MEN RENEWING THEIR MALE IDENTITY:

The role of psychodrama in their process of developing a positive self-identity as male.

by

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The purpose of this study was to investigate the experiences of four men who felt a significant, positive change in their satisfaction with their self-identity as men. The study begins with a discussion of the personal and social implications of the gender role changes that have occurred over the past half-century and how these have affected men, citing several authors who claim there are a growing number of men who are dissatisfied with themselves as men. Thus the significance of the research participants' positive change in this regard was highlighted, and the research aimed at discovering the deep phenomenological structure of the experience that brought these men to a greater satisfaction with themselves as men. The research participants had all experienced this change through the process of doing an enactment in a psychodrama group therapy workshop. The interviews revealed that they were dealing with their relationships with their fathers and other men. They needed to reconstruct an experience that can be seen as a rite of passage, in which they were able to stand up for their authentic selves and integrate that into their identity as men. This, then, allowed them to reconnect with the experiences of other men as creating a balance of separateness and community that stands as a fundamental structure of human existence and experience in general.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract ................................................................................................................................. ii
Acknowledgments ....................................................................................................................... v
Chapter I: Introduction ................................................................................................................. 1
Chapter II: Literature Review ....................................................................................................... 7
   A modern crisis ............................................................................................................................ 7
   Changing masculinities ................................................................................................................. 11
   The transference of identification ............................................................................................. 16
   Men's groups as a therapeutic approach ............................................................................... 20
   Psychodrama as a context for this research .......................................................................... 24
Chapter III: Methodology .......................................................................................................... 29
   The interview ................................................................................................................................ 29
   The interview introduction ........................................................................................................... 31
   The interview questions ............................................................................................................. 31
   Procedures for analysis and interpretations .............................................................................. 33
   Selection of research participants ............................................................................................ 34
   Demographic information .......................................................................................................... 35
   Personal perspective of the researcher ...................................................................................... 36
Chapter IV: Results ..................................................................................................................... 38
   Four men's experiences in psychodrama .............................................................................. 41
   Harry ........................................................................................................................................... 41
   Theme summary: Harry ............................................................................................................ 46
   Dick ............................................................................................................................................ 47
   Theme summary: Dick ............................................................................................................... 55
   Joe ............................................................................................................................................. 56
   Theme summary: Joe ................................................................................................................ 63
   Tom ........................................................................................................................................... 64
   Theme summary: Tom ............................................................................................................... 72
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The shared themes</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being able to express one's emotional truth</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The power of the enactment: externalization and change</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Afterwards: integration and release</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The shared structure: The authentic self and the moment of arrest</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The fundamental theme (an outline)</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter V: Discussion</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The fundamental theme: The journey of the authentic self</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The authentic self</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The journey begins: the transfer of identification</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The 'false male' disorder</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rejoining</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theoretical implications</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The bad father</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The rite of passage</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implications for counselling practice</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implications for further research</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix A: Recruitment letter</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix B: Consent Form</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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CHAPTER 1: Introduction

Like it or not, men today must deal, on some level, with gender as a problematic construct, rather than as a natural, taken-for-granted reality (Messner, 1993, p.723).

The gender roles and expectations for both women and men in North American society have changed drastically in the past several decades. This represents a fundamental social revolution which is having far reaching consequences. Individuals are being faced with the need to reexamine the basic components of their gender identity, and establish the meaning of masculinity and femininity in their lives. In the current literature which focuses on men’s issues and psychotherapy with men there are some common themes concerning current changes in male gender roles and masculine identity. Many authors suggest that a majority of men who seek out therapy are there, in part, because they are unsatisfied with themselves as men (Erickson, 1993 ; Meth and Pasik, 1990). Patrick Dougherty writes that, “Most men who come to therapy do not have a strong masculine identity” (1990, p.170). The traditional stereotypes concerning the appropriate attitudes and behaviours for men have come under fire, not only from the women’s movement, but from within a slowly burgeoning men’s movement as well. As a result:

In the late 20th century, we face a crisis of major proportions in the masculine identity. For men, the options for behaving in less traditional ways have vastly increased. But many still experience being caught. The price of breaking society’s prescribed roles for men is still great. And yet, the cost of not moving beyond those strictures also can be exorbitant for men.” (Erikson, 1990, p.445)
The difficulties many men face in terms of their self-identity as a man, or "masculine esteem" (Dougherty, 1990), are often brought up in the literature as being at the root of broad problem areas concerning male depression and withdrawal, relationship difficulties, aggression, and violence toward women (Trimble, 1986; Sternbach, 1990; Grusznski and Bankovics, 1990). A. Jenkins deals with therapeutic programs for violent and abusive men. He writes:

Many descriptions of abusive males include low self-esteem, feelings of inadequacy, fears of insufficiency and inferiority in relationships and with respect to masculine identity." (1990, p.21).

It seems that these feelings of inadequacy, or low 'masculine esteem,' can become so acute for some men that they act out violently in misguided and dangerous attempts to prove their manhood at whatever cost. We are in a historic period in which the dominant and accepted understanding of what it means to be male is changing. This process of change has created confusion and uncertainty, affecting many men in ways that can be profound and dangerous for the individual, those close to them, and society as a whole.

The aims of this study are: 1) to explore the nature of men's self-identity as male, 2) to explore the social and developmental processes that make this issue so volatile in the psychology of men, 3) to discuss how self-identity can arise as a problem for men, and 4) to look at how this problem can, perhaps, be dealt with. Issues of gender are so fundamental that it is difficult to separate questions of power and social structure between men and women as segments of society from those concerning a healthy sense of self-identity for individuals within society.
Also, the construct of gender that the individual integrates into their self-identity is fundamentally related to the norms of the particular group that the individual identifies with. Thus the question of how an individual feels about their gender identity is necessarily connected to a larger questions concerning their identification with a particular social group and its prescriptions of gendered behaviour and ways of inter-relating. There has been a lot of interest lately in the ways in which the gender constructs within these larger social groups have been changing. The women's movement has had a profound impact on the social construction of both male and female gender roles in many groups and sub-groups of society, and there is a growing body of literature specifically concerned with the “changing masculinities” (Connell, 1993) within these groups as a result. However, in this study I hope to side-step these politically charged areas in order to examine this process of change from the point of view of individuals, rather than social groups and power structures. Therefore, instead of trying to tackle new developments in the changing social construct of masculinity, I am going to look at a small group of individual men and try to understand their processes as *individuals* towards self-understanding and self-acceptance as male.

In order to do this I have chosen to use a phenomenological methodology in this study, and to select individuals as co-researchers based on the approach they have taken in dealing with their problems, rather than the particular group, or sub-group of society that they come from. I will make an in-depth analysis of the experiences of several men who have felt a positive change in their sense of
themselves as men brought about as a result of their participation in a psychodramatic enactment. The purpose is to discover the nature of change in the self-concepts of these men, the underlying themes and processes involved, and the particular therapeutic experiences they felt helped them toward a greater positive satisfaction with their own masculine identity.

My interest in using psychodrama as a context for research into men’s experience of masculine identity initially stemmed from my own participation in a psychodrama workshop. I observed several enactments with men as protagonists, and although these men did not necessarily identify masculinity as a key issue in the therapeutic process they embarked upon, they did choose to enact situations and dynamics that brought out and highlighted themes of masculine identity. Also, in the debriefing discussions after the enactments (which are integral to the psychodrama process), several men related experiences of ‘taking their place as a man,’ and ‘finally being able to act with confidence as a man.’

The father-son relationship was central to several of these men’s enactments, and issues concerning masculine expectations, and the need for appropriate role modeling were clearly portrayed.

Through this experience I came to believe that the therapeutic opportunities provided by psychodrama are particularly suited to helping men address their personal issues concerning their self-identity as male. Through role-play individuals can approach problematic relationships and situations, repairing difficult and traumatic experiences in their development, and then taking on new
roles and actions which are witnessed and reinforced by the group. Perhaps
because of the action focus, and also the externalization of internal conflicts in
the present moment, men seemed more willing to express the full depth and
intensity of their problems, and more able to deal with them productively.

Psychodrama thus seemed to provide a forum where these men could deal
with some of the personal and social issues relevant to their understanding of
what it means to be a man in a healthy and productive sense. It is difficult to
discuss a ‘healthy sense of masculinity’ today, because the traditional stereotype
of masculinity has been so fundamentally tied to male dominance over women
(Segal, 1993), as well as competition, control, and aggression (O’Neil, 1990).
These qualities have become almost synonymous with masculinity, even though
they have been shown to be almost inherently detrimental to men’s physical
health (Leafgren, 1990), their relationships (Grusznski & Bankovics, 1990), and
the fulfillment of their emotional needs (Allen & Gordon, 1990). The underlying
assumption for this study is that traditional male socialization and the prevailing
mainstream attitudes toward masculinity are indeed creating a powerful
dissonance in the lives of many men. They are neither able to ‘measure up’ to the
ideal male stereotype, nor to find satisfaction and fulfillment in themselves
because of the expectations derived from it. It is especially in reaction to feelings
of inadequacy that men become angry and violent, either outwardly toward
others, or inwardly toward themselves.
In this study I will examine the process of change for my co-researchers that led them to feel more satisfied with themselves as men. The central questions of my research project are: how did these men come to feel more satisfied and confident with their self-identity as male; what were the critical moments in their process that helped this shift happen, and how have they come to view this aspect of themselves. My aim is to illuminate the basic form and place of that gender identity within the larger structure of the individual’s self-concept, and to identify some of the steps these men took to reach this more satisfying understanding of themselves. There has already been much discussion and literature written on ‘changing masculinities’ (Segal, 1993; Messner, 1993; Connell, 1993) from a more theoretical and historical perspective. I feel that by allowing the individual voices of these men to be heard, we may gain new insights into how men can and do come to terms with the social changes affecting many of us today.
CHAPTER 2: Literature Review

A modern crisis:

While feminists often receive the blame for male bashing, popular culture has done a much better job of portraying men as pigs. From TV to music to advertising, men are associated with a host of unsavory traits: emotional clumsiness, fear of love, selfishness, vanity, a propensity for violence, even poor grooming. Given those cultural messages, it's probably hard for most men today to arrive at an identity that encompasses some idea of maleness they can embrace as moral and appealing (Minkowitz, 1995, p.70).

One key factor often alluded to as the background for the present 'crisis in masculine identity' is the rise of the women's movement and the subsequent reexamination and redefinition of socially sanctioned gender roles. In his foreword to Beth Erickson's book quoted above, Frank Pittman (1993) states that, “family life is undergoing the most wrenching change in history: the decline and fall of patriarchy.” (p.vii). Whether this will prove to be hyperbole or not, it is clear that many traditional elements of the male gender role have had to change as women have demanded their right to equality. One central tenet of the old male stereotype that has to give way for gender equality is that of male dominance over women. This belief is central to the 'masculine mystique' and plays a large part in the masculine self-image of many men (Kahn 1984, Meth, 1990). Lynn Segal, in fact, sees this element of dominance as the central factor in the construct 'masculinity':

The power and meaning of 'masculinity' derive not just from autonomy, or familial interaction, nor indeed from any fixed set of attributes that all men share, but from wider social relations. The concept of 'masculinity'
condenses, above all, the cultural reality of women’s subordination (1993, p.629).

Whether it will ever be possible (and I certainly believe it is) to establish a sense of masculinity which does not imply male dominance, Segal’s argument makes it clear that this theme is still very much present in today’s concept of masculinity, and that it runs counter to the social progress made in this century.

Another factor in the modern male’s confusion regarding masculinity and gender roles is that these have become more and more connected to issues of violence and abuse:

Men’s gender roles have been implicated in family violence, rape, and child sexual abuse (Finkelhor, 1984; Finn, 1986; Russell, 1984). These serious problems have received much attention in the media, and the public has become sensitized to men as abusers. Consequently, men feel blamed and in the defensive about sexism and their gender roles (O’Neil, 1990, p.23).

Men hear many negative qualities attributed to their gender, and are confronted with images and stereotypes played out in the media that confirm these negative attributes. Even in the research literature there is a general identification of the problems connected to the construct ‘masculinity’, and a lack of possible avenues to address these problems. Many authors talk of the need for change, yet it is the problems that are expressed as the given elements of masculinity, left without contrasting possibilities for change. In this way the restrictive ‘masculine mystique’ becomes identified as the core element of masculinity altogether:

The ‘out-of-balance’ metaphor extends into the internal life of men and results in an imbalance in the realm of feelings and emotions. Part of being ‘manly’ is to deny and to dissociate from such natural human feelings as fear, sadness, and dependency (Allen & Gordon, 1990).
Thus a further ground for confusion is established, as men try to understand how much of these negative qualities are *necessarily* connected to the masculinity they share a part in.

While some of the qualities attributed to 'masculinity' are obviously or overtly negative there are some whose negative consequences are more subtle. In its traditional sense masculinity has been associated with strength, independence, control, and competition, which can all be viewed as being more positive than some further attributes such as dominance and aggression, but nonetheless, “An increasing number of men are discovering, however, that conforming to such societal prescriptions often results in feelings of emptiness, loneliness, and dissatisfaction.” (Hetzel, Barton, & Davenport, 1994, p.52). In the history of our society the pioneering spirit with its emphasis on ‘rugged individualism’ and self-sufficiency, and also the industrial revolution with its emphasis on competition and the ‘self-made’ man, have established a stereotype of the male ideal as distant and alone. The ideals of strength and independence, when taken to an extreme, require the man to deny any need for support from others.

The injunctions of the ‘male mystique’ against expressing emotions, needs, or any other ‘feminine’ qualities thus require the denial of a large portion of the individual’s experience. Real human needs for connection and relationship are not sanctioned by the stereotypic male gender role and hence the serious difficulties many men face in their personal relationships. The denial of real needs in order to project an acceptable image makes it difficult for the individual
to communicate and interact with others as a whole person. These restrictions inherent in the old male stereotypes can thus limit men severely and cost them in many ways. Perhaps most apparent, though, are the limitations placed on personal expression and the inability to make important emotional bonds with others. The pressure to accept and adhere to these stereotypes can create serious conflict within and between men.

Any behaviors that may suggest a weakness become associated with a loss of masculinity, and consequently, a loss of worth and value. ... Men who fulfill their socially stereotypical male role by behaving in ways that are expected are in conflict with men who attempt to behave more in accordance with their basic psychological needs (Leafgren, 1990, p.6-7).

Men today are being challenged to find a way to view their masculinity in a positive light. Social changes have made it necessary for men to adapt to the changing roles of women and this has required that some of the fundamental elements of the old masculine stereotype be reexamined and removed. Certain characteristics of this masculine stereotype have also come into the awareness of our society, through the media and otherwise, and as a result masculinity itself has become suspect. Violence and aggression have become synonyms for masculine behaviour. As well, it is clear that many aspects of the old masculine stereotype are resulting in isolation, frustration, and unhappiness for a growing number of men. The ‘old’ stereotype that I refer to here continues to persist, and in many ways is still the yardstick that men use to evaluate their own masculine identity. The stereotype is ‘old’ only in that it no longer functions to give men a
constructive understanding of their gender roles and gender identity in the
changing, modern world.

Changing masculinities:

In the preceding discussion we have seen that a great many authors point to
a crisis, or fundamental change in our society’s concept of masculinity. At the
same time, however, there is also a clear agreement among many of these authors
that masculinity itself has never been a simple, easily defined construct. When we
begin to look closely at this phenomenon we must accept that there are different
masculinities defined within different groups and resulting from different
historical, social, and cultural realities. From this point of view, gender is a
socially constructed reality, encountered at such a deep level that the attitudes and
behaviours defining it are easily, and often, taken as “perfectly natural;” that is,
they are a fundamental part of the socially endorsed view of reality, i.e., justified
by evolution, biology, or even ordained by God.

Shared ‘realities’ become ‘truths’ and are passed down by each generation
in families, cultures, and societies. In this respect, gender meanings and
gendered prescriptions for behavior are social constructions that fit a

“As opposed to any essentialist understandings of it, not only across time,
but across place, age, ethnicities, even within different contexts in much
the same time and place, ‘masculinity’ differs and changes.” (Segal, 1993,
p.626)
In a homogenous culture isolated from other points of view a particular gender code may prevail relatively unchallenged. Within any modern culture or society, however, there are many groups and sub-groups, and perhaps the ‘crisis in masculinity’ being experiences broadly within the ‘mainstream culture’ today, is also related to the growing mosaic of co-existing ethnic, religious, and (sub-) cultural groups that are part of modern society. Lynn Segal (1993) writes:

We can ... observe the growth of ever more assertive and challenging multiplicities of male identity -- whether gay, anti-sexist, androgynous, super-tough, or other more specific male identities (p.627).

For example, as a man living in Vancouver, Canada, I have a broad range of different ‘masculinities,’ present and working within my society. There are many ethnic communities co-existing in this city, and a large gay community, not to mention the many diverse sub-cultures of these and ‘mainstream’ society, such as the sports community, the arts community, the academic community. From the perspective of ‘masculinities,’ each of these groups has a different construct of masculine identity. In some ways it could be shown that the ‘crisis in masculinity’ which is at the focus of this paper is an aspect of the ‘mainstream,’ white, Euro-American culture only, and perhaps it is a clear indication of the end of a previously homogenous cultural ideology at the core of this politically dominant group. However, at the heart of men’s troubles with gender identity is a broad attack on the foundations of patriarchal, “hegemonic” masculine power (Connell, 1993; Donaldson, 1993) which is not limited to ‘mainstream’ culture alone:

The distinctive feature of the present moment in gender relations in first-world countries is the fact of open challenges to men’s power, in the form
of feminism, and to institutionalized heterosexuality, in the form of lesbian and gay men's movements (Connell, 1993, p.613).

Thus the growing emphasis on equality -- between genders, and between cultures -- and the ethic of a personal right to self-determination, are forcing 'mainstream' society to deal with and hopefully acknowledge differing masculinities. Previously oppressed versions of masculinity, especially those developing in the gay community, now form an important area for further research. Also worthy of research would be the consequences and spread of conceptual models of human nature that, like the Jungian, or the Taoist, suggest that any individual encompasses both a feminine and a masculine aspect (anima/animus, yin/yang). In this study, however, I will not be able to address these issues directly, and it is perhaps most important that I clarify at the beginning that this study will not look at the construct of masculinity held by gay or bisexual men. The scope of this research is not large enough to identify even one such group or sub-group and outline the construct of masculinity at work within it. Instead I will focus on a small group of individuals and their personal process toward a positive understanding of their own masculine self-identity. In this, I am perhaps taking the concept of masculinities to an extreme and positing that men in our complex, modern society are being challenged to come up with a personal construct of masculinity, incorporating those constructs that speak to their personal experience. It is in this spirit that I will use the term, "self-identity as male."
If we accept the view that there is no 'deep masculine essence' with pre-
ordained, universal characteristics, then being male, biologically, is different
from being masculine in terms of conforming to the prescribed meanings and
behaviours of gender within any one social group. This distinction between
biological sex and socially constructed gender has important ramifications. As
Michael Kaufman (1993) states:

The word gender gets bandied about as if it means the same thing a sex,
but it doesn't. Gender is our notion of the appropriate behaviour, thought
and activities of men and women, out ideas of masculinity and femininity
(p.19)

And,

To be a man means only to have a penis and testicles. ... What makes it
difficult to be a man is that most of what we associate with manhood is
the collective hallucination of gender” (p.271).

Even a biological definition of maleness may not always apply universally, but
the present ‘crisis of masculinity’ has to do with men’s perceptions of themselves
as compared to the socially created image of appropriately masculine nature and
behaviour. This ‘hallucination of gender’ as Kaufman and others argue is thus not
something intrinsic to the individual man so much as the group they are trying to
be a part of. This understanding alone may be helpful to many men if they
consider that the confusion concerning ‘masculinity’ is not only a personal
problem, but a reflection of the confusion of the role our society ascribes to men
in general.

Kaufman, Segal and others see this distinction between male sex and
masculine gender as a clear indication that those, like Robert Bly, who encourage
men to ‘find their deep masculine essence’ are reinforcing a search for a fantasy, or ‘hallucination.’ Yet both of these authors and others who write about ‘masculinities’ (Connell 1993) refer to some core characteristics of the masculine gender ‘hallucination’ that are common to most social groups.

The concept of “masculinity” condenses, above all, the cultural reality of women’s subordination (Segal, p.629)

Although there is no one set of characteristics that defines masculinity, there are some enduring and pervasive features. In the eyes of many men and women, masculinity means being in control, having mastery over yourself and the world around you. It means taking charge. (Kaufman p.28)

What these authors are describing here has been termed ‘hegemonic’ masculinity by Bob Connell (1993) and others. “What in the early years had been written of as ‘the male sex role’ is best seen as hegemonic masculinity, the ‘culturally idealized form of masculine character’” (Donaldson, 1993, p.646-7).

Hegemony means the domination of others. Thus, the essential characteristic of the dominant, patriarchal form of masculinity is to have power --to be a man means to have power over others -- not only non-men, i.e. women and children, but also other men, or groups of men, who would then be less ‘masculine.’ The situation this definition of masculinity develops would seem to necessarily involve hierarchies of power, competition, and the need for men to prove their manhood through their control of others. To be a man on these terms would also require hegemony over oneself -- i.e. control or suppression of any unruly emotions. This does seem to outline some of the major problems involving masculinity today, and indeed, describes an ideology that clashes head-on with
any notion of equality, whether gender, racial, or simply interpersonal. If this aspect of modern masculinity is really as fundamental and pervasive as these authors seem to think, then we need to understand the roots of its development in order to change it, before men can come to terms with their gender in an egalitarian world.

Transference of identification:

Why are men so concerned with measuring themselves against some external concept of masculinity? Psychoanalytic theories may have at least a partial answer to this question. The problem of searching out and establishing a personal sense of masculine identity may have its roots in the very early stages of male development. Nancy Chodorow (1978) analyses the early development of gender identity from a psychoanalytic perspective and stresses that the nature of the attachment of young boys and girls toward their mothers as the primary caregiver is different. She sees this difference as having far reaching ramifications. Richard Meth (1990) discusses male identity development in the first chapter of his book Men in Therapy. As part of this chapter he discusses the implications of Chodorow's analysis. Meth writes,

Chodorow's analysis reveals that patterns of fusion, symbiosis, attachment and separateness are different for men and women. Basically, the male infant's sense of connectedness with the primary caretaker becomes an ambivalent relationship, a delicate balance between his needs for a sense of emotional intimacy and the equally urgent need for identity, which leads to detachment and emotional distancing from the mother.
The boy’s sense of attachment to his mother is in conflict with his recognition of being different from her, and therein lies the beginning of the boy’s search for his masculine identity. The boy must turn towards his father, or some other masculine role model, for an understanding of the gender-related part of his identity.

There is nothing new or surprising in the idea that boys must look to their fathers for an understanding of masculinity and the male gender role, but what Chodorow and Meth see as crucial is that there is a stage in male development when the boy’s attachment and identification with his mother is rejected. The boy’s sense of being male becomes extremely important to his sense of identity, as he searches to shift the object of his identification from his mother to the most intimately known member of his own gender, usually his father. “When a boy pulls away from the close bond established with mother, the amount of emotional involvement and nurturing from father becomes a critical factor” (Meth, 1990, p.10) According to these theories, boys begin their lives with an unquestioned sense of attachment and identification with the mother. Early on, the young boy, “... like his sister, is sensuously merged with the mother” (Segal, 1993, p.628). However, the boy quickly reaches the stage of recognizing gender differences, and he begins a process of separation from the mother and connection to the father. The boy’s sense of identity thus becomes contingent upon the father’s recognition of his masculinity. The ‘merged identity’ that the infant has with its mother (as primary caregiver) becomes suspect, and a similarly deep bond of
identity with the father is perhaps not so easy to create. Without the recognition
and acceptance of a shared gender identity established in a nurturing relationship
with the father (as the new object of identification), the boy would be left in a
state of limbo, knowing he is not fully like his mother, and wondering whether he
is really like his father.

Although all infants begin life with a primary emotional attachment to the
mother, sons must separate from this relationship to achieve their
masculine identification. The male infant seeks out the father for
continued nurturance and protection. Merton (1986) and others found that
the frequent lack of an emotionally available father creates a condition
referred to as ‘father hunger.’ This subconscious yearning is believed to
result in behaviors that attempt to make an emotional connection with the
father. The behavior patterns may range from being passive and approval-
seeking to macho and attention-seeking. From this perspective, the self-
concept becomes a collection of the son’s projections of behaviors that
would build a connection with the father (May, 1990, p.11)

This pattern of searching for a masculine identity through which the boy is
accepted by his father and separated from his mother seems to be a critical part of
what it means to be male. In other cultures, and in previous phases of our own,
this search for identity was addressed by male rituals and rites of passage that are
now lacking in today’s Western society. The discontinuation of the old rituals of
masculinity has been necessary as the roles and expectations of men have
changed. However, as a consequence the boy’s search to identify with his father’s
masculinity has become problematic and difficult to fulfill, thus contributing to
the ‘father hunger’ that Beth Erickson (1993) calls, “the single most important
loss with which nearly all men have to come to terms” (p.266).
In the above discussion I have tried to identify, first of all, several of the most salient socio-historical reasons behind the present 'crisis in masculine identity,' then I've tried to summarize the basic thrust of the psychoanalytic theories that are being discussed in much of the literature concerning men's issues. From both of these viewpoints there are reasons that contribute to the difficulties surrounding men's confidence in their own masculine identity. Taken together these two factors describe a situation where men today do not have a model of healthy masculinity that is truly acceptable either for themselves or for society as a whole, and yet there is a psychodynamic process beginning early in every man's life through which he is searching for just this very thing. Men are caught in a double-bind, searching for belonging and acceptance among the company of men, but unable to clearly identify what the rules for membership in the 'masculine club' are. According to the psychodynamic theory there is a sense in which each boy feels himself to be an outsider to this club at one point, and then searches out masculine expectations, 'projecting' behaviours and attitudes that would connect him to that masculine world.

Several further consequences of this journey away from identification with the mother and toward that with the father are not difficult to identify. First, the fear of femininity, which is commonly referred to, can be seen as a direct outgrowth of the boy's efforts to separate himself from the feminine world and prove himself adequate to enter the masculine. Also associated with that initially experienced world of identification with the mother would be the primal
experience of emotional intimacy, which might result in an opposing association of ‘masculinity’ with emotional restriction, rejection of intimacy, and male attachments based on role expectations, not emotional bonding.

The men’s group as a therapeutic approach:

In the present situation there seem to be several key ways in which the developmental needs of boys described by psychodynamic theory are not being met. The change in the object of the child’s identification from the mother to the father is a crucial step in building a sense of personal identity. This step grows out of the boy’s recognition of his maleness as different from his mother’s femaleness, and the boy’s sense or personal construct of the meaning of his own gender will develop in relation to the male models that he encounters around him.

There is a growing trend in our society for sons to be very distant from their fathers. Many single parent families are headed by mothers, and even when fathers are ostensibly still attached to the family they can be absent in many ways when it comes to relating to their families and children. Guy Corneau, in his book, *Absent fathers, lost sons* (1991), cites Canadian and American statistics to support his statement that,

In the United States, for example, one in five children lives in a fatherless home. ... In Canada, according to the 1986 census, almost one child in seven lives in a fatherless family (p. 11-12).

Thus there is a large percentage of children, roughly half of whom are boys, who do not have a father-figure present in their lives. This fact, coupled with the
problem that many fathers, or father-figures who are physically present, may be
relating to their sons from behind the restrictive barrier of the ‘hegemonic’
masculine stereotype, gives these sons little to hold on to and learn from as
appropriate models of male gender identity. Without other, more intimate and
realistic models to learn from, boys are left with the media, sports, movies,
television, to provide them with the information they are so desperately looking
for. The media, however, cannot provide them with a relationship, or -- most
important of all -- some form of recognition or approval from the male role
model. Even without an appropriate masculine model present in their lives, boy’s
will recognize their maleness as different from their mother’s femaleness, and
begin their search to understand what it means to ‘be a man.’

This process underscores the fact that many adult men have not been able to
confirm the transfer of their gender identity, and may still need the company of
other men to learn about what is normal in a man’s experience, and the different
possibilities of attitude and behaviour that can apply to men’s lives. Men’s groups
are often considered the most important therapeutic method for helping men
adjust (Grusznski & Bankovics, 1990; Sternbach, 1990). It seems that gathering in
groups is in itself a break with the old independent and self-sufficient male
stereotype -- but perhaps more importantly, men in groups learn from other men.
Men who have not been able to confirm their sense of self as male can listen to
the testimony of others who feel exactly the same way, and through this realize
that the ideal they were trying to live up to was truly an impossible
‘hallucination.’

The members strongly valued the feelings of universality and
commonality that emerged throughout the course of the group. All of the
members entered the group “feeling defective as a man.” The recognition
that they were not the only ones who experienced the pressures of trying
to conform to the male gender role seemed to be therapeutic to the
members (Hetzel, Barton & Davenport, 1994, p.59).

The men’s group as a therapeutic vehicle can also provide each member with the
experience of being open and vulnerable with other men:

The group offers, perhaps for the first time, a place where a man can allow
himself to be open and vulnerable with other men. ... The group can help a
man define and embrace his masculine identity (Dougherty, 1990, p. 173).

In doing this, the men as group members are encouraged to recognize and express
their own needs and inner, personal world. They may have shut off, or denied this
‘inner reality’ previously as being associated with the world of the feminine.

From the Mytho-poetic gatherings inspired by Robert Bly to the Christian
‘Promise Keepers’ there is a growing men’s movement that focuses on men
gathering together to encourage and support one another. Of course, there have
been many forms of ‘men’s groups’ throughout history, from the catholic clergy
to soldiers in the army -- and the group itself is a powerful vehicle for reinforcing
the values and behaviours that it approves of. This could present the problem that
the group might act to reinforce the old stereotypes, rather than move beyond
them:

Until the mid-1950’s, the military service was perhaps the most universal
and most powerful group for radical transformation of the male psyche. ... 
Many men use groups such as the Lions Club, the V.F.W., the community
sports leagues, and the less formal fishing and hunting groups as a place to
hide. These groups are often used as an escape from the feminine world -- not for initiation or maturation as is needed, but out of fear of being dominated and engulfed by that world (Dougherty, 1990, p. 172).

The Promise Keepers spend the bulk of their time teaching men how to refrain from abusing because they believe men ought to be good masters, not abusive ones. They don’t doubt for a moment that the ultimate responsibility for the world -- for men’s and women’s lives both -- is men’s. ... This fantasy of benevolent domination is at the core of the Promise Keepers’ vision. ... To the Promise Keepers, patriarchal power is legitimate and, in fact, desirable, so long as it is not ‘misused’ (Minkowitz, 1995, p. 69).

The Promise Keepers and other such groups may be useful to some men if they do, in fact, provide a place where they can show their inner feelings and have them be acceptable. Inasmuch as these groups support the old stereotypes of power and control, however, the message they give to their members will be fundamentally conflictual, and will not provide a healthy opportunity to learn appropriate new ways of being in today’s world. The orientation of the male group towards men’s relationships with women will reflect on their orientation towards the inner, ‘feminine’ reality of the men themselves. As such, a ‘healthy’ men’s group might be measured on its ability to lay a foundation for equality and integration while still representing the difference and separation between the sexes.

Lacking a healthy male group to help him separate from the feminine world, a boy is likely to oppose or polarize against the feminine in an attempt to find his masculinity. The result is an ongoing and often unconscious fear of the feminine ... (Dougherty, p. 172).
Psychodrama as a context for this research:

I have chosen to look at men's experiences in psychodrama and how they relate to their self-identity as male. The reason for this is that during my experience as an observer and participant in others' enactments at a psychodrama workshop I became aware of how this powerful experience changed the people who chose to go through it. Several men expressed feeling stronger, and more self-confident about themselves as men afterwards. I became intrigued as to how this process worked, and how these men felt about themselves.

As the discussion of Chodorow’s (1978) arguments and psychodynamic theory suggests, the boy's relationship to both his mother and father have many ramifications on the boy's self-identity. Men may very often need to address the internalized relationships with their parents in order to change the sense of themselves that have been built through them. In terms of male identity they may particularly need to approach the internalized figure of their father in order to re-evaluate and reconstruct some of the expectations and masculine roles that developed as a result of that relationship. One of the particular therapeutic opportunities of psychodrama lies in the possibility it allows the individual to recreate internalized relationships in the present through role-play.

A young man in conflict with a parent talks directly to a person as an auxiliary ego playing his parent. His fantasy (or reality) of his hostility or love can be acted out on the spot. He can experience his pain ... in direct relationship to the ‘father,’ ‘mother,’ or other person who helped build the pain into him, since his enactment takes place as closely as possible to the pertinent, specific core situations in his life (Yablonski, 1976, p.4).
Once the protagonist (the person who’s story is being enacted in the psychodrama) has externalized the relationships that need to be dealt with, then they are free to try out different ways of acting within those relationships while being supported by the safe atmosphere of the group.

In psychodrama, members are given the freedom to try out a diversity of roles thereby getting a sharper focus on parts of themselves that they would like to present to others. Playing roles also enables participants to get in contact with parts of themselves that they were not aware of. Psychodrama offers members many opportunities to challenge stereotyped ways of responding to people and to break out of behaving within a rigid pattern (Corey, 1985, p.197).

The new behaviours that are tried on in the experimental arena provided by psychodrama are witnessed by the group, which is then able to give feedback. This feedback is central to the entire process of psychodrama because it provides the protagonist with an immediate sense of how these new roles are coming across.

Thus, through psychodrama the core relationships and role dynamics which are at the heart of male socialization and development can be made present and alive in a very powerful way. Men are able to address the loss at the core of their ‘father hunger,’ or the pain inflicted on them by their parents, or the lack of understanding and support. Those who have felt restricted in some way are able to challenge themselves to try out new roles, behaviours and emotional expressions. In many ways the psychodramatic enactment can work as a catalyst for change, and the individuals involved may experience a shift in their self-concept as a result.
On the cognitive level psychodrama encourages new ways of thinking. It allows a situation to be seen through a variety of perspectives often affecting a shift in perception within the client. ... Because from the perspective of the brain “to do is to know” the action component of psychodrama anchors new learning on a cognitive level.

On the behavioral level, psychodrama provides the opportunity to explore and change old behavior and practice new behavior. Feeling, thought, perception and behavior tend to be role specific; we tend to organize these aspects of self around playing a particular role. If we can explore and play out the role and observe it in action we can begin to make meaningful corrections (Dayton, 1994, p. 248).

Summary:

The literature on men’s issues identifies the background to what has been called the crisis in masculine identity, and identifies areas of conflict due to outdated and dysfunctional gender roles for men. Much of the literature looks at the restrictive consequences of the ‘old’ male stereotype, and by implication suggests that when men are able to see past these restrictive expectations they will be able to come to some form of resolution. However, psychodynamic theories suggest that it may take more than a simple recognition of what’s wrong to help men make the deep changes in their self-identity and way of being that are necessary. To some extent the men’s group and I believe to a greater extent psychodrama, seems to offer the kind of therapeutic experience that can help men recognize and create the changes that they need. My question is, then, for men who identify themselves as having achieved some measure of resolution in this regard, what are the experiences and meanings surrounding their self-identity that
have enabled them to achieve a more complete and satisfying sense of themselves as men?
The research question:

What were the experiences in the psychodramatic process that had a significant effect upon the protagonist's sense of himself as a man, and how did these experiences help to bring the man closer to a more positive and fulfilling self-identity as male?
CHAPTER 3: Methodology

In this study I have chosen to use qualitative methodology because at this point in the discussion of 'changing masculinities' I feel it is important to hear the voices of individual men who are dealing with these problems. I have also chosen to focus on the insight and awareness gained through participation in a psychodrama workshop. The co-researchers for this qualitative study will have taken part in a psychodramatic enactment, whose thematic content touched upon issues related to their sense of themselves as men. Through a phenomenological methodology I will investigate the experiences these men had in the enactment that created positive changes in their sense of self-identity as a whole, and then more specifically in their personal understanding of their own self-identity as male. The phenomenological approach will allow me to further focus on the personal experience of masculinity for each man, and the cluster of meanings surrounding this concept for him. In this way I hope to bring to light some fundamental elements of the personal concept of masculinity for these men, and identify the critical events in the transformative process that brought them to a greater self-acceptance and positive satisfaction with themselves as men.

The interviews:

I have gathered the initial data through semi-structured interviews with four men. The interview began with a brief explanation of the research purpose and
background, and then I asked my research participants to describe their psychodrama enactment and the experiences that surrounded it. The purpose of the interview was to elicit an in-depth account of the lived experience these men had that was focused on their psychodrama enactment. The basic structure of the interview was divided into three main areas: before, during, and after the enactment. The questions that I asked were only meant to establish a basic framework for the man to structure the account of his experience by. I began by focusing the co-researcher on the research topic and asking him to identify the important themes that initially prompted him to do an enactment. Then I asked him to describe the enactment itself, and the most pivotal moments within it. Finally, I asked him about his experiences immediately following the enactment, and during the time that had passed since. During this process I repeatedly asked my research participants what thoughts and feelings they were aware of at that time, and in the moment of remembering.

So, more precisely, I asked my research participants to examine: 1) the reasons that led them to do an enactment and how this was related to their sense of themselves as men, and masculinity in general; 2) the process that occurred during the enactment, the meaningful events involved and the transformative changes they experienced; and 3) the effects of the enactment on their self-identity as a man, and their present feelings and meanings surrounding this. These interviews were as open-ended and unstructured as possible so that my personal biases concerning masculinity would have a minimum effect. The following is a
Interview introduction:

I would like to take you back to your psychodrama enactment. I want you to focus on your experiences in the enactment and on the whole process that took place before, during and after the enactment. This will help me get a sense of the whole story and meaning surrounding the experience. What I would like you to focus on is your sense of yourself throughout this process, and how that may have changed.

In general, what were the themes involved? I want to emphasize that all of the themes you felt were important in your process are of interest in this study, even though I eventually want to focus on those themes that you feel were related to your sense of yourself, or your self-identity as a man. I want to avoid creating any expectations about what 'self-identity as a man' means. I am interested only in how you personally feel about this particular aspect of your identity, and in how this feeling may have changed due to your experience in psychodrama.

The interview questions:

Before:

1) Can you remember the moment you decided to do your enactment?
   -- How did you get to that point?

2) What were you aware of concerning the issues you wanted to deal with?
   -- What were you thinking/feeling with regard to these issues and the choice of dealing with them in psychodrama?
3) How were these issues present in, or affecting your life?
4) What did you feel you needed?

During:
1) How did the enactment begin?
2) What characters, roles, etc., did you bring into the enactment from your life experience?
   -- What were you aware of as you set the scene?
3) As you set the scene what did you feel was important for the group to know?
4) What did you do? What happened?
   -- What were you aware of as you did the enactment?
5) What were the critical / pivotal moments in the process?
6) What actions / directions of the leaders were you most aware of?

After:
1) What were you most aware of the moment the enactment was done?
2) Were you aware of any shifts regarding the issues that prompted you to do the enactment in the first place?
3) How are these issues present in, or related to your life now?
4) Have you been aware of any significant changes in the way you experience yourself since the enactment?
5) Do you feel any change in the way you are as a man?
6) Do you feel this process was important to your self-identity as a man?
Procedure for analysis and interpretation:

These interviews were audio-taped and transcribed, and then analyzed in the following way:

1) Statements that referred directly to the issues, experiences, or phenomena in question were identified.

2) The meanings inherent in these statements were extracted and formulated into discrete units.

3) Themes of meaning were developed by comparing all the transcript statement-units and grouping them into meaning-clusters. These meaning clusters were reduced into concise descriptions of the theme that best described the commonality present in the clustered statement-units.

4) An internal validity check was done at this point by comparing the themes that were developed with the original transcripts to see that they are comprehensive of, yet did not imply anything additional to the transcripts. This check was done by having several independent judges acquainted with the field of phenomenological research review a summary of the themes found and compare them with both the extracted meaning statements, and the original transcript.

5) The validity of the themes that were developed was further ensured through a second interview with the research participants. A summary of the themes was presented to the research participants to examine the “fit” these had with their experiences. Two of them were also able to review the short case study
of their account that was developed for the results chapter, and approved of the interpretation that was presented there.

Then finally 6) the themes and categories found in the interviews were compared and a comprehensive narrative developed (Colaizzi, 1978). In this comprehensive narrative I tried to draw out a 'shared structure' (Osborne, 1990, p.86) of the basic themes and issues involved for these men, the pivotal experiences they had in their enactment and the shifts or changes that resulted from it, and finally, the critical elements in the psychodrama process itself. After this process was finished, the shared structure of meaning and experience -- or fundamental theme -- was then checked once again for validity with my research participants, as well as several experts in the field. The validity and reliability of the result was thus enhanced by checking my interpretations for congruence with my research participants' accounts and through its 'empathic generalizability', i.e. "the extent to which that structure resonates with the experiences of other people," (Osborne, 1990, p.88).

Selection of research participants:

The members of the psychodrama workshop were either professional counsellors, or students of counselling psychology, and were therefore already somewhat sensitized to the issues at hand, and able to be introspective and
articulate about their experience. The representitiveness of my co-researchers as a sample of the general population is, however, quite limited. The men that were interviewed all chose to take part in the psychodrama therapy, and this fact in itself contributes to a relative homogeneity. The experience of counselling is very familiar to all of my co-researchers, and the belief in its therapeutic value is common to them. There may be some subtle bias because of the type of men that choose counselling as a profession, but it is far beyond the scope of this project to determine what kind of bias that might be. Overall, however, I believe that the level of expertise, and the mind-set of the individuals involved in this study will be helpful in deepening the level of its findings.

Demographic information:

The selection of my research participants was not based in any way on demographic information. Two of the men were in their late twenties, they had both been recently married and were students working on their master’s degrees in Counselling Psychology. The two other men were in their late thirties or early forties, had both been married and started families, and had been professional counsellors for several years. All four men were caucasian Canadians, and middle class.
Personal perspective of the researcher:

My personal perspective is an essential element of the research I am about to do, because in the phenomenological method my interpretation of the connections, and relative importance of what my research participants say, is an undeniable part of the conclusions that I draw. Therefore it is important that I present my personal viewpoint to the interested reader in order that they may see how certain conclusions were arrived at within the context of my interpretation. Issues concerning gender roles and the understanding of what it means to be a man or woman have been important in my life since I was a child -- and I mean this in a more conscious fashion than the deep structure of gender identity, although I'm sure that was an essential part of my awareness as well. My parents were divorced when I was eight years old. My mother is a very strong, liberated woman, and at that time she chose to take charge of her life in a way she felt unable to do before. I was brought up in my father's house after their divorce, but my mother was welcome there, and came often during those formative years to give me ongoing nurturance and support.

I know that this was a very unusual situation, and I am very grateful to both of my parents for their continued support during that time when they also had to follow the different paths of their own lives. The gender roles that I internalized, however, were never quite the same as those I saw depicted in the media or
reflected in the ideas and opinions of most of the others around me. My experience, however, was clearly part of a growing and fundamental change in society. The question of how gender relations can be set on a firm foundation of equality has thus been central in my thinking from a very early age. Since my early twenties I have become more and more aware of how men's attitudes and reactions can easily become destructive, even though these seem to come from some authentic inner need that in itself is not evil, and can not be seen as what defines us as men.
CHAPTER 4: Results

Introduction:

In order to best portray the results gained from the four interviews with my research participants I will first try to give a brief case study of the most important information gathered from each man. I will refer to the men from now on by their code names: Tom, Dick, Harry, and Joe. Their experiences were all highly individual, so in many ways I feel it is necessary to first describe what their actual experiences were before outlining a deep thematic structure that I see as common to them all. In the interviews there were two main strands of thematic content that I was interested in. 1) the themes and issues involved in this therapeutic process for each man, and their personal experience of moving toward greater satisfaction with their own self-identity as male. And 2) the elements of psychodrama that helped them achieve this goal. From the beginning, however, when I became interested in this subject during my first psychodrama workshop, I felt that there was a clear connection between these two strands. The nature of this connection has to do with the fundamental place of interaction and relationship in forming identity. As one of my research participants, Harry, put it, "In terms of organizing our experience, my view is that principles come out of interaction." So in trying to describe the process of change that helped these men
re-organize their experience and form new principles of self-identity, it will also be necessary for me to describe the interactive process they went through.

Moreno (1947), the founder of psychodrama, delineated three basic stages that are involved in psychodrama: warm up, enactment, and debriefing. The warm up period for these men included their own counselling experiences prior to the psychodrama workshop in which they did their enactment; and for three of the four it also included the experience of being in several such workshops, participating and observing others’ enactments before deciding to do their own. Thus part of being fully prepared to do the enactment seems to have included a long process of personal reflection, which eventually allowed these men to identify critical moments and themes in their past that had never been resolved. As Tom put it, “An image had kind of crystallized for me about ... a critical moment where my development, I felt, got stuck.” This 'moment of arrest,' as I’ve termed it, became the germinal idea for Tom’s enactment, and each of the others went through a very similar ‘crystallization’ process.

The debriefing that occurred after their enactments was also critically important to the entire experience for each of them. Changes in these men’s sense of themselves occurred both during the enactment itself and as a result of hearing from the other participants and observers about what they had witnessed and how they had reacted to the highly personal drama each man had presented. The structure of this particular psychodrama workshop is such that a follow-up debriefing meeting is held one month after the weekend workshop. This is in
order for the participants to share the inner developments and changes that occur because of the workshop, and continue to be in process for some time after the actual experience. In this next section I will present a synopsis of each man’s enactment, and the issues they identified as being involved in it. I will try to use quotations from my interviews with each man as much as possible in order to remain as true to the actual data as I can, while hopefully presenting it in a clear and concise manner. I will also give a rough account of their experiences of the warm-up and debriefing process, and present a distilled summary of the themes that were involved. Some of these themes went through major developments and changes during the process, so they are presented in somewhat minimal terms that attempt to describe those thematic elements that remained constant. These theme summaries were reviewed and discussed with each of my research participants, and what I have presented here was approved of by them.
Four men’s experiences in psychodrama:

The enactments, and the themes involved.

Harry:

Harry initially chose to do the particular enactment that we discussed as part of his own research into psychodrama as a therapeutic intervention and technique. It wasn’t the first time he had done an enactment, and the decision at this time to do one was primarily based on the process of his research rather than a deeply felt inner need to deal with these issues in this way. He did, however, want to deal with an authentic issue that was both personal and pressing in his inner world at that moment. It speaks for the power of psychodrama as a technique that Harry’s psychodrama took on the depth of importance that it did for him, without his initially expecting, or being prepared for it to do so. Harry put it this way:

I had done a lot of personal work and been in analysis for four years ... and I had been in other enactments with other issues. So at that time I guess I was still left with issues with my father.

There was ... the issue of touching his corpse, and feeling that he was dead. My mother had made a decision that at age 11, or whatever it was that I was -- that it would be unpleasant ... but that had always left a gap in my spirit -- a sort of coming to terms with his death.

So I wanted to fill in some pictures ... seeing him dead, and I hadn’t been able to express anger to him about the injustices done to me at the hands of my mother ... and, you know, confronting my mother with his perceived support.

So for Harry the point of the enactment was to provide him with several corrective experiences or interactions with these long-held internal objects of
experience that would give him a new set of inner ‘pictures’, thereby filling in some gaps that had left these relationships unfinished. “I saw myself as being able to fill in missing psychic pieces, I guess, through some concrete experiences in psychodrama.”

In the enactment itself Harry had only a few basic guidelines for what he intended to do:

I sort-of just let it free-flow, with my father as the anchoring point, sort-of dragged him through a time-line ... up until his death and then touching his imaginary corpse. That was my only real structure -- starting before he died and showing him what happened to me up till now, and then ending back at his graveside.

I think I was going to show him what I had been through because of his death.

The primary, sort-of emotional opportunity was to express anger at him for being stupid enough to go and die.

Harry’s main focus was on bringing his father back from the dead, showing him what it had been like to grow up without a father or any other male support around, and recreating some fatherly support in order to express some of the pent-up emotions towards his mother and aunt that had been stifled since his father’s death.

I needed to feel both safe and strong enough to rage at these ghosts -- to rage at my mother, and rage at my brother, and rage at my aunt ....

In this process, however, a new theme emerged in the psychodrama:

It fell out in terms of ... raging at females, and having my father witness my raging at females. As I was shaking him and saying ‘see what they did to me’ and ‘see what you left me with’ -- I guess it was then it just emerged: well, yeah, you’re dealing with female responses to your developing male adolescent needs.
The other theme that sort-of emerged ... was a division between lack of support from the females in my life, ... and having an absence of support from father figures, males, etc., for my developing male identity.

Once the director noticed this theme emerging he created a scenario that would heighten Harry's experience of it, dramatizing, or externalizing the dynamic, and then repairing it by providing a new kind of experience that had been missing in Harry's life:

The director ... took all the women to one side of the room, and left me with the men. That seemed to be the culmination of that theme that emerged about men vs. women, and their different needs emotionally for development.

I guess I was a bit surprised and off-balance by the degree to which I discovered I needed it [the huddle of men], because it felt so good to get that kind of male support in that very focused and direct way.

There was ... an increased sense of belonging, like this was my group, and I guess of a positive contrast because the women had been separated out. It was like a special club -- it was good to belong to this club -- a feeling of being taken into the men's club.

So this theme that emerged was unexpected, but very powerful, and it formed a pivotal point in the psychodrama experience. Harry's enactment went through several stages before and after the 'huddle', ending with the reenacted burial of his father's corpse. In many ways, however, the experience of getting support from the huddle of men stood out for him as being of central importance. Another pivotal moment during the enactment was when Harry expressed his anger towards his mother.

I think telling my mother off felt like a highlight. ... With my mother I think I felt less conflicted, less guilty, less compromised -- less held down. ... I wasn't swallowing my feelings; I was more just letting them out. ... It felt empowering ... I guess freeing is another word for it --
cleansing perhaps ... but, yeah, it was a relief and release around some of those aggressive feelings. It was a catharsis.

During the de-briefing after the enactment Harry was particularly struck by the support he got from the women in the group, and this also served to help him gain a new perspective on women in general.

Getting support from women for what I suffered at the hands of females growing up was a surprise, but also quite validating. It was good to know that there were some women that weren’t all malevolent.

In the month following his enactment Harry noticed several developments and changes both in his sense of himself, and in some of his important relationships with others. In terms of his relationship with his mother and other women he named the following two changes:

I was just clearer, I guess, about my right to be angry at certain things women have done to me.

In terms of after -- going home after a few days -- I was more tolerant of my mother when I saw her. I didn’t feel I was compromising myself.

A final, important aspect of Harry’s experience centered on this psychodrama enactment was a dream he had shortly afterwards, and which he brought up at the one-month-after follow-up meeting. The dream brought together and focused some of the most important elements of his experience in the enactment and gave him a concise statement that Harry took as a new principle for organizing his experience and structuring his way of relating to others.

In the dream I was on a military ship -- a naval ship -- and it’s completely manned by men. There are no females on this boat. In the opening scene ... there was target practice ... It’s a grim business, but we’re doing it ... We knew that we were preparing for the real fight. In the dream I am the chaplain ... the captain and I are planning the real mission
together. The captain says to me, 'We have to be as strategic about our caring as our killing.'

I saw [the dream] as sort-of an integrating theme around safety with aggression.

The thing that lasts most for me is that damn dream. ... I’ve used that line many times and in many ways -- that we have to be as strategic in our caring as our killing. It has a lot of resonating wisdom for me. ... It organizes a lot of past experience, and present experience, and it has become sort of a guiding image for me in many ways.

The following is a summary of the major themes I found in the transcript of my interview with Harry, and the important sub-headings within those themes.

Also included are themes that related specifically to his experience of psychodrama as a therapeutic intervention.
Theme summary: Harry

Father
-- closure around his father’s death
-- expressing anger re: abandonment
-- opportunity for support and recognition

Mother
-- being left with her and the women of the family
-- anger at women
-- becoming less conflicted through the psychodrama experience

The male group
-- Separating the men from the women
-- rejoining identity -- part of male development
  -- being accepted into the ‘male club’
  -- receiving support and protection from men
-- maleness vs. masculinity
-- gaining a new perspective on women

Being strategic
-- the dream
-- change in the principle for organizing experience
-- achieving a balance of aggression and caring

Autonomy
-- being who you are
-- support for one’s self (self confidence)
-- being part of the team: membership in co-constructing masculinity

Psychodrama
-- concrete interaction and the basis of change
-- boundary formation
-- feedback and support
Dick:

Dick did his enactment during the first psychodrama workshop that he attended. In this way he was the least familiar with the process of the four men I interviewed. Two of the other men had been struck while watching other’s enactments and had had insights into the focal point or moment of arrest that they needed to center their own enactment on. They then had six months or so before the next psychodrama workshop to prepare before doing their own enactments. To me it seems that this is, indeed, part of the warming up process, and the fact that Dick jumped right into his enactment during his first experience with psychodrama may have been partly to blame for the sense he had afterwards that the experience hadn’t been as powerful as he had hoped.

I didn’t go into the psychodrama weekend with a real crystallized sense that I would know what enactment I would do -- if I were to do one. ... It was a bit of a barrier because I would hear things like -- you come into the psychodrama from previous ones knowing the enactment you’re going to do.

For me the most important thing about the weekend was not really my enactment, it was the whole weekend. ... I kind-of thought that my enactment would be so much more powerful that it would stand out as ... the transformative experience, and it wasn’t powerful enough to overshadow things.

There were several factors that contributed to the rather incomplete feeling that Dick ended up with. One such factor that figured largely in Dick’s account of his experience was the feeling of being under time pressure. The weekend workshop was drawing to a close when he did his enactment, and there were several other people also wanting to do enactments in a relatively short period of time.
I think it was valuable and it did do something, ... but it could have been more powerful without that time pressure.

Thus there are several reasons for the fact that Dick was not as satisfied with the psychodrama experience as the other three men, but the issue of not being as thoroughly prepared, or ‘warmed up’ for the enactment does stand out for me as an important difference between Dick’s experience of his enactment and that of the others. Dick was present when Tom opened up the weekend workshop with his enactment. Six months later he looked back and saw this difference between his and Tom’s experience:

I didn’t have that sense of -- like Tom did in his. He was so obviously [ready] ... he had everything planned out. He knew exactly what he was going to do. Granted, he had prepared. ... I wasn’t drawing on that same inner solidness of this is exactly what I need to do. So I needed more direction.

Tom, of course, didn’t have his enactment completely mapped out before hand either, but he did have six months to prepare, after first deciding what general moment in his life he wanted to focus on. I believe this preparation did, indeed, give Tom a greater sense of what he needed from the enactment, and a clearer spontaneous awareness of how to proceed in it from one moment to the next.

Dick had, however, also gone through a warming-up process of deep self-reflection that had spread over years before going to the psychodrama workshop. This process had clarified for him the issues he wanted to deal with, and the specific moment in his past that represented a focal point for these issues:

For years and years I’ve had this feeling that I wasn’t able to experience a full range of emotions. In the early years of thinking that, I didn’t know what it related to, and I grew to think that it had to do with the death of my sister when I was nine.
My sister was sick of leukemia. She was six and I was nine. ... During that summer just before she died we had just moved to a new town, my mom then moved three hours away. ... My brother and I stayed with some other people for the summer, and my dad had just bought a new business. He was working the business and then going to visit on the weekends. We just had our own, other life, with just occasional visits.

... The feelings aren’t totally accessible to me. ... If I tell that story to people they’ll understand the feelings that would be associated with it even though I can tell someone that story, and not really feel much of anything.

So for Dick, the main goal in doing the enactment was to gain more access to his own emotions. “I went into the psychodrama thinking that something needs to unlock my ability to cry.” He chose the moment of his sister’s death,

... because I figured that would be part of what would be a powerful enactment for me -- would be to do something that was rooted in real experience where I should cry, and should have cried, and would cry then in the group -- which would be very weird and unusual, and frightening.

The enactment itself had roughly three stages to it. In the first part Dick “was supposed to play” with his friends and brother while his sister lay in hospital on the other side of the room. Then he left his friends and went to say good-bye to his sister. This was the central, repairing interaction at the heart of the enactment, because Dick felt he had not been able to say good-bye to his sister at the time of her death. After saying good-bye, Dick turned to the other members of his family and spoke individually to his father, mother and brother. In the end,

It tapered off into -- coming together as a family and being okay with people’s differences ... people’s different ways of dealing with [her death].
There were several parts of the enactment that stood out for Dick. The first was a difficult sense of tension in moving from the first scene where he was playing with friends to the second in the hospital beside his sister’s deathbed.

Going into the enactment it’s pretty hard to enter into the spirit of this ‘happy go lucky’ playtime and then go there, when that’s where I am - - that’s where the enactment is for me... kneeling by her bed and talking to her.

The first scene was uncomfortable because his mind and spirit were already involved in the interaction with his sister that was to come. It was here that the theme of ‘being directed’ first came up in our interview:

To be bluntly honest, I had a feeling of the scene being overly directed... and I don’t reflect on that saying it was directed wrongly, but ... I was very aware of it being set up by somebody else. ... It probably was important for me to do more of my own setting up.

The feeling of being directed, and not quite being able to take charge of the overall flow of the enactment, left a strong impression on Dick and came up several times in his interview. This theme also seemed strongly tied to his feeling of not being quite prepared enough and not having an “inner solidness of this is exactly what I need to do.”

Another pivotal moment for Dick in his enactment came in saying good-bye to his sister.

When I went there, and was kneeling down there -- that felt to me like where I wanted to be, like the central part of what needed to happen. ... Then I was able to forget more of what was going on outside of that and experience more emotion.

When I was saying good-bye -- when the time came to let go. ... Just that moment of letting go was a more powerfully sad time and deeper than the rest of it.
I was holding her, with my two hands holding her hand, and then, after that point we let go, and somebody pulled the sheet overtop of her, and she was gone -- dead.... That was an amazing time.

The recreated experience of saying good-bye was a deeply moving and emotional experience for Dick. He did experience and express his emotions in front of the group. He cried in front of the group, and that was the benchmark experience he had identified as what he needed to do. He had also moved closer to resolving the grief and loss around his sister’s death through finally being able to say good-bye, and through this interaction, being able to reclaim the good parts of his relationship with his sister that had previously been closed off -- perhaps because of their separation at the time of her death:

I recall feeling that it was important that she said good-bye -- not just that I was able to, but also that she said some nice things to me.

Even in the midst of crying, and it was terrible, and it was sad, but gee -- we did have a really good relationship, and you know, we were the buddies in the family.

After saying good-bye to his sister Dick turned to have a few words with his family, who had been gathered as witnesses to the previous scene. Dick identified this during our interview as “potentially fuel for another enactment or two.” He felt at the time that what he had to say to his father and brother especially, was somewhat unconnected to his sister’s death, and so it seems that he was unsure about whether he wanted to get into that.

The speaking to my parents, and especially my dad, and my brother ... um, I think those could have been saved. Not that it was not valuable to do, but ... I didn’t feel it was all one thing.
There was another dynamic going on in his interaction with his father and brother, it seems, and for whatever reason -- time pressure, or a sense of it’s not being connected enough to the deep emotional issue he’d just dealt with -- Dick chose not to engage that dynamic fully.

Yeah, ... to stand up for yourself, ... my psychodrama contained a little of that. There was a bit of standing up to my parents, my father in particular ... It was more general than around just that event of my sister’s death.

I was speaking to [my brother], standing up for myself, and it wasn’t terribly connected to my sister’s death, so -- I don’t know if it was the best time to go into that.

In some sense this ‘standing up for yourself” was an emerging theme that was developing out of the other interactions going on in the enactment, and it may be evidence supporting the argument for repeated involvement in the psychodrama process. Dick recognized that this part of the enactment had left him fuel for further work, and so it could be seen as part of the ‘warming up’ process for those enactments in the future.

The final part of Dick’s experience that I feel is essential to relate here is his reaction to the feedback and response he got from the group after his enactment. Prior to the enactment he had identified crying in front of other people as an almost unattainable benchmark in his ability to experience and express emotions, and beyond that, as he put it, “Normally I hate being observed ... unless I’m absolutely confident of what I’m doing.” So the reaction of the group to what he’d done was in itself a reparative, therapeutic force. Dick made the following comments about the feedback he received from the group after his enactment.
The power of the group in that moment ... supporting, accepting, 
even approving of this ... and even stronger than that -- respecting --
during and after with the feedback. ... Respect is -- that’s a good thing to 
do, and I really respect you for doing that. ... It’s more ... there’s 
something good about you to do that. It just touches more to the core of 
myself as a person.

I could feel that nobody thought that it was a weak thing, or a bad 
thing -- they thought it was a good thing. I think that was part of that 
transforming experience of -- it’s not just a neutral thing, not just a bad 
thing, but its actually a good thing.

I think a part of what psychodrama did for me was that I had an 
experience of a group of thirty people where I felt very okay -- like people 
thought I was okay ... and so I should go away from that thinking, yeah, I 
guess maybe I am a good guy.

Dick describes the enactment as a “transforming experience” around the 
expression of his own emotions. The act of crying in the scene that he had 
recreated was deeply validated, and his courage to carry out this project of self-
disclosure was not only accepted, but respected and admired. Although this 
experience was a benchmark experience for Dick, he did not feel that it 
dramatically changed his ability to experience and express emotions.

I feel it’s more okay to be emotional, but it’s not a big shift.

It was a small step along the way, and if I go to other psychodramas 
there’ll be other enactments I could do.

I don’t feel that my life changed magically -- which would then lead 
me to say, “wow, that was so powerful that that was the right enactment, 
and that that was the right time ....

Yet he is clear that his experience in psychodrama has made a profound and 
irreversible difference in his sense of himself and his ability to express emotions.

When you haven’t done something, or you don’t think you can -- 
once you can never say that again .... [Now] I have more of an experiential
knowledge that ... I can [cry] -- it's a potential. It's not something that's
impossible for me.

The following is a summary of the themes I identified in Dick's interview,
and includes several themes not yet mentioned in the above discussion, but I think
sufficiently related as to be self-explanatory at this point.
Theme summary: Dick

The authentic self
-- acceptance and respect from others (being okay)
-- being witnessed
-- restricted in front of male groups (hockey buddies)
-- as expressed by the dream

The ability to experience and express emotion
-- the ability to cry as a benchmark
-- the full range of emotions in general
-- being able to grieve (sister's death)
-- sharing emotion in relationship
-- experiencing emotion while alone vs. being witnessed

Self direction (autonomy) vs. being directed by others.
-- psychodrama experience
-- father and brother as 'overly directive'
-- standing up for self
-- leadership and self-confidence
-- balanced assertiveness

The moment of arrest, and a step toward release.
-- sister's death
-- process of identifying the moment to center the enactment on
-- fuel for further enactments

Psychodrama
-- the group: safety, acceptance, witnesses
-- experiential learning
-- being directed vs. being lost in the experience
-- time pressure
-- taking on reality
Joe’s enactment concerned an event that happened to him fairly late in his life, as compared to the other three men. The important internal relationships that he chose to reenact through psychodrama did not have to do with his family of origin, but rather with his co-workers. That these relationship were nonetheless very important to Joe, and instrumental to his personal development was clear, however, from the beginning. One of the reasons for this was the nature of the job Joe was in, and the atmosphere it created around the relationships he had with his co-workers. Joe was recruited straight out of university to become assistant director of “a sort of prison -- it was a day parole center.” He worked for the Corrections Branch, essentially as a parole officer, and at that time that meant he had the power to arrest his parolees if he felt there was adequate reason for it. In fact, the police would avoid making the arrest if they knew that their suspect was a parolee, and they would make use of the parole officer’s power of arrest to enter into situations that might otherwise have required them to obtain a warrant. So the job was very much like police work -- intense and at times life-threatening.

I mean, people have tried to kill me, people have threatened to kill me who I have every belief that that was their intent. ... I’ve arrested guys who’ve had guns, knives, and all that kind of stuff.

At the center of Joe’s enactment was an unresolved conflict that had put an end to the closest male friendship that he’d had at that time with the man who was his partner in these life-and-death situations. Joe’s friend Steve was supposed to back him up as he went out to make a particularly difficult arrest, but didn’t.
This failure to be supported by his closest male friend and partner had affected Joe very deeply. It was almost ten years later that Joe took part in a psychodrama workshop as an observer and participant in other people's enactments when he was struck by what he needed to deal with in his own enactment.

A friend of mine was doing a psychodrama,... and he had divided the room into men -- he wanted the men to support him because he never felt that men had supported him ... and all the women were on the other side of the room.

It really gelled for me when I watched his, and I thought -- I know exactly what I want to do mine on ... and it had to do with men, and how we treat one another, how we are in relationship with one another.

The issue was this unresolved conflict with my former partner. ... He and I separated under, ah, unfortunate circumstances. ... So I had the need to go back and repair that situation ... recreate that moment in time, and then do it differently.

In the interview Joe spent some time describing the background of the 'unfortunate circumstances' behind the moment when his friend had let him down, and how this moment had, in fact, only been the most obvious symptom of an underlying code of 'masculine' behaviour that seemed an inherent part of the world of Corrections. In the last year of his five-year stint in Corrections Joe was assigned to deal with the developing problem of biker gangs in Alberta. The vice-president of one of these gangs had been convicted of first degree murder in the vicious slaying of several members of a rival gang. He had served the mandatory first ten years of his sentence, and was sent to the parole center where Joe was the assistant director. The moment Joe had identified as the center of his enactment began when this biker reported to the parole center. He was wearing his 'colours'
-- the club’s insignia on the back of his jacket -- and rode into the center’s courtyard on his Harley, surrounded by twenty other members of his gang. By wearing his colours alone he had already broken the terms of his parole. Joe described the real scene that he wanted to recreate in the psychodrama and its lack of resolution in the following way:

I said to my partner -- this is it. There’s no point in screwing around here. We need to go out and get him -- and that’s it. ... I went out, arrested him in the courtyard with twenty other bikers there, and brought him in. My partner didn’t come out with me. ... He didn’t have the balls to do it.

We got into a beef with him when we arrested him, and he broke Steve’s nose ... so he had to go to the hospital. ... I was carting [the biker] off to jail ... so, um, we were never able to resolve the issue that night.

[Steve] knew I was very pissed off with him that he didn’t back me up .... As a result of that, he and I had one conversation ever again. ... He had a couple days off because of the nose thing, and I phoned him up. ... I said, we’ll have to talk about the incident, and he says, “I’m not interested in talking to you.” Well, that was the last conversation I had with him. By the time he came back I had resigned, and ... we never spoke to one another again.

Steve’s action was, in fact, only the final straw in convincing Joe to resign from Corrections. It was a glaring symbol for something that he felt was at work in the world of Corrections generally, and that had to do with the way men dealt with and supported one another around the difficult and intense moments that were just part of the job. What made Steve’s betrayal so powerful was that he had not only refused to accept or acknowledge his failure to support Joe, he had also chosen to avoid dealing with this major roadblock in their friendship in favor of maintaining the ‘masculine’ facade.
For Steve face was everything. He could never appear to be a coward. He could never appear to be afraid, and everything -- *everything* he did was control.

Steve could not own up to the fear that stopped him from supporting his friend in a deadly situation. This fear was unacceptable to the identity he tried to project for others to see. At some level his refusal to deal with the issue afterwards was not only a betrayal of their friendship, it was also an attempt to draw Joe in and make him complicitous in this denial of both of their authentic emotional reactions to what had actually happened.

Steve was, however, only acting in accordance with the prevailing attitudes within the Corrections Branch. The job of being a parole officer, of working in the para-military Corrections system and ‘keeping the peace’ with dangerous criminals is a very male-oriented job, and the atmosphere that Joe found in it defined itself as distinctly masculine. So Joe understood that

That’s one of the things from my psychodrama, is just the whole issue of what it means to be a man -- how do you express that?

To be a man in the institution where Joe was assistant director meant to be dealing with dangerous situations as an everyday occurrence. “You know, there’s a sense of ...terror in institutions, because the violence, and the unpredictable nature of the place is always just below the surface.” Yet to be a man there also meant that the constant terror inherent in the situation was never acknowledged. “No one talked about it -- it was like keeping a family secret.”

This whole issue about Corrections was, you know .... Resolution with Steve was just one small part of it. It’s the whole sense of ... um, not letting it burn me, like it has burned some of my former colleagues -- altered their personality where, you know, uh ... they just didn’t go home
anymore, and they drink, and they are on the road all the time, and their marriages are breaking down. ... It wasn’t just the resolution of that relationship, it was all the other stuff that went along with that job.

Like the other men working with Joe in Corrections, Steve was unwilling to admit to fear. It was an overwhelming fear that kept him inside when Joe arrested the biker. He could not even admit this to his closest friend, and was willing to let go of the friendship before he would do that.

He and I had been really good friends; his wife and I had been really good friends; his wife and my wife had been really good friends -- all that kind of stuff, right? But poof -- like that [it was gone].

Joe understood that this attitude of conforming to the masculine code was destroying the lives of the men he worked with.

In his enactment Joe recreated the scene where he went out into the courtyard of the institution and arrested the biker:

It was like a crescendo ... We reenacted the scene with [the biker] ... there was a discussion leading up ... and ah, we enacted that, and then we did the thing with [the biker], then the fallout -- the going to hospital and taking [the biker] away, and all that stuff. ... It was like a release -- a rupture for me. ... It was just building so much pressure, right, and it just went -- Boom -- and everything was out, and over, and done.

What I did differently was -- I told him, you know, you asshole, what were you doing? And the person who was playing him said -- “I was too terrified to do anything else.” -- It was like -- BOOM -- you know? Like, um ... like it was just all over. And then I was just, kind-of ... really quite stunned by it.

When the guy -- I want to say Steve, but it was the guy playing Steve -- yelled out that he was terrified, and that’s when the kind-of -- the rupture occurred.

What happened differently during the enactment was that Joe pressed the issue, calling his friend Steve out to account for himself, and Steve finally admitted to
his authentic emotional reactions. That was what was needed for Joe to finally feel released from that unresolved interaction.

After that release there was one more part of the enactment that Joe felt was a pivotal experience.

The other thing that came out of my psychodrama ... was being able to take my place as a man.

Marv ... sat me down at the -- after the explosion -- and then [I] just sat behind the desk and looked around and just -- reclaimed everything.

I had this big desk. You see, I was ... I was 24 or 25 when I started there. ... Marv had me sit at the desk because it was like me reclaiming everything back of ... the relationship I’d lost with Steve, my status as assistant director -- because I’d gone and I gave it all up. I would have been a warden by now.

So that was a very pivotal moment -- me reclaiming back my identity, or my place. ... It was able to bring all of the issues together in terms of my identity as a man, my loss of relationship with Steve, my loss of status ....

So, after the ‘explosion’ or ‘rupture’ that happened when Steve admitted his fear, Joe was able to go back to his old post, symbolized by his desk, and reclaim the parts of his self-identity that he had had to leave behind there so abruptly.

In his interview Joe didn’t talk a whole lot about the effect of the group around him on his sense of the experience of the psychodrama. But there were several comments that he made that I feel reflect an important part of his experience. The first of these was the kind of confirmation he got from the group’s feedback afterward about the atmosphere present in the institution that he had recreated.

[The enactment] was done at the ... school of theology ... and it really resembled the institution I worked in.
People commented after that they felt like, shivers up and down their back because it was so -- the place just became gruesome. It was amazing. ...The people in it and the people that were there felt a sense of, you know, ... terror.

People commented that they actually felt afraid. ... You should feel afraid. These are very scary situations and people who pretend not to be afraid are dangerous to be around.

The atmosphere of the place where the enactment was done took on some of the feel of that place where the real event had occurred, and it was the constant underlying terror present in the institution that was most strongly conveyed to those who witnessed the enactment.

There is one last important part of this overall experience for Joe. Ten years after leaving his job at Corrections, and after doing the psychodrama workshop and ‘resolving’ the issue internally for himself, Joe decided to finally make contact with Steve again.

[After the psychodrama] I called him and um, ... we had a very interesting conversation on the phone, and we had a reconciliation. ... That was nice -- very nice, because about six weeks later he shot and killed himself. ...

There was never any connection between his suicide and me calling him.

Steve’s suicide sent shivers up my back when Joe first talked about it in the interview. It had obviously haunted him for some time.

The following is a summary of the themes I found in Joe’s interview.
Theme summary: Joe

Corrections
   -- power and control over others
   -- the intensity and danger inherent in the job
   -- terror below the surface
   -- damaged lives of co-workers (trauma)

Denial of emotions
   -- the masculine front
   -- control over self
   -- denial of need to process experience
   -- self destruction
   -- the silence around male trauma

Male relationships
   -- male friendships (undermining the masculine front)
   -- lack of support from men
   -- men as the 'disposable' gender
   -- the (para-) military ethic: highly conditional acceptance

Moment of arrest and moment of release
   -- Earl's betrayal
   -- the confession of terror -- revealing emotion

Taking one's place as a man
   -- reclaiming identity
   -- integration with authentic self
   -- autonomy (reinventing self)
   -- satisfaction with self-identity as male

Psychodrama
   -- the nature of the experience
   -- taking on reality
   -- the change process
Tom

Tom had attended several psychodrama workshops prior to the one where he did his own enactment. It was during the previous weekend workshop that he was touched by someone else's enactment and had an insight into the enactment that he needed to do for himself.

I remember watching a woman enacting... parts of her childhood. ... I saw her really regress to this little three year old. I really resonated with... the little girl's voice. ... It just sounded so innocent, purely asking for what it needed. ... I realized that that was the voice that had been deadened in me for a long time.

I remember going home that night and ... I was feeling very raw. ... An image had kind-of crystallized for me about... a critical moment where my development, I felt, got stuck.

In the spirit of psychodrama I took out pictures of the people involved and said what I needed to say -- just on my own. ... It really did crystallize that part of me that was hurting, and what kind of enactment scene represented that pain.

Tom had six months between the time he recognized the critical moment or scene that he wanted to work on in the enactment, and the time when he actually did it. This did allow him some time to reflect and become more aware of just what he wanted to do in his enactment. He had identified the project of reclaiming the spontaneous child's voice as the central theme, but this theme was connected to many other parts of his life.

Tom described the moment in his childhood he had identified as when his development got "stuck," and it became clear that this was connected to a problem he was still having in using his adult speaking voice.

It was a time when I was five and I was out with a couple of friends, in the carport. I was fooling around with the antenna of our car and it
broke. [My dad] grabbed my arm and whipped me downstairs and took a belt to me and strapped me pretty hard. I felt extreme remorse even as I broke it; I was crying even before he came, but he still, despite the fact that remorse was already there, hurt me.

I think that the lump in my throat type of thing is that I so much wanted to say that this was unfair ... to speak my emotional truth to him, but just knowing that that was impossible with him. ... So I’d always felt held back from speaking my truth, and felt that it would be received harshly and not be understood.

I’d always been aware of this felt sense that was un-articulated and quite amorphous to me ... but I’d always been aware of situations when I felt I had something important to say but I wasn’t sure of how it was going to be received. I felt this real lump in my throat, it was like a choking sensation. ... I really felt like it took away from my assertiveness and my strength -- you know, in expressing myself.

Tom’s sense of regaining his voice was connected to his sense of being able to present his full, authentic self to others, especially to older men who were in positions of authority and evaluation over him.

I introjected that part of my dad as that inner critic, or that oppressor that never let that part of me free.

I’ve always had this critical voice that I listen to -- some people call it the judge, or the internal critic, and this was something that made me very cautious in the way that I am with people and very aware of other people.

I also noticed that the critic in me got most strong whenever I was around older male adults. Especially adults who were in a position of power over me, and whose opinion I respected, but especially at times when I wasn’t completely sure of their frame of evaluation.

This is another issue for me -- feeling misunderstood, or evaluated on something that doesn’t contain a full appreciation of who I am. ... Any evaluation based on limited understanding of me is something I have always had a hard time dealing with. ... It would come up in me as this lump in my throat that I can’t even speak sometimes for fear of this happening.
Tom’s father did not want to hear about Tom’s sensitivity. He didn’t allow his son to explain his emotional truth to him, and so punished Tom quite severely based on only a partial understanding of Tom’s intentions and inner reality. Tom had internalized this dynamic, and felt its continued presence up to the point of doing the psychodrama enactment. The ‘lump’ in Tom’s throat seems to have been a metaphorical reminder that his emotional truth was still stuck inside. It would arise as soon as Tom felt that he was about to be evaluated based on a partial understanding that did not take his inner reality into account.

Tom’s actual enactment had several parts to it. He began by introducing the characters and talking about the background in order to, “let people know, I guess, what it was about this painful event that kept me from being my full self... or why I felt stuck in this place.” In the first stage of setting the scene Tom was introducing the auxiliary egos, making sure that the players understood the characters they were meant to portray, and making sure that the witnessing audience was aware of the full background to the story. From there, Tom moved into creating a sculpture of the family. This technique is intended to bring out family dynamics in a concrete form, and although the sculpture may be static to begin with, in Tom’s case as soon as the sculpture was made he began interacting with the characters in it.

Marv pretty quickly got me to sculpt, because I’d been starting to describe the family system ... so he just had me sculpt that symbolically in terms of how I experienced that. ... He was bringing what I was talking about into a symbolic form and that took on some immediate reality. ... Then we were into it right away.
I was speaking to my dad about the costs of the way that he was with me. So I was confronting him with my suffering. That experience... was very positive for me because this was something that I haven't told my dad.

After I'd... confronted my dad, Marv got me and the other guy who was representing me as a five year old. He told us to go over and play a little recklessly and get into trouble -- something that I'd always been very careful not to do. We went over there and were making a big mess. ... I knew I was going to have to face my dad there ... so I felt a little anxious at that time, so I wasn't totally letting myself go free in the moment, although, you know, I was supposedly ... in a way ... having a little fun.

And then this was the most real situation for me. The guy playing my dad, he sounded just like my dad with this angry, rageful, loud yell. He said -- "God damn it, Tom. What the hell do you think you're doing?" Then he came rushing over so strongly, reaching to grab me.

I still felt that -- it sent a real shot through me, and I felt paralyzed as this five-year-old kid again. I totally felt like I was in that space -- it was amazing to me. ... I was aware of how I was positioning myself... a real body memory... the way that I was holding myself: ... That was potent.

At first the director had Tom's mother step in to protect him from his father, in order to create a corrective experience that had never happened. Tom described his mother as feeling powerless to help him in these situations, but nonetheless she had been aware of what was going on. But the psychodramatic situation allowed for the previous scene to be replayed -- as is only fitting when the scenario represents an interaction and dynamic that replayed itself over and over again for years in Tom's life.

I wanted to be the one to stick up for that part of myself, and to fight for it. ... We did it again and this time I turned around and yelled, NO! and grabbed him by the shirt and I pushed him backwards.

I'm glad that the guy playing my dad was a big guy -- a really big guy so I could really lean on him and I could put quite a bit of force into it. ... I felt ... that more than just confronting my dad and speaking at him I was really setting my limit, and taking back my sense of power, and not allowing myself to remain in that stuck place.
Tom’s enactment had two more central interactions that he felt were pivotal. The first was a role-reversal with his father:

The next thing we did was a role-reversal. ... So I spoke from my dad’s position to me as a five year old. That was good because ... I had a lot of empathy for my dad in terms of how hard it was for him to be a parent. ... That was the best he could do with what he’d been given. In some ways it was important for me to have my dad be known as a loving father.

This experience may then have been fundamentally tied to the one that followed, which developed spontaneously out of Tom’s ‘felt sense’ of what it was that he needed at that moment:

This is probably the most important thing ... because this just kind of came to me spontaneously as what I needed. Marv was asking -- how would I like my parents to leave ... you know, what would I like to happen from this. I had this really strong picture of what it was that was happening for me right now, and what it was that I needed to do for myself.

I took the guy who was representing me as a five year old, and I brought him in close and I held him ... held him in front of me like I had my arms wrapped around him like bars -- like a cage -- like I had been holding him prisoner. ... So I apologized for that. That was very, very emotional for me. ... I felt grief, then ...

I needed to forgive myself for keeping myself prisoner, for being my own oppressor. ... It’s amazing, because after I’d cried for a long time those stiff iron bars that I felt I was wrapping around him really melted, and it was an embrace. ... That was the purest expression of self-love ... that I’ve ever had. I think at the heart of things that’s what I’ve been needing.

After his enactment was over, Tom felt that the entire experience was consolidated and affirmed by the feedback from the group:

I felt a little surprised that I saw people crying. I was surprised because I guess I’d always minimized the ... gravity of this. That, yeah, okay, this is something that I feel a lot about but no one else ... would think it was any big thing. I mean, other people have been through so
much more, and this is really quite insignificant in the grand scheme of things.

I felt gratified because I felt like my emotional truth connected with people. ... There was a deep sense of affirmation — that I was really seen. ... That was probably the most consolidating experience ... seeing how it had been witnessed. Yeah, I think I always really yearned for that sense of affirmation, of being really understood, and valued for that understanding.

Tom had come into the psychodrama with the hopes of regaining his innocent and spontaneous voice. This voice had been locked up and 'oppressed' by the internalized father-image, but in speaking back, and then forcibly yelling, pushing, and fighting back against this image that had been externalized, Tom was able to express his emotional truth. This was witnessed by the group, and Tom felt, possibly for the first time, that his entire self had been accepted, affirmed, and valued.

There are several further themes that came out of my interview with Tom that I feel are very important to touch on here. The first, and perhaps most important for my research has to do with his sense of the balance of masculinity and femininity within him. He had made the connection between the sensitive child in him that his father would not accept and his “feminine” side; and found that in most situations with other men this side of himself had to be silenced in order for him to feel that he could be part of the male group.

I always had a bit of trouble around my male friends just because I always tended to be more of a sensitive and emotional type of guy. I never felt that I had any male friends who would honour that part of me. In fact I always felt that that part should be kept quiet ... to keep up the more traditionally masculine ways of being with them because that’s how I could best join with them.
The more "feminine" qualities that I felt I had... that was something that wasn't really seen or valued by other males. All they did see of me and value in me was the "male" part. I tended to almost not like that male part of me because it felt like it was a betrayal of my wholistic self. ...

As a result of the experience that Tom had in the psychodrama he felt that there was an important shift in the way he experienced this particular dynamic within himself:

Not only did I feel like a stronger adult and, you know, a stronger man, I felt like I had brought with that that sense of playfulness. That me, as a man, I'm going to value that -- that little kid in me, the little boy. It allowed me to open up.

I've embraced that part for myself, and to be now doesn't mean that I... have to put on a "masculine" face. That to be male I can bring my vulnerabilities and my compassion, intuition.

The funny thing about having come to a sense of integration with those two parts is... now that I feel that that other part of me has been seen and affirmed and validated... I don't despise that maleness as much any more. ... I'm not just showing one at the expense of the other -- they're more intertwined, I guess. So I'm just showing more fully myself. ... I don't feel like this part of me is just living inside and is neglected.

Embracing all of my maleness I have a sense of valuing both the yin and the yang in me. ... I feel like I've expanded, I guess.

In the roughly six-month period between that psychodrama workshop where Tom had done his enactment, and sitting down for the interview for this research, Tom noticed several other important changes in his attitudes and behaviours toward himself and other people. These shifts were mainly centered on his sense of self-confidence in his relationships with other men -- whether male friends, or older men in positions of authority -- and also in his developing style as a counsellor.
Definitely in terms of following my intuition in a counselling session. I would tend to get frozen before ... in the past. ... [Now I have] more trust in myself than before -- yeah, spontaneity.

This weekend I was around all my male friends [back home] ... and they are all typically male in many ways. ... I don’t feel like I’m betraying myself around them any more.

I’m not angry at my male friends for so-called making me only show that side of me. I don’t feel they’re making me do anything anymore, they’re just being themselves -- and I’m free to be me.

So it has made a difference feeling more comfortable around those so-called authority figures. I feel like I’m safe with them because I’ve broken ... the power that that episode had over me.

The following is a summary of the themes I found in my interview with Tom. I have grouped the themes into six major headings, and tried to show the most important sub-headings within each group. As with the other interviews in this study, I found it very difficult at times to separate out the many themes that seemed linked and intertwined in very important ways. However, after quite a bit of sorting and re-organizing, a general schema was arrived at. Afterwards, Tom checked the summary over (as did the other participants for their interview summaries) and approved of the themes as I have presented them.
Theme summary: Tom

Father
-- refusing to acknowledge/punishing the sensitive, spontaneous side
-- misunderstanding re: intentions, inner world
-- Mother's powerlessness

Moment of arrest -- moment of release
-- silencing own emotional truth
-- breaking free of the old family system
-- becoming centered -- reclaiming self

Male relationships
-- being evaluated by older men
-- male friends
-- betrayal of the inner “feminine”

Authentic Self
-- becoming free of the inner critic
-- regaining the spontaneous voice and the intuitive self
-- being truly seen (without shame)

Autonomy
-- freedom from other’s opinions
-- reintegration -- showing the full self
-- gaining equality as an adult
-- self-love

Psychodrama
-- opening up the inner world
-- action therapy and experiential learning
-- the ‘warm-up’ being prepared
-- techniques used: sculpting, role-reversal, etc.
Shared themes:

The experiences of the four men described above were all very different -- as individual as the men themselves, their family backgrounds and the lives they have led. Yet there are themes that are shared between them, and within these shared themes hopefully some sense of the underlying structure or unifying process that each man went through, bringing them closer to a sense of satisfaction with their self-identity as male. There are three major common themes that I feel are important to describe here. These themes relate roughly to the development of the issues these men faced through their experience in psychodrama.

The first has to do with the common aspects of the issues that prompted these men to do an enactment. The second has to do with similarities in the nature of their experiences within the enactment itself, and the third has to do with a similarity in the shift that occurred for each man afterward. Baldly put, these men were all dealing with deeply rooted difficulties in the expression and acceptance of their "emotional truth," as Tom put it. Within the enactment they approached a moment in their lives that represented the fundamental interaction or situation that stopped this part of themselves from coming forward. The psychodrama allowed them to externalize this dynamic and break free of it (or, in Dick's case make a step towards this). Afterwards, there was an increased sense of autonomy, which included a greater satisfaction with one's self-identity as male.
Being able to express one’s emotional truth.

For three of the men the problems in terms of expressing emotions and having that part of themselves accepted were especially, or even specifically centered on their relationships with other men. While for Harry the emotions he felt he needed to express were mainly directed at women, it was still necessary for him to feel he had male support in doing that. For Joe, the theme arose in terms of the male-dominated world of Corrections, where the dangers were very real and often life-threatening, yet the masculine code denied the men involved any chance to admit to feelings of fear, terror, or trauma. The men who worked in corrections had to be in control of their prisoners, and of themselves, at all times.

The whole thing of control -- it was never be out of control, never show your emotions. (Joe)

Joe’s friend Steve was so subjugated to this code that he preferred to lose Joe as a friend than to admit his fear and deal with a difficult situation where that fear had been overwhelming.

Steve’s story is in itself an incredible case study into the self-destructive nature of the masculine code that he so longed to live up to. Joe related part of this story, and as a paradigm of this male dynamic, I feel it has a place in this account.

Steve’s father was a military officer, and had wanted Earl to have a military career. Earl had joined the military, but didn’t cut it. He had had a mental breakdown and was hospitalized. His wife didn’t even know that.

And you know, the role his father assigned him -- the military is good. You’ll be a military officer. ... You fucked up -- whoops, you’re no good. ... I mean, the only real good role is that of military officer, so even if you’re in corrections, that’s second rate.
So I recognize that for Steve any kind of failure, or anything to do with “not being a man” was absolutely off limits -- even it that’s how you felt. ... He would just push everything down.

So [in the end] Steve’s only option was an act of violence against himself.

Just as Steve had chosen to protect his masculine facade rather than be honest with a friend, he had also chosen to value that masculine facade over his own life. It seems to me that Steve chose suicide because he was unable either to become or to maintain his self-image as the military man -- the hyper-masculine, unfeeling stereotype that his father set as the standard for acceptance. This stereotype was also very much at work in the world of Corrections that Joe was dealing with, and he saw that this was leading to a kind of slow self-destruction for his co-workers.

It strikes me that the guys that I worked with were all damaged in some way ... and that role of maleness was like -- printed on their forehead. They didn’t ask, necessarily, for that role.

For Dick the entire enactment was centered on an attempt to reclaim the emotions that should have been part of his grieving for the loss of his sister. Dick identified that his ability to experience and express emotions had been “locked up,” and that this was affecting his work as a counselor and his interpersonal relationships, including that with his recently married wife. He chose to center the enactment on his sister’s death because he was aware of being unable to feel the emotions that he knew should be there. He knew at some level that he did have a strong emotional reaction to his sister’s death, and had never allowed himself to
experience it, but he was also hoping to open up his ability to experience his
emotions in general.

So I came into this psychodrama with all this in the background. ... I
know that I need more emotional release about this, and maybe that would
relate to being more emotionally free and expressive in general.

In order to grow, to be more healthy I need to be able to more fully
express the full range of emotions, including the weak and sad, and ... It's not just the crying aspect, it's also being able to be really happy, and
to be really angry.

For example the whole issue of being able to cry in public. ... I know
that does relate to maleness, and ... maybe just personality and family too-
and then trauma induced repressed emotions ... so that subsequently I
don't cry -- with people in particular.

My interpretation of the dynamic at work here for Dick -- and I want to
stress here that this is my interpretation -- is that it wasn't just the trauma of his
sister's death that overwhelmed him, and kept him from being able to experience
emotion. There was a subtle theme that I saw as emerging in Dick's enactment
that he was not quite prepared to go into. Dick's own uncertainty that this
enactment was the right one, and his sense of having identified "fuel for further
enactments" testify, for me, that this psychodrama experience may yet serve as
the warm-up for the enactment where he truly confronts the source of his trouble
with emotions.

The theme that I saw as emerging from Dick's enactment had to do with
being overly directed by his father and brother, and through this over-direction
Dick was given the message that they didn't want to hear his "emotional truth."

In my young life my dad was overly directive, and so that's a part of
the history and context now in my life.
My brother sometimes is overly like my father has been ... and so there are times when ... he seems to know what’s right and best for other people -- like me.

This feeling of being overly directed also came up in Dick’s psychodrama experience, and was uncomfortable for him:

Being a person who lets myself be directed, perhaps more than I would like to sometimes ... and so there were times when I was being directed when I felt like maybe it should have gone a different way, but ... I just followed the direction.

This feeling seemed to be strongest for Dick during the very first scene of his enactment when he was directed to play with his friends while his sister was in hospital. He made the following comments:

I was very aware of it being set up by somebody else. ... It probably was important for me to do more of my own setting up.

I guess I felt like I was having a hard time getting into the role, doing what was set up. Like I start off and I was -- my parents were with my sister away in a different city, where she is in the hospital, and I was playing with friends, and my brother. ... Maybe I’m wrong in thinking that my difficulty in getting into that scene was a result of that having been set up by someone else. ... but I was aware of it being set up by someone else and of that feeling of -- this is hard to act, to feel like what I would have done naturally.

Dick’s description of what made this scene uncomfortable is exactly parallel to the experience he lived through as a child, and it wasn’t what he would have done naturally back then either. Dick’s connection to his dying sister was minimized and practically ignored when her death actually happened, in that he was directed (by his father presumably) to stay in a different city, in a separate, “other life” while his parents looked after her. Dick had had a discussion with his father around this issue about a month before doing the enactment.
Well, with my father I had a conversation with him shortly before the psychodrama, connected to my sister’s death. It was very emotional. Her death had been so hard for them as parents that they felt like -- had I not received a lot from the whole ordeal, and not being together ...[at least] their faith had been strengthened. ... I felt like I needed to say to him -- that was your experience, that wasn’t my experience, so, no -- I didn’t get a lot.

Whatever the reasons were for keeping the brothers away from their dying sister that summer, it had a far reaching effect on Dick at least, and it seems to me that the message he internalized from that moment in his life was that it was not right, or good, for him to fully experience or express his emotional reactions. This message was essentially given by his father, or at least it seems that Dick identifies him as having done so.

In keeping with the sense that it is particularly in front of men that emotional expression is taboo, Dick made some further comments about male groups:

If I were with my hockey buddies, and telling a sad story ... how acceptable would it be for me to suddenly break down into tears? ... It wouldn’t be. It would be weird.

If you cry in front of men and women, you know there’s women there that are totally fine with it -- but what of a group of all men? If the same range is validated ... maybe there’s a bit more power there, even.

So it seems to me that for Dick there is still some unfinished business around emotional expression in front of other men, and that this may relate to his relationship to his father, and the kinds of messages Dick received from his father around emotions as a child.
In Tom’s case, he had clearly identified the dynamic that instilled in him the message that he should not express his emotional truth, and he was very aware of some of the consequences this had had for him.

I was a pretty sensitive guy ... but my dad didn’t appreciate that part of me, and he wasn’t as aware of it.

I felt misunderstood to begin with because he didn’t know that I was a sensitive kid.

He wanted me to think, and be responsible, and do the right thing -- to do the adult thing ... and so he punished me quite strongly when I was acting purely from where I was at.

Tom’s father did not accept his emotional truth, and Tom felt particularly judged and at times punished for it. This led him to hold that part of himself back, and to feel ashamed of it, especially in his relationships with other men.

I didn’t bring all of me into relationships ... because I was always critical of how this would be received, and ... I guess there’s a lack of a feeling of worth related to it ... I was the kind of guy that got along with everybody, but that was partly because I was never boldly myself.

So I tended to de-value my maleness. ... It went, um -- I’m just using this to avoid showing other parts of me, and there’s a lot of times when I’m feeling misunderstood and neglected because people aren’t relating to me as my full self. I’m only showing my so-called male side, which I wasn’t really sure was truly who I was.

Tom felt that to be accepted by other men he had to put on a front, pretending to be just his ‘male’ side, while betraying the sensitive, ‘female’ side that he distinctly felt was also part of his “full self.”

Harry’s case is a little bit different, but fundamentally the themes converge. The death of Harry’s father left him without male support at an important time in his life, and this left him with two fundamental ‘emotional truths’ that he could
not express. The first was anger at his father for abandoning him, and the second was anger at the women in his life for denying him affection and support, as well as the possibility of autonomy as a man.

I certainly see a connection with the death of my father resulting with me being left with the personality of my mother who was a cold and critical person. And then the subsequent choice of my first wife ... that was a way of me trying to act out a rescue fantasy around my own mother, which was virtually impossible.

The ... theme was there of coping with the cold, critical woman and trying to wrest some appreciation and affection from them in some kind of impossible way.

The emotional truth of Harry's feelings toward the women in his life could only come out after he felt he was being supported by other men. It seems that before the psychodrama he did not feel this support and acceptance from other men at a level that would allow him to vent his anger and frustration with women. Without this support he felt vulnerable to the anger of his mother and his aunt, and the other women who were in powerful positions in his life.

It was when the men and women had been separated in Harry's enactment that he had a sense of finally being supported by the men in the 'huddle.' It was "a feeling of being taken into the men's club." Once there, the true nature of Harry's experience -- his emotional truth -- could come out:

There was a ... a bit of a sense of shared knowingness in the huddle, I guess -- 'We know about those women' -- which was positive to soak up a little bit.

There was a shift there that goes back to my conditioning -- and some North American conditioning, because it's not nice to see that that clearly. It's sort of seeing the devil in the female race. We're not supposed to see that, right? We're not supposed to see some of their capability for malevolence, or destructiveness, or self-centeredness. You know -- that's
mom and apple pie, and we’re supposed to imagine that that’s all there is. ... You have to watch them, because they can be just as fucked up as any guy. ...

Being in the huddle gave me permission not to feel guilty about that -- or that my self was safe. ... I had some support, so I could call a spade a spade, and say, yeah, that’s my experience.

Being taken into the huddle created the necessary conditions for Harry to feel safe enough to express these emotions that he had carried inside for many years.

The power of the enactment: externalization and change

There were several common themes that developed out of the experiences the men had of the psychodrama process. The most important of these, I feel, has to do with the almost alchemical process by which the internal drama that the protagonist brings to the enactment at times takes on a very convincing external reality for the individual. Joe talked of how the building where his enactment was held, “just became gruesome,” and the observers “actually became afraid,” because the constant background of terror and violence that was part of his experience in the institution had been reincarnated in the enactment. Tom said he “felt paralyzed as this five-year-old kid,” when, in the enactment, his father yelled at him. Tom called it a potent body memory, and said, “I totally felt like I was in that space -- it was amazing to me.” Dick, although normally very uncomfortable when being observed, was aware that once he was into the enactment itself, “There was a significant diminishing of my awareness of the group,” and said that
the most potent part of the experience was, “The moment, or the time in it where I was able to be lost in it ... really experiencing and expressing.”

This sense of having been lost in it came out again in Dick’s interview. While speaking of the moment when he spoke to his sister in the enactment, and said good-bye to her, he became a little confused, saying, “I feel like I’m going from the present into everything else -- mixing up my tenses here.” This suggested to me that part of the psychodrama experience was still present for him -- that in some sense the internal dynamics surrounding his sister’s death had been made external in the psychodrama, and now the actions he had performed there had become a part of this dynamic in an ongoing, internal present. In psychodrama theory this process is addressed through the concept of “surplus reality.”

“surplus reality -- that which we carry within our psyches as a personal history, which affects the whole of who we are and how we relate.” (Dayton, 1994, p.8)

During the enactment it seems that this internal reality becomes externalized and that for the protagonist, the players actually become, or ‘take on the reality of’ the person projected onto them. Dick described this ongoing sense of a dual reality:

It’s pretty hard to separate them -- I mean the person who played it, speaking as my sister. ... I couldn’t separate them and say one or the other, because I felt that I was very aware of the both of them being together. I mean, I knew ... that it wasn’t my sister speaking to me. It was Sue speaking to me, as though she were my sister, and she was imagining what my sister might say -- but I thought she did a good job of it. It felt right -- exactly what she said.
So the inner world of the individual is externalized onto the players and the situation in the enactment, and these experiences of these men testify to the power of that process to feel real, to actually take them back to that time in their lives and do things differently, so that the internal reality is shifted and changed.

Tian Dayton (1994) makes the comment that,

"Moreno established the science of psychodrama to offer individuals an opportunity to rework missed developmental stages by allowing them to experience and practice the dynamics of a given stage in a safe therapeutic environment." (Dayton, 1994, p.7)

In a sense, however, it is not only experience and practice in the dynamics of the developmental stages, but also repair. Fundamental messages that were internalized during certain stages of life, and that became the organizing principles of the developing personality, were externalized, worked through, and changed.

Harry, for instance felt that with his father's death he had been fundamentally deprived of the inner experience of male support. This left him overly influenced by the world-view of his mother. In the enactment the process of joining with the group of men in the huddle created a fundamental shift in his inner world.

[The huddle] took away a set of pictures or representations ..., but with a felt sense -- you know, it wasn't all talk. I didn't have to believe it. I could feel it and remember it.

I think at the time I felt ... that this was new, this was good ... and a bit of a 'click' -- like a fitting in or, "this fit."
This new experience was brought together by Harry’s dream, which he felt gave him a verbal representation of the new principle he had internalized for organizing his experience and behaviour in the world:

The context of the ship of men [in the dream]... was, I thought, the representation of the huddle from the psychodrama.

In terms of organizing our experience my view is that principles come out of interaction, and so to me that [line from the dream] is a new organizing principle ... in opposition to my mother’s message in life which was ... listen, you’d better not be selfish, and you’d better listen to my view of the world, and you’d better try to always be kind and good. ...

That left me defenseless in many ways. It was a lousy strategy for living in the world and also for functioning in relationships at times. It left me too giving and exposed, and not self-protective enough. So I see the dream as ... organizing the experience of the enactment ... and integrating that, where I can say, well, you have to be as strategic about your caring as your killing ... you have to be aggressive too, and that’s okay.

Thus it seems that through this process of externalizing the inner reality, old relationships and interactions from childhood, or whenever, can be brought into the enactment with a powerful sense of present, external reality. Old, internalized messages that came from these interactions can then be addressed and repaired, allowing one’s sense of self, and one’s relationship to others to be changed. As Tom put it:

Words ... they can do a lot for me, but not as much as the feeling of actually doing it -- pushing back against the force that was making me feel small, and wrong, ... and ashamed of myself.

Afterwards: integration and release

A final common theme that I want to highlight concerns the sense all four of my research participants had to some extent, of being unburdened, freed, or
released after their enactments. This feeling seemed to be tied to a sense of self-confidence, or 'being okay;' that is, their inner sense of self could come out more honestly, was more acceptable to themselves, and was less vulnerable to the lack of acceptance from others. Tom put it in the following way:

    So after that there’s this feeling ... that I’d broken the family system as it was -- that I could take myself out of that emotional position in it.

    I think what was good about this experience was that I was able to show a part of me that I kept hidden for a long time. That in itself was very unburdening ... I just felt unleashed in some ways.

    I felt so myself. ... That feeling of being unleashed, or unburdened was tangible in the way that I was. I just felt freer to be me.

    Harry explained a similar feeling in terms of being more able to lay claim to his male side, and being able to use that strategic balancing of caring and aggression to support himself:

    Well, the sense of self-ownership, of a permission to own my masculinity -- a clear sense of the boundary and the difference between the two camps. ... They are they, and we are we.

    I’m much more confident, being more strategic ... and there’s more permission to support myself without any guilt or recrimination for that.

    There’s a freedom in being who you are ... in knowing who you are, being who you are, being accepted for who you are, and then acting like who you are.

    For Joe there was a deep sense of becoming integrated with his ‘real’ self that was just slightly disconnected, or in his terms, being able to take his place as a man. This integration led to a greater sense of satisfaction with himself and his roles for the important others in his life.
It was like I stepped into my skin — you know, that... the real me was just slightly over here, and I was sort of here -- and I just stepped into it.

I think as a result of this integration process that I feel quite confident about who I am, and ... quite comfortable with that. You know -- the sense of taking my place ... my various roles as a man -- ... as a brother, as a father, as a husband, a son -- those kinds of roles. I'm very happy with them.

Finally, Dick also felt that he had made a step toward integration and wholeness, and although he wasn't yet satisfied with the amount of progress he had made in this area, he did still feel that there was some change toward a greater acceptance of his whole self.

Maybe I have a sense ... a little bit of a boost in self confidence.

So, that's an image I carry with me ... that idea of being more spontaneous, being more okay with whatever happens to come out, or -- honesty and frankness.

So there was a sense of -- hey, it's okay for me to be more spontaneous, and to let more people experience me in a greater openness.

After their enactments, all four men had an increased sense that they could be themselves more freely, with greater confidence and authenticity than before.

The shared structure:

The authentic self, and the moment of arrest:

In trying to determine a shared structure that could best describe the common nature of the experiences and changes these men went through, it seemed to me that the most fundamental element that linked their four stories was centrally concerned with the acceptance or denial of what I have called the
'authentic self.' In this study the term first arose for me through Tom’s interview when he talked of “betraying his wholistic self” by trying to hide his sensitive side in order to conform to his father’s code of masculinity, and feeling “inauthentic” as a result. The term also had a certain intuitive ‘fit,’ which was borne out in the reactions of the men while discussing the themes drawn from the follow-up interviews with each of them. In all four cases, however, there was a clear sense that the ‘authentic self’ -- or the lived experience of one’s own intentions and emotions -- was in conflict at some level. At some point in the lives of these men they all received the message that a part of their authentic self was unacceptable. This message was given in the context of relationships and interactions that were fundamental in their lives, and it had long-lasting, profound effects upon them. In searching for the essential structure of the experience that brought these men closer to being satisfied with their self-identity as men, it seems to me that they were all involved in a process of reclaiming, reintegrating, and defending that part of their authentic self that was hidden away at some point because it was unacceptable.

As I inquired into the process each of these men went through in deciding to do a psychodramatic enactment, I found that there was another common theme that emerged. Each of them went through a long process of self-reflection that began long before the psychodrama workshops. As I referred to it earlier, I see this as part of the warm-up for their enactment. What strikes me now as most important for the overall experience and process of change in the enactment was
discovering the central moment, or pivotal point in their lives when they first took
in the message that part of their authentic self was unacceptable. For two of the
men I interviewed the insight into this moment in their own lives came through
watching someone else’s psychodrama enactment. The emotional involvement of
witnessing someone else’s enactment ‘triggered’ them into recognizing the
moment in their own lives when they had internalized the message that a part of
their authentic self was not acceptable. This message was given by his father, in
Tom’s case, and by his male co-workers and the career ethic generally in Joe’s.

For the other two men the moment was not as clearly defined as a single
incident, but arose as a theme they had been dealing with for some years, both in
and out of their own personal therapy. Both of these men focused their
enactments on the unfinished process of grieving the childhood loss of a family
member -- his sister in Dick’s case, and his father in Harry’s. In a sense it was the
lack of repair around this loss, and the inability to come to closure with it, that
imparted to these two men the same message that a part of their authentic selves
was unacceptable. The real, inner experience of that grieving part of themselves,
and the personal needs that went unmet because of the loss they suffered, were
unacceptable within their family situations. For all four of these men there was a
sense of being “stuck” at this point in their lives when they felt required to hide
part of themselves away. I have termed this the ‘moment of arrest,’ and although
the entire dynamic of ‘being arrested’ may not have been contained in a single,
historical moment, they were able to identify a single moment, or a theme (such
as the death of Harry’s father) that symbolized the dynamic as a whole. This became for them the point at which they internalized the message that in order to be accepted by those around them, they had to deny a part of their authentic selves.

So, by giving an outline of these two concepts -- the authentic self, and the moment of arrest -- it is possible to describe the basic project that each of these men entered into by choosing to do his enactment. They all wanted to reclaim that part of their authentic selves that had been denied, and integrate it into a new, more complete and satisfying identity. To do this they needed to return to the moment of arrest that they had identified, recreating the interaction that had occurred so that they could do it again -- differently. The point being that this time it would be possible to stand up for the authentic self as an adult, and require that the others involved listen and understand so that the true experience of the authentic self could be expressed and defended.

I was mostly coming at this as the adult me ... bringing those resources into the re-enactment ... the perspectives I have and the strengths that I have in order to do it over again in the way that I would like it to have gone. (Tom)

This project also points toward the more fundamental theme that I feel is at the heart of the process each of these men went through to some degree, and which I feel may be a basic part of male development: The journey of the authentic self from otherness to rejoining.
The fundamental theme:

I will give a brief description of what I mean by this theme here, and then develop it more fully in the discussion chapter following. The journey of the authentic self is not so much a journey of time and place as it is of identity. My research participants described a situation where their full authentic self was not accepted within a certain context. This means that their identity within that context was only partial, since the experience of the authentic self can never be completely denied -- as Joe's friend Steve could attest. So there is a sense of one's authentic self being 'other' than the image one projects for others to see within that context.

[It was] a feeling like I need to stay in a shell, and that it's not safe for me to be freely who I am. (Tom)

It never felt good to just throw out one part of myself and have people judge me just on the basis of that alone. (Tom)

For these men, the context in which they felt 'stuck' had to do with their relationships to their fathers, and/or other men. It seems that their true experience of their authentic selves could not be part of their gender identity as men, or to put it another way, their authentic self was 'other' than the masculine identity that was acceptable to other men.

The term 'rejoining' comes from Harry's account of his experience in the huddle. It was at this point in his enactment that, for the first time, he had a sense of support from other men for his authentic self as male. When I first described this theme to Harry, to see if the description 'fit' for him, he suggested that rejoining might not be the best word to describe his experience, because he didn't
have a sense of being joined to the male group previously, so couldn’t be re-joined to them. But rejoining means something slightly different than just becoming part of the group, although this is also an element. By rejoining I mean that these men could feel re-joined with their authentic selves — “It was like I stepped into my skin.” (Joe) In order to be rejoined in this way, each man needed to be able to accept his authentic self as part of his self-identity as a man. This formulation seems simple, yet it implies that the authentic self is different than self-identity, and that there is a process of relationship and interaction mediating between the two. It is this process of relationship that defines the journey of the authentic self from being ‘other’ than one’s partial self-identity, to being fully ‘rejoined’ to that self-identity within the context of a reference group that can accept and mirror back a true image of one’s authentic self.
Chapter V: Discussion

The fundamental theme:
The journey of the authentic self from otherness to rejoining.

I realize that there are several terms I have used in this formulation of the fundamental theme that will need to be clearly defined. I will at first, however, try to give an explanation of just what I mean by this “journey” as a whole, before becoming somewhat more confusing by making the necessary arguments and references to back up my claim that this theme is indeed at work, and is common to the men I interviewed. I term this developmental theme a ‘journey’ because I see it as having a metaphorical connection to the ‘hero’s journey’ that Joseph Campbell, among others, describes as an archetypal theme that exists across many cultures and historical periods. In many ways I think this theme is not limited to the male gender at all, but the particulars of its dynamic would be somewhat different for women. However, I am only going to deal with this theme as it pertains to male development, as that is the focus of my study.

The journey of the authentic self is a journey of identity, and the process by which men develop their sense of identity is different than that for women. The reason for this is because of the different roles that men and women have in biological reproduction, and parenting, and the way these different roles affect children’s development as they grow and take on an identity.
Women's mothering ... produces asymmetries in the relational experiences of girls and boys as they grow up, which account for crucial differences in feminine and masculine personality. (Chodorow, 1978, p.169)

Chodorow's analysis is centered on the differences in the experience and effects of mothering on girls and boys, but it seems to me that there has to be a corollary to this in the different experiences of fathering. In my study I have found that there is, at least for these men, a critical dynamic at work in the identification process between fathers and sons, or male groups and men that wish to be able to identify with them.

The authentic self:

The central character in this journey of development is the authentic self. The authentic self, as I see it, is simply the subjective experience we have of our internal processes as we go about living -- acting, reacting, and interacting with the world around us. It contains within it that part of us that is emotional -- is sensitive and responsive in an immediate, spontaneous way. As a construct, the authentic self represents for all of us the spontaneous, lived experience of being in the world, and as such it is distinct from self-identity. I see this distinction as parallel to the one made by Winnicott (1965) between subjective omnipotence and objective reality. Mitchell and Black, in their book on the development of psychodynamic theories after Freud discuss Winnicott's theories in a clear and succinct way. They state that,

To the child's experience of subjective omnipotence is eventually added an experience of *objective reality*. The latter does not replace the former,
but rather exists alongside or in dialectical relation to it. (Mitchell and Black, 1995, p.127)

Subjective omnipotence is Winnicott’s term for the initial quality of experience, or inner reality in an infant’s life. It includes within it both the subjective self -- as the center of experience -- and the ‘omnipotent’ sense of the self’s power to create the object of its desire simply by desiring it. As a pure center of experience the child is not yet aware of itself as an identity -- as an object among other objects in the world. But as the child develops, it gains a sense of objective reality and of itself as a player in it. There is an interaction between the child’s sense of its own inner reality and the awareness of the reality of others, and it is in this interaction that the child begins to build an identity. Mitchell and Black (1995) describe this part of Winnicott’s theory in the following way:

There is a gradual awareness that the world consists not of one subjectivity, but of many; that satisfaction of one’s desires requires not merely their expression but negotiations with other persons, who have their own desires and agendas. (p.127)

To become “me,” with a consolidated sense of a self, ... requires a maternal environment that adapts itself to the child’s emerging subjectivity. The infant begins to have a sense of his “mother’s son,” a set of images and expectations he must come to terms with, only after “me” is firmly established, believed in, enjoyed. (p.132)

My purpose here is to support my contention that the authentic self is separate from self-identity. The authentic self develops out of that original state of ‘subjective omnipotence’ and remains as the center of subjective emotional desire and response in our dealings with the world. Self-identity, however, is
developed out of an awareness of how others respond to this authentic self, and in how these responses reflect upon the similarities and differences of that authentic self (as seen by those others) with other objects in the world. The critical point to make here is that the authentic self cannot perceive itself -- it creates an image of itself developed out of what is reflected back through the responses of others. At times the image that is reflected by others is a far cry from the sense one has of one’s authentic self.

In Winnicott’s view it is chronic maternal failure that causes this kind of radical split within the self between the genuine wellsprings of desire and meaning (the true self) and a compliant self (the false self) ... In an autobiographical fragment, Sullivan vividly captured the kind of splitting that Winnicott had in mind: ‘There was such a difference between me and my mother’s son, that I often felt myself to be no more than a clothes horse upon which she hung her illusions.’ (Mitchell and Black, p.131-132)

I feel my research has shown that there is a similar splitting that occurs when the father fails to provide a supportive environment for the son’s developing gender identity. To be more precise, when the normal splitting that occurs when the son transfers his sense of identity from the mother toward the father is not repaired through the father’s acceptance and reflection of his son’s full, authentic self as male.

The journey begins: the transfer of identification

Nancy Chodorow in her book, The reproduction of mothering (1978), set out to describe the reproduction of gender through the experiences of children due to the dynamics generated by the mother being the primary caregiver during the
child’s early life. The book, and her discussion of early male development has
been cited repeatedly in the literature on men’s issues. To a certain extent
Chodorow recognizes that her account relies on a family structure where fathers
are often absent, or unavailable, but in focusing on mothering I feel she has
missed an important piece of the puzzle. She describes the major difference in the
experience of boys and girls in the following way:

Because all children identify first with their mother, a girl’s gender and
gender role identification processes are continuous with her earliest
identifications and a boy’s are not. ... The boy’s oedipal crisis ... is
supposed to enable him to shift in favor of an identification with his
father. He gives up, in addition to his oedipal and preoedipal attachment to
his mother, his primary identification with her. ... A boy, in order to feel
himself adequately masculine, must distinguish and differentiate himself
from others in a way that a girl need not -- must categorize himself as
someone apart. (p.174)

It is in this self-categorization as apart that I see the boy as entering a state
of ‘otherness.’ There is a necessary split between his authentic self and his
identity because he has up to this point identified himself as being like his
mother. His body, however -- a part of his identity as an object in the world -- is
not like hers, it is like his father’s, and as Chodorow puts it:

A boy’s identification processes are not likely to be so embedded in or
mediated by a real affective relation to his father. At the same time, he
tends to deny identification with and relationship to his mother and reject
what he takes to be the feminine world. (p.176)

Chodorow takes this process as being responsible for a relatively constant
difference in the orientation of boys and girls -- men and women -- towards
relationships and connection in general.

The basic feminine sense of self is connected to the world, the basic
masculine sense of self is separate. (p.169)
However, Chodorow also describes what she feels is the boy's basic goal during this transfer of identification:

For boys the major goal is the achievement of personal masculine identification with their father and sense of secure masculine self. (p.165)

My research into the literature on men's issues shows that this goal is rarely achieved -- as does the phenomenological research presented here. I believe that this is because, while her analysis may be correct in placing the boy in a self-identity as separate, this is a difficult and painful experience which, if left without further repair, cannot develop into a secure self-identity as male.

So the boy is caught in a kind of limbo. Without a real, affective relationship to his father he can only create a partial identity for himself as male. He may see himself as physically male -- although even this aspect of identity needs acceptance and recognition -- but he is not able to share his emotional, affective, or authentic self in relationship to his father, and have these emotions mirrored back as part of his male identity. Thus it seems to me that without a real connection and relationship with the father, in which the father accepts and acknowledges all of who the boy is as male, the boy will be stuck in this condition of 'otherness.'

This split between the interior and exterior self -- or between the experience of the spontaneous, authentic self as subject, and the reflected self as an identity, or object for others in the world -- creates a dissonance and dislocation. At the point when the male child realizes that he has a penis, and is different from his
mother in that way, he is challenged to restructure his self-image, modify the organizing principle for his experience, and create a new self-identity as male. At this point the boy recognizes his physical otherness from his mother, and so enters into an identification of himself as being 'other.' In this state the boy cannot be sure that his objective nature, or identity in the world, is congruent with his subjective experience, or authentic self. His identity as male must be affirmed by other males -- or, at least an other male, and preferably his father.

The reason this journey through otherness towards a new identification as male takes on such magnitude in male development is that for many men this process is interrupted indefinitely by a moment of arrest. The four men I interviewed all experienced the situation -- in one form or another -- that certain parts of their authentic self were not, or would not be affirmed as male. This denial left that part “stuck” in otherness. The individual cannot identify all of his experience of himself as being male, and yet he cannot identify those ‘other’ parts of himself as feminine because the physical reality of his body does not allow him to take on that self-image, or identity.

The ‘false male’ disorder:

Winnicott refers to what he terms a “false self disorder,” which concerned “the person who acted and functioned like a person but who didn’t feel to himself like a person” (Mitchell and Black, p.124). While the process that Winnicott discusses takes place much earlier than the boy’s transfer of gender identity, I
believe that there is a parallel process that begins to take effect once the boy has entered into ‘otherness.’ According to Winnicott, the most important element necessary for the development of the child’s ‘true self’ is the responsive nature of the mother’s relationship to him.

It was not just feeding that was crucial, but love, not need gratification, but the mother’s responsiveness to the “personal” features of the infant’s experience (p. 125).

It is not just responding to the child’s body and basic needs that creates the appropriate maternal relationship, it is also responding to the inner reality -- the ‘personal features of experience’ or authentic self of the child. Winnicott’s account is concerned with the earliest development of the child’s subjectivity and sense of self. He felt that it was important for the mother “to suspend her own subjectivity to become the medium for the development of the subjectivity of the infant” (p. 126). At the time of the boy’s transference of his gender identity this stage of development is past. So it may not be necessary for the father to suspend his subjectivity to quite the same extent, but it is necessary for him to suspend his own agenda long enough to recognize and accept the boy’s inner reality as a real and important part that is also male.

This crucial early experience enables the growing child to continue to experience his own spontaneously emerging desires and gestures as real, as important, as deeply meaningful. (p. 127)

Without the experience of a ‘good enough father’ the boy will experience a moment of arrest -- as my research participants did -- in which his full, authentic self is denied meaning, importance and reality.
The child’s psychological development essentially ceases. He remains stuck in psychological time, with the rest of his personality growing past and around a missing core. The kernel of genuine personhood is suspended, buffered by an adaptive compliance with the deficient environment. (p.129)

Mitchell and Black are referring here to the consequences of an inadequate nurturing environment as provided by the mother for the infant child. However, it seems to me that what is being described here applies very well to the experience of many men today, and it applies to an ongoing inadequacy in the nurturing environment provided by the father and men in general. For men who experience this inadequacy their genuine being as a man is suspended, and in an attempt to wrest from the father the identity they need to see reflected, they comply with the father’s rules for masculinity — or whatever rules they may internalize from their environment as possibly making them good enough, finally, to be a real man.

In his book, Healing the male psyche John Rowan (1997) gives a succinct account of the development of this “false self.”

One of the first things the boy has to do, of course, is to separate from the mother. The early symbiotic relationship has to be broken. This first step, the one that the little boy takes in order to free himself from his symbiotic connection to his mother Greenson (1968) refers to as dis-identification. ... This process produces what has sometimes been called the male wound. The special interest of this wound is that it introduces a permanent element of dislocation into the lives of one sex, but not the other. (p.39)

The picture we are building up is of trauma producing a split between a true self (hidden and remote) and a false self (presented to the world). This false self basically thinks of itself as not-OK. ... And so the mask begins. It is as if we were saying somehow ‘I am not OK, but I will give you something good enough to please you if I can.’ This is how we learn to be what we are not. And this is why we are always uncertain about our self-image, as to whether it is really good enough. ... It is because we do not really have inside ourselves any sense of having the right to judge. (p.40)
Rowan sees this split between the authentic self and false identity as present in the experience of many adult men in our society, and my literature review, and this research agree with him: “How do we arrive at adulthood carrying around this enormous burden -- this public relations self that has to be protected and improved at all costs ...?” (p.40) Chodorow may indeed be right when she states that the basic male sense of self is separate -- the authentic self has been separated and hidden away. This may be normal, under the present conditions of our society, but intuitively it doesn't seem to me to be a natural place for development to stop. It is like a dissonant note left hanging, waiting to be resolved. The lack of connection creates an uncertainty around the true nature of the self that is painful, and damaging. If we take the Hero’s journey as a metaphor, then the male experience of separateness may be necessary, but it should be only a stage in the process of the hero’s adventure, resolved by his return.

The courage to face the trials and to bring a whole new body of possibilities into the field of interpreted experience for other people to experience -- that is the hero’s deed. (Campbell, 1988, p.41)

Rejoining

The final part of the ‘journey’ referred to by my formulation of this fundamental theme is termed ‘rejoining.’ The central part of this rejoining process consists in the individual (boy or man) being able to leave the condition of otherness behind. In order to do this he needs to feel that his authentic self is
seen as male by those whom he identifies as male. This would finally enable him to see all of what he experiences as himself as, in fact, being male. Before going any further, I feel it is necessary to affirm that the four men I interviewed were very well adjusted men, and were by no means overwhelmed by the ‘false male disorder’ that I outlined earlier. The fact that all of them felt more integrated after the psychodrama enactment does, however, speak to their experience of ‘otherness,’ and of being split between an authentic self and a partial or unfulfilling self-identity as male. From the transcripts of my four research participants it is possible to see that they all, to some extent, underwent the ‘rejoining’ process that resulted in an integration of these parts of self. It seems that there are several stages, or aspects of this rejoining process, and that it is an ongoing interaction between the individual and the group that he wishes to identify with.

The three stages of the rejoining process that I could identify in the experiences of my research participants were: 1) the individual’s presentation, or exposing of their authentic self in the presence of the group; 2) the witnessing of the individual’s authentic self by the group and the mirroring back to him of the identity that they perceive; and 3) a reciprocal process of identification between the group and the individual, where the group accepts the identity of the individual as one of them, and the individual accepts the shared identity of the group as corresponding to his authentic self. These stages are not necessarily linear, and indeed in normal interactions may develop cyclically over time. What
is important to note here is that first of all, the individual cannot feel reconnected to others unless he is courageous enough to show his full, authentic self. Second, the group in which the individual does this must be up to the challenge of providing an appropriately nurturing environment, which can repair the split self rather than retraumatize it. Third, the final process of identification involves an ongoing, reciprocal relationship between the individual and the group.

Kohut (1971) developed an understanding of the kinds of experiences needed to create a healthy sense of self that seems to me to correspond roughly to the second and third stage in the process of rejoining as I have understood it. The second stage is essentially the response of the group to the individual’s presentation of their authentic self. In my terms, in order to be able to ‘rejoin,’ the individual must present their authentic self, which must then be fully seen and mirrored back by the group. Like Winnicott, Kohut felt that the self had a basic need for a certain elemental nurturance from its environment, and this mirroring was one aspect of that.

A kind of nurturing context (much like Winnicott’s “holding environment”) within which the patient can begin to feel more seen, more real, and more internally substantial. Kohut called this the mirroring transference (Mitchell and Black, p.161).

The therapist, the psychodrama group, or the good-enough father nurtures the developing self by mirroring back to it a sense of the identity that the self is to them. This creates for the self a sense of being real -- of the reality of the feeling, desiring, authentic self as an identity in the other’s world.
Kohut’s idea of twinship transference corresponds to what he saw as an early childhood need for the selfobject experience of feeling a basic likeness to the powerful and important other. This corresponds to the process of identification, in which the authentic self, in seeking to understand itself, looks toward the mother, and then the father, asking them and itself -- am I like you? Are you like me?

Kohut identified an alter ego or twinship transference, wherein the patient yearns to feel an essential likeness with the analyst, not in terms of external resemblance but in significance or function (i.e., feeling a like-gendered analyst shares a sensibility about being male or female) (Mitchell and Black, p. 161).

In order for this essential likeness to be affirmed, both the patient and the analyst (in this example) need to support the transference. The patient, like the authentic self, is seeking to understand who, or what he is in the reality beyond his own subjective experience. If the analyst denies the likeness, then the rejoining of the patient’s inner subjective experience with his self-image, or identity cannot occur. If the analyst supports the likeness, the patient still has to feel clear within themselves that there are no further barriers to the identification. Kohut saw the patient as having a deep yearning for this ‘twinship;’ however, in the case of gender, for instance, the patient may have received a deeply internalized message in childhood that they were not acceptable as male. To feel a twinship with the male analyst, then, the patient would not only need the analyst’s support for the identification, but would also need to address that internalized message before getting his own support for it. The twinship transference, or identification, thus
requires an ongoing reciprocal support from both the individual, saying ‘yes, I am like you,’ and the other, saying ‘yes, you are like me.’

So, in Kohut’s self psychology, the healthy development of the self requires a nurturing environment, in which the authentic self of the individual can be fully seen and mirrored back; and in which the desire to be identified with this supportive environment is welcomed and affirmed. It is essentially these mirroring and twinship transferences that I see the group as providing or supporting for the individual in the rejoining process. This is the process through which a healthy sense of identification can be established, and the split between the hidden, authentic self and the public, partial self can be repaired:

A mirror transference helps the patient overcome depersonalized and dissociated defenses to believe in the reality of her subjective emotional experience (Sullivan, 1989, p.72).

If the therapist, the group, or the not-good-enough father fails to provide this nurturing environment for the developing self, “self-esteem collapses and either a demoralizing sense of emptiness and futility or a rageful outpouring ensues” (Mitchell and Black, p.161).

Theoretical implications:

The bad father:

The journey of the authentic self from otherness to rejoining describes the process that men go through in transferring the object, or referential other of their
identification from the mother to the father. This transfer is by no means a simple operation, and it seems that for many men it involves a hiatus, or moment of arrest, where the father denies a complete likeness and part of the boy's authentic self must remain hidden away. This denial on the father's part may have many motivations, the first and most obvious of which may be the father's fear of being replaced by the son -- and therefore the desire to keep the son from attaining full status as a male. Another motivation may be that the father is simply passing on his sense of what it means to be male. He may never have felt 'rejoined' to his father and his authentic self, and so in an effort to prove himself adequate to his father's 'masculine' image he refuses to acknowledge that like his son he has a sensitive and emotional side that feels separate, hidden away, and alone.

This sense of feeling the need to prove oneself adequate seems to me to be the hallmark of the 'false male disorder.' It implies that the individual is aware of a part of their inner experience of themselves that is unacceptable to the image they feel they have to portray. The individual who is looking to provide this proof for everyone and anyone is often very dangerous to himself and others, precisely because he has identified the father's lack of connection as what it means to be male. So the real need for connection may be met with violent denial. However, it also seems to me that this need to prove one's masculinity has been exacerbated by our society's lack of a male rite of passage. This lack seems blatant and glaring to me now, and it strikes me that the power of the patriarchal hierarchy is in fact better supported by sons who try desperately to meet their father's long list of
demands before they will be considered worthy of acceptance. Perhaps our society’s patriarchal system has depended upon the waning importance of a ‘rite of passage’ that would otherwise make its sons too independent.

There are many possible consequences that could be seen as resulting from this enforced split of the authentic self -- from the self-destructive denial of any parts of self that are not in keeping with the socially constructed code of masculinity, to the violent attempt to oust the authentic self from otherness through aggression towards the feminine. In any case, it seems that it would only be through the most extreme denial of certain parts of the normal, subjective experience of self that the boy’s identification with maleness could be completed -- unless his father, or the men around him are willing to accept his full, authentic self as male. For their part, fathers and father-figures may have their own reasons entirely for withholding acceptance.

The rite of passage:

It seems to me that it was in a sense a rite of passage that occurred in the rejoining process for the men I interviewed. The psychodrama enactment allowed the men to interact with a group of others in order to be brought into their maturity and full status as autonomous, individual men supported by and supporting the other men in a reciprocal acceptance of identification. Nonetheless, even this ongoing rejoining process does not arrive at a perfect match between the individual’s inner reality, or authentic self and the image
reflected back to them by others. There can never be a perfect match because the authentic self cannot perceive itself as an identity, and has to find its identity through the imperfect understanding and reflection of the other. Through the initiation process, however, the individual becomes accepted into the sphere of others as an equal in this human, existential situation.

Sartre (1956) tackles this problem in his discussion of the look. The look is the fundamental human experience of being observed by an other. In this experience there is a recognition that one is an object to be perceived by the other, and at the same time one is aware that the other only dimly perceives one's authentic self.

I do not aim ... at my Ego as an object for myself ... in fact it is separated from me by a nothingness which I can not fill since I apprehend it as not being for me and since on principle it exists for the Other. ... Nevertheless, I am that Ego; I do not reject it as a strange image, but it is present to me as a self which I am without knowing it (p.349-50).

We can only know ourselves as an identity through the eyes of an Other, and so, according to Sartre, and my arguments so far, this tension between the self and identity is a fundamental aspect of human consciousness. Thus a ritual of initiation that connects the son to the father also contains within it an aspect of incorporating this otherness as a shared experience that connects all human beings.

With a proper nurturing environment created by the mother, the child becomes aware of itself as a subjectivity distinct from other subjectivities, develops a sense of its own authentic inner reality, and begins to develop a self-
image, or identity. With a proper nurturing environment created by the father, the child -- of either sex -- begins to create a basic orientation towards the not-mother, or Other. This other has never been connected, as the mother has, to the inner reality of the child, and so, in a sense represents the rest of 'objective reality.' Thus it seems to me that the father's role is to extend the process of development for the child's identity so that a connection can be made between the authentic self and its identity in the larger world beyond the intimate tie with the mother.

This process of developing identity would be at work for a child of either sex, because both boys and girls will be confronted by others who are not their mother, and by an objective reality that feels separate and beyond the intimate tie they have with their mother. They will, of necessity, develop some sense of their identity for those others who are not intimately tied to them. For both girls and boys, then, the process of identifying with the father as an other may be an integral part of individuation from that intimate tie with the mother, and the subsequent development of a distinct sense of self-identity.

The father is the first significant other that the child meets outside his mother's womb. For the newborn, the father first of all represents -- albeit rather indistinctly -- the non-mother; he incarnates everything that is not her. ... His very presence triggers a process of differentiation, since by claiming his wife he puts an end to the blissful state of symbiosis in which the mother and child were living: "Your mother is my wife, and she loves me too!" he says. The child senses that he himself is no longer the only object of desire. The father, then, embodies in this way the principles of reality and order in the family (Corneau, 1991, p.16).
Thus the rite of passage into maleness is also an initiation into the human existential condition of living with otherness; that is, living as an authentic self within the world of objective reality. The initiation comes through the recognition that the objective world, and our own identity that develops through our interaction with it, is beyond us. Our objective reality is held 'out there' as the image of us that is perceived by others. It is in our moments of great joy or despair that we change and renegotiate our understanding of the organizing principle of identity that connects our authentic self to that objective reality that we are 'out there.' The rite of passage, or initiation brings us face to face with the mystery that who we are is not either the authentic self, or the identity for others - we are both.

The dynamics of initiatory change can also be provoked by any unexpected, dramatic event: accident, divorce, abortion, the death of a loved one, the loss of a career, an eruption from nature that destroys the shape of a life. All severe separations in life evoke the sense of initiation in the psyche and open a person to psychological and mythical territories of unusual depth. Initiation is the psyche's response to mystery, great difficulties, and opportunities to change. (Meade 1993, p.11)

The fact that tribal initiations include mutilation of the body is a disturbing reality. ... For all its apparent brutality, tribal mutilation expresses a very simple truth: to become genuine human beings, we must open to a world of unforeseen circumstances in which we will be spared nothing. It is almost as though human substance must be corrupted and punctured so that its essence can emerge. Although the son's unconscious, unified world of childhood is in fact burst asunder in the initiation, the purpose of the initiation is not merely to gain entry for him into a world that is absurd; the goal is to provide him entry into a wider unity, a larger universe. He becomes a full-fledged participant in, and a responsible member of the community. His actions now carry their own weight in the continuation of the world (Corneau, p.147).
Implications for counselling practice:

I feel that the most important implications for counselling practice that develop out of the research and interpretation I have put forward here stem from the understanding that men do need to be relational. In Chodorow’s terms men may indeed have a sense of self that is more apart, and separate, but this is not enough. The emotional needs that keep coming up in the literature on men’s issues have been denied for a reason, but it is an unhealthy reason, and it is a symptom of a pervasive social problem. Psychology and counselling, as a field, has a huge project ahead to help men reconnect to this emotional side, and find a way to feel more complete and authentic with their identity. That men desire this kind of connection with others, instead of being left ‘apart,’ is evident:

The first issue, which became apparent during the first group session and emerged repeatedly throughout the course of the group, concerned a painful struggle deep within each of the group members. This struggle centered around a conflict between strongly desiring emotional intimacy with other men, yet deeply fearing the intimacy and the vulnerability that accompanied it (Hetzel, Barton, & Davenport, 1994 p.57).

Problems like male violence -- especially violence against women, depression, substance abuse, etc., can be seen as having roots in the dynamics described in this thesis. These are problems that affect our society deeply, and tend to reproduce themselves with increasing speed. To address them we may need to address men’s sense of self-identity at the most fundamental level by addressing their need for connection with others.

The desire and will to be nonviolent will rarely eliminate violent behavior. Even if will alone can result in a man not acting aggressively, if he has not learned to recognize and express feelings to gain support from a
community of other men he will remain isolated, lonely, stressed, and at risk for violence (Grusznski & Bankovics, 1990, p.210).

It seems to me that if we understand the need men have for a nurturing environment in order to support their self-identity as men, then we can begin to develop therapeutic approaches to address this. Men’s groups are an important factor in restoring men’s ability to connect with one another, and if they are properly conceived and run, then they can provide the basic elements of the nurturing environment that is needed.

The role of seminar leader ... provides a corrective ‘fathering’ experience. For most contemporary men, the experience of a father has largely been one of either the absent father, the neglectful father, the moralistic father, and, worse, the abusive, violent father (Sternbach, 1990, p.32).

It is my assumption that the group itself, as the shared creation of the members and myself becomes the “good enough mother,” the holding, nurturing presence that Winnicott (1960) so acutely located as fundamental to human growth (Sternbach, p.33).

Psychodrama seems to me to hold the most power in being able to address men’s needs, however, because the core relationships, and deep issues of arrest can be externalized and dealt with in the supportive atmosphere of the group.

In psychodrama the person can play out the introjected parents both from his point of view and from theirs. ... Spending time in the role of the parent allows for playing out the introject in a safe clinical environment where destructive internalized roles can be examined, experienced and released. Spending time in the role of the protagonist helps that person to give back to the parent such feelings as shame, anger and even love which he has carried in silence within him (Dayton, 1994, p.222-3).

In psychodrama we reach into our own experience and pull out ourselves. This is, in itself, healing -- to speak the words we dared not speak but had shouting within us (Dayton, p.9)
Psychodrama is able to focus on an individual’s experience in a way that brings out their story and opens it up to the group with an active, here-and-now presence. This allows not only the individual but also those taking part, and those witnessing to become emotionally involved, and to identify with parts of the story that speak to their own “emotional truth.” Thus the protagonist, and the others present in the psychodrama group take part in and mutually construct a nurturing atmosphere that can aid the development of the self. This atmosphere contains the basic elements identified by Winnicott and Kohut in that the inner reality of the individual becomes paramount, and is witnessed, affirmed and reflected by the group.

All post-Kohut self psychologists tend to regard as the most central and creative features of Kohut’s contributions the methodological innovation of sustained empathic immersion in the patient’s subjective reality and the theoretical concepts of the selfobject transferences. (Mitchell & Black, p.167)

A further important implication of this research is that the need of the authentic self to be nurtured by the environment is not restricted to childhood. The developmental needs of the individual require this kind of nurturing first from the mother, then the father, and finally from the larger world of others around us.

Kohut came to regard selfobject needs for affirmation, for admiration, for connections with others who can buoy us up and whom we can respect, as undergoing maturation and change of form but operating continually from birth till death, and as fundamental to human experience as are the needs for companionship or solitude (Mitchell & Black, p.166).
Implications for further research:

This study investigated the experiences of four men before, during and after their psychodrama enactment that helped them gain a greater satisfaction with their self-identity as male. The therapeutic process of psychodrama was central in the investigation in that it created a focal point for the changes these men experienced in their sense of self-identity. The main goal of the research, however, was to understand the basic structure of the changes they experienced in relation to their sense of themselves as men. Thus there were two main areas involved in this research: 1) the development of a positive male identity, and 2) the therapeutic process of psychodrama. Thus there are a number of implications for further research that arise from this study, within the realms of male identity development, female identity development, and the nature of psychodrama as a therapy to affect positive change in this development.

The foremost limitation of this study was its small number of participants who were very similar in certain key aspects. These four men were all counsellors or counsellors in training, and this fact alone may create some subtle biases. They were also all caucasian, and from middle class, Canadian backgrounds. Thus there is a clear indication that further research with more subjects from varied backgrounds would be helpful in understanding the generalizability of the results of this research, both in terms of male development in general, and across cultural
and social differences. Particularly important would be further research into the experiences of gay, or bisexual men, as the aspect of sexual orientation may fundamentally affect, or be affected by, the kinds of developmental themes discussed in this thesis. Different cultural viewpoints might also have a considerable effect upon the dynamics of developing identity, not only because the nature of parental care and community support could be substantially different, but also because a different culture may place a different emphasis on individuality and individual identity. In a culture where a sense of unity with the community, nature and the universe is a greater part of one’s identification of self, the role that gender identity plays in the over-all make up of self-identity might be substantially different.

There is a second main area of limitation in that the research was focused on the changes experienced through psychodrama. Further research could be done to investigate whether similar changes occur on some level, or to some degree for men in men’s groups, or other forms of counselling and therapy. I feel that some of the goals identified in men’s groups -- to become open and vulnerable, share deeply personal stories, and learn from the experience of others’ of one’s own gender -- were all satisfied within the psychodrama group as well. However, I am aware that this group was made up of counsellors and counsellors-in-training, and that many other men may have felt far too intimidated by the group to have engaged in this process at all. Research into psychodrama and men’s issues may
reveal ways to make this therapeutic approach more accessible and attractive to more men in general.

Further research is also necessary to identify the exact elements of the psychodrama process that were most influential in the change process. A critical incident methodology with a larger sample of men in psychodrama could begin to highlight the most important areas of this therapeutic approach that facilitate a positive change in the subject's self-identity. The nature of the warm-up period and the individual's previous experience with psychodrama seemed to emerge as important factors in this study, relating to the individual's state of readiness. Also, the construct of the 'moment of arrest' needs further examination to understand whether it describes a common phenomenon of experience. Further research is needed to establish the nature and extent of the effect these factors have on the individual's experience and change.

The psychodrama group was also made up of both men and women. It seems to me that this factor was also important in the experiences of these men. The presence of both men and women in the enactments themselves seems important, especially in the context of change regarding gender identity issues. The role-play aspect of the psychodrama may not be fulfilled unless the individual is able to deal with actual women portraying the important female roles in his enactment. The presence of both men and women is also important in the follow up and feedback process that happens after the enactment. Further
research is necessary in order to understand the different effects that this 'mirroring' may have upon men when it comes from either men or women.

So, while the psychodrama group has many similarities with other basic groups and group processes, there are differences that warrant further research. Psychodrama allows the possibility for the individual to open up to deeper levels of experience, and to try on different roles and behaviors in a more realistic way. Both of these aspects may be very important to the 'rejoining' process as I have understood it. Also, the fundamental theme developed as a result of this research reflected the shared structure of the participants' experiences based upon an Object Relations theoretical viewpoint. This point of view deals with very basic, almost pre-conscious dynamics of interaction and relationship. Further research would be warranted to simply flesh out this theme and see if it still holds true for other groups of men, and whether it can be seen as present and at work in other forms of therapy.

I also feel that further research is necessary to investigate the constructs that I have used in this research. Perhaps most important in this regard would be further research into the distinction between authentic self and identity. Many other theorists have posited constructs that seem to me to run along similar lines, such as Carl Rogers' (1959) reference to incongruity between experience and the concept of self, or Morita therapy's concept of the 'as-is' self (Ishyama, 1986). This indicates to me that these constructs are of interest in many areas of psychology. Also tied into this distinction between authentic self and identity are
the concepts of shame and social anxiety. Further research into how the ‘lived experience of self’ is related to the experience of ‘self-under the eyes of others’ may find important and productive avenues for dealing with these problems.

The fundamental importance of mirroring that is part of my argument in this thesis is also an important area for further research. Research, for instance, into the connection between mirroring in this sense, and socialization might yield important results. In my mind these two concepts deal with the way in which a person is formed as a socially independent individual, capable of being a responsible and inter-dependent member of a healthy community. As constructs, mirroring and socialization have some similarities, yet they come at this process from fundamentally different directions.
Summary:

The purpose of this study was to investigate the experiences of several men who had felt a significant change in their positive satisfaction with their self-identity as men. The importance of this change, and its significance for many men in our society today was discussed at the outset, and the research aimed at discovering the deep phenomenological structure of the experience that brought these men to a greater satisfaction with themselves as men. What I found was that these men had to deal with their relationships with their fathers and other men. They needed to reconstruct an experience that can be seen as a rite of passage, in which their authentic selves were accepted into their identity as men. This then allowed them to reconnect with the experience of other men as creating a balance of separateness and community that stands as a fundamental structure of human existence and experience in general.
REFERENCES


