



A pilot study evaluation of Marte Meo for divorced fathers

David S. DeGarmo ^a, Jeremy Jones^b and
Laura A. Rains^b

A Marte Meo strengths-based video feedback programme for improving divorced fathers' self-conceptions and parenting was tested. By identifying and reinforcing fathers' skills in child communication, we hypothesized that fathers would exhibit pre-post improvements in fathering self-evaluations and behaviours. Therapists treated eleven divorced fathers with three to five home-visit, video feedback sessions over twelve months. Data showed reductions in harsh discipline and inept parenting, and some evidence of improvements in efficacy and father involvement. Changes in fathering identity were significantly associated with changes in parental efficacy ($r = .47$), harsh parenting ($r = -.64$), and inept parenting ($r = -.42$). Programme acceptability was rated high on positive experiences and low on negative experiences. The data suggest promise for promoting fathers' effective parenting, quality involvement and self-conceptions through video feedback.

Practitioner points

- Single fathers are relatively under-represented in clinical treatment and evidence-based science relative to practice with mothers and couples
- This article shows evidence of promise for *Marte Meo*, a strengths-based video feedback treatment, to improve parenting skills of at-risk fathers
- Reinforcing and building upon existing skills can be a complementary treatment component and/or an alternative to deficit-based practice

Keywords: fathers; intervention; parent training; Marte Meo; fathering.

^a Prevention Science Institute, and Department of Educational Methodology, Policy, and Leadership, University of Oregon. Address for correspondence: David S. DeGarmo, PhD, Prevention Science Institute, 6217 University of Oregon, Eugene, OR 97403; email degarmo@uoregon.edu.

^b Implementation Sciences International, Inc., Eugene, OR.

It is well established that quality father involvement matters in the lives of children before and after divorce and matters for both resident and nonresident father-child relationships (Coley and Medeiros, 2007; King and Sobolewski, 2006; Leidy, Schofield and Parke, 2013). Quality post-divorce involvement is associated with lower rates of children's internalizing and externalizing problem behaviour (Amato and Gilbreth, 1999; Simons, Whitbeck, Beaman and Conger, 1994) and lower rates of noncompliance (DeGarmo, 2010b). The quality of the father-child relationship is also directly associated with children's physical health independent of inter-parental conflict (Fabricius and Braver, 2006; Fabricius and Luecken, 2007). Similarly, father involvement over time is predictive of fathers' health, controlling for inter-parental conflict and fathers' stress (DeGarmo *et al.*, 2009).

Although quality father involvement is a key mechanism that accounts for children's quality post-divorce adjustment, very few evidence-based programmes focus on fathering involvement for at-risk separated or divorced fathers. Noted exceptions are the Supporting Father Involvement (Cowan *et al.*, 2009) and Dads for Life (Braver, Griffin and Cookston, 2005) programmes. Our study focused on tailoring a mature clinical intervention programme to address single and divorced fathers.

The theoretical intervention model for divorced fathers borrows largely from fathering identity theories and symbolic interaction. Related fathering identity theories have been widely applied to the study of divorced fathers to explain individual differences in why fathers remain involved with their children following separation (Ihinger-Tallman, Pasley and Buehler, 1995; Madden-Derdich and Leonard, 2000). Among the few empirical studies that have tested identity theory, cross-sectional evidence has shown that father identity predicts reported father involvement (Fox and Bruce, 2001; Rane and McBride, 2000). Similarly, longitudinal evidence from self-report and observed behavioural measures of father-child interactions has demonstrated that fathering identity predicts quality involvement by divorced fathers (DeGarmo, 2010a). Although fathering identity is a key theoretical construct that demonstrates predictive validity, virtually no data exist about evidence-based intervention technologies designed to enhance a father's sense of efficacy and identity salience with regard to his fathering role.

Programmes targeting father identities may benefit from father-oriented components that increase men's awareness of the fathering role and how it affects child development and fills child-centered

needs. Identity theory posits that positive behavioural and interactional feedback and positive reinforcement of strengths can shape more desirable definitions of self-identity and role behaviours. This article reports findings from a small pilot study to evaluate the feasibility of conducting the Marte Meo video feedback approach with divorced fathers. The present study's aim was to test the potential of Marte Meo to improve fathers' quality involvement with children through improvements in fathering parental efficacy and fathering identity.

Marte Meo

Marte Meo (Latin: 'by one's own strength') is a video feedback intervention based on clinical strengths-based practice (Axberg, Hansson, Broberg and Wirtberg, 2006). Marte Meo was developed in the 1980s and is used by more than 10,000 therapists across thirty countries. The central tenets are focused on shared meanings of social interaction between children and primary-support adults. The method is based on the idea that children develop and grow in interaction with these adults. The method is strongly rooted in dialogue that provides a child with the relevant information and support needed during developmental stages (Axberg, Hansson, Broberg and Wirtberg, 2006). Children with conduct problems can have established 'problem-affirmative' systems of communicative behaviours with caregivers during social interaction. Marte Meo was developed to help adults and children restore and build more supportive, developmentally appropriate dialogue when their communication has been marked by perturbation and disturbances. Parents identify reinforcing strengths during observed social interactions with their child, and then build on their existing strengths to communicate better with their children and to meet the child's developmental needs more effectively.

Marte Meo is the most widely used parenting intervention in Scandinavian countries for families at risk during infancy and the early childhood years and is utilized to improve parent-child interactional problems in community health, child welfare and educational settings (Høivik *et al.*, 2015). Marte Meo has been widely field tested, yet has a limited research base, especially considering the large-scale implementation of the clinical intervention. Published findings on Marte Meo report positive outcomes regarding increased maternal

sensitivity, decreased maternal depression (Vik and Braten, 2009; Vik and Rohde, 2014), and decreased child externalizing behaviour (Axberg, Hansson, Broberg and Wirtberg., 2006). The larger literature base on clinical interventions with children that utilize video feedback also has an almost exclusive focus on the interaction between mother and child. A recent systematic review of the extant literature concluded that video feedback interventions positively impact a variety of behaviours including increasing maternal sensitivity as well as attachment, yet very few studies were found regarding father-child interactions and whether there are benefits for this dyad (Stina, Philip and Ingegerd, 2016).

Marte Meo and father self-conceptions

The Marte Meo clinical method is directly relevant for divorced fathers at risk for lack of quality involvement with their child and for children of divorce who are at elevated risk for problem behaviours. Although the Marte Meo method is widely used with fathers in northern European clinical settings, it has not been evaluated in a randomized, controlled study for specific populations of at-risk fathers. Marte Meo was developed in this pilot specifically for samples of fathers at risk for lack of quality involvement and ineffective parenting. Marte Meo is theoretically akin to symbolic interaction perspectives on identity development (see Mead, 1934; Stryker, 1968). It was hypothesized that fathers receiving Marte Meo would exhibit marked increases in their positive fathering identities, sense of parental efficacy and abilities to better identify and meet developmental needs of their children. To our knowledge, this is the first evaluation of the Marte Meo method with divorced fathers that has assessed their change in efficacy, fathering identity and reported father involvement.

There are two reasons why Marte Meo could be an ideal intervention approach for focusing on changes in fathering identities. First, the video feedback approach is akin to cognitive behavioural, identity-based interventions that provide positive feedback and reinforcement for strengthening desired definitions of self (Oyserman, Terry and Bybee, 2002). Second, it is consistent with a generative fathering perspective (Brotherson, Dollahite and Hawkins, 2005) because it focuses on the developmental needs of the child by strengthening a father's connections with his children's needs, moral

development and prosocial adjustment (Axberg, Hansson, Broberg and Wirtberg, 2006).

Symbolic interaction and self-conceptions

The symbolic interactionist framework also emphasizes how behavioural interactions shape meanings and definitions of self and, conversely, how these identities provide behavioural guidance. From the symbolic interaction perspective social roles are symbols associated with positions in society that provide norms and meanings for directing behaviour. Attached to roles are identities, a person's self-conceptions of his or her role or position in the social structure based on enduring, normative, and reciprocal relationships with other people (LaRossa and Reitzes 1993; Stryker 1968, 1987). In short, people acquire meanings for defining identities through their social interaction (Burke and Reitzes, 1991; McCall and Simmons, 1966).

For at-risk fathers, identity theories have garnered much theoretical attention in an effort to explain variation in father involvement. At the same time, however, very little empirical attention has been paid to these theories. Fathering identity theories simply posit that the more a father identifies with the father role and the more important or central it is to his self-conception, the more involved he will be with his children (Ihinger-Tallman, Pasley and Buehler, 1995; Madden-Derdich and Leonard, 2000).

Because an individual can hold multiple role identities at one time (e.g., father, husband, scout leader, musician), another primary assertion is that multiple identities must be organized hierarchically, and the ranking in order of importance is considered identity salience and likely to be organized in a salience hierarchy. *Salience* refers to the subjective importance that a person attaches to each identity, typically measured by ranked social roles one occupies (Thoits, 1992). Similarly, *centrality*, typically measured by Likert-type ratings, is defined by those identities that are highly valued or that are more central to how we see ourselves. They are the ones more likely to guide our behaviour and affect our general sense of self and wellbeing.

Several cross-sectional studies have shown predictive associations of fathering identity and quality involvement. For example, when Rane and McBride (2000) used a penny-sort task to compare various roles of resident, married fathers (e.g., spouse, worker, father), they found that fathers with a greater level of centrality measured more

strongly in terms of behavioural engagement and responsibility with their children. Using father ratings of involvement in child-related activities, Henley and Pasley (2005) found that increased identity investment and role satisfaction were associated with higher levels of involvement for both married and divorced fathers. Using a measure of identity salience, Fox and Bruce (2001) found that father identity predicted a composite measure of engaged fathering, including behavioural engagement, affective involvement, and responsiveness.

More recently, the Oregon Divorced Father Study (ODFS), a county representative study of shared-, full- and no-custody fathers, employed causal modelling to test longitudinal relations among fathering identity and domains of father involvement. Baseline father identities of divorced fathers measured as both salience and centrality predicted growth in father involvement over time, measured as days per month, overnights per month, and father-child activities (DeGarmo, 2010a). Time-varying prediction models also showed that father identities were more predictive of growth in involvement than vice versa.

Theoretical model and hypotheses

Our hypotheses are illustrated in the conceptual model shown in Figure 1. On the basis of theories of symbolic interaction, cognitive behavioural feedback and fathering identity, we hypothesized that a video feedback intervention designed to build on a father's existing strengths and to reinforce and strengthen a father's connection with the fathering role would be associated with increases in parenting efficacy and fathering identity and, in turn, quality fathering involvement. To date, no video feedback and self-conception intervention programmes have been developed or evaluated for fathers at risk for compromised parenting and lack of father involvement. Our small pilot study was designed to demonstrate the feasibility of translating the Marte Meo intervention approach. Although this was not a randomized trial and we could not demonstrate programme efficacy, a critical component of feasibility analysis is testing for expected pre-post improvements in the fathering measures. More specifically, our within-group hypotheses regarding group means (M) were that (a) following Marte Meo, post-intervention means for parenting efficacy, fathering identity, and father involvement would be higher,

$$H_1: \text{Parental Efficacy } M_{\text{POST}} > \text{Parental Efficacy } M_{\text{PRE}}$$

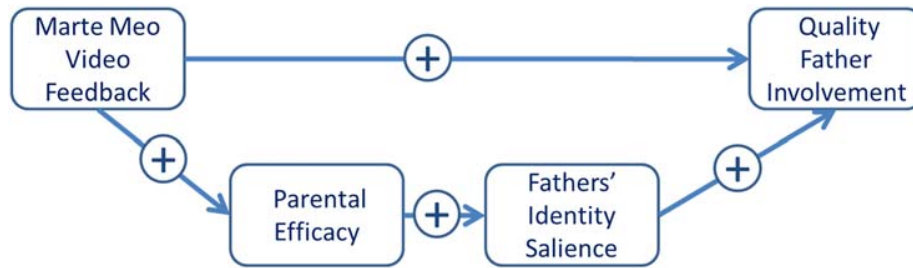


Figure 1. Conceptual model and heuristic for proposed associations following Marte Meo video feedback intervention for single and divorced fathers. [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

H_2 : Identity Saliency $M_{POST} > Identity Saliency M_{PRE}$

H_3 : Father Involvement $M_{POST} > Father Involvement M_{PRE}$

and that (b) following Marte Meo, post-intervention means for harsh and inept parenting would be lower:

H_3 : Harsh Parenting $M_{POST} < Harsh Parenting M_{PRE}$,

H_4 : Inept Parenting $M_{POST} < Inept Parenting M_{PRE}$.

Method

Marte Meo intervention procedures

Intervention training activities were supported by a small, twelve-month research and development award from the host institution. The pilot project included the training and certification of two Marte Meo practitioner therapists and the recruitment and assessment of a small pilot sample of single fathers. The training included ongoing supervision and feedback of Marte Meo trainees by certified trainers at the University of Lund, Sweden. Therapy sessions and intervention activities included several repeated home visits with fathers. Marte Meo therapy involved (a) fathers identifying an area in which they wanted to improve interaction and communication with their child, (b) videotaping routine fathering activities with the focal child, (c) therapists conducting a behavioural analysis of father-child videotaped interactions, (d) therapist editing of video clips for feedback to fathers at a subsequent home or centre visit, and (e) edited video clip feedback and supervision by the University of Lund trainers.

Video recording of father-child interactions included both structured (e.g., dressing, feeding, homework completion) and

unstructured (e.g., playing) activities. Video recording lasted for five to fifteen minutes per session, depending on the context and quality of the interaction. Once video recording was concluded the therapist analysed the recorded interaction and used computer-based video editing software to select segments that demonstrated one or more of the Marte Meo target behaviours. The seven target behaviours that are emphasized in Marte Meo are (a) the parent determines the child's focus of attention; (b) the parent confirms the child's focus of attention either verbally or gesturally; (c) the parent actively awaits the child's reaction; (d) the parent names the ongoing and forthcoming actions, events, experiences, feelings or anticipated experiences; (e) the parent verbally or gesturally confirms desired behaviours approvingly; (f) the parent triangulates the child in relation to the environment by introducing persons, objects and phenomena to the child; and (g) the parent takes responsibility for a satisfactory ending to the parent-child interaction (Aarts, 2000; Axberg, Hansson, Broberg and Wirtberg, 2006).

In accordance with Marte Meo procedures (Aarts, 2000), during analysing and editing of the Marte Meo video the therapist identified the following: the fathering skills already present; the kind of support the child needed; what it looked like when the father was doing what the child needed; and what information the father needed in order to provide appropriate developmental support. All these objectives were completed by closely examining the microsocial events playing out between the father and child and editing the video segment to highlight the salient elements.

Edited videos were typically about three minutes in length. They consisted of one still picture at the beginning and one at the end that captured the positive interaction in the relationship and three to five video clips in between of the father and child that focused on Marte Meo target behaviours. Each video segment was titled in a way that reflected the developmentally supportive parenting behaviours depicted in the clip in order to provide a focus for the video.

The video feedback was provided to the fathers by practitioners in a therapeutic manner. The intention is to highlight fathers' strengths and avoid direct teaching or corrective advice about how to change their behaviour, which would imply that what they have been doing is either wrong or just not good enough. The therapist played back each clip to create a context in which the father would be able to identify the strengths that he brought to the father-child interaction and identify the benefit that was provided to the child. Adaptive guidance

was provided so fathers could readily identify their developmentally supportive parenting behaviours, and verbal reinforcement was given for the fathers' efforts and appropriate conclusions.

Sample

In total, eleven fathers completed the Marte Meo intervention within a twelve-month time frame. Fathers were recruited through public court records searches of monthly electronic dockets randomly selected from court filings for divorce, dissolution, and annulments. Fathers who had obtained a divorce decree in the past eighteen months and who had a son or daughter ranging in age from four to twelve years were eligible for the pilot study. Two of the fathers were full-custody fathers, seven had shared custody, and two were mother-custody fathers. Focal children included seven boys and four girls.

Recruitment, consent, and assessment procedures were developed and IRB approval was obtained from the host institution. Fathers or children with severe cognitive impairment were excluded from participation. Recruitment letters were mailed to eligible participants that explained the Marte Meo project and activities, risks and benefits of participating in the Marte Meo intervention, and risks and benefits of completing the pre-post intervention questionnaires. Fathers were paid \$50 for participation and children were paid \$20 for participation. In addition to the fathering outcome domains, a post-assessment acceptability survey was also conducted to evaluate the video feedback programme from a participant point of view.

Measures

Pre-post intervention outcomes included previously validated measures used in samples of at-risk fathers, including parental efficacy, fathers' identity, and fathers' parenting behaviours.

Parental efficacy was measured with the Parental Locus of Control Short Form (Hassall, Rose and McDonald, 2005). The 24-item, self-report questionnaire measures parenting control orientation (i.e., internal vs. external) in four dimensions: parental efficacy; parental responsibility; child control of parents' life; and parental control of child's behaviour. Participants rated the items on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly agree*) to 5 (*strongly disagree*). A total mean score was obtained, with high scores indicating a high sense of control or internality and low scores indicating an external locus of

parenting control. Cronbach's alpha was .72 and .69 at pre and post, respectively.

Fathering identity salience was measured with the Parental Identity Questionnaire (PIQ; DeGarmo and Forgatch, 2002), in which the subjective importance attached to father identity is measured by paired social role comparisons and forced choice rankings of social roles. The PIQ obtains a forced choice index ranking from two sections of paired comparisons of role identities (e.g., parent, employee, friend, partner). The first section reads, 'Thinking about social roles that you are involved in, compare each pair below. Shade the circle that best answers the statement "I define myself as more a ___ than I define myself as a ___"'. Each role identity was then totalled for the number of times it was answered first in a comparison. In the second section, respondents were asked to 'think about meeting people for the first time . . . If you were to think about meeting a new roommate, what would you tell them about yourself first? . . . second? and so on'. Fathers ranked their roles from first to last for (a) telling a news reporter about yourself, (b) meeting someone new at work, (c) meeting a friend of a close friend, and (d) meeting someone at a party. Both sums were rescaled to a common metric of 0 to 1 and averaged. Cronbach's alpha was .62 and .73 over time.

Harsh discipline was a self-administered questionnaire that included a 5-item summative index rated from 1 (*never or almost never*) to 5 (*always or almost always*) in which fathers responded to the question, 'When [focal child] misbehaves, how often do you . . .?' Rated items were *raise your voice/scold, yell, spank on bottom, slap, hit*. Cronbach's alpha was .76 and .68 over time.

Inept parenting was measured with three items from the same instrument that asked when the child misbehaves, how often do you *do nothing, let it slide, decide it is more trouble than it is worth*. Cronbach's alpha was .68 and .59 over time.

Father involvement was measured with the Family Activities Checklist, an index of twenty-four common parent-child activities engaged in during the two months (e.g., play indoor games, eat together, go for a walk, see a movie). The endorsed checklist items were summed.

Analytic strategy

We examined within group mean changes to test our primary hypotheses that father efficacy, salience and involvement would show pre-post improvements, and that father harsh and inept discipline

would show pre–post declines. We first conducted paired sample *t* tests. Reliance on standard normal inferential statistics for a pilot study can be questionable given the small sample size and large standard errors (Kraemer et al., 2006). Therefore, in addition, we focused on estimated confidence intervals and effect sizes (Gardner and Altman, 1986) using bias corrected bootstrapped confidence intervals using 1000 Monte Carlo draws using the wBoot package in R. To further test feasibility of expected theoretical relations we examined bivariate correlations among change scores.

Results

The pre-post means, standard deviations, means test, bias corrected bootstrapped difference and confidence intervals are reported in Table 1. We hypothesized increases in pre-post parental efficacy, father salience, and father involvement, and conversely, hypothesized decreases in harsh discipline and inept discipline. In general there was evidence of support for the within group change hypotheses. Each of the mean change scores were in the expected direction, with small to large effect sizes. However, only three of the five scores indicating evidence of statistically significant change. Inept discipline showed a significant mean change (M change = -1.27 , $p < .05$) with a large effect [$d = .80$; Cohen (1988) characterizes effects sizes of .2 as small, .5 medium, and .8 and above as large]. Reductions in inept discipline showed marginal decline and (M change = -1.27 , $p < .10$) change in father involvement measured by father-child activities showed a marginal increase (M change = $.82$ $p < .10$). Both harsh discipline and father activities displayed medium effects, .58 and .61, respectively. Father efficacy had a modest effect size of .30 and father identity salience showed little change. To better examine pre-post change, boxplots, means and confidence intervals of the fitted mean change are shown in Figure 2.

As preliminary evidence of the theoretical model, the final step of analysis revealed that although father identity was not sensitive to clinical change, correlations showed associations of change in fathering identity with changes in parental efficacy ($r = .47$, $p < .10$), harsh parenting ($r = -.64$, $p < .01$), and inept parenting ($r = -.42$, $p < .10$) were each in the expected direction.

Finally, to evaluate social validity, mean scale scores of father's acceptability are shown in Table 2. Data indicated that fathers rated the Marte Meo programme very positively. The acceptability survey included

TABLE 1 *Marte Meo Pre-Post Means, Standard Deviations and Bias Corrected Bootstrapped Confidence Intervals with Effect Size (n = 11)*

		Pre intervention	Post intervention	Mean Change	BCB Mean Change	95% Confidence Intervals	Effect Size <i>d</i>
Parental efficacy	(10–50)	44.36 (3.94)	46.09 (3.44)	1.79	1.89	(-2.78, 3.64)	.32
Father salience	(0–1)	0.84 (0.12)	.86 (.16)	.02	.01	(-.10, .10)	.09
Father activities	(0–23)	17.27 (2.45)	18.09 (1.86)	.82†	.85	(-.68, 1.27)	.58
Harsh discipline	(5–25)	11.45 (2.42)	10.18 (2.75)	-1.27†	-1.30	(-2.18, .54)	-.61
Inept discipline	(3–15)	5.72 (1.49)	4.81 (1.53)	-.91*	-.91	(-1.68, -.36)	-.80

Note: * $p < .05$, † $p < .10$; BCB = Bias Corrected Bootstrapped Mean Difference and Confidence Intervals, 1000 Monte Carlo draws.

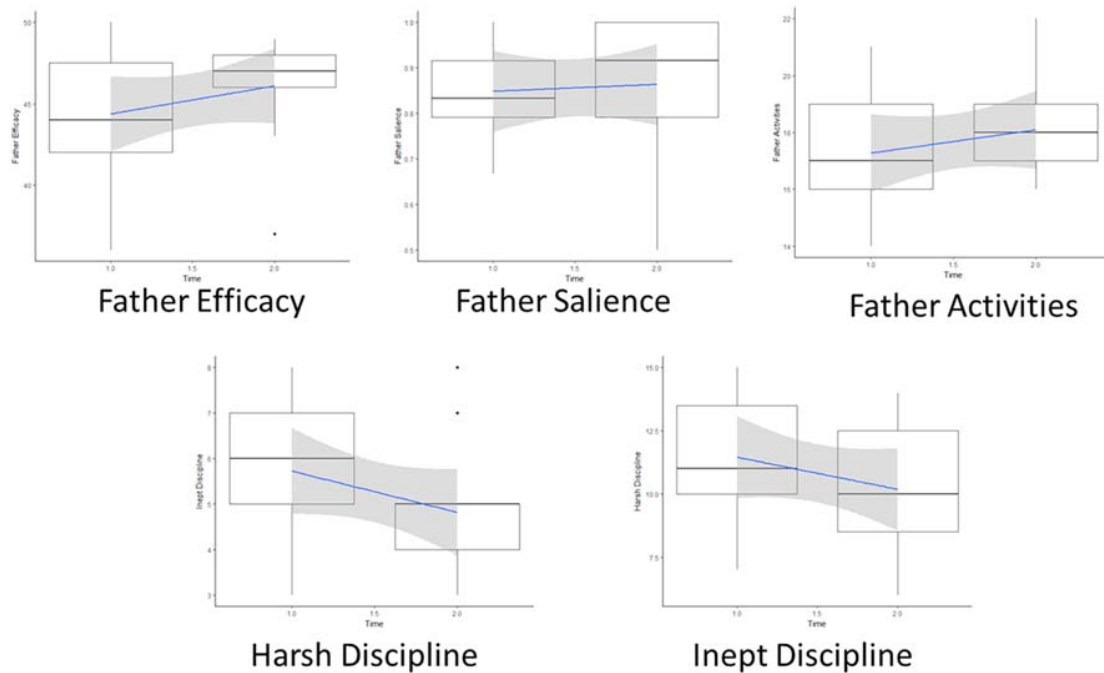


Figure 2. Pre-post boxplots, mean change and 95 per cent confidence intervals for fitted slope. [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

items rated on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). The Positive Experience scale included seven items (e.g., *Marte Meo was a positive experience for my family, I learned practical tools from my therapist, I have improved my communication with my child, Marte Meo has benefited my child, I have gained confidence as a father*; $\alpha = .93$) and the Negative Experience scale included six items (e.g., *Marte Meo has been stressful for my family, I found treatment difficult, length of time for each visit was too long, the program was burdensome*; $\alpha = .94$).

Discussion

By identifying and positively reinforcing fathers' skills in communicating with their child during Marte Meo video-based microsocial feedback to fathers, we hypothesized that fathers would learn to build on their existing strengths to better dialogue with, understand, and interact with their children, and further, would exhibit pre-post improvements in fathering self-evaluations and reported fathering behaviours. To our knowledge, this is the first evaluation of the Marte Meo method with single fathers assessing change in fathers' self-conceptions of the fathering role. The data showed promising evidence for the theoretical

TABLE 2 *Fathers' consumer and acceptability ratings of Marte Meo*

	M	SD
<i>Positive Experience Scale</i> ($\alpha = .93$)	4.35	.64
Marte Meo was a positive experience for my family	4.67	.71
I learned practical tools from meeting with Marte Meo therapist	4.11	.78
I have improved my communication with my child	4.44	.73
Meeting with Marte Meo therapist has benefited me personally	4.22	.83
Skills I strengthened and used through Marte Meo benefited my child	4.33	.71
I have gained confidence as a father	4.11	.93
I would recommend Marte Meo to other fathers	4.56	.53
<i>Negative Experience Scale</i> ($\alpha = .94$)	1.54	.90
Marte Meo has been stressful for my family	1.56	1.01
I found participating in Marte Meo treatment difficult	1.33	.71
The length of time for each videotaping was too long	1.33	.71
The length of time for each video feedback visit was too long	1.44	1.01
The length of the programme and total visits was too long	1.89	1.45
The programme was burdensome	1.67	1.12

model and provided data for the feasibility of further translation and evaluation of the Marte Meo within larger more representative samples and within randomized control trials with fathers.

Each of the hypothesized domains showed improvements as expected, with the exception of the measure of identity salience. Identity structures have been shown to be more stable and less resistant to change relative to more state-like characteristics, such as self-esteem (Burke and Reitzes, 1991). Given the associations of change in efficacy and change in harsh parenting with change in identity salience, more evaluation will be needed to clarify whether there was limited power in testing change in identity or whether it is less sensitive or responsive to the Marte Meo approach. Although the measure of identity salience was not sensitive to change, we note that fathers rated themselves as having gained confidence as a father on the exit survey (Table 2).

The pre-post changes in efficacy and reported fathering behaviours provide some preliminary support for the use of Marte Meo as a potential standalone or complementary approach for intervention technologies that involve divorced and single fathers. These findings are consistent with the notion that effective programmes that target father

identities may benefit from father-oriented components to increase men's awareness of the fathering role and how it affects child development and fills child-centered needs by using a generative fathering perspective (Brotherson, Dollahite and Hawkins, 2005; Parke and Brott, 1999). We argue that interventions that increase fathers' positive parenting are likely to yield significant benefits for children as a distal outcome (Cabrera, Shannon and Tamis-LeMonda, 2007).

Systematic reviews indicate that fathering intervention programmes that promote positive engagement and non-coercive, non-authoritative styles of parenting, and in particular that support co-parenting alliances, tend to be the most effective programmes for fathers (Asmussen and Weizel, 2010; Cowan, Cowan and Knox, 2010). For divorced and separated fathers, conflict resolution programmes are the predominant forms of mediation and court-based parenting programmes for both parents, as well as the dominant intervention target for single fathers of divorce (Braver, Griffin and Cookston, 2005; Cowan, Cowan and Knox, 2010; Gordon, 2000; McIntosh, Wells, Smyth and Long, 2008). We argue that more attention should be paid to father-focused generative parenting approaches to intervention to strengthen fathers' skills, to promote better father involvement either directly or indirectly, and to improve prevention and treatment efforts for at-risk fathers. Currently, evidence-based examples of parenting skills programmes for fathers include Incredible Years (Webster-Stratton, Reid and Hammond, 2004), Triple P (Fletcher, Freeman and Matthey, 2011; Sanders, Markie-Dadds, Tully and Bor, 2000), and Marriage and Parenting in Stepfamilies (MAPS; Forgatch, DeGarmo and Beldavs, 2005). Evidence-based programmes involving co-parenting alliances include Supporting Father Involvement (Cowan, Cowan, Pruett and Pruett, 2007), Family Foundations (Feinberg, Kan and Goslin, 2009) and Dads for Life (Braver, Griffin and Cookston, 2005).

Marte Meo has a growing evidence base with a host of positive outcomes across various populations with regard to parenting (Osterman, Möller and Wirtberg, 2010; Vik and Rohde, 2014) and adult caregiving (Einang Alnes, Kirkevold and Skovdahl, 2011). The vast majority of research focuses on mothers, and very little research to date has examined the potential benefits of strengthening men's development as fathers and their ability to support the development of their children. Further examination of Marte Meo with fathers, particularly those experiencing disrupted parenting, is warranted to determine if the intervention is beneficial, as has been demonstrated with other populations.

Limitations

Our study was small in scale in terms of sample size. Caution is therefore warranted for drawing inferences about effects (Kraemer *et al.*, 2006) and with regard to generalizability. Study findings demonstrate the feasibility of conducting video feedback intervention with single and divorced fathers. The findings are consistent with those from prior Marte Meo research for parent-infant and parent-adolescent interactions (Axberg, Hansson, Broberg and Wirtberg, 2006; Stina, Philip and Ingegerd, 2016; Osterman, Möller and Wirtberg, 2010; Vik and Rohde, 2014). The theoretical model proposed here should be evaluated with a larger sample and within the context of randomized, controlled conditions.

Acknowledgements

This research was supported in part by grants R01 HD42215 from the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, and grant P50 DA035763 from National Institute on Drug Abuse.

References

- Aarts, M. (2000) *Marte Meo: basic manual*. Harderwijk, the Netherlands: Aarts Productions.
- Amato, P. R. and Gilbreth, J. G. (1999) Nonresident fathers and children's well-being: a meta-analysis. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, **61**: 557–573. doi: 10.2307/353560
- Asmussen, K. and Weizel, K. (2010) *Evaluating the evidence: what all practitioners need to know to deliver evidence-based parenting support*. London: King's College.
- Axberg, U., Hansson, K., Broberg, A. B. and Wirtberg, I. (2006) The development of a systematic school-based intervention: Marte Meo and coordination meetings. *Family Process*, **45**(3): 375–389. doi: 10.1111/j.1545-5300.2006.00177.x
- Braver, S. L., Griffin, W. A. and Cookston, J. T. (2005) Prevention programs for divorced nonresident fathers. *Family Court Review*, **43**(1): 81–96. doi: 10.1111/j.1744-1617.2005.00009.x
- Brotherson, S. E., Dollahite, D. C. and Hawkins, A. J. (2005) Generative fathering and the dynamics of connection between fathers and their children. *Fathering*, **3**(1): 1–28. doi: 10.3149/ft.0301.1
- Burke, P. J. and Reitzes, D. C. (1991) An identity theory approach to commitment. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, **54**: 239–251. doi: 10.2307/2786653
- Cabrera, N. J., Shannon, J. D. and Tamis-LeMonda, C. (2007) Fathers' influence on their children's cognitive and emotional development: from toddlers to pre-K. *Applied Development Science*, **11**(4): 208–213. doi: 10.1080/10888690701762100

- Cohen, J. (1988) *Statistical power analysis for the social sciences* (2nd ed.). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Coley, R. L. and Medeiros, B. L. (2007) Reciprocal longitudinal relations between nonresident father involvement and adolescent delinquency. *Child Development*, **78**(1): 132–147. doi: 10.1111/j.1467-8624.2007.00989.x
- Cowan, P. A., Cowan, C. P. and Knox, V. (2010) Marriage and fatherhood programs. *Future of Children*, **20**(2): 205–230. doi: 10.1353/foc.2010.0000
- Cowan, C. P., Cowan, P. A., Pruett, M. K. and Pruett, K. (2007) An approach to preventing coparenting conflict and divorce in low-income families: strengthening couple relationships and fostering fathers' involvement. *Family Process*, **46**(1): 109–121. doi: 10.1111/j.1545-5300.2006.00195.x
- Cowan, P. A., Cowan, C. P., Pruett, M. K., Pruett, K. and Wong, J. J. (2009) Promoting fathers' engagement with children: preventive interventions for low-income families. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, **71**(3): 663–679. doi: 10.1111/j.1741-3737.2009.00625.x
- DeGarmo, D. S. (2010a) A time varying evaluation of identity theory and father involvement for full custody, shared custody, and no custody divorced fathers. *Fathering*, **8**(2): 181–202. doi:10.3149/fth.1802.181
- DeGarmo, D. S. (2010b) Coercive and prosocial fathering, antisocial personality, and growth in children's postdivorce noncompliance. *Child Development*, **81**(2): 503–516. doi:10.1111/j.1467-8624.2009.01410.x
- DeGarmo, D. S. and Forgatch, M. S. (2002) Identity salience as a moderator of psychological and marital distress in stepfather families. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, **65**(3): 266–284. doi: 10.2307/3090123
- DeGarmo, D. S., Reid, J. B., Leve, L. D., Chamberlain, P. and Knutson, J. F. (2009) Patterns and predictors of growth in divorced fathers' health status and substance use. *American Journal of Men's Health*, **4**(1): 60–70. doi: 10.1177/1557988308329454
- Einang Alnes, R., Kirkevold, M. and Skovdahl, K. (2011) Insights gained through Marte Meo counselling: experiences of nurses in dementia specific care units. *International Journal of Older People Nursing*, **6**: 123–132. doi: 10.1111/j.1748-3743.2010.00229.x
- Fabricius, W. V. and Braver, S. L. (2006) Relocation, parent conflict, and domestic violence: Independent risk factors for children of divorce. *Journal of Child Custody*, **3**(3): 7–27. doi: 10.1300/J190v03n03_02
- Fabricius, W. V. and Luecken, L. J. (2007) Postdivorce living arrangements, parent conflict, and long-term physical health correlates for children of divorce. *Journal of Family Psychology*, **21**(2): 195–205. doi: 10.1037/0893-3200.21.2.195
- Feinberg, M. E., Kan, M. L. and Goslin, M. C. (2009) Enhancing coparenting, parenting, and child self-regulation: effects of family foundations 1 year after birth. *Prevention Science*, **10**(3): 276–285. doi: 10.1007/s11121-009-0130-4
- Fletcher, R., Freeman, E. and Matthey, S. (2011) The impact of behavioural parent training on fathers' parenting: a meta-analysis of the Triple-P Positive parenting program. *Fathering*, **9**(3): 291–312. doi: 10.3149/fth.0903.291
- Forgatch, M. S., DeGarmo, D. S. and Beldavs, Z. G. (2005) An efficacious theory-based intervention for stepfamilies. *Behavior Therapy*, **36**: 357–365. doi: 10.1016/S0005-7894(05)80117-0
- Fox, G. L. and Bruce, C. (2001) Conditional fatherhood: identity theory and parental investment theory as alternative sources of explanation of fathering.

- Journal of Marriage and Family*, **63** (May): 394–403. doi: 10.1111/j.1741-3737.2001.00394.x
- Gardner, M. J. and Altman, D. G. (1986) Confidence intervals rather than P values: estimation rather than hypothesis testing. *British Medical Journal (Clinical research ed.)*, **292**(6522): 746–750. doi:10.1136/bmj.292.6522.746
- Gordon, D. A. (2000) Parent training via CD-ROM: using technology to disseminate effective prevention practices. *Journal of Primary Prevention*, **21**(2): 227–251. doi:10.1023/a:1007035320118
- Hassall, R., Rose, J. and McDonald, J. (2005) Parenting stress in mothers of children with an intellectual disability: the effects of parental cognitions in relation to child characteristics and family support. *Journal of Intellectual Disability Research*, **49**(6): 405–418. doi: 10.1111/j.1365-2788.2005.00673.x
- Henley, K. and Pasley, K. (2005) Conditions affecting the association between father identity and father involvement. *Fathering*, **3**(1): 59–80. doi: 10.3149/fth.0301.59
- Høivik, M. S., Lydersen, S., Drugli, M. B., Onsøien, R., Hansen, M. B. and Nielsen, T. S. B. (2015) Video feedback compared to treatment as usual in families with parent-child interactions problems: a randomized controlled trial. *Child and Adolescent Psychiatry and Mental Health*, **9**(3), doi: 10.1186/s13034-015-0036-9
- Ihinger-Tallman, M., Pasley, K. and Buehler, C. (1995) Developing a middle-range theory of father involvement postdivorce. In W. Marsiglio (ed.) *Fatherhood: contemporary theory, research, and social policy* (pp. 57–77). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- King, V. and Sobolewski, J. M. (2006) Nonresident fathers' contributions to adolescent well-being. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, **68**(3): 537–557. doi: 10.1111/j.1741-3737.2006.00274.x
- Kraemer, H. C., Mintz, J., Noda, A., Tinklenberg, J. and Yesavage, J. (2006) Caution regarding the use of pilot studies to guide power calculations for study proposals. *Archives of General Psychiatry*, **63** (May): 484–489. doi: 10.1001/archpsyc.63.5.484
- Leidy, M. S., Schofield, T. J. and Parke, R. D. (2013) Fathers' contributions to children's social development. In N. J. Cabrera and C. S. Tamis-Lemonda (eds.) *Handbook of father involvement: multidisciplinary perspectives* (2nd ed., pp. 151–167). New York, NY: Routledge.
- LaRossa, R. and Reitzes, D. C. (1993) Symbolic interactionism and family studies. In P. G. Boss, W. J. Doherty, R. LaRossa, W. R. Shumm and S. K. Steinmetz (eds.) *Sourcebook of family theories and methods: A contextual approach* (pp. 135–163). New York, NY: Plenum.
- Madden-Derdich, D. A. and Leonard, S. A. (2000) Parental role identity and fathers' involvement in coparental interaction after divorce: fathers' perspectives. *Family Relations*, **49**: 311–318. doi: 10.1111/j.1741-3729.2000.00311.x
- McCall, G. J. and Simmons, J. L. (1966) *Identities and interactions*. New York, NY: Free Press.
- McIntosh, J. E., Wells, Y. D., Smyth, B. M. and Long, C. M. (2008) Child-focused and child-inclusive divorce mediation: comparative outcomes from a prospective study of postseparation adjustment. *Family Court Review*, **46**(1): 105–124. doi: 10.1111/j.1744-1617.2007.00186.x
- Mead, G. H. (1934) *Mind, self, and society*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

- Osterman, G., Möller, A. and Wirtberg, I. (2010) The Marte Meo method as a means of supporting new adoptive parents. *Adoption & Fostering*, **34**: 49–57. doi: 10.1177/030857591003400207
- Oyserman, D., Terry, K. and Bybee, D. (2002) A possible selves intervention to enhance school involvement. *Journal of Adolescence*, **25**: 313–326. doi: 10.1006/jado.2002.0474
- Parke, R. D. and Brott, A. A. (1999) *Throwaway dads: the myths and barriers that keep men from being the fathers they want to be*. New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin.
- Rane, T. R. and McBride, B. A. (2000) Identity theory as a guide to understanding fathers' involvement with their children. *Journal of Family Issues*, **21**(3): 347–366. doi: 10.1177/019251300021003004
- Sanders, M. R., Markie-Dadds, C., Tully, L. A. and Bor, W. (2000) The Triple P-Positive Parenting Program: a comparison of enhanced, standard, and self-directed behavioral family intervention for parents of children with early-onset conduct problems. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, **68**(4): 624–640. doi: 10.1037/0022-006X.68.4.624
- Simons, R. L., Whitbeck, L. B., Beaman, J. and Conger, R. D. (1994) The impact of mothers' parenting, involvement by nonresidential fathers, and parental conflict on the adjustment of adolescent children. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, **56**: 356–374. doi: 10.2307/353105
- Stina, B., Philip, A. F. and Ingegerd, W. (2016) Video feedback intervention with children: a systematic review. *Research on Social Work Practice*, Prepublished 20 October 2016. doi: 10.1177/1049731516671809
- Stryker, S. (1968) Identity salience and role performance: the relevance of symbolic interaction theory for family research. *Journal of Marriage and the Family* (November): 558–564.
- Stryker, S. (1987) Identity theory: developments and extensions. In K. Yardley and T. Hones (eds.) *Self and identity: psychosocial perspectives* (pp. 89–103). New York, NY: Wiley.
- Thoits, P. A. (1992) Identity structures and psychological well-being: gender and marital status comparisons. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, **55**(3): 236–256. doi: 10.2307/2786794
- Vik, K. and Braten S. (2009) Video interaction guidance inviting transcendence of postpartum depressed mothers' self-centered state and holding behavior. *Infant Mental Health Journal*, **30**: 287–300. 10.1002/imhj.20215
- Vik, K. and Rohde, R. (2014) Tiny moments of great importance: the Marte Meo method applied in the context of early mother–infant interaction and post-natal depression. Utilizing Daniel Stern's theory of 'schemas of being with' in understanding empirical findings and developing a stringent Marte Meo methodology. *Clinical Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, **19**: 77–89. doi: 10.1177/1359104512468286
- Webster-Stratton, C., Reid, M. J. and Hammond, M. (2004) Treating children with early-onset conduct problems: intervention outcomes for parent, child, and teacher training. *Journal of Clinical Child and Adolescent Psychology*, **33**(1): 105–124. doi: 10.1207/S15374424JCCP3301_11