PARENTHOOD AND MENTAL ILLNESS: A SOCIOLOGICAL JOURNEY THROUGH SILENCED EXPERIENCES OF ILLNESS

Melanie Suzanne Boursnell
BA, PgDPH, M.Soc.Hlth
A thesis submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
July 2008
DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

This work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution, and to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. I give consent for this copy of my thesis, when deposited in the University Library, being made available for loan and photocopying subject to provisions of the Copyright Act 1968.

I hereby certify that the work embodied in this Thesis is the result of original research, which was completed subsequent to admission to candidature for the degree.

......................................................... ........../....../.....
Melanie Suzanne Boursnell (candidate) Date
ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the experiences of parents (both mothers and fathers) with mental illness. Following a tradition of sociology, this thesis is guided by the concepts of ‘generosity’ from Frank and ‘stigma’ from Goffman and ‘risk’ from Lupton. The thesis has gathered data from three sources. In-depth interviews with parents with mental illness are explored to gain an insight into their lived experiences of parenthood and mental illness. The national and state mental health policies on mental illness are analysed in order to assess their applicability to support services for parents with mental illness. The submissions to the Senate Select Committee Inquiry on Mental Health (2006) are also analysed to gain further information about the experiences of parents with mental illness based on a small number of submissions relating to their perspectives.

Analysis of the data collected and assimilated in this thesis provides a clear picture of the troubled terrain faced by parents with mental illness. The narratives from the interviews reveal stories of long-term mental health issues for parents with mental illness whose parenting role is largely unsupported. Analysis of this data provides a greater understanding of how parents negotiate their parenting role within the context of socially prescribed notions, limited agency, and limited capacity due to a lack of support services for parents with mental illness. Analysis of mental health policies highlights the disparity between policy and practice. Whilst national mental health policies are now in place, parenthood continues to be overlooked through the continued medicalisation of people with mental illness, and policies that operate under an individualist and economic rationalist discourse.

The motivation for this research was to elicit increased understanding and insight into how parental mental illness affects experiences of parenthood. This thesis focuses upon lived experience, social processes, and social policies relating to parents with mental illness. The specific contribution of this research to the sociology of mental health is that it documents for the first time parenthood as lived by parents with mental illness. Finally, it offers theories as to how the gaps in policies and services can be filled to support the ‘silent’ parents whose parenthood is so often unacknowledged the lack of attention paid to their mental illness.
LIST OF TABLES

Table 1  DSM-IVR Diagnostic Criteria  Page 13
Table 2  Summary of Interview Guide  Page 41
Table 3  Themes from the Third National Mental  Page 64
          Health Plan
Table 4  New South Wales Health Policies  Page 69
Table 5  Area Mental Health Policies  Page 71
Table 6  Recommendations of the Inquiry  Page 93

Figure 1  Age and gender of participants  Page 99
Figure 2  Marital status of participants  Page 99
Figure 3  Number of children  Page 100
Figure 4  Custodial status  Page 100
Figure 5  Custodial status and diagnosis  Page 101
Figure 6  Diagnosis of participants  Page 102
Figure 7  History of mental illness  Page 103
Figure 8  History of mental illness - Gender  Page 103
Figure 9  Intergenerational mental illness  Page 104
Figure 10  Current support  Page 105
Figure 11  Inpatient care  Page 106
Figure 12  Employment  Page 107
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There are many people who have provided invaluable support to me during the process of this thesis. I acknowledge their support and contribution - without them it would not have been possible.

I am indebted to my Supervisors - past and present. Firstly Dr Chris Lennings, University of Sydney for starting me on this journey; Dr Bethne Hart and Dr Peter Khoury for providing with fundamental support during a significant part of this work and Dr Stephen Tomsen for giving me the insight of his significant experience. Dr Ann Taylor - thank you so much for picking me up and carrying me over the line and Dr Terry Leahy for also providing support. I would also like to acknowledge the support of University of Newcastle for providing a Research Scholarship for this degree.

The parents who generously opened up their lives to me were an inspiration. I listened to their stories and shed many tears through the process of the data collection. They will stay with me forever.

To my wonderful friends; they provided child care and a shoulder when I needed one, especially Christine Tate, and Jannette Atkinson. Elizabeth Rathgen was also fantastic for assisting me when I needed an alternative point of view and Bob Mitchell for his assistance in formatting this thesis for submission. I would like to acknowledge VAN Services, NSW Health for their support, especially Sue Prosser for her feedback on earlier versions of this thesis.

Last, but not least, to my family. David and Harriette have been more patient than I could ever imagine! Their unconditional love and support kept me going when I thought that there was nothing left and the finish line seemed so distant.

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my mother Jennifer Margaret Collyer. I am grateful to have had a mother who provided such an outstanding example of parenthood. I admire her determination and generosity to continually give to her children, her family and anyone she meets in spite of her terminal illness. She has been the most inspirational woman that I could ever have hoped to meet. I am so glad that she has lived to see me complete this work.

Melanie Suzanne Boursnell

July 2008
TABLE OF CONTENTS

Declaration of Originality i
Abstract ii
List of Tables iii
Acknowledgements iv

PART I: SETTING THE SCENE

CHAPTER 1
OVERVIEW OF THESIS

| 1.1 | Introduction | 2 |
| 1.2 | Thesis outline | 4 |

CHAPTER 2
PARENTHOOD AND MENTAL ILLNESS: KEY CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL ISSUES

| 2.1 | Introduction | 6 |
| 2.2 | Parenthood - biological, social, and ideological constructs | 6 |
| 2.3 | Mental health - sociology, definitions, and models | 9 |
| 2.4 | Discourses - medicalisation and the sick role | 11 |
| 2.4.1 | Medicalisation | 11 |
| 2.4.2 | The sick role | 14 |
| 2.5 | Stigma - labelling, deviance and risk | 15 |
| 2.5.1 | Stigma | 15 |
| 2.5.2 | Labelling | 18 |
| 2.5.3 | Deviance | 20 |
| 2.5.4 | Foucault | 21 |
| 2.5.5 | Risk | 23 |
| 2.6 | Parenthood, mental illness and employment | 26 |
| 2.7 | Illness experience - narratives, and generosity | 26 |
| 2.7.1 | Narratives | 27 |
| 2.7.2 | Generosity | 30 |
| 2.8 | Implications of the literature for this study | 31 |
| 2.9 | Chapter summary | 32 |

CHAPTER 3
RESEARCHING PARENTS WITH MENTAL ILLNESS

| 3.1 | Introduction | 34 |
| 3.2 | Methodology | 34 |
| 3.3 | Ethical issues and protocols | 36 |
| 3.4 | Liaison with non-government organisations | 38 |
| 3.5 | Recruitment of interviewees | 38 |
| 3.6 | Data collection | 40 |
| 3.6.1 | Interviews | 40 |
PART II: MENTAL HEALTH SYSTEMS IN AUSTRALIA: WHERE IS PARENTHOOD?

CHAPTER 4
ANALYSIS OF NATIONAL AND STATE MENTAL HEALTH POLICIES

4.1 Introduction
4.2 Morality underlying mental health policies
4.3 Background to mental health policy in Australia
4.4 Deinstitutionalisation - The Richmond Report (1983)
4.5 Commonwealth mental health policies - development of National Mental Health Policy (1992)
  4.5.3 The Australian Network for Promotion, Prevention, and Early Intervention (AuseinNet)
  4.5.4 The National Action Plan for Promotion, Prevention, and Early Intervention for Mental Health 2000 (PPEI)
  4.5.5 The NSW Select Committee on Mental Health, 2002
4.5.6 Out of Hospital, Out of Mind! (2003)
4.5.7 The Third National Mental Health Plan (2003-2008)
4.5.8 Not For Service: Experiences of Injustice and Despair in Mental Health Care in Australia (2005)
4.5.9 The Senate Select Committee on Mental Health (2005-2006)
4.6 State mental health policies - New South Wales
4.7 Area mental health policies
4.8 Non-government policy positions
  4.8.2 Principles and Actions for Services and People Working With Children of Parents with a Mental Illness Australian Infant, Child, Adolescent and Family Mental Health Association (AICAFMHA, 2004).
  4.8.3 Family and community strategies
  4.8.4 Families First
  4.8.5 A Head Start for Australia: An Early Years Framework (NSW Commission for Children and Young People, 2004)
4.9 The merging of parenthood and social policy
  4.9.1 Issues with policy for parents with mental illness
4.10 Chapter summary
CHAPTER 8
PARENTS’ EXPERIENCES OF THE MENTAL HEALTH SYSTEM

8.1 Introduction 158
8.2 Inpatient treatment - experiences of and feelings about . . . 159
8.3 Being in inpatient care with their children 165
8.4 Generosity of care 169
8.4.1 Lack of generosity in support and diagnosis 171
8.4.2 A specific example of lack of generosity 174
8.4.3 Generosity of clinicians 175
8.5 Examples of good mental health services 177
8.6 Chapter summary 179

CHAPTER 9
PARENTHOOD, MENTAL ILLNESS AND EMPLOYMENT

9.1 Introduction 181
9.2 Opportunity to reconstruct identity 182
9.3 Challenges 183
9.3.1 Financial challenges 184
9.3.2 Discriminatory attitudes 186
9.4 Preserving past identity 189
9.5 Gatekeeping 190
9.6 Chapter summary 192

PART IV: SEARCHING FOR MEANING

CHAPTER 10
IMPLICATIONS OF INSIGHTS INTO THE LIVES OF PARENTS WITH MENTAL ILLNESS

10.1 Introduction 195
10.2 Who are the parents? 196
10.2.1 Intergenerational mental illness 200
10.2.2 Summary – Who are the parents? 203
10.3 ‘A good enough parent’ 203
10.3.1 Stigmatised parents 204
10.3.2 Summary of this section 208
10.4 Experiences of the mental health system 209
10.4.1 Resilience - finding appropriate places for support 211
10.4.2 Pathways to care 213
10.4.3 Diagnosis 214
10.4.4 Generosity and inequity 216
10.4.5 Responsibility for bad service - lack of generosity 218
10.4.6 Staff 221
10.4.7 Summary of this section 223
10.5 Parenthood, mental illness and employment 224
10.5.1 Meanings associated with employment 224
10.5.2 Impact of gender on employment 225
10.5.3 Summary of this section 227
10.6 Analysis of mental health policies 227
  10.6.1 Policies supporting stigma 229
  10.6.2 Deinstitutionalisation - failure of policies to acknowledge parenthood 230
  10.6.3 Advocating for changes to policy 232
  10.6.4 Mental Health Senate Inquiry 235
  10.6.5 Summary of this section 236
10.7 Chapter summary 237

CHAPTER 11
ENDING THE SILENCE

11.1 Finding the voices 238
  11.1.1 Recommendations arising from this research 238
  11.1.2 Suggestions for further research 241
11.2 Concluding comments 242

PART V: SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Appendix 1 245
Appendix 2 246
Appendix 3 248
Appendix 4 249
Bibliography 250