new, fresh sprout that follows and imitates me and shapes its personality by looking at me..." and K142's "... because I feel the responsibility and excitement of being a role model..." state that fathers know that they were role models and realized their importance.

### Discussion

Within the scope of this study, 82 fathers with children aged between 2 and 72 months were asked to produce metaphors about their experiences of "being a father" and in this regard, 96 different opinions were expressed, and 66 different metaphors emerged. Regarding the source of these metaphors, 128 different opinions were expressed. When the metaphors were analyzed, the fathers stated a total of 96 metaphors, and the most frequently expressed metaphors were listed as "being a superhero", "great plane tree", "gospel", "school", "rainbow", "being a cloud", "rebirth", and "gift". It is seen that these metaphors point to the positive aspects of the fatherhood experience. The literature also emphasizes the positive aspects of the fatherhood experience (Blanco Castro et al., 2022). In the analysis of the metaphors generated, codes, categories, and themes were determined in terms of the source of the metaphor [the explanation made for the metaphor]. According to the results of the analysis of the metaphors produced, a total of three themes were analyzed: Interaction with Children, Contributing to Fathers' Well-Being, and Perceived Fatherhood Duties. A total of two categories were analyzed in the theme of Interaction with Children: Learning-teaching process and gamification. Since the 0-6 age period is a critical period for the child, it is crucial that the father interacts with the child and wants to contribute to the child's well-being during this period (Cabrera, 2010; Diniz et al., 2021; Rolle et al., 2019). Paquette (2004), and Volling and Palkovitz (2021) also emphasize the importance of the role of fathers, especially in early childhood. Especially father engagement's contribution to the child's emotional regulation is essential in this process (Cabrera et al., 2017). The fact that the fathers who

participated in the study tried to both learn fatherhood with their children and contribute to their lives may be an indication of how fathers have become as important as mothers in childcare in recent years. Moreover, the fact that fathers expressed their experiences of being a father with metaphors related to gamification is in line with the literature (Robinson et al., 2021; StGeorge & Freeman, 2017). It is stated that fathers spend most of their time playing games with their children and especially playing rolling games that develop gross motor skills. In particular, it is also known that early childhood and the period until the start of school is seen as the period with the highest frequency of fathers' play (Amodia -Bidakowska et al., 2020). Fathers can interact with their children most easily through play, and this is also seen in the metaphors produced within the scope of this study. As a matter of fact, fathers tend to learn and teach from the fatherhood experience (Masciadrelli et al., 2006). Furthermore, it is perspicuous that there is a process in which fathers both learn and teach by playing games in their interaction with their children.

In the other finding of the study, the theme of “Contributing to the well-being of the Fathers”, there are three categories: “Relaxing metaphors”, “Metaphors about positive life events” and “Metaphors indicating a basic need”. It is seen that the fathers described an experience that positively affected their well-being. The metaphors they produced for the state of being a basic need can be seen as a reflection of this. In particular, it is seen that fathers associate with traditional gender roles and that there is a positive relationship between being a man and a father (Baldwin et al., 2018). It can be said that men with this tendency attribute a positive meaning to fatherhood and perhaps see it as a status to be attained. As researchers, it is seen that the belief that fatherhood should be an indispensable and must-have experience may also cause stress. It can be said that fathers with traditional gender beliefs, who see fatherhood as a fundamental duty, care about being a father and try to be a good example (Schoppe-Sullivan et al., 2021; Shafer et al., 2021). Fathers also take ownership and responsibility for tasks such as providing preparation for the child's developmental achievements (Ashton-James et al., 2013). From this point of view, the ability of individuals to fulfill the duties defined as roles and responsibilities may have an effect that will increase their well-being. Especially interacting with children is likely to have the same effect.

In the theme of “Perceived Fatherhood Duties”, two categories were analyzed: "Responsibility and Accessibility" and “Being a Role Model”: they expressed the meaning that participant fathers attributed to fatherhood and how they saw the fathering experience for themselves. Thus, their views and experiences regarding the tasks and responsibilities of fathering were expressed in this way. This result is also in line with the literature (Schoppe-Sullivan et al., 2021; Shafer et al., 2021; Wray, 2020). Baldwin et al. (2018) who addressed the concept of fatherhood experience for the first time, stated that dads think a lot about their fatherhood identity and their changing roles, how it affects the fatherhood experience, and fathers' own father involvement dimensions before and after. It is seen in the literature that fathers especially attach significance to their responsibilities and role modeling. In terms of father involvement, fathers believe that they should be role models in the process of teaching values to their children (Masciadrelli et al., 2006). In addition, recent fatherhood models indicate that fathers tend to be more active, responsible, involved, engaged, and connected (Huttunen & Eerola, 2017). The fact that fathers express that they do their best to take care of their children's needs, to be accessible, and to be role models in life is a situation that other studies have also expressed. The dads do their best to fulfill their roles and responsibilities and take an active role in meeting the needs of the family is also quite understandable in terms of the definition of "working and responsible fathers" (Ranson, 2012).

Consequently, it is seen that fathers' perception of "fatherhood" also includes the dimension of responsibility, which society attaches great importance to. They might be very willing to compromise, especially when they consider the future of their children, their current conditions, and the financial and moral investment to be made in their future. In fact, despite the responsibility and care burden of fatherhood, many people in the world are motivated to become fathers even if they are caught unprepared (Spiteri et al., 2022). Therefore, it can be concluded that fathers are motivated toward father involvement. Thus, it is understandable that many metaphors produced in the study and their sources have positive content.

### Conclusion and Recommendation

When the study findings are examined, it is understood from the metaphors produced that the participants' perception of "being a father" is positive. Significantly when the sources of the metaphors are examined, being a father contributes positively to the well-being of dads, even though there are expressions related to difficulties and care burdens. This finding aligns with the literature (Allport et al., 2018; Wilson & Prior, 2011). Although fathers have positive feelings about the presence of their children, the fact that they also stated challenging aspects such as responsibility and care burden might emphasize that stress might be experienced in fatherhood duties. Therefore, the concept of paternal stress can be studied in the literature just like that of maternal stress. As a matter of fact, although it is stated in the literature that fathers contribute a lot to the development of children, it can be said that fathers also contribute positively to their well-being. In addition to the researchers' studies on the effects of father involvement on children, it might also contribute to examining the relationship between fathers and their own well-being. Furthermore, fathers' interaction with their children and high levels of father involvement contribute positively to fathers as well as children. The most crucial suggestion regarding the study results is that it is vital to investigate in detail the variable of father involvement in fathers' well-being. The most critical issue is that it would be meaningful to create models for fathers' relationships with their spouses and the effect of this relationship on the child. In the components of psycho-education programs such as the Father Support Program of the Mother Child Education Foundation [AÇEV], it would be effective to inform fathers about other dimensions of the concept of father involvement. For policymakers, it would be necessary for the Ministry of Family and Social Services to organize a series of integrated programs in cooperation with the Ministry of National Education to increase father involvement. The concept of fatherhood should be conveyed to fathers and their partners through psycho-educational programs with healthier and more prosperous content. Since the perception of fatherhood and fathering has many cultural components, it can also be reinforced with unhealthy and false truths. As a result, an inaccurate father figure might emerge. It is valuable for policymakers and non-governmental organizations to carry out programs, activities, and studies in this context.

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