UNDERSTANDING FATHER: ADULT SONS LOOK BACK

An analysis of the longitudinal father relationship from the perspective of adult sons.

by

BODHI DAVID ADAM

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Department of Social Work

The University of British Columbia
Vancouver, Canada

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UNDERSTANDING FATHER:
Adult Sons' Reflections on the Father Relationship

ABSTRACT

The present study explored the experience of relationship with father from the retrospective viewpoint of adult sons. Healing the father relationship has become an interest for many men and gender specific research in other fields of social enquiry has recently investigated the changing father role, yet in the social work and family therapy research literature, a lacuna was identified concerning the particulars of interpersonal relations with fathers. Twelve adult sons were asked to relate stories involving themselves and their fathers from progressive stages in their lives. Additional specific questioning sought the sons’ perspectives on their relationships with father. Data was transcribed, qualitatively coded and grouped into 9 themes descriptive of father and son relations. Limitations of the study resulted from the small sample size, bias introduced by self selection and the problem of reliability of retrospective accounts, thus limiting the confidence with which findings can be generalized. Interviewing and analysis were guided by eclectic application of existing social science theory.

Multiple levels of factors were found to characterize the relations between fathers and sons. Themes distinctly emerged which involved (i) personal dynamics of the relationship including rivalry, conflict and approval seeking, (ii) family concerns including the importance of mother, multigenerational patterns and developmental factors impacting on the relationship and, (iii) within the societal rubric, the experience of father as stranger, an image of him as hero and the role he engages in as provider. The
primary clinical implications of the study are the confirmation of the importance of addressing the father relationship for adult men and the possibility of utilizing father as an opening into male emotionality. Future research will be required in order to confirm the salience of these themes by incorporating random designs, larger samples, multiple sources of evidence and cultural comparisons. This will also refine and focus an initial developmental model of father-son relations and longitudinal male psychological development which is proposed here.
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Chapter I

INTRODUCTION:

Popular attention has recently begun to focus on the experiences and issues men are dealing with in their lives and one of the most consistent themes to emerge is that of men identifying the painful difficulties in relationships with their fathers. The father and son dyad has been described as "the most challenging of family relationships" (Yablonsky, 1990). Our myths and stories, religions and literature, as well as these personal experiences all confirm that this is both an important and a problematic relationship. Yet the social sciences have offered few meaningful insights into the nature of father and son interaction. This lacuna becomes important in light of the fact that family structures and relationships are under pressure from many directions and are changing in many ways. The chances that a boy will grow up living in an intact family unit together with his father, or that a father will actively father his son, are not good and are getting worse. What does that mean to a son? What implications does this have for male development? What is behind this widespread interest by men in their fathers?

This study focuses on understanding fathers in relation to sons, looking upon the father son relationship as an important component of family dynamics and a key to the reproduction of fathering and of masculinity. The questions addressed are "how do adult sons perceive and understand the influences of their fathers, in looking back over the course of their lives?," and "what characteristic themes typify these relationships?". "Understanding fathers" is a challenging and complex task requiring the integration of a multitude of diverse and interactive factors. Comprehensive use of a broad range of literature guided this work.

Relevance for Social Work

Social work has long been a female dominated profession and very seldom has it deliberately focused on male psychology or experiences. The question "what do social workers know about fathers?" was raised in an important survey of the literature by Grief and Bailey (1990) which concluded that what we do know, we don’t get from the literature. When fathers are studied, it is in their role as perpetrators (particularly of sexual and physical abuse), as alcoholics in dysfunctional families, as missing and needed in the home, as
embattled and suffering, as "disengaged" and resistant to clinical intervention, as unwilling or unhelpful parents or as contributors to antisocial or unhealthy attitudes and lifestyles. This author's own recent search for fathers in family therapy literature turned up 32 items: 10 referred to sex abuse, 5 to father resistance in therapy, 4 to single fathers, 3 to father's role in child psychopathology and 4 to alcoholic fathers. Spurred by a conviction that this depressing picture of fathers is distorted, simplistic and harmful to practice, this project hoped to focus attention on more healthy father functioning in order to describe "what works?" rather than simply "what's wrong?".

Culture relies on the father-son relationship for the transmission of masculinity and passing along of guidelines for appropriate male behaviours. The suggestion has frequently been made that certain serious social problems may be linked to inadequate fathering. While many apparently stereotypical "masculine" behaviours have apparently lost their utility in modern culture, we should be careful to separate those behaviours from the deeper sense of what it is to be male today, a topic many men are re-examining widely. The view that masculinity itself is the problem is not helpful because it is likely to polarize the discourse and easily leads to blaming, guilt or to inappropriate attempts at change. Fathers are especially important to sons because it is they who can most effectively impart a more mature masculinity. It is important therefore to focus on this relationship in order to gain a greater appreciation of the possibilities for change.

Social workers deal daily with the casualties of family problems and must make decisions influencing the lives of clients and their families based on their values and conceptions about normal and healthy family dynamics, including for example, what to expect from fathers' participation in the family. Over the past twenty years, we have come also to appreciate more fully the persisting influence of one's historical family throughout adult life. In assessing needs and in considering options for our interventions in the lives of families, it is important to optimize our understanding of the experiences of all its members: we should therefore not ignore the father and son relationship.
Goal of the study

This study was an exploratory investigation into the general question of father and son relationships. Its primary goal was to describe themes typical of these relationship and to identify factors which influence their quality. A significant part of this goal was to give voice to the experience men have of their fathers and so further our understanding of both male relationships and psychology.

The image of father is widespread and pervasive in our culture. Religions have described God as the father or grandfather, our society has been identified as patriarchal, and many of our social roles are apparently based on an image from past constructs of the father role including teacher, policeman, hero, ruler and healer. Yet in recent times, the personal experience of father has diminished greatly and in many ways it is more difficult now for father, the man, to participate in the life of the family, than ever before. This study sought to identify and describe some of the obstacles to that participation.

This focus on males in family relationships is not intended to diminish the obvious importance of females in the family. Rather, it hopes to contribute towards a more honest, complete and apparently burgeoning literature on male experience, just as the past twenty years has seen massive amounts of work on the corresponding phenomenon of being female. Such work has helped to reveal the gap in social science research and writing on specifically male experience.

Although there seems to be much loss and anger at the absence of fathers, both in the literature and in life, no general agreement exists about whether fathers play essential roles and what that role should optimally be. One working hypothesis is held that much of what passes between fathers and sons is seldom verbalized, and hence is unstudied. A primary goal of this investigation was to hear respondents’ stories, and to use those stories to enlighten others about what passes between fathers and sons. The study sought out men’s personal accounts and makes frequent use of respondent’s stories toward this end. Despite many problems inherent in these relationships including the difficulties of making verbal what may not often be articulated, it is felt that the search for eloquent and powerful voices was not futile.
Theoretical Orientation

This work is guided by principles taken from a variety of theoretical orientations. Insights from theories of psychosocial development (Erikson, 1950) are used in the overall design of the study, biological and psychoanalytic work describes some of the predispositions looked for in understanding the dynamics of male interactions and family systems theory and social learning theory helped to identify some of the factors influencing the current state of the relationships under consideration and the context within which these relationships exist. This eclectic approach has previously been labelled "human ecology" in an attempt to unify the social sciences with a concept borrowed from the physical sciences (Hawley, 1950; Dutton, 1987; Nett, 1988). Often considered together with family systems theory, it applies many of the important theories seen in the social sciences to human endeavours in a multi-levelled approach to analysis and understanding.

The most fundamental tenet of ecological theory is that of interdependence between the population under study and the environment in which it exists (Micklin, 1984). Environment has been defined as "whatever is external to and potentially or actually influential on a phenomenon under investigation" (Hawley, 1950, p.65). In this case the population is father and son relationships and the environment is the multitude of family and social characteristics which heavily influence those relationships. This ecological emphasis on physical and social context has been transposed to social work previously (Germain, 1979).

Bronfenbrenner (1979) has described the ecological environment as a series of "nested structures, each inside the next, like Russian dolls" (in Nett, 1988, 282) in order to emphasize the way each approach to understanding is contained within the larger realm or rubric. In this context, biological and psychoanalytic theories are used to understand intimate factors related to self and interpersonal relationships; family systems and psychosocial theory is used to examine human phenomena in the context of the family and personal journey through life; and culturally deterministic theories such as social learning enlighten us about forces exerted by the greater context within which the object of enquiry is situated. The direction of influence between levels is generally from the broadest to the narrowest, that is the societal context shapes the family experience and the family context in turn shapes the personal experience (Freeman, 1991). Conversely, it takes tremendous unity and force from the
personal levels to impact upon the higher levels of family and especially on society.

The differences between these various levels has been blurred in some cases by, for example, feminist theory on attachment which links the psychoanalytic developmental theories about early parent infant interaction with the sociological observations on how parenting is done in our society (Chodorow, 1978). Family systems theory has strong overlaps with ecological theory in that it also emphasizes multiple levels of meaning and analysis, the importance of power relationships within the systems and the interdependence of individuals within a system. The emphasis on the family as an independent emotional system (Kerr & Bowen, 1988) found in family systems theory is perhaps the greatest difference.

In practice, each application of ecological theory will differ in emphasis according both to the researcher's orientation and to the question under study. There is some movement currently towards an erosion of the traditional boundaries between the social sciences. An ecological framework seems particularly well suited for organizing a study of fathers and sons because of the multitude of factors involved in these relationships and because of the balance it can bring to this complex topic.

In order to cover the full range of dynamics within these relationships, blind spots in our theory must be avoided, when possible, although there is always danger in using an analytic tool which is then too broad or diffuse. It is this author's own belief that politically inspired theories which dominate much sociological, feminist and social work thinking, ignore or condemn, at the peril of their usefulness, much of psychological and biological contributions to human understanding.

This study has also been influenced by feminist thinking in some important ways. One important feminist contribution to the social science research dialogue has been to cast doubt on the notion of true objectivity in the positivistic search for knowledge. Thus, a researcher's own agenda or personal biases should be made clear at the outset. This author believes that although males have, as has been charged by feminist scholars, dominated social science theory and research, that this prior work does not necessarily describe actual male experience of the world; that in fact it often obscures it. An insistence on the rational at the expense of the experiential actually masks much about how males live in their world. Certainly, this prior work has seldom allowed that it is deliberately studying specifically male
experience as such. To base our understanding of male psychology on this prior work therefore is seriously mistaken.

What is required is exploration of the emotional world of men, an area all too often declared empty or frozen. This study intends to focus on sons' personal experiences of their fathers in the context of their families and society with the expectation that father may prove to be a key to men's inner lives. Many men are currently turning their attention to their fathers in attempting to understand themselves and their experiences. It is hoped this work will help to shed some light on what they can expect to find.

**Structure of the thesis**

The balance of this introductory chapter (I) includes a brief history of father participation in the family. It will serve to highlight contributions from various perspectives into understanding fathers and at the same time allow some of the more persistent themes about fathers to begin to emerge. The last section of this chapter briefly introduces broad themes from prior father research and then describes the rationale for the focus, method and style of analysis used in the study.

The method chapter (II) provides detailed research procedures including comments on the sample, interview, limitations of the study and a descriptive profile of the sample obtained. Appendices A, B and C provide the research material used in these procedures. The analysis chapter (III) describes the procedures used to organize and analyze data, resulting in nine themes typical of father and son relations. Appendix D gives a case summary of each subject interviewed and Appendix E presents a compilation and categorization of the material obtained in the form of chronological stories from the relationships.

These nine themes are divided into three chapters (IV, V, and VI), each addressing a different level or category of theme: personal, family and societal. Each of these chapters integrates both relevant theory and more detailed consideration of previous father research into a discussion of the various themes identified.

Finally, chapter VII summarizes the study, highlights the more salient findings, identifies some of the implications both for practice and research and concludes the work.
A Brief History of Fathering

Evolutionary/biological

The first question about fathers and families is how long have they been around in more or less recognizable form. It seems clear that families have emerged as discrete units separate from larger tribal or extended family groupings only in the last several thousand years of European history, but also that some form of bond and mutual cooperation has existed between mothers, children and fathers in most cultures for much of history (Mount, 1982). For our purposes, the meaningful question becomes "how did father become involved beyond the sexual act itself?" One currently accepted view includes an evolutionary perspective while another offers an analysis based on power. We shall return to this latter position after a brief exploration of the former through some bio-evolutionary history.

The evolutionary position basically argues that at some point in our ancestral past, it became adaptive for parents of both sexes to participate in post parturition care of the offspring: children with fathers assisting in their care were more likely to survive than those without. Our closer relatives - apes, gorillas and chimpanzees - generally exhibit little father involvement with offspring: the primary task for dominant males seems to be to ward off competing males. Both human babies and their lactating mothers require large supplies of high energy nutrients and benefit greatly with protection from difficult environments. Within this view pure altruism cannot exist so that if fathers participate by protecting and contributing sustenance, it is because this provides some advantage to the survival and spread of their own genes (Alcock, 1984). Although the mechanisms involved in the heritability of such behaviours as protecting and providing are not well understood, it is not unusual for sociobiologists to theorize in this manner nonetheless.

We can begin to see some themes emerge here from the gender division of roles in reproduction. In prehistory, females clearly gave birth and nursed infants and males' contribution took the form of protecting and to some extent providing, and later on in teaching skills relevant to survival (Wilson, 1975). These aspects of fatherhood - providing, protecting and teaching; and a strong sense of its social construction - will re-appear with
varying emphasis constantly throughout history.

Only a brief word about the other approach to understanding the evolution of the family is required initially. Based on the work of American ethnographer H.L. Morgan, Engels (1884/1942) described a pre-historic time of promiscuous sexual relations and loose, maternal dominated social organization. According to this view, only with the advent of horticulture approximately 12,000 years ago did more or less monogamous male/female family units begin to become the dominant form of social organization. Prior to this era, a time of matriarchal rule and rather ductile sexual relations was thought to be the norm. Engels and a number of feminist writers since have described this "historical subjugation of women" by men who were envious of maternal power and chose nuclear family styles as a way of dominating women and children and protecting personal property. Fatherhood is then the primary means of maintaining control over women’s reproductive rights (Kraemer, 1991). This analysis attributes patriarchal family structures to male authority and patrilineality as evidence of continued male derogation of women’s position.

It is interesting to note how contrary this explanation of male involvement in family is to sociobiological theories which see this participation in monogamous family arrangements as only reluctantly agreed to by males as a trade-off in the struggle to differentially reproduce. We must resist the temptation to become sidetracked at this point into a debate on cultural versus biological determinism: the view taken here is that there is an interactive relationship between the two and it is important to understand the influence of both on family development. That women menstruate, parturate and lactate is not inconsequential, nor is basic sexual dimorphism. Neither are we bound to make our life choices solely according to biological predispositions. We can see however from these examples how "scientific" evidence can be evoked in support of contrary views of human behaviour and understandings of male motivation.

Cultural Comparisons

One way social scientists have tried to examine pre-historical parental styles is to study cultures which appear to have changed little for many thousands of years. Hunting and gathering was the primary mode of economic activity for the vast majority of human history
The sociologist Alice Rossi (1978) says that there are theoretical upward limits on the amount of nurturant behaviours that we can expect from fathers, based on biological predispositions. While this seems to be confirmed in this brief examination of fatherhood thusfar, it would be difficult to make the case that in mainstream North American culture we are at or near this limit. We should also be careful not to assume that nurturance is the sum total of parenting behaviours, that fathering is simply mothering by males. There are many factors at work in our own society which influence, well beyond the bioevolutionary levels, the amount and kind of parenting that fathers do.

**Pre-industrial fathers**

This look at fathers now moves forward in history to pre-industrial western Europe and North America. There is no doubt that agriculture, notwithstanding the excesses of Engel’s accounts of family origins, had a profound effect on social organization. Settlements and cities expanded while nomadic lifestyles disappeared. Families and extended families grew as food supplies became more stable, and economic activity was organized around agriculture, especially animal husbandry and cropping.

Again, we can find evidence of this historical rural lifestyle in present day form in the relatively few mixed family farms that have survived here in Canada. This style of
production emphasized the cooperative aspect of the family as an economic unit. There are
distinct spheres of interest, particularly in relation to jobs requiring physical strength versus
endurance (resulting primarily in fathers being active on the farm itself and mothers within
the nurturant atmosphere of the home), yet it is also far more likely that fathers have some
daily presence in the home and especially that women and children participated importantly
in economic activities on the farm (Hareven, 1978). Each member contributed to the overall
production of the family according to ability. Correspondingly, other family functions such
as caretaking, teaching and healing were contributed to by several family members as well.
Greater family size and the tendency to spread childrearing over many years are, of course,
also important factors affecting the distribution of labour within the family. Pre-industrial
American families averaged 8 children (Demos, 1983).

**Industrial Revolution**

These general comments about huge and complex patterns of social change are offered
as broad descriptions of those times and may be rightly viewed as selective historicizing. It
is fathers’ place with which we are concerned, however, and it seems quite defensible to
argue for example that the overall impact of the industrial revolution and urbanization on the
family had its most serious repercussions for the fathers.

Although some refuse to admit that the industrial revolution was a revolution at all - it
spanned several generations and came in several waves in transforming economic and
social lives in Europe and North America - there is no doubt that profound changes were
brought upon the social lives of individuals in those countries, and in the remainder of the
world, by the industrialization of economies over the past hundred and fifty years. As
capitalist factories arose, virtually everyone - men, women and children - became involved
in production for wages. This was a profound change from the economy of the family farm
both because it introduced the direct relationship between time worked and money earned and
because family members began to earn wages separately from other family members. This
is indeed consequential: it involved a shift from a time in which the family unit was the
primary element of economic production to one in which individuals became labour in the
marketplace: from being a part of a collective economic unit, family members became
isolated components in the production of wealth. No longer were family members required
to cooperate on a daily basis for their survival. Rather, they would go out of the home for long periods daily, alone, to earn a living.

As wealth accumulated and fewer workers were required to participate in the wage economy, more social changes took place. Evolving concerns for social justice and a decreased demand for labour led to children being taken out of the active workforce and instead placed daily in schools, particularly in growing urban areas. Teaching children became a professional occupation so that fathers, now busy wage earners, stepped back from their previous involvement in such activities (Lasch, 1978). Also as wealth became accumulated, women began to leave the workforce: it was a new sign of capitalist achievement for a man to earn enough income that his wife did not need to work. Wealthy early capitalists would often hire maids in the home, so that child care and nurturant duties would be provided by paid help, but take place in the family home. Families still tended to be much larger and nurturant activities beyond breastfeeding were much more likely to be carried out by older siblings or relatives. Children would have been, by our standards, largely left to rear themselves.

With the establishment of the industrial wage economy, women spending most of their time in the home, and new beliefs about the developmental needs of children, the role of the mother within the family came to be seen as paramount (Demos, 1982). The rearing of children became more clearly the mother’s task as an appreciation grew of the importance of early childhood and even prenatal experiences on adult development, both contributions of the new fields of psychology and the social sciences. This continued the process of greater gender diversification or family role segregation which was occurring especially for the growing North American middle class men and women.

Increasingly then, father’s role became more solely defined in terms of the breadwinner role. The measure of his worth became a question of his ability to accumulate wealth and to provide adequately for his family. Gender based divisions of labour developed distinct spheres of influence in the family, with the mother clearly dominant in terms of influence in the home and father in the marketplace. As father’s role in the home waned however, his financial power in the family became more profound. By relying completely upon his income the family became dependent on his earning ability. So, at the same time
as his presence and influence within the family was attenuating, his absolute power, in an economic sense, over the family was growing.

Fathers leaving the family on a daily and sustained basis influenced not only his role in the family, but also his experience of the family: as well as becoming an emotional stranger, as alluded to previously, his continued experience of the world has been shaping his character (Demos, 1982). Daily contact with workmates with whom he may only share his external self can tend to contribute to a reliance on qualities which are suitable for success in work - competitiveness, ambition, aggression, need for control, lack of emotionality - but seem to be inappropriate in the context of the family. These same characteristics are of course recognizable as male sex role stereotypes. When we see these attributes as being shaped by our economic role, we can begin to look beyond the apparent incongruity of such characteristics in relation to the family and appreciate their developmental function in an economically competitive world.

Especially in a prosperous and ambitious North America, this identification with the provider role came to mean great expectations for males: rather than contenting oneself with carrying on the work the father had done before, it was expected that a man should surpass the material achievements of his father. These, of course, are developments which exert a strong continuing presence in our families today.

Absence is really what this economic based shift has meant for the father’s role. He left home daily and is gone from view for most of it. His emotional connection with the family decreased and his identification with the role of provider grew enormously. As a virtual stranger, his power as feared disciplinarian of last resort grew. His commitment to work often seemed to surpass that to family, for this is where society measures his success. Men have always contributed economically to their families but probably never as exclusively as in modern middle class North American families.

Post War Fathers

Post war responsibilities of the father’s role at home were expanded marginally in the sense that it became expected that he would ensure adequate sex role identification in his children (Pleck, 1987). One could argue that concern for this particular function actually came as a result of the lack of a humane father presence in the family and of the over
importance, in an emotional sense, of the American mother. The fear was that without a
strong male presence (as was now common), boys would become emasculated but even that
girls would be adversely affected. Mead (1961) and Parsons and Bales (1956) both argued
against the emotionally dominant mother influence and called for more father involvement
to balance the family and lead toward a population less fearful and less obliging of authority.

The dominant paradigm for research into father influence in this era was one which
compared children from father absent and father present families. The theory was that lack
of strong male figures might leave children confused about "normal" sex role identities. It
took thirty years of research to show that the presence of fathers did indeed help children to
have a stronger sense of self, but that the particular style - traditionally masculine, feminine
or otherwise - of the father had no bearing on the sex role identity of the children: the
relationship is more important than the content (May, 1992). Father absent research showed
that sons in families without fathers tended to show more delinquent behaviours, were
cognitively disadvantaged and less socially able than two parent families; although the
multitude of potential intervening variables presents difficulties for this type of study
(Pederson, 1976).

The concern that fathers should teach children, especially sons, sex appropriate
behaviours is really a re-appearance of the father in his role as moral guardian, which
predominated in pre-industrial times. What has changed is the nature of the teaching -
instead of a very sectarian concern for the souls of one's offspring, fathers now became
responsible for shaping their social psyches, their super egos in fact. The responsibility is
the same: to teach children, especially sons, about the nature of the world, their
responsibilities in it and to prepare them to survive "out there", on their own. The difference
is in the nature of that world and the type of preparation required by children; but not in the
nature of social expectations of the father role. Note however the malleability in the social
role of father, how some aspects of his function vary with those of mother and with the
nature of society's demands, even while the theme of father as provider runs clearly
throughout history.
Introduction to the Study

Father Research

The lack of a clear and developed body of social work research literature on the question of father-son relationships led to a widened scope in a search for relevant work. Four major and related areas address the topic of fathers and fatherhood in various ways: the absent father research investigations which originated after the second world war; the psychological and developmental literature, some of which has recently shown useful theoretical developments; the feminist inspired investigations of the "emergent" or involved father; and the recent popular writings from the men’s movements which address various themes of men’s experience, including the "hunger for father". These areas will be briefly described here in this introductory chapter and then discussed in more depth in the context of results in the discussion chapters. Ecological theory is useful in order to frame a presentation of this research because the groupings appear to fall naturally into our three levels of understanding: social, personal and family.

Absent father research sought to determine the influence on families of loss of the male parent primarily in terms of the family’s diminished ability to adequately socialize children. An appeal of this type of research has been the power of the simple logic in the natural design: if children with fathers act one way and children without father act another, then differences must be due to the father. Results have not shown unequivocal relationships between the absence of fathers and such suspected deficiencies. This seems to be due to complications from other variables, for example mother attributes and skills, socio-economic status, age at loss of father, ethnic background and presence of other adult figures (Pederson, 1976). The paradigm does not permit statements about the influence of fathers, only about his absence (Lamb, 1986b).

Correlational studies have sought to determine father influence by measuring similarities between fathers and sons in terms of personality, behavioural and social outcomes. Overall, these studies found that boys most closely modelled fathers with whom they had solid relationships, whatever the personal characteristics of the fathers (Biller, 1971). The present study re-opened some of these types of questions from the perspective of sons who
are fully grown. It asked adult men how they perceive the influence of father in their life choices and how similar to their fathers do they see themselves as becoming? The subjects in this study were socialized in an era when Parsons' notions of "instrumental" and "expressive" roles more accurately described gender roles for fathers and mothers. Structural functionalist explanations may still contribute something to our understanding of father, particularly in his primary function as "provider" (Daly, 1992).

On the personal level, many modern theories about the role fathers play in the psychic development of their sons may be traced to Freud's Oedipal theory of 1913. The key element for our purposes is the role fathers play in helping boys to come to identify themselves as separate and different from mother, and thus in opposition, male. It is the resolution of this dynamic which is thought to strongly influence the relationship between a father and his son.

The question of whether fathers do actually play a large role in helping sons to break mother attachment underlay this study. How would evidence of this process manifest itself in adult life? The extent to which interviews about father yield information about mother may give a good sense of the extent to which she plays a vital part still in the adult man's life. One shortcoming of psychoanalytic theorizing is in its tendency to see the role of the father passively, as if his mere presence were enough to satisfactorily influence his son. It has been noted in the current men's movement literature that even if modern fathers are physically present, they are not unlikely to be emotionally absent (Corneau, 1991; Osherson, 1988). This study sought to explore whether a strong relationship in itself is vital to a boy's development.

On the family level, little research has been done which focuses on the particular role father plays in his involvement with sons. Recent developmental work has tried to show that, given their absence from the family, fathers are indeed capable of greater nurturant involvement with their children. Fein (1978) advocated the emergent father as a more involved, nurturant role within which men would actively participate in care giving to their young children. This participation is believed to benefit both children and fathers (Lamb, 1976). Work like that of Radin, 1981) and Pietropinto (1986) has attempted to erase the
"myth" of male inadequacy around childraising. This study looked for signs of differences in outcome for sons who describe their boyhood father relationship in warm, intimate terms, as opposed to one which is characterized as harsh or distant.

A major theme emerging from the popular literature on men's issues (e.g. Bly, 1990; Keen, 1991) also addresses the relationship between father and son on all three of these levels. Many writers have noted for example the importance of decreased father-son contact due to technological and economic developments over the past one hundred and fifty years (Engels, 1880/1942; Kelly, 1989). The suggestion has been made that this has resulted in a lack of direction and a sense of spiritual connection for modern men and a lack of strong interpersonal relationships with other males (Bly, 1990; Corneau, 1990). Jungian inspired work on archetypes and mythology suggest the personal need of men for mentors; idealized male figures from whom they learn how to be moral men themselves (Moore and Gillette, 1990). It is not clear to what extent a father can play this role for his own son, but this study looked for indications that sons found learning, inspiration and wisdom in their fathers.

In sum, many of the questions this study addressed were those which dominated past research as well: How do men see and understand their fathers? What are the long term effects of father influence? Can we see differences attributable to the nature of the relationship? Do fathers play instrumental, teaching or mentoring roles, and help their sons "break" from mother? It asked these broad questions of the adult men themselves, seeking their stories from a long term perspective on the past and used narrative and qualitative methodology to organize and analyze the responses.

Research Focus of the Study

It was the exploration and description of meaning or significance to respondents of their fathers that is central to the study. A research methodology was required which would provide sufficient sensitivity to detect differences in meaning, but also be broad enough to cover a wide range of experiences and flexible enough to follow up and amplify results. Qualitative analysis is particularly suitable to investigate questions of meaning or personal
significance (Mishler, 1986). The problem of studying what events actually mean to respondents suffers from the paradox of being on the one hand, perhaps philosophically unknowable, while on the other hand, key to our goal of understanding experience. It was believed that relatively unstructured interviews would provide closer approximations of reality for subjects than normative data. The assumption made here is that, in the last analysis, meaning is only meaningful to oneself, but that our deepest experiences are common.

Method

The telling of family stories has become an area of interest for family therapists recently (Stone, 1988; White, 1986; Freeman, 1991) who believe that there is a close relationship between the story told and personal experience and attitudes. The story may tell facts but it also reveals how the teller sees him/herself within the context of the story and how they have come to understand the meaning of different events in their life. The analysis of narratives has also become the focus of some research attention as well (Polkinghorne, 1988; Mishler, 1987). Colin Peile (1988) has summarized the important debate between what he labels the empirical and the normative approaches to social work research and proposes a creative paradigm which utilizes a synthesis of methodologies.

Credibility problems of narrative research revolve around questions of generalizability and replicability (Hudson, 1982; Fischer, 1981). However, investigations which are exploratory and descriptive enjoy an abated need for scientific agreement. Where conclusions are drawn full explanations are required (Patton, 1990). Qualitative techniques can support and give breadth to normative findings (Peile, 1988). This research intends liberal use of verbatim responses in order to minimize interpretation and distortion. As Polkinghorne says, "the realm of meaning is best captured through its expression in ordinary language" (1988, p.10).

The relationship between story telling and self identity has received some attention in narrative literature. One hypothesis is that each piece of a narrative serves to reinforce the self that is being presented in the interview (Mishler, 1986). The suggestion has also been made that the telling of the story serves to provide a sense of continuity of self for the teller (Crites, 1986) and hence its therapeutic function. The association between the story teller self in the interview and the historical actor self in the story is an interesting one. Because in a
sense, the father/son relationship is about how men reproduce themselves, this study added another dimension to the dynamic: much from both of the primary actors in the narratives is contained within the present day narrator. The hypothesis was that men as they age not only become more like their fathers, they begin to feel as if somehow they are their fathers.

Analysis

While qualitative analysis attempts to be led by the data in building theory through accumulating and successively organizing recurring patterns found within the results (Glaser & Straus, 1967; Patton, 1990), it is important to identify and describe the influence that prior knowledge, research and theory has in approaching analysis, for this will lead to some extent how data is organized and what categories are found. The position taken here is that especially in the social sciences, true objectivity is not possible and claims for freedom from bias is likely to obscure important preconceptions. Taking sides, according to Becker (1966) is inevitable. The bias brought to this study then should be made clear. This author sees himself as an advocate for men as fathers, bringing attention and hopefully understanding towards their relationships. Beyond that, the sources of theoretical insights, influences and decisions made in analysis will be made clear whenever possible.

Qualitative analysis as described by Straus (1987) works closely with the data itself to build conceptualizations and theory with which to view and interpret the evidence gathered, but does not attempt to test hypotheses. Rather than imposing a particular theoretical framework, it attempts to see what emerges from close inspection and successive organizations of the data. The primary aim of this research was to identify and describe emergent themes typical of father-son relationships, and to begin to identify factors which enhance or impede healthy father and son relationships. Qualitative research therefore seemed well suited to use as an approach toward the analysis of the interview data.
Chapter II

METHOD

This study used a qualitative methodology. Subjects were interviewed using a guide which combined unstructured and structured questions. The relatively unstructured questions gathered self report data in the form of anecdotes or stories to address the primary objective, which was to explore the nature of adult sons' perceptions of their relationships with their fathers. Structured questions focused on respondents' own assessments of their father and his influence on their lives. These retrospective accounts of father and son relationships were then subjected to qualitative content analysis to yield themes descriptive of these relationships and to identify factors which are important to their quality.

Sample

The goal of sampling was to obtain for interviewing a broad range of men with a heterogeneity of experiences of their fathers. While truly representative sampling was not feasible, it was hoped that the group of subjects would not be atypical or significantly skewed in any particular direction. Deciding how to select a sample required making an assessment of the relative importance of several factors with little solid or definite information for guidance. The first method considered was a purposive sample selected by the researcher on the basis of known interest or involvement in issues between fathers and sons. It had the advantage that informed and articulate subjects would have been used. The disadvantage of this course was in the problem of getting a sample with only very limited range or diversity. These subjects would have been limited to those known directly or indirectly by the researcher and his relatively academic and professional contacts. It seemed likely that prior men's movement literature has already identified and described many of their concerns (for example Corneau, 1991, Osherson, 1988).

The other sampling method considered was self selection. It was thought that self selection would be more likely to obtain subjects from a broader strata of society. A certain amount of bias would also be introduced with this method however, although its extent and significance was unknown. Based on widespread popular interest in the media and in various
men's movements and writings, it was expected that many men would have some interest in
discussing their relationship with their father, that this is not an unusual thing for many men
today to be doing. At the same time, there was some concern that those who would respond
might be those with more difficult experiences with their fathers than was typical and actually
be looking for counselling or insight into their problems. Still, it was felt that this latter
factor could be identified in subjects and to some extent controlled. The opportunity to
access a wide variety of men from different social strata was a strong incentive, so the self
selection method was used to obtain a sample. Any sample as small as this (12 subjects) will
not be representative of fathers and sons generally, but may still provide useful and important
data. The problem of bias in the sample selection is discussed further in the sample profile.

Advertisements seeking participants in a study on father-son relationships were placed
in various locations on a large university campus, in one edition of the bi-weekly university
newspaper and in one edition of a regular relationship column in a major daily newspaper.
Copies of these advertisements can be found in Appendix A. This latter source yielded the
majority (8) of respondents for the study so that 4 men responded from the university
environment and 8 from the wider community. A total of 12 men were interviewed, each for
about 90 minutes. The self selection bias of the sample may be significant with reference
to age. This is also discussed in the sample profile.

The sample size was limited to 12 in the interests of manageability of data. While
12 would be considered a small sample if quantitative data were being gathered and
hypotheses tested, the exploratory nature of this investigation meant it was not required to
be organized around the use of statistical manipulation. Rather, given the depth of
information gathered from each respondent, this design was expected to provide ample
material from which to extract descriptive information with enough subjects to be able to
identify commonalities in their experiences. There is always a compromise made in
qualitative research between depth and breadth of data collected. This size of sample was
also influenced by the limited time and resources available in a project of this nature
(Master's Thesis). Sampling decisions attempted to balance fairly equally the issue of gaining
important information from a range of subjects, rather than focusing on either depth of
information or a broad based sample.
It was decided to limit the sample to men over the age of 30. More will be said about age in the discussion but the initial rationale is described here. It was believed that all cases would be interesting and so no general exclusionary criteria were established other than that for age and absence of serious mental health problems. Some men were parents themselves, some had minimal contact with their father over a long time period and others’ fathers were deceased. Assessing the relative importance of these particular factors was outside the parameters of this study, although they may well be interesting. It has been suggested that the birth of a son and the death of his father are the two most important events in a man’s life (Osherson, 1986).

An assessment of the mental health of subjects was limited to the fact that no subjects were currently under psychiatric care, nor did any appear to have psychological problems which obviously impaired their life functioning. This judgement was based on an initial telephone conversation during which subjects’ interest in participating in the research was explored. The researcher has some experience in the mental health field.

The decision of where exactly to set the age criteria was somewhat arbitrary although it does follow Clark (1986) who studied the experiences of 10 blue collar adult sons (over 30) of blue collar fathers. However, even though empirical support is limited, clinical and theoretical justification for this 30 year criteria is not lacking. First, the obvious point is that in order to experience a longitudinal relationship, one must have lived sufficient time. The intent was to gather stories from different ages, including one from the adult period of each man’s life. Second, individuals in this stage of life are generally expected to be well into what Erickson (1950) terms generativity, a time of being productive in society. It was expected that subjects’ involvement in this developmental task would be of interest in relation to their fathers. Thirdly, it is believed that at around this age individuals begin, generally, to realistically appraise their place in the world (Freeman, 1991; Bly, 1990; Osherson, 1986). The dreams or delusions we acquire as adolescents begin to fade and questioning may begin about society’s rules and our ideals that have guided life thusfar. Finally, by this age, individuals have normally gained some emotional distance from their family of origin and may therefore tell stories with more candour and insight. For many sons, their fathers are approaching death at this time as well, a fact which we would expect to intensify father-son
concerns.

The impact of other demographic variables was not expected to play a significant factor in predicting the nature of father-son relationship, but can provide useful indirect information about life functioning. A heterogeneity of personal histories and backgrounds was anticipated. A summary of demographic information for each subject is included in Table 1 and is discussed in the sample profile.

Incorporating design structures which would result in cultural or class heterogeneity of the sample was not part of the design, nor does the research deliberately consider how such variables influence the nature of father and son relationships. These variables may be interesting but are outside the parameters of this investigation, which allows that it may be describing predominately mainstream experience. The hope of course is that some of what is found to pass between these fathers and sons is true generally. Similarly, the focus on male experience does not imply that female experience is not important. Rather the belief is that male experience has not generally been well described. It may well be that many of the observations made about fathers and sons are true also for daughters and mothers, or for fathers and daughters.

Procedures

Subjects responded by telephone to advertisements, over a period of approximately four weeks. The daily newspaper notice yielded 8 subjects, flyers posted at the university 3 calls and the university newspaper ad only one respondent. During the initial conversation, the research project and requirements of their participation was outlined. Every caller meeting the age criteria agreed to participate. Interestingly, only one caller responded who was younger than the age limit of 30 and had to be excluded on that basis.

Each subject received the introductory letter by mail at least one week prior to the interview. Audiotaped one to one interviews were conducted by the researcher to gather data. Interviews took place no longer than 3 weeks after initial contact. It was expected that the advertisement, the telephone conversation and the introductory letter (Appendix A and B) which outlined the basic interview format, would stimulate respondents to begin to reflect about their fathers prior to the interview itself. It was hoped that by giving subjects time to
think about stories ahead of time, they might be more articulate and perhaps more forthright. Subjects were offered no financial remuneration, but at the end of the interview they were invited to select a book from a selection on the topic of men and fathers.

Interviews were conducted by the researcher at times of mutual convenience at the UBC School of Social Work or the researcher’s office. Interview format is discussed in the next section. As well as being audiotaped, notes were frequently taken during the interview process which occasionally assisted in clarifying transcription. No follow-up contact was made unless subjects specifically requested transcripts or research summaries. No attempt was made to validate or cross check the accuracy of data obtained in the interviews because it was felt that this information as presented was itself the object of the research. Although it would be interesting to interview the fathers as well, for example, it was the adult sons’ perspective that was under investigation in this project.

Interview

Face to face interviews were the primary data gathering method. The assumption was made that the perspective of respondents is meaningful, knowable and expressible (Patton, 1990) and that an interview is not primarily a stimulus-response activity which attempts to re-create identical questions and contexts for each respondent. Although a standardized guide was developed, other probes were also used and occasionally tangents followed during the course of an interview if this seemed likely to shed light on the relationship. It was the goal of the researcher to create a relaxed and relatively informal atmosphere so that subjects would speak freely. According to a feedback form administered at the end of the interview, most reported feeling comfortable during the interview.

The interview was developed through three pilot interviews with known informants in which content and order of questions was varied and feedback obtained about the interview process. These initial questions were developed through readings of the literature, discussions with peers and several "expert" consultants and through the direction of the researcher’s own knowledge, experience and curiosity. Through several revisions questions were clarified, dropped or expanded and the order of the interview varied. The material from these pilot interviews was not included in the final sample. A three part interview resulted (Append. C)
which consisted of a brief demographic fact sheet, a guide to the personal or family stories, and a set of open ended but structured questions. Interviews lasted approximately 90 minutes. This order gave subjects a chance to begin with straightforward factual material and then to narrate their stories.

The focus in the interview was on stories or vignettes. It was requested that these describe an episode typifying something of the relationship between themselves and their father at various stages throughout life. The first was to come from birth to 7 years of age, the second from 8 to 13, the third from 14 to 19 or the age at leaving home, and the final from any period in adulthood, usually the most recent interaction. This information was outlined prior to the interview, in the introductory letter. The age distinctions also follow Clark (1986) who interviewed 10 blue collar sons of blue collar workers, and is meant to roughly mirror pre, primary and high school age levels. Also, the first two ages approximately bracket the Freudian latency stage of psychosexual development which is begun with Oedipal resolution and ends with puberty. It was not required that stories be factually accurate, or even that they refer to real life events, although respondents seemed to assume that this was the expectation. Stories were assumed to be meaningful as presented and no attempt was made to validate the data objectively. Appendix C (part a) outlines the family stories portion of the interview guide.

It was not anticipated that all subjects would present complete prepared stories and prompts were made, as needed, to gain a lucid image from each time period. Questions were asked in descending order on a default basis, so that if the first, "is there an incident that stands out in your memory?" got adequate response, questioning would then move on to the next time period. If not, the next prompt would be "what sort of things did you (and your father) do together?", and so on. It was decided by the interviewer that an area had been covered adequately when it was thought that an image of the subject at that period could be described. Several respondents had very little to say about particular time periods.

The structured questions sought information describing father, family, self and father’s influence. These topic areas were often covered in the course of telling the stories and so they also were asked only on a default basis. The specific questions were designed to provide more objective and comparative evidence about how the subjects perceived their
fathers, their awareness of his influence on them, the particular style of their family and how they saw themselves. The questions in this last area were expected to help identify images of self which could be compared with the material on father. Generally, questions on family and self were asked last and contributed least to the overall data. See appendix C (part b) for this section of the interview guide.

At the end of the verbal response part of the interview, a brief feedback form was administered.

Stories

Family stories as a data gathering method can vividly represent information in a very condensed manner. The use of stories can also convey rather intimate personal information from respondents because they may be less likely to be examined, controlled and filtered by concerns for social appropriateness. Sometimes the meaning of events is not consciously clear to story tellers, they are merely relating historical and memorable incidents.

Theoretically this project gathered 48 stories (4 from each time period for 12 subjects). There is in reality no completely precise way to count the narratives obtained because of the difficulty of precise definition. For the purposes of analysis, stories were defined as accounts which involved at least the two characters, father and son, and something happening. To answer the question of definition for respondents, they were told that this simply meant descriptions of incidents or interactions that involved fathers and respondents and ideally typified something of their relationship.

In some cases, respondents’ stories included elaborate settings, detailed narratives and several levels of analysis or interpretation of the events. In other cases, subjects denied that they had any such stories - and then gave many. Still others described and analyzed their interpretations rather than related things which actually happened. Some stories were conveyed with moving eloquence and went on for many minutes while others were very succinct: "So I hit him and left" for example. Prompts as outlined in the interview guide were sometimes helpful. Three or four men were obviously not in the habit of story telling and remembered illustrative incidents only when they were asked specific questions about father or family.
Many organizing decisions are made continually in the course of such an analysis and some of this is outlined in the next chapter. The basis for choices made about the inclusion of verbatim examples however should be clarified. Generally, these examples were selected on the basis of their ability to highlight a specific point which had been raised in the discussion. In some cases, many potential examples existed which would also highlight the same point and so clarity and impact also became criteria for selection. Several speakers were highly articulate and their words are used much more frequently in the results. It was the intention however, to select stories which were generally representative and not simply those which contain unique impact or interest. The point is not to tell an individual’s story except to the extent that it illuminates the topic as a whole.

Limitations of the Study

The limitations of this study result from characteristics of the method, limitations due to finite resources and the problems that are inherent in the broad nature of the research question.

Qualitative methods

Problems with qualitative research are frequently identified as pertaining to reliability and generalizability (Hudson, 1982). Ideally, qualitative research has high construct and content validity because it can directly address questions of psychological meaning for respondents. In this study many of the stories stand alone, presented as results of the research. Confidence is held that these pictures of the father relationship are indicative of the subject’s perceptions. There is of course no way to verify any of the events or other interview material and it is easily conceivable that fathers and other family members would give different viewpoints. In some cases, interpretation of stories was provided by subjects. Checks on the meaning of incidents or other statements were made by the researcher during the course of the interview.

The problem that the meaning assumed by the researcher is not that of the story teller compounds into a larger problem related to the assembly of categories of variables of father son relationship. Errors made in understanding individuals might be expected to be exaggerated when considering more subjects. In practice, it appeared to work in the opposite
direction: observations about individuals may be mistaken, but themes are supported by
evidence from many respondents and so would tend to prevent erroneous directions being
taken in the presentation of results. The groupings of factors are held together by a logic
which is generated by the researcher and he freely admits that many other ways of making
sense of this data could be found.

It is believed that this material is highly meaningful to respondents. For some,
speaking of painful or difficult times was obviously therapeutic. At no time however, did the
interviewer feel the need to stop the interview or avoid any questioning due to emotionality
in the respondents. Several subjects indicated, either on the feedback form at the end of the
interview, during the interview itself or informally in conversation with the researcher, that
"it was good to talk about it". The meaningfulness of the material does however compound
the issue of veracity. It must be remembered that results are those reported as meaningful
to the respondents at the time of the interview, but that they do not necessarily correspond
to any objective accounting of events.

The retrospective nature of data gathered does not present a problem to the credibility
of this research since verifying accuracy was not a goal of the study. The stories which a son
told as an adult may well be quite different than those that he would have told at any of the
previous developmental stages. The retrospective nature of the material does however limit
what inferences we can draw about the actual course of events or development of the
relationships. Especially for men who had consciously attempted to understand and work on
their relationships with father, we can expect that the emphasis they place on events currently
reveals more about their present understanding than about what actually happened at the time.
How men speak in the present and how they understand the past are both believed to be
important to giving a picture of the relationship with father. The important thing is to
remember that when we get a picture from the past in this manner, it conveys much
information about the present as well. We may in fact be learning more about the sons’
current life issues than about what actually happened in the past. Several other studies
looking for effects of the paternal relationship on sons concluded that contemporary
influences were equally as strong to the developmental process as the relationships themselves
(Kay, 1989; Gorsuch, 1987).
Highly anecdotal results such as these will often contain limited generalizability and the discussion must address which points are clearly restricted in this way. The intention, however, in using men’s own narratives is to provoke an appreciation of situations and examples which the reader can recognize. When we strike a cord in this manner, results can be said to be highly relevant. When we manage to suggest alternate explanations for familiar material, the results can be said to be useful. The real research outcome in qualitative analysis is the generation of hypotheses from the results. This is addressed in the final chapter.

The interviewer would have preferred to meet with subjects several times. Subjects were interviewed only once and were asked to describe sometimes sensitive information about themselves and their family history in a relatively unstructured way. Great reliance was therefore placed on the ability of the researcher to quickly gain rapport with each subject and of course, this was established with varying success. Problems of inaccuracy due to subjects presenting socially appropriate material and issues of reliability such as whether they would repeat the same story over time would also have been addressed more adequately with a design that included several meetings between researcher and subject.

The study would also have benefitted from a larger sample because one as small as this cannot claim to be representative of the broader population. Attempts have been made to describe the sample in detail so as to identify any dimensions in which it seems uncharacteristic. Despite this, any conclusions must be tempered by the knowledge that this was a small self selected sample of men who volunteered to speak to a researcher about their relationship with their father. This self selection skews the sample so that we cannot consider it representative of the general population.

The original intent of the design was to use quantitative methods to triangulate and thus strengthen the data gathered. Qualitative and quantitative methods together can be used to deal with each other’s weaknesses (Peile, 1988). A questionnaire would have been developed which asked a broad range of questions of each respondent in a format that would allow comparison of results. Standard measures were also to have been used in order to compare family profiles and indices of current life functioning. This type of design could
have permitted the testing of hypotheses but would also have required a sample of many more men. It was decided that the most important initial step would be this exploratory study seeking descriptive information about relevant themes involving fathers and sons.

**Sample Profile**

The intention in the research was to interview as "average" a sample of men as possible, so as to be able to identify common themes of typical father and son relationships. It was hoped that the sample would be reasonably broad in terms of the range of experiences and socio-economic backgrounds and not skewed in any particular direction. A pure randomly selected sample would have ensured adequate representation from different sectors of society but, because of resource limitations, the method of volunteer response to advertisements and notices was used to select the sample.

The overall psychological well-being of this sample was, however, slightly unusual relative to what we expect to be "normal" or "average". Four of 12 men had received or were currently having some form of counselling: one of these four subjects requested referral information from the researcher in order to continue to be able to work on issues related to his relationship with his father, another was currently but infrequently seeing a counsellor - his marriage had broken up several months previously, and the two others indirectly mentioned therapy or counselling they had received at some time in the past in attributing the source of insights or awakened memories. Two other men mentioned that they had participated in men’s groups.

This researcher’s belief is that many of these men volunteered to participate in the research because they were aware of father related issues which had current interest for them and they saw this interview as an opportunity to explore these further. For example, the subject who requested further referral information had identified a connection between his pattern of difficulty with males in authority and his experience with his father. Other subjects were facing challenges which the close involvement of an older male might help to resolve, such as relationship, career or direction in life questions. These interests were not seriously impeding life functions so as to warrant clinical intervention, nor did they appear to be particularly unusual age related concerns. The subjects did seem to have gained the insight
that talking about things helped them to gain understanding. Also, they would almost invariably have claimed that the father relationship was an important factor in their lives.

A summary of the demographic profile of the sample is found in Table 1. Names have all been changed. Ages ranged from 30 to 54 with a mean of 38 and median of 35. Fathers were an average of 30 years old when the subjects were born. Subjects came from families with a mean of 4.8 children (median = 4), with three having 9 or more siblings.

**Table I. Demographic profile and associated factors:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Income</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Father's Income</th>
<th>Father's Age At Birth</th>
<th>Number of Siblings</th>
<th>Birth Order</th>
<th>Age Left Home</th>
<th>Relationship Status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brent</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bruce</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dan</td>
<td>37</td>
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<td>33</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>17/26</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>2.9</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>20</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Key:**

Income:
- <$20,000 - 1
- $20-35,000 - 2
- $35-50,000 - 3
- >$50,000 - 4

Education:
- <highschool - 1
- high school - 2
- some university degree - 3
- degree - 4

Marital Status:
- married - 4
- separated - 3
- dating - 2
- single - 1

Frequency of contact:
- > weekly - 1
- > monthly - 2
- > yearly - 3
- < yearly - 4

**SWLS Range:** 5 (low) - 35 (high)

**Median age:** 35
Only five of the 12 men currently have children of their own, (an average of 2 each), which is perhaps a sign of times changing over a generation. It is difficult to say how many more of those interviewed will eventually become fathers themselves, (perhaps 3) but those that do will be considerably older than the age at which their fathers became parents. This is an interesting factor influencing all family relationships. The self selected age bias of the sample is interesting. None of the advertising mentioned the age criteria for participation because it was thought that the response pattern might be informative. Three of the 4 oldest men (and none of the younger men) said that their wives had suggested they volunteer for the research. The younger men tended not to be in satisfactory marital relationships. If we exclude them from consideration, the age range is 30 to 43 with a mean of 34. Only one man replied to a notice who was under the cut-off age. He was 21 and had to be excluded from the study. It is possible that the ages of men reading a newspaper relationship column may be similarly narrow, but it also seems probable that exploring the significance and meaning of father in one’s life is a concern for men during a relatively narrow time frame in their thirties and early forties. In the discussion chapter, possible explanations for this phenomenon will be proposed within a context of life span development.

Average annual income of the sample was low at around $25,000 with only one man earning over $50,000 and three earning less than $20,000. Seven men were employed full time: three in traditionally blue collar occupations (painting, mechanic and telephone lineman), three in middle management jobs (editing, producing and community work) and one in construction sales. Four subjects were students or working part time (one as a musician and actor) and one was officially and recently unemployed. Men who were extremely busy with career or family involvement would be less likely to volunteer to participate in this type of project.

If incomes were a little low on the average, education may have been slightly high: five men are university graduates, three more began but did not complete post secondary education, three have high school diplomas and one, the highest income earner, did not finish high school. Fathers’ incomes averaged over the last five years were higher, averaging almost $35,000: four earned more than $50,000 annually and only two less than $20,000. Education might have influenced participant’s interest in a research study, but is unlikely to
have directly influenced reports about fathers.

The marital status of the men in the sample is weighted towards the single or divorced end of the population spectrum for men in the age group. Only five were currently married. Of these, Rick had just announced his intention to separate from his wife of 8 months and Dan spoke openly about his unhappy marriage so that only 3 of 12 reported being happily married. These same men were 3 of the 4 respondents over 40. Brent had been separated for several months. Dave, Marty, and Kevin all have non cohabiting relationships, and Gord, Marvin and Bruce have all been single for some time. It may be that a failure of marital relations prompted the interest for many of these men in same sex relationships in general and father in particular.

Overall then, the average subject was between 30 and 40, well educated, earning less than $30,000 per year and of course, white. He was slightly less likely than not to be currently married. Certainly, there are large segments of Canadian population which this sample does not represent, but there is good range of employment, income and education levels.

The sample obtained was atypical in the inclusion of only one ethnic minority, Dan, who is a married Sri Lankan graduate student with a son of 7. Only two others, Gord and Paul were born outside Canada, both with British parents. Brent, Frank, and Rick were all born here in British Columbia. The remaining six men came from the Prairies or Eastern Canada.

The other dimension in which this sample seems a little unusual is that 7 of the 12 men were first born sons, although the families averaged 3 boys in each and so we would expect only 4. Two of the 5 other subjects mentioned older brothers who also had serious problems in their lives. In relation to this, the hypothesis was generated that perhaps first born sons have a more difficult relationship with fathers than their younger brothers. Some of the possible reasons for this are addressed in Chapter VIII. For the purposes of describing this sample, this factor would then support the suggestion that these men had somewhat more pressing issues than usual to deal with involving their fathers, and volunteered to participate in order to examine this for themselves.

The most serious sources of potential bias in the sample then would be related to age,
marital status and birth order. Answering the question as to why these particular men volunteered for the study became an important focus which is addressed in various ways throughout the discussion chapters. This question also helped to generate hypotheses suitable for follow-up by further (quantitative) research as noted in the conclusion. Given this group of potentially biasing factors in the sample and the nature of the results obtained, the focus in the analysis shifted from the original intention to describe simply "normal" father and son relationships towards one which also identifies obstacles to those relationships. Our interest and attention seems to naturally go towards understanding and resolving "problems" rather than towards uncovering and examining what works well in our lives.
Chapter III

ANALYSIS: GENERATING THEMES

To begin with the results of this analysis, 300 pages of data transcribed from the 12 interviews were condensed into 9 themes which typify various aspects of father and son relationships. These themes were grouped into three levels or categories of perspective, each one containing three themes. This chapter details the process by which those themes and categories were obtained. Each of the next three chapters will identify and describe the themes within the context of that particular perspective on the research question.

Grounded Theory

In its purest form, grounded theory attempts to build theory from the data by successively organizing and grouping and regrouping data into categories and factors (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). As Glaser and Straus (1971) point out however, the process of data collection, analysis and coding all tend to merge together with distinctions between them being frequently blurred. Ideally, the groupings become more and more coherent and unified by stronger and stronger associations internally and less and less extraneous or uncategorized data external to the classifications (Patton, 1990).

Categories are expected to emerge from the data and theory is built upon how this organization emerges, at the last stage of analysis. Perhaps every approach to qualitative analysis attempts to use this type of strategy to some degree. The "fitting" of data into groupings and successive organization of evidence is necessary in order to be able to present information in coherent fashion and in a manner which fairly and adequately represents the findings. As a method of analysis, however, it is most suited to field research where massive amounts of passive observations are collected and then ordered in some way. In an interview situation, the very questions we ask already impose some order on the material collected and so provide initial codings with which to organize and view the data.

That categories "emerge" purely from the data itself rather than from the mind of the researcher is also not completely accurate. The number of ways that a simple sentence could be classified will be used as an example to show how many permutations are possible. 34
Consider this comment from the Sri Lankan subject, Dan, drawn at random from the 300 pages of transcripts:

"Generally my father - when I wanted to stay at the residence during my vacation - if I had asked my father, he would have asked me to come home, but if I ask my mother, she would send me money, like that."

Some of the possible categorizations that come to mind (one filled with thoughts about fathers and sons) which we could conceivably make about this sentence alone are that it relates to:

1. Communication (with father or mother)
2. Differentiation from family
3. Poverty
4. Education
5. Expectations
6. Parental differences
7. Absence or distance from family
8. Mother preference
9. Distance from father
10. Attachment to mother

The list is limited only by the imagination and the truth is that the statement may contribute to any, all or none of these categories. Another researcher might develop a quite different list of categories from the same statement.

Given that the goal of analysis is simplification and ordering of data, then it is not feasible nor helpful to apply such a list to each and every statement on each page of data. To a large extent, the categories we select to organize data must therefore be taken from either theory or prior evidence and where it is possible, the sources of each identified. The way that they "fit" the data is important however, and this analysis followed the important principle of repeatedly returning to the data to see that concepts and formulations in fact represented the material.
Case Analysis

The approach to the data began with several close readings of the transcripts and what Patton (1990) calls case analysis. This initial strategy focused on the individual cases or subjects. For each subject a one page summary of the information given in the interview was created (Appendix D). These summaries contain a brief family history, some descriptive information about the father, condensations of the major stories related by respondents at the different ages, any important or relevant information currently influencing the sons in relation to their fathers and a brief comment about the current life situation of the respondents. They are intended to help orient the reader with brief pictures of each of the respondents so that quotations and discussion used subsequently in the text may be read contextually.

Cross sample analysis

The goal of the next stage of analysis was to build categories and groupings for the data obtained which apply across the sample. It began with the research questions as outlined in the interview guide (Appendix C). A large number of pages were headed with questions from this guide and as transcripts were re-read relevant answers, comments or quotes were noted under the appropriate headings. For example, all of the information given involving the subjects while they were younger than 8 years of age was recorded in a single category titled "earliest stories", a grouping which was obtained directly from the interview guide. Descriptive material characterizing the stories obtained at different ages is appended (Appendix E). The material from the stories was then further broken down and included in the factors and categories whose development is described next.

Categories

Originally, it was hoped that a single developmental framework could organize the data with responses to fixed questions being used to expand the story material in building a theory of developmental stages of father and son relationships. While this idea will be returned to later, it was found to be too unitary a concept in that an inordinately large amount of material would not fit within such a framework. The primary motivation in the analysis was to find a way to fairly and comprehensively represent the information given in the interviews.

As discussed previously in the introduction and as suggested by both ecological and
family systems theory, a division of overall categories into three rubrics was established: the personal factors related to the dyad itself including issues of self and growth for both fathers and sons; the family factors in which other members, especially mothers, play a part; and the social realm in which we find the societal context and external influences on the family and the dyad. How well this framework suited the data depended upon sufficient information being gathered which could justify such a frame. If, for example, little data was gathered about influences on the dyad from other members of the family system, this category would have to have been dropped. It was found that more than sufficient material justified these three categories and the challenge was both in limiting the results to these categories and frequently in deciding to which category a particular factor belonged. In some cases items were placed in several categories. Comments about communication for example, were a factor which had both personal and familial application. Others such as "hero" seemed to be derived largely from societal images about men as fathers and how they should ideally be, but this image impacted upon the personal connection between the fathers and sons. A list of initial coding factors, the categories in which they were placed and their source (as far as is known), is provided in Table 2.

Source of factors

Where particular social science "theory" or "academic" (literature) is referred to in the table as sources of factors, they have been described initially in the introduction and will be discussed in detail in later chapters. The sources listed as "research" refers to areas which have previously been the object of specific attention from academic researchers, those labelled "hunches" were hypothetically thought to be important based upon the researcher’s own experience, those listed as "family theory" came from that literature specifically and those listed as "popular" (readings) came from broader psychological, sociological or men’s movement writings. The term "interview" indicates that direct questions were asked about these items in the interview itself. Where several sources are listed they are in order of importance. "Data" refers to unanticipated factors that came from the interviews themselves.

Factors

The factors themselves are those items thought be important components or aspects of the relationship between fathers and sons. They are both influences upon the quality of
the relationship and symptomatic effects determined by the nature of each relationship, that is they both result from and influence how fathers and sons relate. Factors which came from the data are those which the researcher had not anticipated finding, but rather did actually emerge from their repetition in the material. In some sense, this was the discovery part of the process.

Table 2. Initial Coding Factors and Sources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Similarities</td>
<td>Personal</td>
<td>interview, theory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Accomplishments listed</td>
<td></td>
<td>data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Lessons from father</td>
<td></td>
<td>popular reading, hunches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Gifts</td>
<td></td>
<td>family theory, hunch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Loyalty</td>
<td></td>
<td>academic literature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Violence</td>
<td></td>
<td>research, popular readings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Competition</td>
<td></td>
<td>theory, hunches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Approval</td>
<td></td>
<td>data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Communication</td>
<td></td>
<td>theory, popular readings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Personal hero</td>
<td></td>
<td>popular readings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Attachment</td>
<td>Family</td>
<td>theory, research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Birth order</td>
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<td>family theory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Siblings</td>
<td></td>
<td>family theory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Discipline</td>
<td></td>
<td>data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Territory or &quot;turf&quot;</td>
<td></td>
<td>academic, hunches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Communication</td>
<td></td>
<td>data, academic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Father’s family</td>
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<td>family theory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Work</td>
<td>Societal</td>
<td>data, academic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. Success</td>
<td></td>
<td>interview, theory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. Images of father</td>
<td></td>
<td>theory, data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. Absence</td>
<td></td>
<td>research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. Role</td>
<td></td>
<td>research, academic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23. Hero</td>
<td></td>
<td>data, popular reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24. Career choice</td>
<td></td>
<td>interview, hunches</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Principles of coding**

Perhaps the most important stance taken in approaching the analysis was that of deciding to focus on intended or assumed meaning as fundamental units in the data.
Sentences were not "deconstructed" into grammatical points of interest. While this may be an interesting task for narrative analysis, it was avoided in this case for fear of distorting the intended meaning of responses and out of doubt that the result would be either more objective or more profound. The approach adopted can also make the error of assuming understanding where there is none, but this is minimized by demanding repetition from and across subjects in the various categories.

Initially, a fourth category was formed into which all personal characterizations by the respondents and comments indicating self analysis could be placed. These statements would tend to be offered as factors which explained insights the sons held about the interactive nature of their particular relationship. They would include factors such as feelings held about or within the dyad, whether they "clicked" on an interpersonal level, whether the sons held views of their father independent of their experience of him, what changes the sons noticed themselves in the course of the relationship and other "process" oriented items. This category was used in a multiplicative fashion to narrow the long list of factors, each of which could be isolated as important aspects of father and son relationships. The process items interact with the more fixed factor items listed above and so helped to determine their relative importance.

An example may help to clarify this procedure. Rick made the statement that his father never included him as a young boy in showing him what he did at his work. He explained that the importance of this fact was in his having no chance to see his father as a hero and so to want to model his example. We also learn from Rick that he still feels like an 11 year old in terms of his anxiety or nervousness around his father. This feeling in relation to his father then informs the comment made about work and his father as a hero and we hypothesize that the lack of modelling may be as much related to the feelings experienced around father as to father's behaviours with his son. If there is other material supporting that supposition within the interview, it would then influence whether we place the statement as a comment about heroes or about father as distant stranger. In some cases of course, the same statement would legitimately be included with several factors. This "process" category of factors was used then, in assisting in the categorization of the other types of factors by
providing a crude measure of emotionality, intensity and level of awareness.

This process of simplification of these recurrent factors into salient themes was guided by several other principles. The first is democratic in nature: the more often a factor was repeated, both in an interview and between various subjects, the more likely it would be regarded as a fundamental or basic theme. For example, virtually every respondent mentioned the role father played in discipline in the family, whether it were active or passive. The next is in a sense, the perpendicular case to that dimension: if a factor seemed particularly salient, profound or important it may have been included on that basis, even if it was a clear feature from only several respondents. Rivalry is a case in point for this situation: theory existed which would predict and explain such phenomena, thus lending weight to the decision to include it as a theme. In such a case, we should also be able to explain the reason why it was not found frequently in the interviews with other respondents. Here for example, it was suspected that those subjects mentioning rivalry with father were particularly astute and sensitive observers and the notion of rivalry would not occur without some self examination.

The way various factors subsumed into others was also a determinant in how the final thematic arrangements were settled. For example, the phenomenon that was noted in the data that respondents frequently described their successes, achievements or "moments of glory" was initially listed as achievements, but was then incorporated as a component of the theme "approval" as a major theme influencing the nature of father and son relationships. If factors could not be adequately incorporated into others but were too incomplete to stand alone, they were abandoned altogether. The details and rationale for all such decisions made in this way could not feasibly be included in this report. The strength and clarity of the discussion of each theme will have to provide indirect evidence that such decisions were made soundly.

Themes

Arriving at a manageable number of themes was not an easy or altogether satisfying process. Occasionally material is forced into areas where it may not be as salient or compelling as it would be on its own. A number of important observations must be lost altogether. Most unhappily, the researcher runs the strong risk of losing "closeness with the
"data" (Filstead, 1970) in imposing his own final ordering upon the results.

Table 3 shows how various factors were subsumed into the final 9 themes. They were, as described earlier, grouped into the 3 categories, personal, family and societal. The term "theme" is used broadly in this context. In the case of the personal and societal themes, it refers primarily to typical or characteristics dynamics between fathers and sons. The family themes describe important influences upon the relationship which determine to a large extent how those typical characteristics manifest.

1. Personal

The personal category of themes attempts to limit discussion to issues involving fathers and sons as if they existed in isolation, independent of the influence of others. Even this distinction is artificial because of course, there is no son without a mother, but mothers’ role is addressed separately in the family category. We address first inherited or innate drives and motivations and how they manifest in the psyche of men.

The three themes which emerged as most comprehensively describing the data on this most intimate or personal level of the relationships themselves are rivalry between fathers and sons, conflict and violence within the relationships, and a multitude of interpersonal dynamics associated with fathers’ judging or giving approval to their sons. These themes were developed from the factors in groupings that are depicted in Table 3 and are discussed in Chapter IV.

2. Family

Family themes address fathers and sons in the formative "cauldron" of their immediate social context. In the family, "mother: the pivotal parent?", emerged as powerfully and primally affecting the relationships between fathers and sons. Other family members were occasionally significant but generally faded in comparison to mothers. Father’s own family of origin experiences and the continuing impact of family traditions and history are discussed in the theme "father’s father: forces from the past". The interaction of stages of development for both father and son and how this impacts upon the relationship is the focus in theme 6: "father and son: growing up together". Chapter V contains this discussion.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Category</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Rivals</td>
<td>competition</td>
<td>Personal</td>
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<tr>
<td>(father as challenger)</td>
<td>similarities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Conflict/Violence</td>
<td>communication</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(father as foe)</td>
<td>violence</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>personal hero</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Approval</td>
<td>approval seeking</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(father as judge)</td>
<td>gifts</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>accomplishments</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Mother</td>
<td>communication</td>
<td>Family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(the pivotal parent)</td>
<td>turf</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>discipline</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Father’s father</td>
<td>gifts</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(forces from the past)</td>
<td>father’s family</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Father and son</td>
<td>development</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(growing up together)</td>
<td>attachment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>passages</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>7. Father as stranger</td>
<td>absence</td>
<td>Social</td>
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<td></td>
<td>role</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Father as hero</td>
<td>success</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>hero</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Father as provider</td>
<td>work</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>career choice</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. Social

Culturally specific constructions of the father-son dyad are addressed in the societal category of themes. Adult sons’ images of fathers, their sense of his role as a father and their experience of him in relation to these factors yielded three themes of fathers as strangers, as heroes and as providers for the family which are all highly influenced by external societal
factors. Chapter VI addresses these societal themes.

These various themes are pictures of father in different perspectives from the eyes of their adult sons. The rationale and explanations of these themes and factors which formed them will be made much more explicit in the following three chapters. This table is offered here as a guide from which to follow the discussion.

Theory

A variety of sources of theory were used in the analysis to frame this complex topic, helping to organize conceptualizations, categorize findings and generate new questions.

The personal level of themes uses primarily biologically based theory because of the insight this can offer to interpersonal dynamics. Although the personal level has perhaps the most fundamental application, it is not argued to hold the greatest importance in terms of size of effect. Father is first a biological relationship but also importantly a social construction.

The second discussion chapter addressing fathers and sons in the family context, uses family systems thinking to enlighten and expand the results. Feminism and psychoanalysis have also influenced the developmental theories examined which attempt to integrate the psychological within a social context.

The final category of results uses socialization and social learning theory to organize its themes of fathers and sons. These help us identify which factors in the social environment particularly influence interactions between fathers and sons.
Chapter IV

PERSONAL THEMES: FATHER'S SON

Introduction

This introduction addresses questions of relevant theory and literature, setting the stage for an examination of the personal themes between fathers and sons which were obtained through this research. As suggested in the introductory chapter, there is little in the way of a body of research and literature which directly addresses the types of specific interactions we can expect longitudinally between fathers and sons. The most comprehensive review of recent father research which has been directed to social work was by Norma Radin (1986) who summarized for social workers the past 15 years of feminist led developmental research, much of which supports a notion of the highly involved father as a capable parent. Radin concludes "In sum, fathers are not mere substitutes for mothers. They don't mother; they father... and the child undoubtedly profits from the diversity of experiences" (p.85). Beyond this, little meaningful discussion has appeared in social work literature with direct relevance to this topic, so the search for sources was broadened.

It seems appropriate to consider biological theories of fathering because first and foremost, father and son is a biological relationship. There has been longstanding debate in the social sciences on the extent to which biology influences human behaviour and even as major a proponent of sociobiology as E.O. Wilson allows that perhaps only 10% of human behaviour is clearly biologically driven (Baldwin, 1980). Still, an appreciation of how those factors influence fathers and sons is critical. Biology is clearly not destiny, but it is "an important component of male experience" (Doyle, 1983). One of the useful applications of biological theory is in its clear metaphors for human cognitive or emotional processes.

Life itself can be defined as that which grows or develops to reproduce itself (Keeton & Gould, 1986). Sons of course, are fathers’ way of making more of themselves, of dealing with the fact of our mortality and passing on that which of us survives - our genes. The minimal investment in terms of energy required to be spent reproductively does not diminish the fact that fully half the genetic material in every offspring is contributed by fathers. Biological theories assume that the primary motivation within every living organism is this
wish to make more of itself, the drive to reproduce. Sociobiology in particular emphasizes
the difference between males and females in terms of their best strategies towards this end
(Wilson, 1974), although it was Darwin himself who suggested that sexual selection created
sexual dimorphism: females are said to "choose" males with which to mate on the basis of
their ability to contribute good (strongly adaptive) genes and their willingness to assist in the
rearing of offspring. For this reason, according to the theory, "weaker" males do not mate
and thus their "inferior" genes die out. Males are said to compete with each other in order
to be chosen as a mate. As well as many supposedly stereotypical sexual behaviours,
sociobiologists argue that the aggression which we still see disproportionately in males is a
result of this predisposing influence, that aggression in males has survived precisely because
it has helped them in fact to become successful fathers.

One of the predictions this theory correctly makes is that in difficult times, more
daughters will be born, because individually their contribution to the survival of the group
is greater - one male can impregnate many females (Ruse, 1980). Another
prediction/explanation directly relating to fathers and sons is made by Trivers (1971) who
suggests that some amount of conflict between parents and offspring is inevitable because
although they share genes, they are also genetic rivals. The greater investment a parent
makes in any particular offspring, the less energy they have for others, yet the more
investment any one offspring receives, the more likely he or she will survive. The other
important consideration between fathers and sons is that they may become competitors for
access to unrelated females.

These are the important principles of biological influences on social behaviours -
competition, aggression, sexual differences in the reproductive process - and we can examine
results in the context of any of these ideas. The father and son relationship is therefore
expected to be marked by tension and ambivalence (Freud, 1905/1949): on the one hand sons
provide proof that fathers have reproduced successfully and their genes will carry on. On the
other hand, this is another male who could threaten his supremacy and even his life.

An example of this ambivalence is conveyed in this Oedipal age story from Dave,
who grew up on a prairie farm. The wish for the son to carry on his father's work and the
family's biological line is clearly expressed as an awareness of responsibility for this son.
Interestingly, the mother in the family situation is described as dominant and the son is gay
and so unlikely to carry on to reproduce the family name. (He had tried to conceive a baby
with a close lesbian friend, unsuccessfully, several years before!) Repeatedly during the
interview his ambivalence towards the father is expressed as qualified or indulgent praise: this
son already feels the superior of his father in some ways. His narrative is punctuated by
several stories in which the father is a disappointment for his failures to stand up either to
the mother or even to the very young son himself:

"The earliest remembrance I have of my dad and I being alone, there's a real
sense of disappointment on my part. That I disappointed him... I was this little
golden child who was going to carry on my father's name, and I was the only
grandchild. I was named after my grandfather.

Anyways, so the earliest memory I have of being alone and this sense
of disappointment came from - I remember going to a Thrasherman's Parade
in Maple (rural Saskatchewan) and A and P Motors, which is the John Deere
Dealership in Maple, was giving out these emblems that you can iron onto a
plain T shirt. I remember it was this piece of paper with this yellow iron-on
on it, that was for me. And I remember my father encouraging me as this kid,
to go up and get it. And so I had this iron-on transfer.

I remember taking it home and being very proud of it. It sat on the
fridge for what must have been an eternity and I wanted this thing on my
shirt. I used to always check this thing and make sure it was ok. And being
a kid at home, I wasn't yet at school. And it came to the point where we were
going to get this thing put on a T shirt.

And I don't remember what the circumstances were, what I had done
wrong, but I had obviously misbehaved. I was in the truck, standing beside
my dad. There were no seat belts at that point, and I remember my father
saying 'don't you dare rip that. I'll slap you if you do.' He'd never hit me
to that point and did not hit me since, but I don't know if I did something or
if he was having a bad day, or if there had been a conflict with mother, or if
there was financial stress or what. But I remember standing beside him and
ripping this transfer. [deliberately?] Deliberately. To test him, I suppose, to
test him. He stopped the truck and he slapped me. I just remember the look
of... the tears and the crying were not from being hurt - my father had not hit
me that hard - it was the shock that 'holy cow, I really pushed that man over
the limit'... I just remember being so disappointed, in him, in myself. And I
don't know why but that T shirt is still at home somewhere. We were taking
this damn transfer into town to get it put on in one of those shops."

He remembers being so disappointed because he had defeated his father by making him lose
control over something apparently trite, but also symbolically powerful because it represents
interest and respect in the father's life and work. This was a gift from the tractor dealer in
town that his father had wanted for him to value. In tearing the transfer, Dave rejected a
route of fulfilling the family path towards a life of farming as his father had taken and which
there was great hope that he would follow. The importance of "this damn transfer" is
revealed by the fact that the family is still in possession of it, 25 years later.

Psychoanalytic literature is one area which has substantial writings on father and sons
relationships. Classically Freudian theory posits biological drives as the source of internal
psychological processes which give rise to the development of the personality and the psyche.
The father/son dynamic is seen as a defensive source of masculinity for the son who
essentially submits to his father's power and thus comes to identify with him. In the original
formulation, which still receives both much theoretical and research attention (Ross, 1982;
Blos, 1984), it is the boy's erotic desire that leads to competition for mother, then fear of
castration and finally the defensive submission to father. This jealous rivalry and fear of
father with ultimately an acknowledgement of father's superior power brings Hans to resolve
the issue of identifying with father and breaking with mother. The father himself is
essentially passive in the sense that it is his presence alone and not his actions which presents
the threat and the power over his son.

Although Freud's contributions to direct understanding of parenting in general and
fatherhood in particular is rather limited, there have been important psychoanalytic
developments attempting to fill these gaps. Many feminist writers, beginning with the
Freudian Karen Horney have criticized the androcentric nature of this formulation of
personality formation. Rather than penis envy and castration anxiety, Horney proposed that
womb envy motivates the early identification with mother by sons (1928). She argues that
men are overawed and envious of the power of women to give life, an ability against which
men's influence and place in the world seems limited and insignificant. Only when the boy
comes to sacrifice his wish to grow babies will he come to identify with his father. During
the phallic phase boys must overcome this desire to be fecund like mother and according to
Horney, are at risk of developing misogynous tendencies. This envy of the power of the
reproductive capacity of the female combines with a strong early identification with mother
as the major caregiver or nurturer to produce in males a powerful but obviously frustrated desire to give life. By this theory then, males father in order to live out their unconscious desires to mother and to be like mother. Again, this does not seem a particularly compelling or complete formulation of the human psyche but a look at recent trends societally shows there is diminished opportunity for many men to father, and the suspicion arises that fatherhood itself, beyond the sexual act, may not either be strongly "set" in male behaviour patterns.

Male awe, if not envy, of women’s reproductive ability has been a theme for many writers. Fromm spoke of man’s envy of the power mothers hold over humanity by producing children who would love her always. According to Edith Jacobson (1950) men only overcome their desire to be like mother when they become fathers themselves and so finally come to emulate father. The narcissistic impulse in men is lived out only through fathering a son themselves, on whom they can both transfer the failings apparent by their own diminished potential and can idealize themselves as significantly impacting the future. As fathers, men can also experience themselves altruistically, balancing the narcissism with which they are cursed. Also, fathering provides a way for men to answer the question of the meaning in their existence, particularly in light of a mother’s awesome reproductive capability. Jacobson also suggests that men’s intense awareness of the shortness of life (due to their limited reproductive contribution) and fear of death combine to heighten an avoidance or fear of commitment which we can recognize as being labelled a stereotypically male characteristic that could inhibit involvement in fathering.

Recent themes in reworkings of the original theory have replaced drive theory with object relations formation thus shifting some of the emphasis from biology onto social factors. There has also been an appreciation of the possibility of the boy’s "non defensive identification with the Oedipal father", (Lerner, 1986, p.vi) in effect, that fathers can play an important active role pre and post Oedipally in identification, individuation and personality formation of their sons. Beth Fineberg (1986) argued for example that rather than fear of father being the cause of Little Hans’ phobia, it was actually the greater involvement by the father which cured it: the father was the cure rather than cause of the phobia. It was the increased closeness with the father that allowed him to lessen his identification with his
mother and strengthen his identity as a male. This formulation converges with much recent research that has shown active involvement with fathers preoedipally to be beneficial, especially for sons (Lamb, 1976 & 1981; Yogman, 1984; Parke, 1985; Radin, 1986).

Interestingly, in this study, the adult men enjoying the best relationships with their fathers generally were those coming from larger families and from those who had older siblings. It is likely that inexperienced and overinvolved parenting resulting from modern low parent child ratios actually presents new psychodynamic problems for the relationships. Most children will be the first born of their gender and there is much less opportunity to be socialized by older siblings. When benefits are reported for children with higher father involvement we should also consider his contribution as a percentage of the overall parenting and indeed, socialization, which a child receives.

Other writers have focused on fathers’ active role in the Oedipal drama by reminding us that Oedipus was the son of a father (Issacs, 1978: Ross, 1982). Ross pointed out that not only did Freud ignore the active father, he also ignored the reports of many patients in case histories, attributing their stories to fantasy rather than actual depictions of family dynamics. Ross suggests that much of the darker side of the father role results from universal pederastic and filicidal inclinations among fathers. He named this conceptualization the "Laius motif", highlighting the fact that, in order for Oedipus to slay him, Laius (his father) actively stood up, as competitor and foe, to block his way on the road. We will find evidence of this theme in our discussion of fathers and sons based on these interviews. Although the notion that fathers universally have such impulses is definitely unpleasant, in the light of recent societal revelations about the apparently vast extent of incest and other highly inappropriate sexual behaviour, it is a notion worth examining closely. If social strictures are really going to move from "behind closed doors" (Straus, Gelles & Steinmetz, 1980), the lights will have to be turned on as well.

Other post Freudian feminist authors have contributed to a reworking of psychoanalytic attachment theory which acknowledges the importance on later development of the fact mothers do most early parenting but arguing that father can play equally vital roles and that social and relational factors play a role as well as the psychodynamic (Chodorow, 1978; Yogman, 1982). Unlike girls, boys must go through a process of separation from a
sense of unity with mother in gender identity formation (Stoller and Herdt, 1982). Gilligan (1982) argues that this has dramatic repercussions for differences in psychological and moral development, some of which is also played out in parental roles. The appeal of these conceptualizations is in their ability to impart the cathexis or intensity of emotion involved for males in trying to separate from dependence on mothers and intimate relationships. Most men in these interviews still felt safer and emotionally closer to their mothers (and wives) than their fathers (and other men), a situation which has been described as broadly true in North American culture (Bly, 1990; Keen, 1991).

It was Freud who described the father and son relationship as marked by tension and ambivalence, although as we have seen, the actual contribution of the father is a phenomenon of his mere presence, rather than his behaviour. The major point of agreement that these various versions of psychoanalytic theories contain is in the responsibility the father has to help his sons separate from mother in the formation of their core gender identity and their gender role identity (Tyson, 1986). These dynamics are no longer considered as limited to oedipal stage processes and are perhaps better understood as part of a continual process of defining self and identity for man as father and as son. The process sons go through from being father's rival, his foe to finally perhaps, his pride, symbolizes this progression of themes which are particular parts of the dynamic between them.
Theory would predict research to find ample evidence of rivalry between father and son for mother's love and affection, particularly in early stages. Indeed, competition for approbation between parents is a major theme found in this data which is discussed in more detail in the chapter on family themes. In the personal context, however, we can look for direct evidence of such a dynamic of competition between fathers and sons.

Three men reported being aware of feeling competitive with father in relation to mother. (Not incidentally, these same men also all had major problems gaining recognition from father, a phenomenon addressed in the theme discussing "approval".) Of course, this does not mean that rivalry did not play a part in many more of the relationships; simply that most men did not claim to be aware of such a phenomenon. Psychodynamic conceptualizations of course apply to the subconscious; this was thought to be the source of their power. These three men were amongst the most articulate and insightful of the respondents and described many subtle family dynamics. They were all aware of powerful character influences they had received from mother and spoke of traits in themselves to which they attributed her influence. For example, Gord spoke of the "artsy" characteristics which he'd received from his mother. He felt that these traits made his father feel threatened, creating a tension which caused their problems relating to one another.

"I know how to draw and I can play musical instruments to a degree. I'm good on the clarinet. I've got his talent but its uh, you know [spasmodic?] My mom was heavily into arts. Her lifestyle was art. And she pushed me, she used to sit on my bed - which I believe is one of the influencing factors of my life that makes me so fucked up today - is because she sat down and she'd say "Gord, one day you're gonna be a great man". And she was just using me, because Robert was dad's favourite and so she picked me and she used me against him. Like she'd turn me into everything my dad felt threatening. My dad has been even to this day, he's threatened by me like you wouldn't believe."

Bruce clearly felt himself to be in competition with his father, and was also completely aligned with his mother. As his parents' marriage deteriorated into physical
violence through his late adolescence, Bruce attempted several times to intervene physically on his mother's behalf. He was injured himself on one occasion that he remembers vividly and painfully. The bruises, he said, took a long time to heal. When they were divorced, he negotiated for his mother with his father, very clearly taking sides with her and against him. He was well aware that his father perceived him taking sides in this way. He had begun to look down on his father, in much the same way a jealous suitor might, as early as age 12, when he tried to challenge his father's ignorance about the physical world. We have a picture of a son surpassing his father intellectually, although in this case, Bruce remained less powerful physically for many more years. He clearly explains the interpersonal dynamics in his family:

B. Its been like that from the start. Its kinda funny but, I mean, right from square one, its almost as if my mother took possession of me at a very early age and nurtured me in her own manner. And when my brother was born four years later, he followed in my father's footsteps. There's very little doubt in my mind that this was almost an unspoken agreement: that my mother got to mold me in her image and my father got to mold my brother in his image. My brother is very like my father, practically illiterate, much more athletic, in my opinion quite a violent spouse. And I have many more of the characteristics that are predominant in my mother's personality...

Most clearly expressing rivalry with father for mother's attention was Marty. When his father had an aneurism and then a stroke which caused him to spend 2 years in hospital, Marty responded by becoming "the man of the house", getting two part time jobs and contributing to household expenses. He felt happy that "she needed me". The loss of his father was not difficult for him because he "hadn't been around much anyways". Upon his father's return home, partially paralysed, Marty experienced a loss of his mother's attention because she now devoted herself to nursing the father. Marty says he "built up a growing resentment and bitterness toward my father". This grew until a scene was precipitated which saw a frustrated Marty at age 14, angrily and self destructively pounding his own head against the outside of the house, crying out dramatically "why wasn’t it me that got sick, instead of him?".
The rivalry between fathers and sons is importantly but not solely focused on mother. Sons who are moving out from the family and trying to establish themselves in careers also typically position themselves in relation to fathers’ accomplishments. Several men such as Bruce and Gord were still struggling to feel successful about themselves. Others including Dave and Kyle had already surpassed their fathers’ achievements and spoke with some condescension about the fathers’ feelings and understanding of their work. This dynamic of surpassing one’s father is discussed in more detail in chapter VI, in the theme of hero.

Psychoanalysts have identified what they term the "Laius complex" (Ross, 1982) in referring to problem of the son needing to succeed his father. They note that by obstructing the son’s path, the father forces the son to metaphorically become his executioner in order to reach beyond him (Osherson, 1988). In a sense, the son also liberates the father from the responsibilities of the role by surpassing his personal power. In achieving this mastery the son moves onto the same level as his father and can begin to have a relationship with the father more as a friend (Yablonsky, 1990). Bruce’s father joined in a physical fight between his sons two years ago, when he was 76 and Bruce 41 years old. He still seems to be attempting to provoke Bruce, his eldest son to overcome him so that he could then rest, assured that Bruce will succeed in the areas he thinks important, particularly career. Bruce struggles with current relationships, both intimately and with males in positions of authority over him, largely because of his incompleteness in this relationship. We can see that Bruce, despite his intellectual superiority, has never been able to figurately slay his father, and thus rid himself of some doubt about self.

At issue for the father is the nature of his relationship with his son, not of course, his physical execution. Rather it is the role, with its power and responsibility which must fade and a certain amount of "letting go" is necessary in order for him to allow the necessary shift between he and his son. It is a shift which must occur repeatedly although the first son will be most difficult. This was the son who first displaced father as mother’s most intimate partner, who carries the greatest ego transfer for fathers - and who suffered most at the hands of inexperienced parents. That men are often thought to be intensely concerned with establishing power and hierarchy in their relationships (Basow, 1986; Gilligan, 1982), is not unrelated to this positioning between fathers and sons.
The last time Gord saw his father he intended to confront him about the past, to slay him in a sense, but his father was still too strong. He avoided him, inhibiting the growth of Gord's self image and blocking his path toward success. He still considers himself a "failed writer", rather than a good community worker. Gord has always seen his father as the "top of the heap" in comparison to other men, a difficult and demanding man to compete with. When sons still seek approval from fathers, as so many do, the competition or rivalry with him is destined to failure, because it is he who controls the measure of success.

In Dave's story when he was slapped by his father at the age of 5, he remembers his disappointment at his success in getting his father to lose control: in a sense he has defeated his father prematurely and mother became the powerful force for him to reckon with in that family.

The rivalry that we see in these examples comes primarily from much later stages than what we would expect to be oedipally driven in the formation of core gender identity. It appears to be more related to social development than to that of the psyche, to a stage where boys are trying to separate or individuate from their fathers and begin to find their own way (Yablonsky, 1990). These men are not confused that they are male, rather their confusion is around what that means in relation to the important people in their lives. Tyson (1986) differentiates between what core gender identity and gender role identity. The first is settled when it becomes clear to the boy that he is indeed male and would have occurred prior to most of the stories which were accessed in these research interviews. Gender role identity is that more flexible and problematic structure from which males decide how to be male and are of course far more influenced by social influences and by unresolved, sublimated Oedipal tensions.

Conflictual tensions pulling sons in opposite directions between parents is a theme which was very common and will be discussed in more detail in the results section on Family Dynamics. Many more examples of rivalry between father and son will be found in that section as well as in the next theme discussion of violence.
Conflict and Violence: father as foe

If, as many writers, and the evidence cited above, suggests, a modern lack of strong fathering in sons’ lives results in a situation where Oedipal (and Laius) resolutions are seldom completed satisfactorily so that men strive to find appropriate expressions of their masculinity, we would expect to see continued evidence of such struggle being enacted between fathers and sons in later life. The difference however is that father is no longer the omnipotent figure he appears to a five year old and maturing sons may begin to challenge his authority outright, if not his control over access to mother. Violence may well occur when rivalry becomes intense. Of course, we would expect the overt causes of such outbreaks to be sublimated into other issues such as discipline and control.

Sociobiological explanations for male violence similarly emphasize competition for access to safety and to reproductive possibilities. Aggression is seen to have been highly adaptive for males for most of human history (Trivers, 1974). The threat of violence helps to keep hierarchy established in many animal groups, with the most physically powerful controlling access to the means of sexual reproduction. Where incest taboos are not strongly instilled, violence also presents a last line of defence against mother-son sex. In carnivorous animal societies, there is also the necessity to be aggressive in order to hunt successfully and much play fighting, learning and testing occurs in preparation for animals’ independent survival.

One of the primary expectations of the father role which is repeated across great cultural and historical diversity is of that as father as protector. Even in many animal and bird species, the father’s fierceness protects vulnerable mother and infants around the time of parturition. If there are vestiges of this kind of behaviour existing in human males, as many biologically oriented students of social sciences believe (Wilson, 1975; Trivers, 1974), it seems likely to be manifested at least in part in violent behaviour between males in families.

Human fathers and sons do indeed seem to reproduce much conflict and violence in their relationships. Virtually every respondent made comments describing some physical conflict or an awareness of its possibility as a means of resolving conflict with their fathers.
Men reported either incidents of fights, or more commonly, their reluctance to confront father for fear of the physical results. Marty found his father frightening even after he became partially paralysed:

"He was an intimidating man. He was 5 foot 8, this guy was farm raised, probably about 170 pounds. A rock. Even after he's had the stroke and recovered from the stroke, the left side was still good. I would never win in an arm wrestle with him."

He would never physically confront him either and has only been able to express his frustration - and his love - after his father's death.

Even in cases such as those of Marvin and Paul where the idea of challenging father was never a part of the relationship, such descriptions of father's physical presence were frequently presented. Marvin's father was a large imposing ex-policeman with whom he never tangled. Paul's father was not big but he was apparently a cunning and fearless fighter and we hear much about his battles as a young man which involved guns, knives, bottles and stones. In one story his father had to straighten out an "Arnold Schwarzenegger type" who was being a bully. In another he had to carry a "pistol" to protect himself from a fired employee in Jamaica. Paul learned from his father, and his grandfather (who "never lost a fight"!) that a man is only physically violent with other men, but never with women.

"This was another thing I also learned from my dad something I didn't like when I was a kid, was you never hit a woman. Because a woman is a weaker person and only a bully hits a woman. Never strike a woman. I used to fight with my sister and try to take a round out of her, but he says, never hit a woman. I knew if I did I'd get a licking. His dad also taught him that, if you see a man hitting a woman he'd go and bang, knock him down, that was it."

The messages he got from these stories of his father outlined appropriate codes or rules for male physical violence, suggesting of course, that in certain situations, it was absolutely required for a man to be violent.

Unlike his father, Paul, who seemed a very gentle man, has not apparently faced many violent situations in his lifetime. He quickly answered negatively to a query as to whether he had ever gone through a period of teenage rebellion against his father. Paul still struggles at feeling his father's respect and relies on his wife to put his father "in his place", to which he attributed an improvement in their relationship. Interestingly, in Paul's family, with 10
children, it was mother who "gave the kids a licking" and father who pleaded on their part for leniency. The dynamic of the social organization around discipline is addressed in the next chapter on family themes.

Research into men who batter has found that their father is frequently an important factor for men who exhibit this behaviour (Dutton, 1987; Gelles, 1985). Identification with a father figure has been found to be a significant barrier to violent behaviour (Brownfield, 1987). Current treatment approaches are divided between traditional reinforcements of the message of Paul's father to get it under control because "real men don't hit women" and those which seek to somehow break the link between masculinity and violence (Russell & Adam, 1992).

Several men indicated that, as boys, they had wanted more physical interaction with their father. Kyle and Fred both had very peaceful fathers who never lost their temper. Kyle remembered being frustrated with his father when he was 10 because he wouldn't box with him like he'd seen on TV. His father was a little older than most (38 when Kyle was born) and Kyle complained that he would never "engage" with his sons physically. Research has shown that boys prefer physical styles of play (Ross & Taylor, 1989).

Probably every son is either conscious of the point in time when he becomes more physically powerful than his father, or is curious about when that time will come and what it will mean to the dynamic between them. One of the things it may mean to a father who believes at some level that his role is to protect his family, is that, he is no longer best suited to perform that task. On a biological level, his power is waning. Certainly the more socially defined role of provider has superseded that of protector and the economic power this yields for most fathers renders the physical level less relevant. The question of why elders survive as they do in society, remaining powerful long after their physical and productive ability has been surpassed was raised as a difficulty for strictly biologically oriented theorists (Ross, 1982).

To the son however, physically surpassing father may mean that he is ready to go out to face the world alone. Oedipus became king after defeating his father. An example of this dynamic is expressed by Kevin, who had a very tumultuous relationship with his father. He
tells of the "battle royal" in which he challenged and defeated his father at age 14, seeing this now as one of those "manhood test type of things" that fathers and sons do.

"We used to fight. We fought like cats and dogs. I'd skip school and he'd have the day off and he'd come and hunt me down. I remember he tried to kill me with a pool cue once. Thank God, he missed and I was fast. I got caught in a pool hall. That was a favourite place to hang out. He grabbed a cue off the rack and tried to decapitate me with it. I got out of there by the skin of my teeth...

We had one battle royal there when it came to heavy fisticuffs, New Year's morning one time. And I ended up laying a pretty mean licking on him and I remember how bad I felt after that. I felt really bad. I left and had to go down and make amends. He was at work and I walked to his work and saw him and he was in pretty bad shape. I felt really bad. Looking back, I can see now it was a manhood test type of thing that fathers and sons do from time to time, I guess.

I was out being a bad actor and came home. Stayed out all night, drinking. Came home. He'd been out the night before, I think he'd been drinking. I think he was severely hung over, or half cut still. And I guess at that age I was feeling no pain and I was walking in the door at 8 o'clock in the morning. He was telling me that I shouldn't hang around with some of my friends because they were bad and they drank and did drugs. I told him to get stuffed because I didn't think it was right for him to pick my friends - that was the main issue. I told him he shouldn't be picking my friends and was really belligerent about it. So he decided I needed some discipline and that was his way to do it, to beat it into me.

But I showed him that he couldn't..... He came at me with his fists up, so I said, "ok, let's do it". I ended up getting the best of him... I had never struck back before, because I was too scared."

He was actually the only one of these 12 subjects who physically confronted his dad and won. He left home soon after, at the age of 15, although he doesn’t link the events in his mind and is not sure what influence this battle had on his relationship with his father. Kevin’s mother died by suicide at age 10 and much of his rage at his father and his new stepmother - which led directly to his leaving home - is surely emotion projected from that painful event. The image of the father’s execution is strong in this story and the remorse which Kevin feels about inflicting such pain on his father is striking. It may be that some of that regret follows in the knowledge that he was now truly on his own. The father’s devotion to Kevin’s stepmother at the expense of their relationship leads Kevin to lose all respect "as a man" for his father and suggests a kind of death of masculinity for the father.
in the eyes of his son.

The question of violence is often tied to the difficult issue for sons of paternal authority. Whether physical means were used to exert parental control appeared to be frequently linked to whether physical means were ever used by sons to challenge father's authority. Dan, Dave and Rick all related stories of being physically punished by their fathers and being left in shock and fear at his loss of physical control. In all of these cases this was unusual behaviour for the father and it stayed long afterwards in the sons' memory. Rick acknowledges that "If I'd had any balls back in those days, I would probably have walked right up to him and said...". He couldn't quite verbalize what it was he might say, were he actually to take those steps. He had actually announced to his father that he was leaving town to move to another region on the morning of our interview, in a rather covert way announcing that he was going to begin to take control of his life away from his parents. He went on to say that he still feels defensive with his father, "just like I was 10 or 11 years old".

In this case, we can see clearly the potential for growth in facing conflict. Simply avoiding intense and fearful situations leaves sons like Rick frozen in their emotional growth. The therapeutic value and wisdom of facing fear has long been recognized. It may be that strongly interactive relationships with fathers generally can help children to develop competence in dealing with fear, pain and challenge. Fathers' style of interaction with children has been found to be more physically active than mothers generally, even with young infants (Radin, 1986; Seigal, 1987; Ross & Taylor, 1989).

It has been suggested that the role of fathers is to transform aggression in their sons (Samuels, 1988). The intense focus which society is currently bringing to the question of intimate violence may be related to a general lack of strong father figures in families. This is not to suggest that violence is condoned when fathers are present, but rather to recognize that our capacity to control external sources of threats is always limited by the unpredictability of human behaviour and that greater father influence may help us to expand our own internal capacity to deal with potentially frightening or unwanted situations. It may well be that Rick, through failing to confront his father carries that unresolved fear with him and thus becomes more likely to be violent himself, as a way to try and prove himself and
overcome his internalized sense of failure. That fathers are most often the source of physical threats in families of course means that men must also learn to appreciate more fully the cost of violence in intimate relationships (Gelles & Straus, 1988) and to take responsibility for every behaviour they perform.

Beyond its overt destructiveness, the problem with violence is in the "psychic traces" or emotional trauma it can etch painfully in memory, often impacting on the victim long after the event. Bruce experienced a physically powerful and violent father who had been an amateur boxer. He also fought with his brother frequently as a teenager and even as recently as a visit home at Christmas two years ago. When he was 19, Bruce tried to intercede physically between his father and mother, around a time that his father was beating his mother regularly. As we have seen, he ended up being pushed down some stairs, and remembers the bruises taking a very long time to heal. The memory apparently still had not mended. He had failed to vanquish his father and provide safety for his mother. Bruce also felt shame at his failure to keep up with his father on the ski trails when he was 19 years old. Failing to meet the internalized expectation that he should be able to best his father came at great expense to his sense of self, as well as the lingering anger and fear which permeates his life still.

The threat of violence was also present for Gord, who experienced his father as an "intellectual bully", but never challenged him physically. He describes his experience of his father’s aggressive, confrontative style and the violent manner he and his brother have both developed in response:

"The first and only time that I’ve ever confronted him before this dinner table, it almost got into a physical fight, which is one of the reasons that I believe I go that far (to violence). Because with my father its like that. If you argue and you refuse to give ground, which I’ve only found this out once, if you refuse to give ground, its like "you’re not too big for me to take a round out of you" type of thing, you’re not too big for me to give you a good walloping".

It goes that far and I know that in my own arguing I’ve had to deal with that whole aspect of myself. If I argue with somebody the first thing that goes through my head is "am I willing to take this to physical violence?" Because if I’m willing to take this to physical violence then I’m going to say
anything I feel like. But if I'm not willing to take this to physical violence then I better temper what I say, which is a ridiculous way to look at things but I know that.. my older brother is just like that. He'll only argue to such a point and even if he's right, he still has that attitude."

Feminist analyses of male violence have recently focused on the part masculine socialization plays as a contributing factor (Kuypers, 1991; Miedzian, 1991). For example male ego or the need to be in control might be used to "explain" father's belligerent behaviour in the story above. It is not clear to this author how much such explanations explain, however, because many important questions remain: why is there a perceived need to be in control in some situations but not others? Is it not a universal desire to feel in control (as opposed to helpless)? What differentiates male egos in terms of when they challenge and when they accede? Is covert or passively aggressive accession preferable to confrontation?

There is certainly greater likelihood that males will experience violence in their lifetimes and some of that is well explained with traditional masculine socialization theory. Gord for example related an incident which involved both his father acting out his role as protector to his family and Gord joining out of role expectations about male "toughness" that we could not imagine occurring in a gender reversed manner. He asked Gord to go out with him to help find and defend his older brother who had some "biker" types angry with him over a drug deal:

"And some guys came by with tatoos all over them and they had chains in their hands and me and this friend of mine were sitting outside cause it was summer, and said "where's Freele" and I said "I'm Freele" and they said Robert Freele and I said I didn't know and they said tell him when we see him we're gonna kill the guy. They were fucking mean looking man, they looked mean. And so I went and I told my dad and my dad, for about four hours nothing happened and then my dad he comes to me in my room and says put your boots on, we're gonna go look for Robert. You know work boots, like fighting boots... "

Violence, then, was a concern in many of the relationships between fathers and sons. It was learned as a way of resolving conflicts and used to enforce or challenge the status quo. Developmentally, violent challenges to father's supremacy may be rare in modern families,
but there is something almost primordial about the phenomenon. It may be that the modern social problem of violence in families is related to tendencies which are "wired" into men’s make-up but not adequately acknowledged or understood. Certainly, violence as a conflict resolution tactic must be controlled between humans. Gaining an ability to overcome one’s fear and assert one’s position with authority, however, marks a powerful stage of growth for any self within a family system. As a teenager, Brent was proud of being able to tell his father to "fuck off" because it meant he had taken a risk and moved towards independence. Soon afterwards his father was happy to help him to move out on his own. An ability to see conflict in terms of its potential for growth could help us to re-frame much of what appears dysfunctional between fathers and sons. One of the strengths of analytic theory is in its prediction that conflict (but not violence!) is inevitable, that internally the psyche will always wrestle with conflicting forces (the "animal" and the social), and that that conflict will often become projected onto intimate relationships (May, 1986).
Approval: father as judge

The two primary sources of theoretical perspectives discussed thus far propose two different kinds of explanations for one of the most important themes which emerged from these interviews; that of father as judge and sons seeking their approval and blessing. The biosocial explanation would see this behaviour in terms of its adaptive advantages - essentially the less powerful must do what it takes to be safe in the presence of the more powerful figures. The psychoanalytic perspective would focus on the narcissistic father attempting to deal with his own mortality and on the son’s developing ego personality. Both notions find support in many examples in these interviews, but we will also begin to take advantage of a view which is influenced by the social learning and socialization theories that will be examined in more detail in chapter VI. Approval seeking characterized the entire tenor of many of the relationships between fathers and sons. Its manifestations can range from the apparently superficial but constant soliciting of praise to asking for profound judgements about character or worth and frequently it appears to operate on several levels simultaneously.

Wanting to be liked, loved or approved of by others is probably a fundamental human emotion with socially adaptive benefits: if individuals are rejected by the group or by powerful members within it, they may be excluded from the group at risk to their very survival. In many animal species, it is young males in particular who are driven away from the social grouping as they mature, just as in other times it was expected that young men would go off to find their fortunes. Approval to them means security within the social grouping. It is not surprising to see a dynamic powerfully manifested in the frequently difficult relationships between fathers and sons which serves to check and test out how the powerful members are feeling about others.

The pervasiveness and difficulty of this theme is illustrated by the fact that virtually all subjects reported not only some deed they had performed in order to gain the approval of their father but their concern too, about a time when he had disapproved of them. It appears to be more of a major component in those relationships which could be described as unhappy or conflictual and it seems likely that feeling frustrated at gaining father’s approval is related
to this unhappiness for many men. Comments from Gord illustrate how compelling and how frustrating this drive to satisfy father can become.

"Because I wanted so much for my dad to acknowledge me, I joined everything. I got malnutrition when I was a kid, when I was about 11 again, around that age, because I was joining everything. I joined his drama group, which was after school. I joined his puppet making group, which was after school. I joined his writing group, I took his English class in grade 8, I did everything in order to please... I was in soccer and basketball, volleyball, badminton, swimming, gymnastics, everything in order to get his attention and I was an accomplished kid. Man if I could be that person as an adult I'd be a millionaire for christsake. I was involved in everything. Never skipped a class, not one class all through high school, didn't skip one class. Because I, I don't know, I think I was trying to get his attention. And he didn't acknowledge it ever.

The quotation also points out how identity formation plays an important part in this dynamic. The father's positive involvement - his blessing - can help to steer the son in his faltering task of forming a healthy self identity, just as its absence may leave the son wandering through unknown territory. The approval in this sense then is a kind of guidemap for the son's development. Approval from mother might be welcomed, but would not instruct in the same way.

When sons do get praise from their fathers, it is a very powerful experience for them, staying deeply embedded in memory. Marty describes an incident in which he finally got some of the recognition he had always wanted from his father, a sign he took to mean that he was progressing and had talent. Marty's story also highlights another common phenomenon involved in feeling approved by fathers: even when they are willing to express it, they are notoriously poor at expressing praise.

"One time when I was 19, I was singing this Neil Diamond song where he sings "I am I said" in a really deep throaty way and my dad was listening to me and I would always try and get that moment of the voice like Neil Diamond does it. My father would just sing it right over top of me and say "aw, you're horseshit", which I'd heard many times before. And one time I heard in that one word, horseshit, - and he had about five different meanings to it depending on the tone and inflection and the differences were so incredibly subtle, ok - that time, I caught, pride. And wow. Just what it did to me. Phew, right up inside."
The narcissistic interest of the father in Marty's case is striking. Performing music had been a major source of enjoyment for him for many years and Marty says he could have played professionally himself. We also learn that as a baby this father would sit by the crib and endlessly put things into his son's left hand, taking them from his right in an attempt to make his boy left handed like himself. The father himself just failed to make it in the major leagues as a left handed baseball pitcher and undoubtably had dreams of his son "making it".

Some of the other dynamics that are played out in the issue of approval are discussed next.

i) Unfinished business

Approval seeking and giving is a two way dynamic in which both parties participate and fathers' unfinished business can be an important component. Sons typically try to prove, usually with evidence of accomplishments, their worth to fathers, but fathers tend to be demanding, difficult, stingy with their praise and yet have powerful expectations of performance by their sons motivated partly by their own narcissism.

Most men listed something during the interviews which they had done in their life at which they had excelled. It seemed that even by engaging in the process of talking about fathers, men felt compelled to list their achievements as if some association between father and achievements had been strongly established in their psyche: father is the man who judges. Respondents frequently took the opportunity to disclose personal accomplishments and to comment on their father's response, as if to show how unjust his judgement was.

Rick, for example, told how despite his having the fastest freestyle time in the province at the age of 9, his father insisted that he join a family holiday thus missing out on a chance to participate in the swimming championships. He also described the one time in 10 years of playing hockey that his father attended a game as "the best day of my life...". He scored the winning goal. His father took a photograph which the family still possesses, although his limited praise failed to satisfy Rick. Many men were similarly dissatisfied with their fathers' expression of positive emotion towards them.
The father's own sense of himself and his life is thus an important component of his expectations of his son(s) which then becomes internalized in the son's own self image. Fathers often hope their sons will carry on their work and dreams and thus reward activities which are congruent with them. This projection onto the son is a means of living out one's own fantasies. Through this mechanism, the father thus controls to a considerable extent how the son sees himself and experiences his identity.

The kinds of endeavours that fathers choose to approve provides evidence of this. One of the sources of discontent in the relationships was that the pursuits fathers follow frequently held little interest for their sons. Stereotypically male activities were more likely to gain father's approval and less traditional pursuits, such as Marty going off to theatre school in his dancing tights, more likely to receive criticism. As Bruce said:

"I got a strong feeling that I was approved for learning woodcraft skills. He had a woodworking shop in the basement and he'd made some of my favourite toys. The toys I was most fond of were a wooden grain elevator and a wooden train, that he made in the basement. Even as really young child, six or seven, I remember going down in the basement and trying to build a wooden boat that would float in the bathtub, things like that. I remember this was something that I enjoyed and that I enjoyed getting his approval. I did have his guidance doing this kind of obvious ..."

If a father wants his sons to complete the work or he begins in life, he will have strong expectations of his sons. Approval may also become a difficult issue when the father has insecurities which lead him to be threatened by his son making different choices in his life.

Expectation of sons can also become a way that fathers use to come to terms with their own mortality. When sons carry on the family traditions, fathers are assured that their place in history will not be lost and that their life held meaning. Rapid change which we witness in modern society has made this type of family continuity more difficult, a subject which is addressed in chapter 7.

ii) Making parents happy

Children often come to believe, perhaps rightly, that their success is the most important thing in their parents' lives. This can create powerful pressures on children who
feel responsible for making their parents happy. Getting approval becomes the way to measure their success. Bruce was a very accomplished student in high school, graduating with the third highest marks in the province after leading his high school in every year. He sees this accomplishment amidst a deteriorating home environment as an attempt to keep something good in the family and thus to give it a reason to stay together. By earning the approval of his parents in this way, Bruce felt he was making his parents happy, believing that it might be enough to save their marriage. Interestingly, when he moved from home at the age of 19, his marks in university dropped to the point where he began to actually fail out of classes. The parents did divorce soon after he left, suggesting that indeed he was somehow influencing the relationship in this way. This is an extreme case of a not uncommon dynamic. Although, they search intensely for parental approval, the pressure to succeed in order to make parents happy complicates life for any child. Parental ambivalence and conflict challenges the ability of the child to predict what will make them happy and increases any sense of insecurity they may suffer.

iii) Measuring manhood

Generally, the judgement which sons want from their fathers is about something more profound than accomplishments; often it also conveys the sense that the sons have become acceptable males. Gilmour (1990), a social anthropologist, suggests that manhood in our, and many other cultures, is an achievement which must be gained, that it is insufficient to be born male, a man must also, through his efforts, become a man. The recognition that sons seek from their fathers may in fact be a search for acknowledgement of their progress in this task, in effect they are asking him to be the witness to their growth. Brent described a rare example of successfully pleasing his father and suggested how important this approval was to him.

"The only time that dad has ever complimented me, in my lifetime that I can recall, was when I was 19. And he had asked me to level four concrete corners of a house because what they were going to do was they were going to bring in the surveyors. And the surveyors had to have an absolutely level platform in order to make the final survey marks so that they knew exactly where the foundation should be, so that it was within the code etc. etc. for building this house. And I worked something like 12 hours on that, getting
each corner absolutely level. And that's the only time he's come up to me and said 'Brent, that's a really good job. I really appreciate it'. It was like 'Wow. I've worked all my life to get a compliment from him - and I haven't had one since, at least directly to me, that said 'you're worth something.'"

In this case it is the function of fathers' judgements which identify for the sons a sense of self worth. Active father presence has been found to contribute to self confidence in their children, both male and female (Radin, 1986).

The simplest factor may be simply avoidance of the danger of disapproval, in short fear, which drives approval seeking behaviour. Certainly, in these earlier stories comes evidence that the anger and ferocity of disapproving fathers stays in memory for long periods of time. Approximately half of those stories related incidents involving father's temper seeming to be out of control. Figuring out how to avoid such experiences - how to be safe - is one of the more important preoccupations for many young boys. Some, like Rick, never manage and stay frightened "like an 11 year old", well into adult life.

Beyond gaining praise for their efforts or getting safe enough to avoid his wrath, sons also wanted in their father's recognition some confirmation of their worth. If there is, in fact, no real way to measure success at "manhood" or "self", it seems that the only genuine achievement is in moving beyond needing such approval from others. Perhaps by withholding such praise, some fathers' may be trying to inspire sons towards independence. They may be rather obliquely trying to pass on the message that we are never satisfied by attempting to please another. Certainly many sons reported that their fathers appeared to be uninterested in their efforts to please.

iv) Rebellion as a strategy

The tactic which many sons fall back on - to reject or rebel against trying to please father - may be a first stage towards separation of self and should always be considered in light of this possibility; but when behaviour is reactively enacted, such rebellion seldom deals adequately with the problem. Rather, sons run the risk of staying stuck even as an adult within the dynamic of rebel. Brent said that at 14 he decided he could never measure up and so he quit trying. However several weeks before our interview, an interaction with his father
was marked by the father expressing his disapproval of Brent’s new beard. The question of being approved of has never been satisfactorily resolved and is a recurrent theme in their relationship.

Rick also gave up in frustration trying to please his father:

"School? I was always great, honour roll in grade 8, by grade 9 started to fall off. My sports enthusiasm fell off. I wanted to play hockey, but I wanted to play for my dad. He didn’t want anything to do with it, so why would I want to play?... Yeah, the thing is at that age, I only wish I had known, why do it for your father? Why not do it for yourself? If I could have gone back and started over, I would have. I would have for me, not for you. I tried to please him all my life and never seem to have gotten any recognition for it. So you get to a point where, why try any more?"

The problem with not trying is that this leaves the sons in a position of having given up - they carry an internalized sense of failure about themselves which we can see clearly from the way Rick or Bruce or Marty or Gord all speak about their work life. It almost seems impossible for a son to avoid coming to terms with his father’s expectations of him. Eventually he must accept and genuinely want his father to be happy with what he does because his own satisfaction will be measured to a large extent by an inner voice which came from his father.

v) Parents as partners

Some dynamics involved in the issue of getting approval from father are linked to the functional arrangements that follow from having two parents and the very different relationships children have with their fathers than their mothers (Lawton, 1991), which was the experience for all respondents. Each parent takes on specific roles in the family; stereotypically the father as provider, judge and disciplinarian, and mother as nurturer and caretaker.

Frequently, sons reported that it was more important for them to have their father’s respect than his love. Unlike so called mother-love which in the ideal is unconditional, the father’s regard is definitely contingent upon achievement by the son. Sons want fathers to acknowledge their worth but generally recognize that this must be earned, rather than be given automatically. Fathers’ stinginess with sons is often apparently motivated by their
belief that this is the way to provoke effort and achievement or to teach a lesson. Here is an example from Rick:

"I mean he had his good times too, he'd bring us treats and things. But he always had this give and take away situation. I mean he could come home with a treat for us, a chocolate bar or whatever, but if we didn't finish our dinner, we didn't get it - he had his rule towards us getting it, we earned our treat."

Rick told of bringing home his creations from high school shop class and invariably his mother would tell him they were beautiful while his father would gripe "something more to dust". Again, this should be seen within a functionalist context in which mother provides undemanding love thus allowing father, in a sense, to be so brutally honest. We see in evidence from studies on effects of divorce that the nature of fathers' relationships with their children often changes dramatically after marital separation and a change in the functional dynamics of the family (Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980; Kruk, 1991).

There are contrasting dynamics for parents that follow structurally from sharing roles in family. Marty, Gord and Rick all stated that praise came to them from father only indirectly, through mother who frequently was the mediator for the family. Often mother rewarded the sons, while it was father's duty to punish them. When fathers are expected to be the disciplinarian of last resort, this role is performed more powerfully if there is psychological distance between them and the children. In such a situation, mother would be more likely to convey praise and positive regard, because the dynamics of the family system required that sons remain fearful or at least distant and unsure of their fathers. This kind of role separation might be expected to be breaking down in families in recent years. However, as we'll see in the next chapter, the question of which parent any child feels safest with powerfully impacts the kind of approval seeking behaviours they exhibit at home (Freeman, 1991).

vi) Approval and change

When the world changes as quickly as ours, frequently what worked previously no longer serves subsequent generations. If sons master pursuits that are completely new, it leaves father as judge or approver in a difficult position. His knowledge and experience
frequently have no relevance and his opinion, however forceful, is often useless. Several sons had academic accomplishments which were obviously worthy of reward, although at the same time, they provided real evidence that the sons had surpassed the father. Like the son who physically challenges and defeats his father, this creates tremendous pressure for the dynamic or stance within the relationship to shift, even though the father may continue to financially support the sons and otherwise maintain superiority for many more years.

Dan, Marty and Dave all expected their academic accomplishments to help earn their fathers’ respect. It also brought much more. Dan was one of the select few to be admitted to university in Sri Lanka. This did earn his father’s respect, but he expressed how lonely he felt at university and is still on an academic path which has taken him into a world far away from his family. It is as if there is a trade-off between receiving the family’s pride and their intimate support. Similarly, Dave was accepted into a highly competitive program called Canada World Youth for which his father was proud, but it also meant that Dave would leave the farm and the possibility of carrying on his father’s and grandfather’s work there. Marty’s academic accolades came for being accepted into a renowned theatre program that was also a step into a world far away from that of his father, "the man’s man". It has been difficult for each of these men to find inspiration in the lives of their fathers which carries them in their lives.

Finally, an apparent complication exists for fathers in relation to this question of approval and praise seeking when we consider appropriate emotional distance, a common complaint about fathers in families. If the father is too close to the sons, his praise is likely to mean less because his "human" imperfections will be very apparent and if his accomplishments are not greater than those for his son, his judgement will carry no weight. On the other hand, if he is too distant, or his own accomplishments are too much advanced, sons may give up striving altogether. The resolution of this issue is central to father and son relationships and requires of fathers an acute sense of balance and timing. The standards by which a man guides his life and assesses himself come, to a considerable extent, from the tone set by his father’s judgements.
Summary

The movement which we can identify in these themes suggests a possible developmental progression in relationships between fathers and sons which moves from rivalry and mutual threat, through conflict and potential violence to the complex and important issue of approval which a father bestows upon his son. It has been suggested that idealization of father in return is a part of this progression as well (Strozier & Cath, 1989). Yablonsky (1990) argues that the ideal endpoint is a mutuality of friendship between fathers and son. The next two chapters will assess that notion in greater detail.

The biosocial and psychoanalytic literature addressed the kinds of factors influencing and predicting this rivalry and conflict in particular, but the issue of gaining approval is also illuminated by consideration of the social factors towards which we progressively move in this analysis.

The ideal progression for relationship development suggested in this model will be evolutionary, but unlike ecological theory, no static endpoint is envisaged. Few individuals ever make it completely through to the other side of approval seeking behaviour, to a place where we are motivated solely by our own wisdom beyond any need to be liked, loved or approved. For most of us, this remains a distant ideal.
Chapter V

FAMILY THEMES: FATHER’S PLACE?

In considering the factors directly related to family life that influence the relationships between fathers and sons, we consider two further sources of theory which help provide a conceptual framework for understanding our results. Both have been influenced by psychoanalytic theory in that they consider internal or psychodynamic processes important to human behaviour, growth and experience, but they have shifted the focus found with Freud on sexual and biological development towards greater consideration of external social and cultural factors. Family systems theory, like ecological theory with which it is often associated, offers several important principles which help to organize our thinking around the multi-dimensional complexity of family dynamics. Developmental psychology is a source of insight into both early and longitudinal growth factors influencing relationships between fathers and sons. Attachment theory addresses an aspect of development which focuses on the importance of early bonds and relationships found within the family system and life span developmental theory frames individual growth through various stages within an overall picture of human development.

Of these approaches, only attachment theory contains a body of literature which specifically identifies the father and the impact of his position within the family, although most of this is focused on bonding with infants and small children rather than on a longitudinal perspective of fathers and sons in particular. Some life span theory has addressed the gendered questions of specifically male adult development (Levinson, 1978). Feminism has contributed important re-workings of attachment and developmental theory and to a general way of thinking about families which incorporates the consequences of gender.

This family level of discussion bridges the personal and the social levels of focus with themes that address (i) mother as a pivotal figure affecting this dyad, (ii) family and individual challenges and passages that mark the growth of the son into manhood in the light of his relationship with father and (iii) the multigenerational aspects of this connection, which is after all primarily a question of passing from one inception to its successor.
Introduction: Attachment

We first consider attachment as a prelude to the pictures we received in these interviews. Respondents generally had very few early memories with which to illuminate the pre-Oedipal stages of family relationships. Understanding some of the current thinking about attachment patterns will help us to identify more accurately what dynamics are being played out between parents and children.

The insistence on circularity and reciprocity which we find in systems thinking is helpful in considering attachment and bonding dynamics within families. It reminds us that not only do adults become internalized objects in the psyche of infants - having children can also broaden and stabilize the psyche of parents: bonds are attached at two ends. With fathers, for a variety of reasons as we'll see in the next chapter, they often come unstuck, if they are ever set at all. To a large extent fathering, like mothering, appears to be learned from reciprocal interactions between infant and child, in which both parties change and learn and grow (Osofsky & Culp, 1989).

Nancy Chodorow (1978) has applied Freudian object relations theory to feminist investigations into parenting. In particular she has used the understanding that social relations or objects (persons in the infant's world) interact with and influence drive resolution in development of the individual's ego structures and process. The social factor that she focuses on is the fact that parenting is asymmetrically organized, that women in fact do the mothering. The weight of this is especially significant when amplified by Freudian insistence on the absolute importance of early childhood experiences in adult character formation. Thus Chodorow's simple but profound observation is that boys and girls have different experiences as infants because they are all parented by mothers. The difference in their interpersonal environments due to this reality leads to masculine and feminine personalities developing in particular ways because they have different experiences of mother. It is posited that, in these early impressions one has of a parent, lies one's tendencies as a parent. A mother will experience her daughter, especially in very early infancy, as herself, but her son as not her, as an opposite in fact. Because of this, girls and mothers develop a sense of being alike from these relationships while boys experience leads them to feel different and separate from their primary attachment figure.
As we have seen, subsequent intrapsychic resolutions complete this pattern wherein boys must break their identification with mother the primary parent and thus with being a parent, whilst girls remain more deeply connected with mother and with being a parent. This process of separating from mother, first from her physical body and then from her emotional body, and moving towards father emotionally is according to some, a lifelong challenge (Bly, 1990). Fathers’ job with regard to sons is to assist the process as a "stimulus for individuation" (Muir, 1989, p.47) and initiator into group relations. Fathers are however experienced initially as separate and distant, a representative of the world and of independence and activity.

Gilligan (1982) and others, of course, argue that the experience of needing to separate psychologically has shaped the male psyche and influenced the dominant "male" theories of psychological development with their concepts which imply "appropriate" emotional distance: separation and attachment, individuation, independence and differentiation. We also see a focus in family therapy literature on terms such as fusion, enmeshment, boundaries and overinvolvement, all of which may spring from a way of seeing the world through this particularly male lens. Gilligan’s argument is that because girls don’t have the experience of needing to break bonds and separate from mother in order to form a gender identity, they have a different psychological development and so see the world differently: they are more likely to focus on relationship and connections. They become responsible for maintaining relationships and attending to, in Parsons’ (1956) terminology, expressive functions.

Chodorow’s rather simple solution to this problem of male psychic development is that men should parent more actively so that boys will experience closeness with a same sex parent and thus not develop the need to be or feel separate. Much psychological developmental work has recently shown that early attachment work which emphasized the mother infant bond significantly missed the potential and importance of the father bond (Lamb, 1975; Yogman, 1982; Lamb & Oppenheim, 1989). This latter work has led to the concept of the "emergent father", a man highly interested in and involved in the emotional nurturance and responsibility of his children. The men in this sample were all fathered however in an era before the idea of such nurturant fathers became popular, although they have grown up in an era of rapidly shifting ideas about gender roles. We must listen to their
stories conscious that their fathers were strongly expected to be providers and the mothers nurturers in these families.

Attachment to a particular parent is not a simple and singular mechanism which is fixed over time and in all situations, as originally proposed by Lorenz (1965). Much developmental literature suggests that boys tend to move from early bonding with mother toward more mature identification with father, a process which involves a certain amount of conflict in order to break and re-adjust bonds (Bowlby, 1970). We have seen in the preceding chapter some evidence that fathers and sons experience conflict and rivalry as they struggle with positioning themselves in relation to each other. The part that mother plays is also expected to be important to this resolution and the first theme examines evidence about the interaction of influences from this "other" parent.
As suggested above, despite current acknowledgement that fathers are important attachment objects too (Gurwitt, 1989), these sons were born into an era when the role of mothers and fathers was as distinct as anytime in North American history (Demos, 1982) and the role of the mother was felt to be the crucial one in terms of intimacy with the child. Even most of this recent research addresses the father role as important but adjunctal to mother. The biological reality of course is that mother is needed as an intermediary between a father and his children. It is not surprising therefore to find that mothers play important roles influencing the relationships between fathers and sons.

"Mother's contribution may so powerfully affect the child's appreciation of comparatively sparse data from interactions with father himself as to constitute the greater portion of what makes up the child's experience of fathering" (Lansky, 1989, p.29).

Many theorists use a family systems model in order to frame their thinking about families. Several important principles from this model will be used to guide our discussion.

The first is an acknowledgement of the great complexity of family life and stresses the interconnection of the emotional lives of family members by conceiving of the family as an emotional system. It allows for consideration of various levels of understanding simultaneously and predicts that when change or movement occurs within the family, its ripple effect influences all the individuals within that system (Kerr & Bowen, 1988). This is a useful way to understand the relative influence of both parents in a family. Mothering and fathering combine to construct parenting so that strength in one aspect or absence in another will effect the whole. The size and intensity of nuclear or extended family systems also influences this experience. In this level of analysis, we consider the part played by mother within the sons' family context and how this impacts upon a man's experience of father.

The second relevant principle of Bowenian family systems theory emphasizes triangles as a way of understanding many family dynamics, frequently focusing tension in the family system (Kerr & Bowen, 1988). It is the father mother son triangle which is considered here.
Triangles in families are conceptualized as a means of managing anxiety between members of a dyad: when an uncomfortable level of anxiety is reached, a third member, even potentially a pet, is triangled into the system (Freeman, 1991) as an outlet for discharge of this anxious energy.

The key question in this analysis is the source of the anxiety and how the various members deal with it. A mass of evidence points to a variety of potential sources of this emotional buildup which will be discussed in turn including: communication patterns in families, conflict between parents and questions of loyalty, fear and resentment of powerful family members, sexual tensions including incestuous and homophobic dynamics and the question of unresolved family business resulting in inhibition of affection between fathers and sons.

i) Communication

Differences between genders in verbal styles and abilities have been the subject of much research and popular attention (Tannen, 1990; Thorne, Kramarae & Henley, 1983; Maccoby, & Jacklin, 1974). Males are frequently said to dominate in certain formal situations and females to verbalize more in intimate situations (Basow, 1986). Males have been found to be inexpressive emotionally (Balswick, 1988) and to disclose about themselves in different ways than females (Jourard, 1971). The inclusion of problematic communication as a phenomenon connected with functional arrangements between parents might seem to suggest that there is intentionality in the myriad difficulties in communication between sons and fathers. However, functional in this sense does not imply efficient, rational or even consciously made decisions, but rather that it frequently becomes the job for one particular parent to communicate certain things to the children.

Certainly, there were many examples of difficulties in communication reported by the sons in this study in regard to their fathers. Virtually every son reported the fact that they couldn’t talk about something important with their father and that there were large areas of the relationship unexamined and unexplored. As Rick said "we never talk, we’ve never talked about anything".

Mothers, on the other hand, frequently played the role of mediator or facilitator of
communication between fathers and sons. Often she was the confidante, counsellor or the interpreter of father and his moods and intentions. Several subjects said that father never praised them directly, that only through mother did they become aware of how father felt about them or their achievements. One man was stunned to learn from his mother that of the 3 boys in the family, he had always been his father's favourite.

Stereotypical gender behaviours mentioned above surely play a part in this pattern of fathers and sons communicating through mothers rather than directly to each other. The difficulty for males to find appropriate emotional expression is an important aspect of this pattern. Bruce spoke of "a very great gap" preventing the communication of any emotion. Conversely, communication is made difficult by emotionality (Tannen, 1990). Talking can mean different things to different members. When Rick said that he and his father never talk about anything, what he means is that they don't talk about anything important - like feelings, religion or life. For women and perhaps children, communication fosters connection and helps them feel safe. Tannen says that men tend to communicate information rather than feelings, instructing or learning rather than sharing.

For those with whom these patterns remain fixed, they will almost certainly lead to difficulty or at least distance in the relationship. The management of anxiety in triangles, as suggested by theory above, is an important aspect to this pattern; many stories of the men as small boys were memories of frightening incidents involving father's wrath and mother was the parent who made them feel safe. As older boys and young men, communicating through mother can similarly help avoid potential conflict. It also inhibits, however, the development of verbal abilities which would enable males to resolve tension and conflict amongst themselves. When a son feels that he cannot communicate about aspects of himself with his father for fear of disapproval, gaps and potential rifts develop. Reliance on mothers to make this communication means of course that any message is filtered by whatever interests or perspective she brings to the situation. A good father may be represented as unreliable or a father's shortcomings glossed over by mothers according to their inclination (Lansky, 1989).

One assumption in our culture is that we expect our intimacy to be expressed verbally. This is a relatively recent development influenced by social science theories based on the value of verbalizing experience. Fathers, perhaps more than mothers, often concern
themselves with attempting to preserve family traditions at the same time as being unavailable for discussion and can thus appear intransigent. This quote from Dave reminds us that important things were also communicated in other times, in other ways:

"I know that the process of going through an interview like this, my father would find it very difficult, to do. He was born in a generation in which you did not talk, you did not communicate in this way. So I suppose that's a statement about where his offspring have come, learned differently from him. The flip side would be where there had probably been an interview with someone from his generation in which they talk about things which I will never know, or be able to do, things that he's experienced, skills that he's developed that I will never have. It really does go both ways."

ii) Parental conflict

One of the strongest themes to emerge from these interviews is that of the experience of competition between parents for the loyalty and allegiance of their sons. The men were keenly aware of conflict between their parents and often experienced it as a personal dilemma forcing them to take sides with one and pass judgement on the other. Frequently they bitterly condemned their parents’ relationships. Sometimes they felt responsible for balancing one parent’s strength against the other, or somehow keeping both parents happy. They believed that allegiance or loyalty to one parent was likely to bring cost to their relationship with the other parent. They felt used as pawns in their parents’ power struggles. They were very sensitive to these conflicts between parents, made astute reflections on the nature of those relationships and felt they had to manoeuvre for position within that entangled situation.

Two of the sons experienced the trauma of divorcing parents while the men were teenagers. Gord felt in fact that his parents "divorced" after five years of marriage but stayed together, to his disgust, for another 20 years. He tells this alarming tale of being placed in the middle of his parents’ conflict:

"I was 13... My dad would kinda reach out and talk to me every once in awhile but the only time he really did, he took me on this logging road, and it was pitch black up there and we took the old Toyota truck and went for miles and miles and miles and we sat and we got to Duck Lake and we’re sitting there. And he made me nervous, all the time, so we’d sit there for no reason at all, I wrote about this and can’t figure it out. He pulled up his sleeve and had two slashes on his wrist and he’d tried to commit suicide and
he showed me them. And I looked at them and he said, 'that's your mother, that's what your mother did'. That's all he said."

Clearly, the sons felt torn trying to provide balance between their parents. This is interesting in light of the much repeated claim about males that they have little interest or natural focus in managing the complexity of relationships as suggested by Gilligan (1982) above, but also in popular psychology (eg. Goldberg, 1991 and Farrell, 1986). It is not clear whether lack of relational ability increased the perception of distress between parents and exasperated their ability to deal satisfactorily with such strife, but as boys these subjects were sufficiently astute and interested to perceive problems and tension between parents. Research has shown that generally boys are traumatized more than girls by divorce and family break-up (Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980; Nett, 1988). Boys are also reported generally to receive far more "socialization" efforts than girls, particularly in schools (Basow, 1986; Goldberg, 1975), although they still perform more poorly on most indices of social adjustment and achievement (Poole, 1977). It would be an interesting adjunct to this study to interview sisters for their perceptions on family dynamics to determine whether they were as affected by tribulation in the family. Certainly, the retrospective nature of these reports must be remembered as a significant limitation because of the problem of how much current issues distort memories.

iii) Power and fear

An important principle of family systems therapy is that change can only happen with the participation of powerful members (Freeman, 1991). In these results, fathers and mothers were identified about equally as the most powerful member of the family system. The parent identified as most powerful was usually the one with whom the sons felt least safe. This created a curious dynamic whereby the parent with whom the sympathies and allegiances lay, was also perceived as the weaker member. Dave repeatedly expressed his dismay with his mother as a bully, for example, yet was also repeatedly disappointed in his father’s refusal to stand up to her.

Several men expressed the fact that as adults they had reassessed the power dynamics in their families and decided that the "weaker" one was not so weak after all, that in fact they came to appreciate that an arrangement had been made for which both parents were
responsible. Brent for example said he’d always sided with his mother, but recently was beginning to change this view. This raises the possibility that power as perceived in family or intimate relationships is not necessarily about who has the ability to enforce their decisions but rather from a child’s perspective, is an inverse function of closeness or intimacy. If a parent is felt to be close and safe, their decisions are not viewed as arbitrary "power trips", but rather as understandable and reasonable. Popular conceptions of fathers as the powerful figures in families are frequently limited to the financial and other external aspects of family life (Lasch, 1978). In this sample, men were at least as likely to identify mothers as powerful figures in the family.

As an example, Bruce was keenly aware of and involved in verbal and physical disputes between his parents. He sided with his mother against a violent father but, like her, was "bitterly disappointed" when the marriage finally ended, despite the fact that his mother slept on the sofa for the last seven years of the marriage. He attempted to keep his parents together with high academic achievements, believing that by doing well he was giving his parents a positive reason to stay together. That both his grades fell, and his parents separated soon after he left home, suggests that indeed he had been important to the dynamic between them. In terms of the triangle, as he matured, his decreased ability and willingness to divert and absorb anxiety between his parents left them with too great a tension to continue together. The intensity which he did absorb is still carried as "unfinished business" in his life.

iv) Sexual tensions

Sexual tension in some families was a serious source of difficulty. Both Gord and Bruce who struggle in their adult lives with intimate relationships also expressed that their mothers had in a sense claimed them intimately, while their fathers showed more interested in their brothers. Gord says:

"And she pushed me, she used to sit on my bed, which I believe is one of the influencing factors of my life that makes me so fcked up today, is because she sat down and she’d say "Gord, one day you’re gonna be a great man". And she was just using me, because Robert was dad’s favourite and so she picked me and she used me against him."
Later on Gord rebuffed sexual advances made by his mother, cut contact with her off completely and he admits to a misogynous streak related to his "hatred" of her. Bruce similarly spoke of the way his mother related to him.

"Right from square one, its almost as if my mother took possession of me at a very early age and nurtured me in her own manner. And when my brother was born four years later, he followed in my father's footsteps. There's very little doubt in my mind that this was almost an unspoken agreement: that my mother got to mold me in her image and my father got to mold my brother in his image."

Finding emotional distance from his mother was a problem for Bruce as well. She would intrude on him in the kitchen when, as a teenager, he spoke to girls on the telephone, preventing his connecting with other females.

Male fear of homosexual attraction has been suggested as a source of anxiety inhibiting relations between men in general and fathers and sons in particular (Blum, 1985). One subject, Peter, related that his father had told him that he never hugged his sons for fear of making them homosexual. Frank also expressed fear of homosexuality as a factor in his reluctance to get close to men. Interestingly both of these men, the 2 eldest in the sample and most rigidly raised in terms of stereotypes, claim to have had good relationships with their fathers. Perhaps their conscious awareness of this potential factor neutralized it. The one respondent who was openly gay, Dave, described his father jokingly as a "gentle and sensitive man, an ideal homosexual", although he would never suggest this to is father. His sexual preference had never inhibited the closeness which he and his father shared but he perceived that his mother repeatedly stepped between her husband and her son in a variety of ways.

The number of stories and comments which described parental struggles became greatest at around puberty. Incest taboos establishing appropriate physical contact between family members requires establishment of very firm psychic boundaries. This is harder to do in traumatized or single parent families where the child cannot hate one parent while he loves the other (Winnicott, 1944) or where there is much "unfinished business" with the parents. By seeing families as emotional systems, family systems theory of triangulation and anxiety management helps us avoid blaming and see beyond to historic causes of pathogenic
v) Development and conflict

The developmental theory examined earlier would predict that a certain amount of conflict is likely even in normal situations as attachment shifts from mothers towards fathers. When boys mature, it becomes harder for them to remain attached to mothers, however difficult the relationship with father, because society begins to shame "mommy’s boys", and because interest in other females begins. If the relationship with father is unsafe, the son may develop an exaggerated sensitivity to conflict. Tension in the parental relationships was a common and difficult source of strain for sons in positioning with father.

One of the harshest criticisms sons had of their fathers was in relation to how they existed in their marriages. As we’ve seen Dave was "extremely disappointed" in his father’s unwillingness to stand up to his mother. Gord saw his father as failing to go for his dreams and disparaged his father’s choice for a second wife, who was "exactly like my mother". Marty doesn’t believe his father had a chance to survive in his marriage. Kevin "lost respect" for his father "as a man" in relation to his second marriage. Even Frank believed that maybe his father drank because of his mother. Dave and Rick also both condemned the quality of their parents’ marriages.

Dave saw his father sympathetically and could not understand why he didn’t leave the relationship. He described a long history of his mother’s verbal attacks on both father and the children and remembers being disappointed that his father wouldn’t fight back. In this story we get a clear impression as to how the children were triangulated into the dispute between parents:

"This is the same summer, yeah. There was this whole horror summer, it was just awful. My mother tried to run my father over with a car, in the driveway. I can’t believe it.

I remember sneaking out of the bedroom window, and sneaking into the truck and driving to my neighbours, Bert and Louise, who were good friends of my parents but also understood the dynamics of my parents relationship. They were sort of the, other than my mother’s brother and his wife, they were the only ones who knew what the impact of the relationship was having on us kids. And so I ran down there, they welcomed me into the house. I told them that mom and dad were fighting. They said ok, just go to bed."
Well, not 20 minutes later, everything had settled down, my mother and father screech into the yard. My mother comes into the house, insists that she has to see me, that I’m going home with them. And I said no, I’m not. And I remember the verbal match getting so intense that I struck my mother, I hit her and knocked her to the ground. I was a big kid at 13 and I was able to do that. Um, at that point I walked out of the house and went to the car, and sat in the car. I was so angry at her. We got back into the car, my father was driving and my mother was in the front seat and I was in the back. And I remember at that point her shrieking that “you kids, you goddam kids, you never understand what I’ve gone through, you don’t believe (me). I’m always the bad one”.

And so she bullied my father, they would sit in the car in the yard and she would bully my father until he would finally say yes, that he had had this affair. She kept at him and at him, saying, "tell them, did you f**k this woman..." blah blah blah, this whole dynamic, just very angry. There was no point to this screaming match in the car. And I remember my father saying yes, he’d done it. And I still did not believe my father, that he’d done it. And still, to this day I still have questions about it. I was so disappointed that he gave in to her.

This story highlights a number of family factors involved for fathers and sons. The contrast between Dave making a stand against his mother and striking her "to the ground", and his disappointment with his father’s unwillingness to make the same stand, is powerful. He has defined his boundaries and stated how he wants to relate to the power structure in the family. It is an important developmental moment in Dave’s life. Interestingly however, confrontation with a parent does not necessarily damage that relationship. It is when the fear is too great for confrontation or catharsis that relationships wither. By confronting his mother Dave sets down his groundrules for interaction, but opens up the possibility of communication. It is a sign of how strong Dave felt that he was able to make this stand, although rather than considering that perhaps his father was trying to maintain connection, he judged him for a lack of fortitude.

vi) Jealous of father’s attentions

Sons’ criticisms often conveyed a sense of loss when they came to believe that the father’s partner was more important to him than they were. This for many was the beginning of what has been labelled "father hunger", a desire for closer contact and friendship with fathers that has been hypothesized to be widespread societally (Kay, 1989). One of the saddest comments
came from Bruce who said his father has always got his name mixed up with his brother’s, as if he were just not attending to him. The message that a son simply is not as important to him as his spouse and perhaps his work, friends, or other pursuits, is a particularly painful one for sons to hear. Kevin was bitter about the intrusion of his father’s second wife into their family from the time she appeared as the housekeeper, soon after his mother’s suicide. This bitterness continues even today, several years after his father’s death. His disappointment at his father’s loyalty to her, rather than to him, tainted their relationship right up to the end.

"About 4 years ago, I was going out with a girl, a lady. My dad phoned and said ... My stepmother’s parents and her brothers live in White Rock and they were driving out from Ontario to WR to visit and he had 6 weeks holiday. Great I said. We’ll see you when you get here and we’ll phone you. Here’s my phone number, give me a call when you get here. And he did, he phoned me and said why don’t you come over and see us.

It was in the evening. My girlfriend and I decided - she said she’d really like to meet my dad and I said ok. She’s a real character. But we got over and it was really really enjoyable to see him. I hadn’t seen him in about three years and he was really happy to see me and he was really nice to my girlfriend, laughing and joking with her. It was a lot of fun. And we talked for awhile about what he was doing and what I was doing.

Finally I approached him and I said "how about you and I spend a day together, just you and me. You’re out here for a month. Why don’t we take a day aside and we’ll spend it together. He thought that was a really great idea, but my stepmother didn’t. She thought it was really awful. So she brought out a piece of paper, an itinerary and it had every day marked on it and what that activity would be for the day. By that time I had two half sisters. And they still live at home so the kids have to be taken care of. So, she didn’t think that that could fit in anywhere in a month. And I thought that was kind of silly. So my girlfriend was sitting there and she reaches over and grabs the piece of paper and a pencil and looked at it and all the dates and she said here’s a day and she wrote my name in: "my dad and Kevin get together for the day". And my stepmother she was really upset but my dad thought it was quite humorous. And so I said well what about it? And he said OK.

And it was a week away or that type of thing and I said well we’ll phone you to confirm and we’ll see which vehicle we want to take or whatever. So that day rolled around and I phoned him the day before. He made an excuse to get out of it. I was really angry, really really angry. And I just told him what I thought. "You know what your problem... da da da dah wife of yours, she runs your life and you can’t even think for yourself. You
come 3000 miles and you can't spend one day with your only son. You're here for six weeks and you can't do that so I said to hell with you" and I hung up the phone. And I never spoke to him for 3 more years. Never talked to him for 3 more years.

Actually, I never talked to him. I tried to talk to him 3 years later on the phone and the same thing - we got into an argument in the first 60 seconds and I said the hell with it. And I never saw him until he was in the hospital. He'd had a massive heart attack and I never did get a chance to make amends or say goodbye or those types of things."

A systems framework reminds us when viewing family dynamics that each member has his or her own understanding about alliances and loyalties within the family system. Although we should be careful not to use the perspective of any one individual as an indication of truth about family balance, we can see how difficult they often find feeling comfortable with that balance themselves. Similarly, our developmental framework helps us to see struggle at certain stages as being a part of growth and not necessarily something to be avoided or "fixed". These sons often related painful and difficult memories of their family environments. Their healing process involves reframing these events into moments of insight and growth, by seeing how they "function" in some way for the individual.

vii) Turf

Memorable experiences of father at home were rare. Reynolds (1978) argues that this is common and follows from mothers' strong emotional presence in the home and from fathers' tendency to be absent or distant in the family because their primary functions take place outside of the home. It is interesting to note that most of the strong memories these sons had of their fathers came from interactions which occurred outside the family home. Some of the stories that involved fathers took place on camping trips, going to town in the family truck, on a bicycle ride, up a logging road, boating, skiing, at his workplace. That fathers went off daily to work and, as we've seen, mothers often tend to interpret between the children and their father can prevent children from experiencing father strongly.

Dave spoke of the difficulty he still has finding times when he can relate one to one with his father without his mother around. When he calls on the phone, she is always there and dad slips into the background. When he returns home to visit, it is only out in the fields
on the tractor that he spends time alone with his father. Memories of those kinds of interactions are strong. Dave thinks that his mother plays an active role in preventing his father and him spending time together, believing that this threatens her.

The tendency for partners in a marital relationship to have "turf" or specific areas of interest and primacy is not inherently problematic for the family. It may be the most functional kind of arrangement in many cases. There is some evidence that when men try to share equally in child care for example, greater opportunity for conflict arises (Pleck, 1987). Survey data in the U.S. has found that 60 to 80% of women report that they do not want greater involvement in the home by their husbands (Lamb & Oppenheim, 1989). It is important to remember however that the environment in which we interact influences the nature of those interactions. Kyle describes one memorable holiday he had with his father when he was 12.

"The family had always gone camping together in the summertime. We would go to a lake and set up for a week or we'd do a little tour. I guess my oldest brother had moved out of the house and my second oldest brother was old enough that he really didn't want to go. And my mom had never liked camping anyways, so one summer my dad took me and my younger brother camping. And we had a week alone with him. We just went up to a campground on Georgian Bay and hung out. The weather was terrible. It wasn't a particularly spectacular or wonderful vacation or anything but I remember it quite clearly. I remember swimming with him and my brother, and doing things in a closer manner than ever in all the time I was growing up."

Taking boys on fishing trips or to sporting events or simply for a drive in the car seems to provide an opportunity for sons to enjoy more fully their fathers attention and to see him more clearly. Such moments can become important highlights in adult memories.

viii) Discipline

Another case where functional agreements between mothers and fathers influence the quality of relationship between fathers and sons is in the area of discipline. It seemed to be true in virtually every case that a particular parent had the designated role as disciplinarian. As suggested previously, the role often involves invoking with it, additionally to straightforward discipline and punishment, some residual fear or trepidation which then
influences the relationship as a whole. Half of the men reported that usually it was their mothers who doled out physical punishment. Paul noted the fact that his mother "gave the lickings" and his father usually pleaded for leniency on behalf of the kids. Kyle also described his father as the peacemaker in the family. Dave's father physically punished him on only one occasion, when he was about 6.

Marty and Rick however, both experienced the more stereotypical situation that when the children got out of control, father was called in to hand out the punishment. Marty described his experience at home like this.

"Oh, yeah, he still had his influence on me, especially when it came to the areas of discipline. My mother would, discipline me as much as she felt was proper according to her upbringing but when she got into a situation that she felt any discipline that she could do wouldn't work, she'd put it onto my dad. And force him to get serious.

And my father never liked playing the tough guy. He always liked to be perceived as fun Ted. But when my mom demanded it of him, gosh I remember the "wait until your father gets home" routine and that would strike terror into me. He'd go "hey buster, get in here". And he'd make me spill my guts about what I'd done and I'd tell him. And he'd come out with "get into your room, pull your pants down, and get onto your bed". I'd go screaming into my bedroom. This is the worst part - I would never do this to a kid. What he'd do is that he had this piece of conveyor belt - we didn't get it that often, but when we did he wouldn't pull any punches. What he'd do is, I'd be in my room, lying on my bed and that sucker would make me wait. It seemed like an eternity. Probably only about 5 minutes but ... And that was the worst part, I'd be just sobbing. He'd come in and whack me about 4 or 6 times and he'd take his time and talk to me in between slaps. That was not a pleasant experience."

In Bruce, Dan and Kevin's case, it was also more likely to be father who disciplined the children. Dan remembers vividly the sting of a slap his father gave him and condemns himself for using physical punishment with his own son. Bruce and Kevin developed very physically confrontive relationships and both had physical fights with their fathers, as described earlier in the section on violence.

When a parent is the designated disciplinarian, it puts them in a difficult position in terms of other areas of their relationship with their children. Fathers' physical strength, often distant emotional style and sometimes frightening anger all combine to make them effective but easily excessive disciplinarians. Certainly, society has recently been setting new
standards or expectations of parents in terms of their physical punishment of children, creating a situation in which men must learn different ways from that of their own fathers.

The relationship with mother is an important factor influencing sons’ relationships with fathers. Mothers have considerable power to direct the nature of that connection. It takes some apparent sacrifice on their part to step back and encourage closeness to develop between father and son. Such an act requires that they believe genuinely in the benefits to son and father and have sufficient sense of self to love in that way.
2. **Father’s father: multiple generations**

It has been suggested that "impediments to fatherhood are of multigenerational origins" (Gurwitt, 1989). Certainly many new fathers report wanting to improve on the kind of fathering they received (Sagi, 1982). Fear of becoming more like his father as a parent has inhibited at least one subject from having children, despite claiming to want them badly. The lessons and perspective that sons gain from witnessing or understanding the fathering their fathers received helps them to understand, tolerate and learn from that example. The father of the subject just mentioned for example, had left his home at 13 and saw his father again only on his deathbed. This man could see that his own experiences, painful as they were, were an improvement on his father’s experiences.

The men in this sample were basically in the same age range as their fathers had been when they were born (See Table I). It may partly be this fact which stirred their interest in examining their own fathers in a research interview. Only five men had children themselves although the continuity between generations was at least alluded to in most interviews.

The extent to which sons considered and explained their father’s behaviour in terms of his own experience as a son suggests a stage in the relationship has been reached where sons can find some emotional distance from their experience of him. In several interviews, the issues a father faced and the kind of family supports he had available were made very clear by sons obviously well aware of their father’s story. Rick spoke of the difficulties his father faced in experiencing his own parent’s divorce and loss of father from the age of 10. Frank spoke in detail of the move which his father made from a home on the prairies out west and how he established the original family business, long before Frank was born. Dave left his father’s family farm for a different life, but he also knew and appreciated how the strength and stability in his father’s family had helped create a source of support for himself. For other men, a kind of vacuum existed about the experience of the father. The grandfather (and even the father!) was only a stranger to many men. Gord, Bruce and Marvin, for example, refer only very briefly and impersonally to their father’s lives before they became fathers and the image we get is that these men had little or no close family around them as
parents themselves. It is a tenet of family systems theory that the normative emotional family structure in North America is extended, despite our common beliefs that nuclear families dominate the social fabric (Freeman, 1991). The extended influence of multiple generations is clear, although for many of us, a solid awareness of family patterns is nonexistent. Several characteristic themes of multiple generational influences and typical family patterns between fathers and sons are discussed next.

i) Cut-off

Repeated patterns between generations function both positively to give support and connection to individuals in need but also to bind individuals into overinvolved systems full of neurosis breeding dynamics (Freeman, 1991). Only rarely were fathers’ fathers involved directly in the relationships between sons and fathers. This seems to be due to a number of factors, but one of the most important was some degree of cutting off or breaking of family connections. Virtually every family had important male figures (sometimes the sons themselves, sometimes their fathers or the grandfathers) who had left and were cut off, at least to some extent, from the family. Despite this, or perhaps because of it, history did indirectly influence the experience of the sons.

Kyle’s family, for example, moved about the country apparently due to his father’s work, but we also discover later in the interview that his father was so embittered by his relationship with his father that he has only now, as a man of 78, begun to be able to talk about that experience. It seems likely that the moving was not unrelated to the difficulty of that relationship. Both of Marvin’s parents, who had 10 children of their own and many foster children as well, were themselves orphans. Kevin’s father didn’t speak to his father for thirty years and Kevin only met the grandfather once, on his deathbed. Even with all of the painful difficulties for Kevin and his dad, they did manage to stay in closer contact than that. Three of the 8 men with living fathers were currently cut off from regular contact with them and two more expressed the wish for more frequent contact, so less than half of these men were happy with the current state of their relationship with father. Other examples of the breaking of close contact within families include Frank’s father who left the family farm in the prairies during the depression, Gord’s parents who both left family behind in England and Brent’s father who was raised only by his mother and grandmother, with no mention of
the father. Dave left the family farm and home and Bruce, of course, left his family behind back east.

It would appear that the challenges of maintaining close connection between three generations on the male side of families are very difficult indeed. It may well be that this phenomenon is exaggerated in our country with its relatively short European history and changing social conditions, but evidence also suggests that these problems are more intense for males. It was most often men in these families - the fathers or grandfathers - who experienced being cut off from their own family. Stone (1989) also found that it was more often the women in the families she interviewed who nurtured and maintained family connections.

ii) Patterns

The impact of the experience that a father has of his father on the relationship with his son(s) is often strong. Interestingly, it is the fear of reproducing family patterns which often leads to leaving and cutting off from family structures. Kevin is well aware of both his difficult family precedents and yet of the potential power of early influences. He still finds himself unconsciously mimicking a gesture his father had developed long ago, after losing part of a finger. He is considering becoming a parent himself and is terrified that he will turn out to be just like his father. Marty has a similar fear that abuse of drugs or alcohol will mar his life, as he believes it did with his father and grandfather. He watched his father begin to drink more heavily, just as his grandfather had.

"He went from that into alcoholism, or what I’d call alcoholism. Saturday night, more times than not he’d go and play darts and he’d come home. Sometimes I’d have to go and pick him up. It got to where most times I had to pick him up. Just like he had to do with his dad...

Isn’t that interesting how history repeats itself. My sister married a guy, just like my dad in terms of the irresponsibility... My mom’s family, she has 3 brothers, my sister has 3 boys and a girl. My sister is raising 4 kids alone, like my grandmother did with my mom and her brothers, because my grandfather went overseas and never came home during the second world war."

iii) Connection

Some men do find positive ways to express the generational links between fathers and
sons and continuity becomes a strong concern. This concern may appear as the living out of family traditions, acknowledging one’s heritage or honouring family elders. Perhaps this interest develops in compensation for their rather minimal contributions to physical reproduction and frequent experiences of being cut-off or emotionally absent from the family as well. The ability to pass on learning and wisdom to his children helps to give meaning to a father’s life (Jacobsen, 1950).

One way that men ensure a sense of continuity was in the giving of meaningful gifts from fathers to sons. The gifts may be simple straightforward presents, or they may come in the form of lessons, or even with names. Frank, who was to join his father’s garage as a mechanic still possesses, in immaculate condition, the expensive toy truck he received for his seventh Christmas, 46 years ago. He has passed it now to his oldest son, who is also a mechanic, and who has a 7 year old son of his own, so that this truck has become a link through four generations. The first description Frank gave of his family was that it is "automotive".

Bruce, despite his often fractured relationship with his father, also noted that he had, on the morning of the interview, used a very special type of saw which his father gave him for Christmas when he was 10 years old; 3000 miles, a traumatic parental divorce, many physical fights and 33 years previously. The symbol of the saw as a gift from father to son is potent: this particular father, at 78, still seemed to be encouraging his unwilling son to sever an intense emotional bond with his mother.

The gift of names to children is a powerful act which helps give them a context in which they begin to gain an identity. It is not insignificant that as women began to struggle with wanting independent identities, the issue of family names became an important feminist issue. Perhaps in compensation for lack of a strong presence in families and in the reproductive process as a whole, naming is often very important to fathers. Paul told a story about the giving of a name which has influenced his family for four generations. He was born and raised to the age of 14 in colonial Jamaica, the first born in a family of 10. His father, who was also born in Jamaica, was very devoted to his wife and children although he had left home stormily at the age of 14. Much of the information Paul has about his grandfather sounds disparaging, especially in relation to his neglect of family responsibilities.
The grandfather was described as a well educated bum, living on an inheritance and spending most of his time in bars. Still, Paul tells this story about his father's naming.

"His father was a big man, he never lost a fight. And he was carousing around - that was how he (Paul's father) got his name, one of his names. Because my grandfather and this other fella were both rich and they were in their buggies, going through town and raising hell I guess and a policeman grabbed the horse and said stop. And the other fellow said 'get your hand off that'. The policeman said no and so he pulls out a gun and shot the policeman in the hand. And then they went home.

Well, everybody knew their reputation so they came to the house, the police, with rifles and bayonets, circled the house (laughs loudly). So they took my grandfather and the other fellow and they took 'em to jail. Well as I said, they were well educated and they knew the law. And so what they did was, their defence was 'he did it' and the other says 'he did it'. So they couldn't prosecute them. And so they went to the judge.

And at that same time my dad was being born. And the judge says 'look, I'm going to fine you, [I forget how much money it is] and he says, 'if its a boy, you gotta name him after me'. And it was a boy and that's how my dad got his name, from this judge. The judge's name was Judge Portland, so my dad's name is Portland. And that's my second name. And I gave it to my first boy, its his middle name too."

Paul’s father left home angrily at the age of 14 and remained cut off from his father. Despite this, it is interesting that Paul told many such stories involving his father and even his grandfather from days long before he was born. These stories served to create and maintain connections where none existed physically, as well as allowing Paul to live out vicariously a way of life that is far from the quiet middle class existence he has experienced as an adult. The stories of the past expand his own sense of himself. Freeman (1991) suggests that the family story always has a function which must be discovered before change can occur in the family or individual system.

An awareness of multiple generations of family history is a gift of solidity and identity to any child. Family stories help members to make sense of the past and guide actions in the future. The sons who were aware, for example, of how their father got along with his father, were able to see their own situation with more understanding and tolerance. Unfortunately, many men seem to go into the world with very little in the way of such family lore to
support them.
3. Father and son: growing up together.

Erikson (1950) and Levinson (1978) have both contributed important models of individual life cycle development. Erikson, like many social science theorists of human development, took an androcentric view which spoke of male experience as if it were universal. This discussion will address his work as if it were solely focused on male psychological development, which it more accurately describes. Levinson's work was derived from substantial empirical work and, like the present study, has a deliberate male focus. Both authors address adult developmental challenges and describe sequential stages or eras of particular concern during a man's life. They interweave the individual issues in the familial and social context. The complexity of such projects is enormous. Researchers generally have avoided models of adult development in favour of more manageable and testable questions (Vaillant & Milofsky, 1980).

Carter and McGoldrick (1980) have attempted even greater complexity with their Bowenian based model of family development in trying, as this study does, to describe the development of family relationships over time. They caution against twin risks inherent in developmental models. If one tries too rigidly to fit individual cases to the model, the singular cases can easily appear pathological when they do not closely fit the prescribed pattern. On the other hand, too much allowance for unique historical influences robs the model of its integrity and deprives our view of a sense of strength and continuity with the past. Erikson used cross cultural comparisons in deriving his model.

The present project attempts to describe a particular family relationship over time, that of fathers and sons. Themes emerged from interviews with adult sons retrospectively describing pictures of progressive stages in their relationships with their fathers. Because of the complexity of the topic and limited resources, this work does not attempt to test hypotheses but rather to broadly describe themes of fathers and sons and identify influences on the quality of these relationships. In this section, some of the kinds of challenges faced at different ages are described. It should be remembered that the data for this work was taken at a singular point in time, that of adult sons over the age of 30. Not only are retroactive memories suspect in terms of accuracy, but what and how stories are remembered
can be seen as symptomatic of present day concerns. We will return to this point after a look at characteristic themes from the various ages. (Detailed descriptions of the material on which this analysis is based may be found in Appendix E.)

Two points stand out from the earliest memories men had involving their father. The first is a picture of boys gaining a glimpse into the world of men, appreciating perhaps for the first time something of the experiential quality of their fathers’ existence. There is often an idyllic quality to these images. The subjects remember the illumination they saw within a context of childhood memory. The other types of stories from this period, by contrast, tended to be harsh memories of times of intense emotion, often fear, involving fathers who were angry or out of control. The boys were frequently being punished and typically remember not only their fear but also often shock and bewilderment at the behaviour of their father. "Who was this guy?" is the way one subject phrased his reaction. Often mothers were present in these latter pictures too, as if the boys oriented themselves in relation to a position of safety during the incident.

The initial stories come from oedipal to mid latency stages in psychosexual development. Erikson accepted the basic Freudian account of identification through the oedipal complex but added an emphasis on the social components rather than the sexual (Miller, 1983). Stages are described as polarities and resolutions occur along a continuum between the extremes. His 3rd stage of development at 4 to 5 years of age is initiative versus guilt. Children learn to either take initiative and make things happen or they retreat into guilt, bounded by an overactive conscience. In the 4th stage, industry versus inferiority, the boy masters a sense of competency about their learning or develops a sense of inadequacy about himself.

In these stories when boys gain insight into the world of their fathers, they do seem to be acquiring a rudimentary appreciation of both initiative and industry in their fathers, showing interest in what those men do in their lives outside of the realm of the family home. It is an interest which is internalized in their own activity. The 4th stage corresponds to Freud’s latency period which is a calmer period of development for the boys. A rather detached curiosity about the working of the world is apparent. The more emotionally intense
memories came primarily from oedipal ages and can be seen as moments of realization about father's power as well as fear of losing well established intimacy and safety with mother in coming to be identified with father.

Our interest in both halves of the relationship means that we should consider the developmental challenges which the father is experiencing at the same time (Freeman, 1992). Ages of fathers at birth in this sample averaged 30 years. By this time, most men are leaving what Erikson calls young adulthood which is a period of 10 years or so of separation from the family when men are consolidating their identity by mastering intimacy and solidarity versus isolation in the world outside of the family. This stage has been operationalized in research as 10 years of financial independence and living separately from the family of origin (Vaillant & Milofsky, 1980). As Carter and McGoldrick (1980) point out, it is in this stage that changes for the status of women have meant that typically they now spend some time establishing an identity separate from their family and beginning to learn to trust others intimately. Even in as small a sample as this, we also see how evolving social patterns of family size and delayed ages at becoming parents extends this stage for many men well beyond what it was for their fathers. In such a context issues of trust and intimacy become highly important and the mastery of these issues are important factors influencing how fathers parent their sons in their early lives.

Fathers beyond 30 move into what Erikson calls generativity, when interest in building, establishing and guiding the next generation becomes important. It is in their roles as providers that the young boys remember seeing their fathers and turn some interest to his life of work.

A refined model of Erikson’s stages places as a dividing line between childhood and adulthood, the capacity for adult intimacy. This distinction has some empirical support gained in a study examining a 40 year life span of close to 500 men. It showed that unless men mastered intimacy, by which operationally was meant a rather stringent minimum of 10 years of living interdependently and intimately with another person, the stage of mastering generative productivity was limited or not achieved (Vaillant & Milofsky, 1980).

It was while their fathers were moving into this stage of transition from "apprenticeship to master craftsman" (Vaillant & Milofsky, 1980, p.284) in terms of
generative potential that sons generally moved into puberty and adolescence. The potential for conflict is not surprising given the fact that fathers are becoming more rigid, committed and fixed in their lives while the sons quite suddenly have a host of new developments to be incorporated broadly into a fixing of identity. When fathers are trying to discipline themselves into new ways of being, the contrary acts of ego syntonic offspring present a challenge to tolerance. Teenagers of course try out many new identities as one might a set of clothes in search for what "fits".

The pubertal stories began to see fathers described more harshly by their sons, stung by his rigidity, fearful of his judgements and perhaps more openly jealous of his power and sexuality. The change from a relatively benign childhood to a more troubled pre adulthood is captured vividly by Brent is this story of growth in his relationship with his father.

"There was one time at 12. We were walking down the street in front of our house, and I was holding his hand. It felt really great, I felt really comfortable, and was having fun. And some kid looked across the street at me and called me a fag, or something like that. Or dad a fag, I wasn't really sure who he was calling at. But suddenly I felt very uncomfortable and I let go of his hand. Apparently - I found out from mom, dad never said a word - he was very hurt by this, by me letting go of his hand. And it was at that point that our relationship really changed: from, uh, I could go and see him and sometimes get him to do things with me, to being totally alienated from him. And it was from that point too, the kind of relationship I had with him [became] one loaded with anger, on both our parts... this age 12 keeps popping up in my mind as when things really changed".

The period that begins with puberty is a time Yablonsky (1990) refers to as separation and individuation between fathers and sons, when sons must learn to find their own way separate from their fathers. The conflict we see in many of the stories from this age period and beyond function to create this division and distance for the sons.

The next age period framed in the interviews was from about 14 to 19 or the time of leaving home. Sons at this stage were even more closely watching their fathers to see how he was progressing in his own challenges of intimacy and career mastery. The emotional distance they had begun to develop also fostered a general harshness in attitude towards fathers, but they were also influenced largely by how they perceived fathers were living their lives. If they were still perceived as heroes in some sense, the models they formed would

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be more likely to serve usefully for their sons. The difficulties for fathers managing such a task are formidable given the milieu of intense sexuality, family developments, social change and separation pressures. Many men, for example, criticized their father for the way he existed in his relationship with their mother, or in one case, stepmother. Others expressed a desire to avoid the kind of "dead end" career they perceived their fathers to have. Still others vowed to be better fathers.

Significantly, the fathers in this sample tended on the whole to facilitate their sons moving out from home, or at the least to not impede sons on this path. Mothers were more likely to resist their sons moving towards independence, while fathers seemed to see the change as an opportunity to move their relationship with their sons onto new ground, perhaps looking forward to the stage of maturity, mutuality and man to man friendships which Yablonsky (1990) describes. It was only as autonomous adults that men in the sample began to have independent relationships with their fathers, generally after about 10 years of independence, as Erikson prescribes.

Helping sons to move out of the family home is the most obvious application of a theme that has been repeated in different guises throughout this report which sees the father’s role as assisting sons to complete a process of separation on many levels from mother. Erikson believed that the prolonged and lengthening childhood which marks North American society is its distinguishing feature. In Western culture, childhood is often said to have been invented as a concept only in the 18th century (Carter & McGoldrick, 1980). The rituals of manhood found in many cultures act to separate boys from mothers and younger children usually around puberty but in some cases as early as 7 years old (Gilmore, 1990). The lack of active involvement currently by men and fathers in the psychological development of younger boys has created a situation where some commentators would claim that many men never really grow up emotionally (Bly, 1990; Keen, 1991). The struggles seen in the men in this sample in relation to their fathers would suggest that they don’t stop trying.

We would do well to remember that the stories people tell of their family experiences change as they progress and grow and that at each stage, they have a function which is related to the current concept of self (Freeman, 1991). That these men told stories of conflict or jealousy or heroism or distance involving their fathers and mothers is in a sense only a
reflection of how they currently feel and a way of identifying what issues stand in the way of their present growth. The story of the past becomes a metaphor of the present.
Chapter VI

SOCIETAL THEMES: FATHER'S ROLE

Introduction

In this chapter the social influences on father and son relationships in modern North American culture are examined in light of theory which sees gender and roles as primarily social or cultural constructions. The particular drives, bonds and intrapsychic and familial dynamics examined to date are tempered with ecological consideration of powerful environmental influences. In a sense this analysis is broader, describing societal rather than personal or familial characteristics. In another sense, this analysis is more limited in that features of this particular society are examined, which may not apply in other cultures. Socialization theory proposes that humans internalize norms and rules of the culture in learning to be social creatures. Social learning theory describes the psychological mechanisms by which this learning takes place. Feminism has contributed gender specific analyses of these processes.

Structural functionalists such as Parsons and Bales (1956) proposed that becoming a father involves internalizing a set of role prescriptions and requirements as to what a father should be. Societal and cultural norms form the basis of these prescriptions. The roles which are played out in families, argued Parsons, follow to some extent from the functions required of a particular structure such as the family grouping. As family size has diminished over the past thirty years, so too the roles and functions required of family members have been changing. Traditionally fathers took on what Parsons called "instrumental" roles as protector, provider, teacher and other functions which serve external needs of the family unit. Mothers of course, were said to attend to internal needs of the family and serve "expressive" maintenance functions. Role prescriptions should not be confused with the view that says traits specific to male or female personality should define roles, a proposition more likely to be made by conservative psychoanalytic or biological theorists.

Such explanations of course no longer describe typical North American families and have fallen from favour in current analyses, although the concept of roles generally and the specific emphasis on father as provider still influences much thinking about fatherhood (Daly, 1992). The men in this study were socialized in an era when Parsons' model more accurately
described family structures and dynamics. In some ways, it was probably the most rigidly gender role differentiated period in North American history (Demos, 1983).

Social learning theory has attempted to show more specifically how social prescriptions are internalized. Originating in the mechanistic models of early behaviourism, it owes its current popularity to Bandura (1969) who added recognition of the importance of cognitive processes and inherent capacities, while arguing that social modelling is the major form of learning socially defined behaviours. Modelling requires attention by the learner to important observable characteristics. The relative influence of models on individuals depends on how they are perceived and processed internally according to their power, status or attractiveness or to the salience of a particular behaviour such as aggression. Reinforcement or reward by others is the key motivation for repetition of any behaviour.

This basic model is used to explain the acquisition of important behaviours like the sex typed behaviours relevant to our discussion. Father is thought to be the most important model for boys in learning about masculinity, parenting, communicating, and other appropriately "male" behaviours, although social learning theorists stress that the parent is only one of many models the child learns from (Miller, 1983).

Social learning theory has been popular with many feminists, social workers and others concerned with social change because it apparently offers the relatively simple yet broad possibility of directing change by manipulation of the social environment. It has been concerned experimentally with some key feminist issues such as acquisition of gender and aggressive behaviour. Although it has often been understood to compete with Freudian and cognitive explanations of behaviour, some attempts have been made to integrate these works. For example, the modelling Bandura describes can be seen to provide details for the Freudian concept of identification with same sex parents (Miller, 1983). Miller calls for further work to provide the natural ecology involved in aggression, sex typing and dependency since most social learning research work has been confined to laboratory settings.

"The theory's contribution would be much greater if investigators would examine the models and reinforcement contingencies usually found in the typical environments of each phase of development."

[Miller, 1983. p.241]
This project elaborates some of those contingencies for sons in regards to their relationships with fathers in their acquisition and internalization of male models. The incorporation of social learning principles into descriptions of behaviours and social environment is attempted in this chapter.

**Gendered questions**

One important contribution of feminist writing has been the clear identification of differences in socialization pressures upon boys and girls. It is widely acknowledged that generally socialization can exaggerate minor differences and creates roles which rigidly confine the behavioural and experiential possibilities for both genders. The father has been suspected of being an important contributor to the perpetuation of sex role stereotypes (Radin, 1986; Jacklin, Dipietro & Maccoby, 1984), although some research has found that fathers and mothers equally contribute to sex typed play in their children (Roopnarine, 1986). Peretti and Statum (1984) found that sons strongly reflect their fathers authoritarian paternal attitudes and Emihovich, Gaier & Cronin (1984) that a strong positive relationship existed between father’s expectations and son’s sex-role beliefs. Jacklin, DiPietro and Maccoby (1984), two originators of important work on sex differences, looked at sex typing in parent child interaction and found that father-son dyads aroused the highest interest arousal levels in family permutations although not necessarily the most sex typed interactions. In fact this latter study found that fathers were highly sex typed with offspring of both sexes, but that mothers were stereotypical only with their daughters. This of course would mean that unlike their sisters, boys receive conflicting messages about sex appropriate behaviours from their parents, perhaps contributing to gender role confusion. Such confusion and a relative absence of fathers from the personal experience of boys may exaggerate sex role differences and create problems for male development.

Much of the work cited above on sex differences originated in women’s frustration with an experience of constriction attributed to stereotypical socialization. This focus on "stereotypical" masculine and feminine traits has been criticized as misleading and unhelpful. Jungian influenced work and eastern psychology have worked from the hypothesis that both archetypes exist in a different balance within each individual (Moore and Gillette, 1990) as
yin and yang or anima and animus. Keen (1991) argues that the questions should be not those phrased like "am I man enough?" or "do I mother too much?", but rather something like "when do I need to be assertive and when should I submit?". Engendering entire sets of personality traits, he argues, only contributes to polarization between the sexes, but not to understanding or growth.

Feminist post structural analysis has moved beyond sex roles in identifying and describing systemic male privilege in societal structures: not only have differences been created and exaggerated, they are said to promote the interests of males over those of females (Connell, 1987). Women have identified their experiences in areas in which they feel disadvantaged by "patriarchal" power structures, including especially employment and access to financial power and more recently in intimate relationships. Some more radical feminist writers continue to voice Engels' view that the family itself is a patriarchal structure which is designed to perpetuate male privilege and subjugate women and children (Pollock & Sutton, 1985). Father, from this perspective, is an agent of oppression.

Just as an emphasis on gendered traits may polarize discussion, blanket claims that entire genders are "advantaged" in some overall sense, may not only polarize but also contribute to subtle reinforcement of traditional views which perpetuates notions of women as helpless and needy and men as strong but uncaring. In the same way many women have identified areas of social life where they feel oppressed, men also need to articulate their distress. Such a correspondingly heuristic expression of the reality of male experience is only beginning to be articulated, although there is ample evidence that males’ material advantage is of dubious value in our affluent culture: men suffer more alcoholism, suicide, chronic mental illness, death by accidents and death by violence (Goldberg, 1976) than women. Men’s social support networks tend to grow smaller and their relationships are more likely to be superficial. These and other lifestyle factors contribute to a growing difference in life expectancy favouring women by almost a decade (Waldron & Johnston, 1976). This has increased from a difference of less than 2 years in 1920.

A stereotypical fear of seeming "weak" still prevents many men from seeking help and admitting to problems (Robertson & Fitzgerald, 1992) and a social climate which holds males
singularly responsible for the ills of the world similarly inhibits men from genuinely examining and expressing their lives.

One area that the burgeoning and as yet introspective men’s movement has identified as a source of male suffering is in the poverty of their relationships, particularly those with other men (Keen, 1991; Corneau, 1990). Learning how to relate with males is for most men, primarily a product of their own experience with father. The absence of father from active personal involvement in the family life of these men, and in those of North American post war men, is perhaps the most important and problematic aspect of those relationships.
Absence: Father as Stranger

Camus' L'Etranger has been translated into English both as The Outsider and The Stranger. Both meanings fit an image of fathers which emerged commonly from the interviews and which has been identified widely in literature on fathers (Corneau, 1991; Kagel & Schilling, 1985; Ross, 1989). Fathers are frequently virtual or actual strangers to their children. Physical absence of the father from the family scene is so prevalent that chances are only about 50% that a child born in Canada today will live to the age of 16 with their father. At least one in 7 families with children in Canada are currently fatherless (SUN, Feb. 1992). Absent fathers have been so common that a research paradigm investigating their influence (or lack) has resulted in many books and articles on the topic (Pedersen, 1976). We have seen how until recently both psychological theory and research ignored the father as a parent of young children. Youniss and Ketterlinus (1987) have shown that adolescents of both sexes claim also to not know their fathers nearly as well as their mothers. Even when fathers are physically present, they are often described as emotionally absent from families so that they appear to live outside the emotional bounds of the family (Corneau, 1991; Bly, 1990). Only very recently has research begun to examine the relationships fathers have in their families and their first observation is often of the relative poverty of these connections (Gordon, 1987; Kay, 1989).

The men in this sample are unusual by today's standards in that all lived with their fathers until their late teens or until they left home. These men were born before the large increase in the divorce rate began in Canada about 1970. Even so, very many men reported feeling that interaction with their fathers was very limited and their understanding of him emotionally was poor. About half mentioned father's absence as an influential factor in their relationship. Their distance from the family frequently led respondents to ask "who is this guy?" and to fear his mysterious ways. Very often the first comment made in the interviews was "my impression is that he wasn't around a lot", or "we didn't do much together".

Comments which portrayed father as a distant stranger include many which note a profound lack of communication: "I can't talk, I can't speak properly in front of him", 108
"there's a real barrier there", "we didn't talk about being gay, we talked about the weather, grades...", "we didn’t have a real understanding of our father", "its distant, very distant (between us)", "there's a very great gap there".

Effects

Interest in the repercussions of absence has inspired much father absent research, a paradigm which usually assumes that traditional nuclear families are the healthiest environment in which to raise children. For example, concern for adolescents lacking male models has inspired research finding that father absence has led to decreased achievement orientation in high school boys (Hunt & Hunt, 1977), and increased antisocial behaviours such as aggression, delinquency and other criminal behaviours (eg. Brownfield, 1987; Hanson, Henggeler, Haefele & Rodick, 1984). Distant, cold and rejecting fathers have been associated with depression proneness (Zenmore & Rinholm, 1989) and with a "lost" feeling amongst adult sons (Corneau, 1990). The most obvious result from father absence is a lack of an intimate older model for boys. This results in greater reliance on more distant and less "real" models found most often in modern media. The next theme discusses social images in more detail.

Given recent, occasionally misguided attention which emphasizes fathers as abusers, some commentators are not unlikely to conclude that father absence, except for the financial consequences, is not necessarily undesirable (Newseek, May, 1992). Loeb (1986) found that father absent boys develop more flexible images of adult men than boys raised by ineffectual fathers, who frequently develop negative images of adult men and avoid interacting with them as adults. However, research generally finds that father absence is not an advantage to children (Brownfield, 1987; Kagel & Schilling, 1985; Hunt & Hunt, 1975).

The effect of a history of limited contact with their fathers upon respondents cannot reliably be demonstrated with retrospective accounts such as were obtained in this research. However, we note that many of those same men who report criticism of the amount or type of contact they had, also struggle currently with career and intimate relationships and that even as adults, men with frequent contact with their fathers seemed to be more generally content in their lives. Of course, this may entirely be a contemporary phenomenon as a wish for inner guidance in the present, is somehow voiced as a lack of paternal guidance from the
past, but the proposition that father contact at all ages is important to sons’ well being seems equally supportable.

**Some causes**

The emotional distance and absence of fathers has been attributed to (i) stereotypical masculinity (Pleck, 1981), (ii) pressures of economic identification with the role as provider (Bly, 1990), (iii) functional and developmental results of family arrangements and as we have seen previously, power struggles for influence over children. Evidence was found supporting all of these explanations as to why fathers seem to be strangers in their families.

(i) **Attributes of stereotypical masculinity** are sometimes said to prevent the development of close relations. One such aspect that imperils relationship building is emotional inexpressiveness (Balswick, 1988). Communication problems with father was a very frequent complaint. Many men reported that they had never talked, that "we have never spoken frankly about feelings" or that they wished they had been able to say something they had not. Therapy sometimes involves simply speaking those very things. Fathers were often "the silent partner" in the marriage, and the unknown figure in the family. Dan felt that his distance from his father was due to his not knowing "how to father properly" and experienced typical communication difficulties such as being afraid to tell his father about himself.

Schwartz (1988) studied the adult sons’ experience of emotionally absent versus emotionally present fathers and found that emotional presence was characterized by father’s ability to be both nurturant and instrumental. However, fathers who were predominantly nurturant were perceived as not "manly" enough. We can reasonably suspect that some of these fathers’ parental styles were guided by similar fears of appearing "feminine". Marty’s perception was that his father wasn’t around very much and he remembers even as a young boy not being able to tell if his father was happy or angry with him. He attributes much of this to his father’s concern with being a "man’s man", saying his father believed "you do not express feelings of affection between men". He believes his father "stuffed" all of his feelings inside until they eventually blew when he had an aneurism, so that Marty appreciates the cost of male inexpressiveness, although he had no male model for being otherwise.

The role of the father in "masculine" violent and aggressive behaviour by sons has
been studied by Brownfield (1987). He found that physical presence or absence of father was unrelated to aggression in adolescents but identification with a father figure was a significant barrier to violent behaviour. Father absent research generally has shown that it is the quality of the relationship that is important, rather than the particular style - masculine, feminine or otherwise - of the parenting (May, 1992). The presence of the father has however been found to be more important to male development than the quality of the relationship (Kay, 1989).

(ii) A tradition of primary responsibility for the economic needs of the family and excess identification with the role of provider have been frequently described as the major reason for father's lack of involvement with their children (Keene, 1991). Research has found that working class fathers seem to spend more time with their children (Hwang, 1987), suggesting that it may indeed be a question of excess when fathers attend more to providing than relating. Kevin's father worked shift work for 25 years and we frequently saw, in his story, some of the toll this took on his demeanour, his relationships and his ability to father his children. However, Kevin did not complain that his father was a stranger who was away much of the time. He did in fact, make time to coach boys' athletics. Bruce, Kyle and Rick all complained that their white collar fathers would not take the time to play with them.

Certainly many men mentioned their father's absence, often because "he worked too much". Brent remembers his father starting a new construction venture which meant that, as a teenager, he hardly ever saw his dad. Gord's father would leave the family for months at a time while he attended or taught courses in other cities. Rick's father would leave the house every night after dinner to go back to the office to work late into the night. Kyle's father travelled for his work and was frequently gone from the family for weeks at a time.

Still, the complaint that father was unavailable because of work did not come through these interviews as strongly as might be expected and other issues seem also to be important. Several men complained that they didn't believe that necessity forced their fathers to work so much. For example, Kyle, Gord and Rick came as adults to doubt that their father's commitment to work was the only reason for their absence, believing that also they liked their privacy and were escaping from mother or family involvement, something that Kyle at least
had begun to understand in himself.

(iii) Gord felt that his father escaped from the family into his own private world because of his mother who was "the dragon" and he the timid angel, "hiding out from life".

"Even when he was there, he wasn't there... he'd usually be down in his workshop, which was his shrine - that was my introduction to how to run away from life - if he was at home that was where he was. And he would make tiny miniatures. He was unbelievable with his hands, he could do anything... he was so concentrated, so completely away from what was going on around him. That was where he was and you didn't go into his workshop when he was there: it was sacrosanct."

Gord spent a great deal of effort trying to understand this distant character who would stay up late at night, staring at the test tube pattern on the TV, smoking cigarettes. He believes that he was thinking about the missed opportunities in his life. Another time Gord also observed his father, staring vacantly:

"We'd be on the beach and my dad would be staring. We'd be running around picking up glass and everything and my dad would be staring at the edge of the sea and he'd just stand there like this, staring off into the horizon for about 20 minutes. And I used to think, I'd wonder what he's looking at and I remember writing a poem about it when I got older, that he was, his eye was on the horizon but his mind was further away than that. That's the image of my dad, he was like that."

It was the younger men in the sample, Gord, Rick and Marty who most intensely experienced their fathers as strangers. It may be that they have only just begun to turn their focus on him and realized how little they knew about him. The older men like Frank and Paul had many more years to relate to and understand their fathers as an adult, and to come to terms with how he was and perhaps how much like him they had become. There is also a generational difference between these older men in terms of what they expect in the way of relationship with their fathers.

One of the factors which precluded emotional closeness with fathers was the extent to which sons were afraid of their fathers. The role many fathers play as disciplinarian is related to this fact but also the fact of not understanding his moods or his distance left sons unsettled and wary of trying to approach him. It is perhaps not unintended that frequently
irritable fathers create considerable emotional distance around themselves. An example, again from Gord, shows how this fear of a cranky father can make relationship with him very difficult.

"My brother - once we were cleaning out the car and he said "go wash the mats". And my brother didn't hear him but was just like me, he was too afraid to ask dad "what do you mean, what?" So he went downstairs and dad says "what's he doing, go find out what he's doing". So I went down there and there's D. with a scrub brush and soap all over the scrub brush and he has about 15 packets of matches and he was washing the matches. And I said, "what are you doing?" He said "dad told me to wash the matches". I said "he told you to wash the matches?" And I didn't even question it, I went Phh?

So, I went outside and Dad said "what's D. doing?" And I said "he's washing the matches you told him to do". And dad looks on the ground and there's the mats and he walks in and D. is in there washing the matches and he goes up and he just WHAACK across the top of the head. "Think man! I said MATS". That was my dad. Fuck, my poor brother. He must have just been confused, it must have made no sense to him at all. He had about 15 of them and there was soap and he was scrubbing them with a brush."

It has been argued that males are stereotypically poor at empathically understanding others (Basow, 1986) and scenes such as this suggest that this indeed may play an important part in the extent to which fathers are strangers in their families. We have already discussed a number of other factors which contribute to this experience of father as aloof, distant, alien or altogether missing. The relationship with mother, traditional role expectations such as providing and needing to appear "masculine" (which often merely means tough) are important variables. Evolving social expectations of family functioning towards emotional support (Freeman, 1991) may be critical as well. The very question asked in this work, about relationship of son with father, could be construed as a stereotypically "feminine" concern emphasizing connection over independence.

Father absent studies suffer the problem common to social science research of confounding variables (Lamb, 1986) but there is no doubt that physical absence or emotional distance is a widespread and deleterious feature of the experience by many sons of their fathers. The social trend of fathers playing less of a role in family life is troubling and should be resisted vigorously.
Images of father

The strength of influence of a father as a role model is related to how his character is perceived by the son. As we have seen, power, ability to reward, attractiveness and salience determines the clarity of a role model which in theory is mimicked when there is expectation of some kind of reward (Miller, 1983). The social image a son presents of his father gives a strong indication of how powerful a model he provides and thus to what extent sons will mimic their fathers. Generally, sons in this sample were able to describe a relatively objective picture of their father which was often quite distinct from their experience of him personally. The selection of images from respondents presented next is intended to portray this apparent disinterest, although in every case, significant judgements and personal reflections are nested into the observations which will also influence how receptive the son is to modelling his father. Despite the origin of social learning theory in behaviourism, relatively unconscious, internal processes such as evaluation and appraisal are important to this modelling mechanism (Bandura, 1969). Many men remarked on how alike their fathers they find themselves becoming, only as adults coming to realize the power of intimately witnessing his behaviour.

Rick:

"He wasn't the top of his class but I always saw him as being the top of his class. He's a very well respected man in municipal engineering, he knows quite a few of the top guys and he's treasurer of his fraternity. Gets letters from all over the U.S. He's still involved now, and he graduated in 54."

Kevin:

"It was a typical small town with small industry. Dad worked in a place where they made plexiglass. It had one streetlight and two pubs. We had a rocky relationship. He had a rocky relationship with pretty much everybody... he was not the most beloved character... the kids on the team loved him. They played their hearts out for him. He had a good rapport, but not so good as a parent. Or with other parents. They didn't like his style. He was pretty rough around the edges. His drinking and his language..."
Dave:

"He believes in community, he believes in family. My dad is on the municipal council. He's been involved in that for probably the last 20 years. He's well thought of. And I think people think of him as a good farmer. But he certainly doesn't tell anybody that or come across that way. He's very homespun, what you see is what you get."

Gord:

"He's the kind of person that you'd say 'invite him to the party', cause he sits down at the piano and he goes nuts. And his friends are accomplished people, people from the symphony orchestra. When he has a party, he's got singers and dancers there and playwrights there and drama teachers...his parties are always interesting..."

We can see from the ironic statements about images of father how the degree to which a son judges his father's social position harshly will be influenced somewhat by the ethos of changing times, as well perhaps as how he judges himself.

Father as hero

Success, accomplishments, friendships with peers and image in the community are all factors which combine together to form a global view of father as a man. If he succeeds on all those counts, he may well serve as a hero to his son. It is a familiar question whether fathers should be heroic models for their sons inspiring their actions in the world, as if heroism is a necessary component of the successful father. Leaving aside for the moment the issue of whether this is a realistic or even functional possibility or whether it is limited to a particular developmental stage, we first examine the processes and evidence supporting such a dynamic.

Whether sons perceived their fathers as a hero would be influenced by interpersonal or relationship factors as well as the more objective considerations already mentioned. It may be that in order for a man to consider his father a hero, he has first to move away from interpersonal considerations about father which focus on what the son needs or expects from him personally, to begin to see him as a man living his life and not just as the man who is "my" father. There are two opposing forces involved for fathers and sons here. If the man is closely and personally involved with his son in what might be called a nurturant or emergent role as a father, he may not be able to be at the same time the infallible or heroic
figure which many boys apparently expect. Preconceived notions about what a proper father
should be contributes toward inhibiting this idealization of father. The important question
may be what compels a man to want to see his father in this light, what need this serves. It
is probable that close ego identification with father endures so that if a man condemns his
father, he also feels condemned, perhaps unconsciously, himself. A subsequent important
question becomes "what factors contribute to preventing such a perception - where do these
preconceptions or standards of measure come from?" What are the problems with idolizing
one's father?

The importance to individuals of having and becoming heroes has been recognized
in family therapy recently (Freeman, 1991). The hero provides a model to strive towards in
one's life and a way of seeing one's own struggles which gives them meaning. The first and
most important hero in children's life will normally be their parents. It is becoming more
difficult however for fathers to adequately serve as heroes to their sons than ever before.

Here in North American culture, with our ambitious "American dream" expectations
and notions about the inevitable march of progress, it is not usually seen as enough for a son
to repeat what his father has done: he should also use the advantage of his father's work and
the advancements of modern times to get even further ahead. This however creates the
problem that if a son should surpass his father, he is likely to begin to feel ashamed of him,
that he becomes an embarrassment or a weight of the past holding his son back. Bruce told
a story about exceeding his father's understanding of the world at the age of 12 and living
from then on with a sense of intellectual superiority which never quite made up for his
father's superior physical abilities. His ability to defeat his father intellectually but not
physically left him feeling both embarrassed by his father's ignorance and also shamed by
his prowess.

"I remember when I was late pre-adolescent, maybe 12 or 13 - there was a
much increased level of tension or intolerance between my father and me. I
was doing really well in school and I was really quite an avid reader, I really
liked the sciences and I was always reading about technical and scientific
subjects. And we took - he bought his first car in 1961 because he needed it
to do the travelling for the sales work that he was now engaged in - and the
first holiday that we ever took was to P.E.I. We'd never had much of a
holiday in the summer before because we had never been able to get away from the city. Here we were on the Eastern seaboard and it was the first time I ever remember seeing the ocean. We were walking along the beach and the Prince Edward island shore is quite amazing. Its red sedimentary rock and the soil is red...

And we’d be walking along there and we’d be walking over the tides ’cause you could walk at low tide but you couldn’t walk at high tide and so the tides were a really amazing thing to see, because I’d never seen them before. But I’d read enough about them that I said “Yeah well the tides are caused by the influence of the moon and the sun pulling the water on the surface of the earth around. The earth’s water has a bulge that tracks the movement of the moon and it tracks the movement of the sun.

This was completely unacceptable, my father was unwilling to hear that I might know about how the tides were caused. He was convinced that when you got outside the earth’s atmosphere, there was no gravity. He’d understood this I guess, from some of the coverage of the sputniks and the satellites of the late fifties. There was no gravity outside the earth’s atmosphere and so it was impossible, impossible that you could ever have the moon pulling the earth’s oceans around, or the sun pulling the earth’s oceans around. Well I knew that this was not right, I knew that gravity was working whether you were inside or outside the earth’s atmosphere, gravity was what was holding the solar system together, gravity was what held the galaxy together. Gravity was the transmission medium by which the moon and the sun attracted the moon and made the tides.

I remember being very upset that I couldn’t get this very elementary idea through to my father. He wouldn’t accept that I had read up and had an understanding of the tides. This was a sign of the kind of tension, rivalry and stubbornness between us. And its an indicator to me that already I was very distant from him.”

Media and modern times

In times of rapid social changes, such as we have seen in North America over the past fifty years, the gains and lessons which fathers have taken from life, are likely to be less relevant and useful at instructing sons about their lives. Because of rapid technological development, many 12 year old boys are already far more skilled with computers, video games and other electronic equipment than their fathers will ever be. The life experience of fathers must seem ever more trivial to these boys and the dynamic of outclassed family hero becomes even more acute. Even for Dan from Sri Lanka, a similar experience with changing social standards limits the usefulness of his father’s example. In his case it is the father’s experience of having an arranged marriage which is
not helpful for Dan who chose his wife and, as a "modern" man, now looks down on those who continue the tradition of arranged marriages. He has however, never been sure that he chose his wife wisely and his marriage is very rocky.

When personal heroes fail many boys turn to modern media. Music, film and sports stars serve as inspiration for sons and the possibility of knowing them intimately through extensive media coverage including advertising, makes their impact as role models very powerful. These figures may well seem more accessible than it is to their own father. Again heroic images of one’s own father will certainly fade in relation to these larger than life characters. For a time Marty's dad was the star pitcher "up there on the mound", but he ended up paralysed from a stroke and drank heavily before his death. Rick, a talented athlete, bemoaned his father's lack of support for his sports activities and expressed the wish to have a "father like Gretzky", to whom Wayne apparently credits his success. TV fathers don't help by providing images of buffoons (Homer Simpson, Al Bundy), unrealistically perfect fathers (Cosby, Ben Cartwright) or spineless nice guys (Ward Cleaver).

The recent Spielberg movie "Hook" is an interesting media case in point. Its major theme concerns the poverty of the relationship between a grown up Peter Pan(ning), now a mean business executive, and his resentful son. The boy begins to fall sway to the pirate, Hook who, unlike the father, is kind and attentive to him. Peter regains his power to fly only after his great struggle to find a single happy thought: this is achieved by remembering the birth of his son. Naturally, he regains a heroic position with the son by mobilizing the lost boys and defeating the pirates. Although the movie powerfully pushes the importance of involved fathering, it is also disturbing in its reliance for a vision of a mature and heroic father on a man who refuses to grow up. Modern media contains a profound shortage of mature, realistic father figures.

Male development

One of the central themes from Gilmore’s descriptive account of manhood in various cultures (1990) is that males *become* men by learning to turn away from pain and to conquer the impulse to run from danger. The concept of hero is woven right into the core of this masculine ideal. The component of the American dream which demands heroes who conquer
difficulty and inspire us in our lives, presents a special difficulty involving appropriate
distance for fathers. When they have fathers who do in fact succeed well in their lives, it can
present an image which intimidates sons and actually inhibit them from striving because they
fear that they will never be able to match their fathers' accomplishments. On the other hand,
if, as is the case with Bruce, the son does manage to surpass the father's achievements, father
will not be able to play the role of hero but instead becomes a liability. This is one of the
most central difficulties to a father and son relationship. When a father believes it is
necessary that he teach his sons, in some way, this painful lesson about controlling pain and
fear, it will create tension, resistance and conflict which, until the lesson is "learned", the son
interprets as proof of lack of heroic virtue in his father. The improving relationships older
men seemed to have with their fathers may be related to their eventually accepting this
lesson.

The expectations we have that sons exceed their fathers and that fathers are heroes for
their sons appear to be inherently incompatible and may only be reconciled by their
application at different developmental stages. Seeing father unfailingly as hero may be
appropriate while sons are young and father appears an all powerful figure. It has been
suggested that de-idealization of father initiates adolescence for a boy and the "mental work"
during that period is to re-establish father as a viable and meaningful figure (Atkins, 1989).
For many of the men in this sample, this re-establishment "work" had not been completed
even into their thirties. Mutual respect has been found to be key to good relations between
fathers and adult sons (Nydegger & Mittleness, 1991). This maturity may retain something
of the hero's ability to inspire, but the adult task, according to Freeman (1991), is to "be your
own hero".

It is an interesting commentary on our society and the state of relations within our
families that unlike the dominant white culture, Innuit children have been found to identify
their heroes as intimate family members, despite popular exposure to much mainstream media
(Vancouver Sun, June 25/92). In mainstream culture, interpersonal dynamics and social
images seem to prevent perceiving fathers - or other family members - in this light. Dave
has attempted to maintain a pure and heroic vision of his father but it has been tempered by
a slight condescension and a lot of disappointment in his father's lack of strength to stand up
towards his mother. He still doesn't want to believe that his father had an affair 17 years ago
because this would tarnish the image Dave has of him. Gord cheered when *his* father finally
had an affair - this was a heroic act of standing up to his mother - at 17, it gave Gord license
to begin to talk back to his mother himself. Marty, like Dave, has tried hard to find his
father heroic and for example blames the failure to make it in professional sports on sabotage
from his grandparents. However, in the face of his father's failure to perform socially valued
tasks - to be responsible and to provide for his family - this is an difficult endeavour. In a
song which Marty wrote, the vital teaching from his father is prefaced with the line "son my
life's been wasted, so this you gotta hear ...".

What purpose does it serve to have heroes in one's life, especially those from our own
family? Certainly, it can assist open communication and affection between both parties. If
sons believe their fathers are heroes, they will be more likely to learn and model themselves
on lessons from his real life situation. Mentoring by a respected elder has been identified as
an important learning model for both the mentor and protege as a way of facilitating learning
and growth and of easing mid-life transitions (Auster, 1984; Levinson, 1978). Finally, the
actions of those we hold heroic can inspire us to surpass ourselves in our deeds. The attempt
to see their fathers as heroes is an important part of the way sons try to see themselves in a
light which gives meaning to their own lives.
Historically, it has probably always been the case that the human father's primary contribution to the reproductive process is that of providing food and shelter for mother and child. Certainly, in North American post war families, the major division of labour in the family defined father as the breadwinner and mother the nurturer for the family. The overwhelming social expectation continues to be that men should become productive members of society, contributing by working for wages to support themselves, their family and society. To a considerable extent, how well men manage at this task still determines the social recognition they receive and is thus likely to contribute far more to their self esteem than how well they actually relate to their children. Our culture's primary message to males about their job as fathers has been that they must be responsible parents by which we usually mean they should provide well for their children. The father's continued obligation to provide, irrespective of whether he is actually involved with the children, has been described as "social, moral and natural" (Wolins, 1983).

This powerful identification of males with the role of provider influences the relationship between every father and son. The sons in this study invariably identified their fathers in this role and judged his life in terms of this success or failure. Despite the repeated complaint that "he worked too much", the images of fathers were often highly influenced by how sons perceived his financial success. Frank, for example, was highly satisfied with his relationship with his father. He claimed "he was my hero" of the man who "always had plenty of money" and ran a business employing 37 people. Frank's father was able to offer Frank a job and to give him money to buy a house after he was married. He taught Frank how to make decisions which took into account the concerns of everybody involved, in effect how to be a boss. Marty's case is at the other end of the extreme. He struggled to feel respect and rapport with a father who was unemployed much of the time. It was his mother who got Marty a summer job at the factory where she worked and to whom he gave his earnings as a boy of 12, to help out while his father was hospitalized. That the men in our society are judged primarily for their financial success certainly influences how sons see their
fathers and thus the relationships they have together.

The model which a father sets as a provider remains with their sons as a powerful factor influencing their own working lives. Several men mentioned how, as boys, they had seen their fathers as having little or no choice in terms of orientation to career and money. As they matured and considered career decisions themselves as men, they often reassessed judgements of their fathers' lives in terms of his commitment to these aspects of his life. The older men were more likely to be accepting and respectful of their fathers' example and the decisions they made themselves were often based on lessons learned from his example. Younger men were more likely to be critical. Kevin, for example, who has not yet begun to raise a family, saw his father as having been trapped at a shift work job in a dead end town which he determined to escape. Kyle left his job with a prestigious corporation in order to gain more control over his life. Dave determined at the age of 13 that he would escape from life on his father's farm.

The modern pattern of father's daily absence from the home in order to labour for wages began with the rise of industrialism. It has been blamed for the deterioration of intimacy between fathers and their families (Bly, 1990). We have seen how many sons viewed their fathers as strangers, playing only peripheral parts in the daily emotional life of the family because of their involvement as providers. Prior to the industrial revolution and widespread urbanization, the entire family unit was more likely to be involved in production for the support of the family (Demos, 1983). The example of Frank's family where everyone is employed in the family business is a throwback to rural lifestyles. Paul's father tried, with limited success, to create an economically communal family with his adult children.

The tendency for fathers to be completely absent from family view for a fixed period every day was not as pronounced in the sample as might be expected. A surprising number of boys helped out with their father's business as teenagers, or their father's workplace was accessible to them as children - at the garage, sawmill, grocery store, gas station, cafe, antique store or the farm. Being able to observe father at work was important to the sons. Traditional occupations that allows such flexibility appear to be disappearing in our modern economy. Some of the enigmatic quality many men perceive in relation to their fathers originates when as children they see him disappear daily from the family to a work life that
often remains a mystery.

Historically, with the withdrawal of children and then of women from the paid workforce, the family became completely dependent upon father as provider. In this sample, only Marty's mother provided more for the family financially than the father. Rick's mother worked for an income, particularly after the boys grew up, but Rick still resented that his father had kept her on an allowance believing this to be evidence of some meanness of his father. Bruce's mother was unable to function when the divorce with her husband demanded decisions about financial matters and Bruce had to negotiate on her behalf. It is interesting to note that as the family's financial dependence on fathers grew in post industrial economies, this coincided with a trend for them to become emotional outsiders or strangers within the family itself, compounding their difficult position in relation to the family.

One historical trend we can identify is the increasing narrowness of the role for fathers of the baby boom generation: society has left for fathers few substantial tasks to do, other than provide (Lasch, 1978). This is in part typical of the movement towards greater specialization and "experts" within society and some would say part of an attack on the integrity of the human family (Mount, 1982), but it is especially significant in the context of much diminished family size. This latter fact may also be partially implicated in the movement of women into the workforce, simply because there are less children around to parent.

Pleck (1987) argued that there were four eras of North American fathering: in the 19th century it was that of father as moral guardian, then breadwinner in the early 20th century, sex role enforcer in the post war generation and now what has been termed the new nurturant or emergent father (Pleck, 1987; Lamb, 1986; Fein, 1978). Like that of father as protector, the first role of father as guardian and teacher of morality has largely vanished. Both functions have been replaced by societal institutions (legal and educational) which left fathers' responsibilities - and opportunities to interact meaningfully with their children - much diminished (Lasch, 1978). Rick told of his father trying to help him with high school mathematics, but giving up in frustration because he had no comprehension of the level which his son understood. Several generations earlier, he would have been responsible for Rick's entire education. Similarly, Gord told a story about going out with his father in order to try
to protect him from some "biker types", in a scene concerning father as protector in a way very few men are involved in anymore.

Because of the age of the sample, the impact of "emergent fathering" was not evident with fathers in this study although it has been noted how sons’ evaluations of their fathers were influenced by changing social expectations on gender appropriate behaviour. This author would argue that the evolution of both of these roles however, moral teacher and nurturer, are actually driven by changes to the economic order and the social structures by which we organize our production and reproduction, and that the provider role remains paramount for most men in modern North American culture. Pleck’s idea that fathers were expected by society to instil gender appropriate characteristics in their sons, only seems to make sense in the context of his regular absence from the family which is probably the overriding fact about fathers in the modern era. Bruce and Marty for example, both complained about having to deal with stereotypical sex role expectations from their fathers, but both also complained that he was never around and they felt alienated from him. Absence on a daily basis from the family creates a situation whereby learning about sex appropriate behaviour from fathers was no longer possible by example so that more overt and probably coercive forms of teaching became necessary. The slowly emerging nurturant father can be seen as a social response attempting to fill the vacuum and balance the workload as more women moved back into the paid workforce over the past twenty years, although serious obstacles remain.

The combination of perceived tough economic times and the move by women into the workforce over the past decades created a situation where the ability of fathers to provide for their new families in the manner of their fathers is very difficult. Those with a self image still wedded to their financial success will suffer. The conflict for fathers having to balance between providing and nurturing becomes exaggerated. Those men who choose not to organize their lives around career will be at some disadvantage not only economically but in mating as well: there is evidence that male mates are selected preferentially on the basis of their earning ability (Buss, 1988).

Some of the families of these subjects experienced important work related events including primary income earner’s loss of jobs, occupational changes and the moving of
families due to career considerations. Such events invariably stress the family dynamics. It is significant that although men report that family is more important to them than career, they spend no more time with their children than fathers did a generation ago (Cowan & Bronstein, 1988).

The issue of perceived financial responsibility and identification of the father as provider is one of the most pervasive aspects of the role. It can create powerful obstacles for those wishing to foster stronger father involvement in the emotional life of the family. Given, its long history and the continued rewards for this focus in our society however, it is a difficult area for change can occur. The large scale movement of women into the paid workforce may eventually help to erode some of the extremes of this identification for fathers. Beyond that, we should remember in assessing our priorities that children are our real wealth.
Chapter VII

CONCLUSION

A. Summary

This study investigated the father and son relationship in attempting to identify and describe some of the important factors which impact upon these relationships.

The importance of the father to family life in general and to developmental growth of children in particular was long overlooked by social science research. Over the past 15 years that lack has been rectified to some extent by psychological attention to the part fathers play during infant development and by sociological attention to fathers’ participation in childrearing and in domestic duties overall (Lamb, 1986b). Gender specific feminist investigation has inspired both of these fields of study with concerns both for the psychological health and development of children and especially for equitable arrangements in the family workload. This concern with fathers has not yet been established in social work or family therapy and much of that literature, when it does address fathers at all, is limited to a concern with the role fathers play in social pathology of various types (Grief & Bailey, 1990).

More recently, a burgeoning men’s movement has widely identified fathers as a primary concern for many men who are actively examining masculinity and their role as men (for example Bly, 1990; Keene, 1991). A longing for more intimate relationship with frequently absent or distant fathers has become a familiar plaint at gatherings of men across North America. The emotional distance of fathers has been described as one of the most critical facts about fatherhood today (Comeau, 1991). Physical absence of fathers has been a concern of researchers searching for evidence of what impact it has for children to grow up without fathers. Although absent father research as such has lost much of its impetus, the experience of absent or remote fathering has grown profoundly for many individuals. This has occurred because as divorce rates rose, mothers have remained the primary parent and because economic pressures continue to compel most men to focus solely on the component of the father role which proclaims that they should provide for families.
Through feminist theory, gender specific investigations have generally downplayed the importance of inherent differences and attacked the presumption that indicate that sex should determine role while on the other hand, emphasizing the difference in socialization experiences for males and females and usually advocated reduction of these social differences. The present study hoped to unravel what gender specific aspects of father and son relationships might best be considered "fixed" or relatively immutable, and what would be suitable as a focus for change. The transmission of masculinity is a primary function of father son relationships and this study looked for indications of how that occurs. It was suspected that a general inadequacy of this process was linked to the father hunger that has widely been voiced.

The past decade or so has, as we have seen, witnessed a concerted research effort which also often spilled over into the popular media, proclaiming the "new father" and telling him how to be and do things differently than his father did. The truth is that men are probably "fathering" less, despite this effort (Radin, 1986; Pleck, 1987). Why? The experience men have of their father will be one important factor in their decisions about whether and how to "father". It may also be that the agenda to "father" more nurturantly has not come from the men themselves but rather as a response to women's demands for more help at home, as they move into the workforce. A third factor might be related to attempts to change male psychology, based on prior social science work which was dominated by males but did not necessarily nor deliberately describe male psychological experience. This study hoped to contribute to our understanding about male psychology and the dynamics of men as fathers and sons. It is believed that men will father well only because it conforms in some way to their experience and understanding of the world.

This study was an exploratory attempt to describe father and son relationships longitudinally. It used qualitative interviews and analysis to obtain and evaluate narrative data about fathers and sons. Twelve respondents to advertisements seeking adult men to speak about their relationship with their fathers were interviewed for about 90 minutes each. Respondents were limited to men over the age of 30 and ranged up to 54, with a median of 35. The interviews consisted of relatively open ended questions and the soliciting of family stories. Respondents were asked to relate an incident which stuck out in their memory from
successive time periods, beginning before about age 8, from then until 13, another from 14 to 19 or leaving home and finally a story or incident involving themselves and their father as an adult, preferably recently, if the father was still alive. Further questions about images of father, family, self and awareness of his influence, were addressed to fill in the picture of the relationship and to gain some family context for the stories. Particularly for those men who did not have a wealth of stories, these latter questions (Appendix C) provided much of the material provided.

Important limitations of the study arise from the sampling method which was the use of self selected volunteers. It cannot be considered a broadly representative sample and may be biased toward men who have significant personal concerns with their fathers. More first born sons than would be expected volunteered and about one third had been involved with counselling previously. The rather small sample was limited by convenience and resources, although a wealth of data was obtained from the 12 interviews.

B. Results: Themes

Interviews were transcribed verbatim and then a summary formulated for each subject (Appendix D). The father and son story material was organized and grouped into age segments and some initial themes and typical concerns for each age bracket described (Appendix E). Data was then coded and compiled into groups of factors or important components and aspects of the relationships. These were derived from prior literature, discussion with informed sources and from the interviews themselves. The analysis returned repeatedly to the data in order to verify this method of accreting data into a series of 9 themes. Themes were grouped, 3 into each of 3 categories or areas of concern; personal, family and social.

The personal themes attempt to isolate factors which involve development of self for either father or son that impact upon their relationship, including conflict, rivalry and approval. The family themes discuss fathers and sons in relationship to the family context
in which they exist - the impact of mother, developmental passages and multigenerational factors are identified as particularly important in this respect. The third level of themes concerns the influence of societal factors upon father and son relations and the tendency to fathers’ absence, his image to the son and his commitment to the particular role of provider are particularly salient topics which emerged.

1. Personal Themes

Personal themes highlighted the difficulty and challenges in creating possibilities for growth and connection between fathers and sons interpersonally.

i) Rivalry: father as competitor

Rivalry between father and son was experienced importantly in many relationships and is of course predicted by the Freudian account of formation of male gender identity (Freud, 1905/1949). From a baby son’s arrival until his departure from the home, sons displace, to some extent, fathers from their central place in the mothers’ affections. Those men who were conscious that they felt rivalry with their fathers, were especially aware of it during their sexual maturation. It manifested typically as feelings of closeness and safety with mother and tension, conflict or fear with father. He was often a threatening figure to these men. As adults, men with a stronger sense of father as rival also tended to still have major problems in gaining approval from their fathers. Similarly, they seemed to have problems as adults in establishing careers and intimate relationships.

The proposal that a son must figuratively slay his father has been described in psychoanalytic literature as the "Laius complex" (Ross, 1982). As well as his son, Laius experienced their rivalry and so attempted to block Oedipus’ path on his route to become king. This myth highlights the ambivalence which marks these relationships: maturing sons can fulfil fathers’ dreams of legacy, yet also remind him of his mortality and thus threaten his domination. No father and son can hope to completely avoid issues of rivalry between them.
ii) Conflict: father as foe

Conflict and violence was also a theme which became evident as men discussed their fathers. The point at which a son becomes physically stronger than his father is often an important moment in the relationship, although generally the power fathers have in terms of emotional and financial forces continue well beyond this period of time. Challenging the domination of father is a feature of these relationships which can help sons in developing a sense of self. Several sons voiced regret that they had not yet attempted this challenge and felt importantly "stuck" in relation to father, and by extension, in relations with other men.

Even when physical violence was not at issue between fathers and sons, whether for conflict resolution or for minor discipline, most men described something of the physical nature of their relationship. The father's role has been identified as transforming the aggression of their sons (Atkins, 1989) and clearly fathers can help children of both sex to come to terms with their physical energy. It is important to remember that the conflict and occasional violence that occurs between fathers and sons - sometimes quite wildly - can be profitably seen to have a function in the process of separation and individuation for sons from fathers. We cannot expect it to disappear unless we provide other means to facilitate this process.

iii) Approval: father as judge

The gaining and giving of approval was also found to be a major theme of the personal relationships: sons engage in myriad behaviours which are designed to solicit the approval of father and clearly, fathers judge, and are expected to judge, their sons. Very frequently, this approval seeking behaviour was frustrated by a lack of attention from father or an inability to determine what actions would succeed in gaining his approval. Despite its apparent prevalence, it seems likely to be an activity which is inherently unrewarding.

Again an examination of the functionality behind such behaviour may help us to understand this dynamic. For fathers, the ability to pass judgement is both a confirmation of their position and an opportunity to pass on their knowledge and wisdom. Often they withhold praise in order to teach and direct their sons. The types of behaviours approved are directly influenced by how well they affirm the fathers' own choices and values. Their own
sense of satisfaction with life, attitudes to interpersonal relations and clarity of personal boundaries is therefore important.

Sons seek approval in order to feel safe with a more powerful figure, to gain feedback about their own growth and choices particularly in regard to "becoming a man", and to give back to fathers genuine regard. They are especially frustrated when apparently obstinate fathers seem to continually test rather than praise them and when the choices the fathers would praise seem to have no relevance to the sons’ situations. By withholding altogether, fathers often seem to be indirectly attempting to convey the message that seeking the approval of others never satisfies.

2. Family themes

Family themes examine influences which closely impact upon the ability of fathers and sons to maintain a strong or positive relationship within the context of their immediate social environment.

i) Mother, the pivotal parent

Mother is overwhelmingly seen as the primary parent both in the social science literature and in society: plainly, children are believed to need their mother. She also plays an important, often crucial role in the relations between fathers and sons. Frequently she is the intermediary between fathers and children, interpreting him for them and otherwise facilitating and controlling communication in the family. She often serves to triangle or defuse anxiety which builds up between fathers and sons.

Sons in this study experienced themselves being caught up in conflicts between their mothers and fathers, often feeling trapped, manipulated, hopeless and eventually resentful in regard to questions of loyalty between parents. Conflict between sons and a parent was influenced by the closeness or not of the other parent, in a functional kind of arrangement that made hating one parent ok if love was still experienced with the other. Some sons were jealous that father seemed less interested in them than in their mother.

Territorial issues between fathers and mothers such as division of "turf" have important impact upon sons. Many sons only described memorable encounters with fathers which occur with distance from the family home. Within the home, father was clearly on
mom’s turf and so the impact of his presence was often diminished. Mother was frequently
described as the powerful figure in the family and father as the forgotten man. If fathers’
role is to help sons break overly intense emotional bonds with mothers, his involvement in
the life of his sons must be established more powerfully than it was for many of these sons.

ii) Father’s father: multigenerational influence

Sons often were able to reconcile the experience they had of their father by
recognizing the impact of his experience with his own parents. The sons who spoke in detail
of their fathers’ own family experiences seemed to have gained a sense of independence
which suggested a healthy emotional distance from him. Not infrequently, men claimed to
have wanted to be a different kind of parent than their father was, yet as they aged, they saw
how they were becoming more and more like him.

One typical multigenerational pattern was that of being cut off to some degree from
one’s family of origin. This was true in at least one of the three generations for most men,
either between father and grandfather or father and son. It seems to be very difficult for
males to remain highly connected over several generations. The ways they do attempt to
remain connected are interesting. Importance is given to names, to lessons learned from
father, to gifts he has given them and they held onto, and to stories he told them which
illuminated something of who he was or where he came from. When such connection
between fathers and sons is maintained, it is a powerful support for men finding their way
through adult life and it is the absence of such support which has frequently been linked to
various social pathologies.

iii) Father’s son: growing up

Some literature suggests the existence of developmental stages in father/son
relationships. Yablonsky (1990) describes the initial period as being a time of ego unity or
blending between fathers and sons, the second phase as one of adolescent separation and the
final being a new mature level which balances connection and independence. The fathers’
role has been found to shift with each phase as different challenges confront the relationships
(Gordon, 1987).
It is important to identify the particular developmental task for both the father and son at the different stages. In the earliest stories typically young sons were seeing their fathers beginning career and family establishment, at ages similar to those of the adult sons during the interview. It is especially during this stage that calls for nurturant fathering is made. At adolescence, sons begin to explore and need flexibility while their fathers are generally well entrenched in tasks such as career and family consolidation (Erikson, 1950) which require rigid commitment, so it is not surprising to see conflict frequently arise. Fathers may feel a need to "step back" at this stage in order to manage tension and allow growth. Fathers often assisted the sons to move out of the home, offering new and sometimes surprising support for sons. As adults, mutual respect has been found to be the most important factor in successful father/son relations (Nydegger & Mitteness, 1991). Unfortunately, this stage is not always achieved by the time of the death of the father.

3. Societal Themes

Social learning theory and gender specific investigations note that the father son relationship is the crucial means of transmission of masculinity from one generation to the next.

i) Absence: father as stranger

One of the most commonly made observations about fathers is that they are often strangers in their own families. The physical absence and emotional distance of fathers is a troubling phenomenon reaching epidemic proportions in society currently and has been a concern of researchers at least since the second world war. Although they almost invariably lived with their fathers until leaving home, the sons in this study all made comments like "we didn’t do much together", or "we didn’t talk about things", or "there was a great gap there". The reasons for such lack of father involvement are surely myriad, but several important categories of causes can be identified. Stereotypical masculinity often seems to prevent communication of an emotional nature between men. Relationship itself may be a "feminine" topic to focus upon. Other role requirements are paramount for many fathers, particularly his highly developed sense of obligation to provide. Fear of fathers and struggles
for influence with mother also seem to prevent closeness between fathers and sons.

This absence primarily means a lack of a strong gender appropriate role model and adult guidance for the sons. Research evidence has found that boys raised without fathers are likely to have lower cognitive development, greater anti-social behaviour and possibly more sex role rigidity. Reliance upon mothers, the education system and the media for boys to learn about male models is surely insufficient investment in their future.

ii) Images: Father as hero

The objective images a son describes of his father tells us much about how salient and powerful a model he provides. Innuit children select intimate family members as heroes, unlike mainstream children who, rather disturbingly, tend to name figures known through the media. That we expect a son to idealize his father as the hero is an image at the core of the masculine ideal. A number of obstacles towards sons perceiving fathers in this light can be identified.

If a father is too close or nurturant with his son, he may be perceived as too "unmanly" (Schwartz, 1988) and not heroic. In changing social times, his experience and wisdom is less likely to serve and he may well become an anachronistic embarrassment. Developmentally, the son may have to de-idealize father through adolescence as a part of the process of individuation (Atkins, 1989). The minimal amount of contact many sons have with an absent or uninvolved father means that media figures are frequently better known and clearly more "perfect" heroes for the sons. The media offer few images of mature realistic male models. Fear and shame of father can easily replace a heroic vision of him.

As an adult, the son should perhaps focus more on "being his own hero" (Freeman, 1991), but a successful relationship with father will need to include at least a healthy measure of respect for the elder figure.

iii) Role: father as provider

The economic function father plays as provider for the family continues to be our most important social expectation of fatherhood. Even when he is not involved in any other way, we expect fathers to "support" the family. Men are judged most importantly by society,
by the family and by himself, for his ability and success in this role: the good father must
first and foremost be a solid provider, the successful man earns a good living. Sons learn
their own approach to work from fathers’ example and are often pleased to able to say that
"he taught me how to work hard".

This emphasis on economic provision makes his role far more narrow than even in
the recent past, inhibiting other functions such as teaching and protecting and impacting
heavily upon the kind of involvement a father may have with his son. Despite the exclusivity
of the function, it is increasingly difficult for fathers, in most places, to provide solely for
their families. Recent calls for more "nurturant" fathering can be seen as an attempt
societally to replace some of the lost mothering children receive as women participate more
in the paid workforce. Real commitment to involved parenting by men will require strong
social efforts to break this obsessive pattern of identification of the role of father with the
obligations involved in the accumulation of material wealth.

C. Implications

Although some of the implications of this study are direct and obvious, they must
generally be considered as preliminary. This was an exploratory investigation which sought
to identify broad themes and to generate interest and questions about the topic of sons and
especially fathers. It did not attempt to answer specific questions.

The primary implication is contained within the original research focus itself: fathers
are an important relation. As a social institution, fatherhood is in need of attention
throughout society, from individuals through to policy makers and including social workers,
counsellors, therapists and researchers. The discussion of implications of this study which
follows focuses on its clinical or therapeutic utility, its considerations for policy makers and
its contribution toward further research questions.

1. Clinical implications

The emphasis in this work has been on the nature of the experience of the adult sons
who were interviewed and the results will primarily be of interest to those working clinically with families and family related problems. Social workers and family therapists will want to encourage in their direct work with individuals and families, an appreciation of the importance of father participation in family life. They can help to identify the various possible problems which arise in relations with father as described herein, and share a perspective that understands these issues as influenced by developmental factors of change and growth. They can also help families to understand and find ways around some of the multitude of obstacles to father involvement which exist structurally.

i) "Fatherly behaviour"

The knowledge that fathers often see their role as helping sons struggle to individuate and separate from mothers and from emotional dependency and so become independent individuals is important for those working clinically with families. Much paternal behaviour that appears harsh, neglectful or dysfunctional may be gainfully reframed as attempts to help particularly their sons in this process. As a researcher listening dispassionately, it is easy to see this apparent functionality. Of course, the therapist must also be able to help the client to appreciate this view. At the same time, it may be that fathers could often be profitably reminded of the importance of maintained connection and the fact that children do manage to establish themselves independently, regardless of paternal intervention. Despite what we often believe we have learned from our parents, some evidence suggests that it is actually the quality of the relationship which is important (May, 1992). Every parent can profitably be reminded that children learn more from what we do and how we are than from what we say or attempt to instill.

ii) Development

It is important for those working with families to have a sense of the developmental progression of father-son relationships and the interaction of different challenges for these individuals within the family dyad as they mature. Developmental thinking has focused on the missing father in relation to infant attachment and results here confirm theory which predicted the difficulties we see in terms of rivalry and conflict prior to meaningful bonding.
occurring with sons. It would appear that such bonding frequently does not occur. The adolescent years are ideally an excellent time for fathers and sons to develop connection, although developmental forces and lingering mothers' influence often inhibits this process. When sons stay stuck in conflict as rivals or subordinates with their fathers, this can continue to foster distance between them well into adult life. Maturing concerns with career, marriage and mortality and their establishment as equals can provide new impetus for sons to heal and develop better relations with fathers.

It may be that there exists a "developmental window" during this time in which men can optimally resolve "unfinished business" with father, related to both his approaching death and sons' current needs. Eventually the power balance shifts towards the sons and aging fathers may experience some of the dependency they knew in their sons. If the connection has been maintained, sons can use this opportunity to share some of the nurturance they may have missed earlier in the relationship, albeit in a reversed direction.

Identifying sons in relation to where they are currently in terms of connectedness, separation or renewal with father will also enlighten us as to a number of self issues for sons. We must remember that whatever the story, the person remembering it and not the actual facts are the important issue. Even if he is deceased, father almost certainly plays an important role internally for men between about 30 and 45. Having them focus on their father often reawakens a sense of internal measurement and satisfaction or not with self. This may be a useful technique for therapists assisting men to "open up" and explore their emotional lives. The nature of expression of emotions connected to father will tell us much about how sons feel about themselves and their lives.

iii) Conflict and connection

It is important to repeat that conflict is often usefully perceived as functional between fathers and sons. Where it becomes habitual, certainly intervention may be required, but in general, conflict at appropriate stages can often be welcomed as a sign of fruitful growth in the relationship. Especially with sons entering adolescence and teenagehood, fathers can be reminded that sons will need to break away and to "defeat them" in some manner. Their trust that this son will develop well will be stretched to the limit, as will their own strength and
certainty in self. The concepts of figuratively slaying father and a task of adolescence to de-
idealize father are important notions contributing to an understanding of father-son conflict.

At the same time, it is enlightening to appreciate the ways that fathers find to attempt to maintain a sense of connection between their fathers and their sons, often without being conscious of this intention. The giving of gifts, names and family stories and the enforcement of family traditions can all help men to feel importantly connected to their sons.

iv) Birth order and family size

One interesting aspect of this volunteer sample is the overrepresentation of first born sons. It has been suggested that first born children have the most difficult time in relation to their parents. In support of this idea is the fact that of the five men who were not eldest sons, three mentioned that their oldest brothers had alcohol and drug or mental health problems. The possibility is that first born sons volunteered for the research because they had more pressing or difficult issues to resolve in relation to father. Possible reasons why eldest sons have a tougher time are not difficult to find. The first born son and perhaps daughter often receive the brunt of parental direction and then are expected to pass these messages on to younger members. The eldest son generally carries much of the load from paternal expectations for carrying on the father's name and work. The parents, of course, are less experienced with their first born children and finally, if emotional overinvolvement is a difficulty for parent child relationships, it is likely to manifest most powerfully with the first and perhaps the last born children.

The trend in the Western world toward smaller families which has resulted in declining population in some areas has interesting ramifications in relation to parental relationships. If the average family has two children or less, then most boys will be first born sons. All of the difficulties noted for sons in relation to this position will be the norm rather than the exception. Society as a whole may begin to take on characteristics typical of first born children.
2. Policy Implications

Policy consideration should be given to the issue of a historically narrowing role for fathers to play in family life. Our highly specialized society has taken many of the family related tasks for fathers away from their domain and employed "expert" teachers, policemen, doctors, athletes and entertainers in their place. Fathers' absence from active involvement in their families has resulted in part from an over emphasis of their role as providers for the family. Sons, and probably daughters, tend to experience their fathers unidimensionally as a result and "father hunger" comes from a desire to have a more full and human experience of father. It is possible that some socially pathological behaviours result from "distant" fathering.

i) Domestic involvement

The impulse over the past decade towards a more highly involved father has frequently been inspired by feminist considerations for gender equity and equality of opportunity in terms of career and access to financial security. It has not been a highly successful movement and it is doubtful that overall men father more now than they did twenty years ago. Some evidence shows that men who act as highly involved fathers have at least unstable and perhaps more difficult experiences as parents (Radin, 1985, Kruk, 1991). The reluctance for men to become more involved with their children may also be related to the fact that 60 to 80% of North American women claim to not want more involvement by their husbands at home. Just as male resistance to women entering the workforce still impedes their access in some areas of economic activity, female control over the domestic domain remains strong. Real sharing of domestic power between fathers and mothers will come with an appreciation of the children's need, from the realization that parenting is not just an important obligation but also a profound gift, and from men beginning to be with children in their own way.

ii) Vanishing fatherhood

There should be concern that the trend towards a diminished role for fathers will continue towards a point where they will become inconsequential contributors to child...
development. Certainly there has been frequent debate in recent years over the extent of male responsibility and rights around reproduction. Usually, the obligation to provide has been seen to remain paramount and in Canada maintenance enforcement programs have been developed to attempt to ensure that fathers, irrespective of their actual involvement with their children, do in fact pay to support them.

Several interesting legal challenges have attempted to define the rather hazy area which corresponds to fathers' rights in relation to their offspring. It has been charged that legislation clarifying men's rights and obligations in relation to "illegitimacy" extends the control men have over reproduction beyond the bounds of marriage (Pollock & Stanton, 1985). Such a position of course tends to compel both genders to remain fixed in their respective childraising and providing roles and deprives children from meaningful contact with males, a consequence as we have seen, with potentially serious problems for boys and for society.

iii) Social support for fathers

Given the greater natural involvement by females in the reproductive process and a long history of greater emphasis societally on the part mother plays, if we are to support equality in gender role opportunities domestically as well as in terms of economic opportunities, as a society we might have to begin to give fathers greater possibility to be meaningfully involved with their children. This greater opportunity would be needed to compensate the strong tendencies we have seen in the opposite direction. For example, the powerful identification of father with the role of provider should begin to be mediated with policies which permit greater flexibility in the workplace, particularly for fathers. Legislation and court dispositions must insist on at least equal rights and responsibility in all areas of the care and support of children.

Greater sensitivity and awareness is needed in our images of fathers. Those we see currently in the media, in the education system and in the expectations implicit in social legislation all perpetuate a vision of father which makes his emotional involvement with his family more difficult. We could encourage men to reassess priorities in terms of felt obligation to provide for or participate in their families.

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iv) Divorce and fathers

One relevant social trend which also impacts to some extent on the over involved aspect of small nuclear family units and puts pressure on father and son relations, is the high divorce rate. The intensity of relationships in single parent families - as well as the problem for children of not having a parent to love while they hate another - creates very difficult situations for parent child relations. Even though most sons in this study experienced intact family situations, they felt powerfully touched by marital strife. Families without fathers perhaps takes some of the pressures off for many sons in relation to paternal expectations, but the complete absence of intimate adult male models creates a situation which society should respond to in terms of generating socialization opportunities for boys, as well of course in alleviating financial stressors for children generally.

That custody dispositions still routinely assume "mother preference" as the "best interests of the child" is also problematic if society is to encourage maintenance of father relations after divorce. Custody arrangements should always consider the long term effect of father absence as a serious problem for children.

3. Research Implications

The complexity of general family relations is indeed critical to appreciate and future research would profitably begin with an eclectic framework that enables researchers to appreciate the interplay of the multitude of factors involved in families. Adequate isolation and manipulation of specific variables which positivistic enquiry requires is seldom possible in family investigation.

i) Theoretical model

Describing fundamental family relationships requires a willingness to tolerate some unclarity because of the complexity of factors involved. An ecological perspective enables consideration of some of this diversity and provides a framework which nests groups of factors within progressively more comprehensive levels. This report separated personal from family and societal levels of influences and factors which impact upon the father son dyad. This has contributed organizationally but there remains many problems of overlap and
omission which further research will need to solve.

When we attempt to identify, for example, issues of personal growth and ego identity for fathers and sons, it is surely misleading to exclude mother from such consideration. The fact that sons come literally out of mothers and only then can grow towards fathers, symbolizes the importance she plays. Similarly, the separation and individuation which much of our theory assumes to be the normal pattern of emotional development, may be accurate within our cultural zeitgeist but could be quite mistaken within societies which have different notions about personhood and emotional growth. Gender, ethnic and societal factors run like a magnetic field through the emotional and relational experiences of individuals.

ii) Adult sons’ interest in father

The importance of the age specific male interest in father should be examined in more detail to determine if this concern really is widespread or whether fathers become important only to a particular subset of sons at a certain time in their life and with specific issues in relation to him. Describing the characteristics of those men with this concern would then become an important research task. If particular adult developmental challenges emerge which father hunger is an attempt to fulfil, then we would know that it is not the father experience itself which is important but rather the contemporary events facing the adult sons and our interventions would not address fatherhood per se but rather adult male psychology. Repeating studies such as these longitudinally to see how differently men spoke about their experiences of father some years later would also help to answer this question.

iii) Developmental model

Further research is required to develop and clarify the model of typical progression of father and son relationships if it is to become an accurate and useful tool for clinicians trying to understand male psychological challenges. Confirmation of themes and typical progression of stages is required from a larger randomly selected sample.

Research which studied boys raised by highly involved fathers could provide important information about psychic development in terms of separation and individuation. The
detection of psychological differences between boys raised entirely by fathers and those raised entirely without fathers would inform theory which attributes strong importance to gender in parenting. Is Chodorow right with her prescription for altering the gender universe? Can concern with individuation over connection be replaced that easily?

Similarly, the question of how children raised completely by a single parent - absent father research - remains an important paradigm informing us as to what is natural child development. Large scale mixed method research may be required in order to adequately compare boys' experiences with and without fathers and assess the relative importance of factors such as other family support, financial strain and mothers' resources. Similar studies involving other cultural groups would help to isolate which of the themes obtained here are peculiar to occidental culture and which have some universal application.

Finally, the most compelling study of this type would include a multiple generational view which interviewed different experiences of sons, fathers and grandfathers.

iv) Gender questions

The gender specific nature of father offspring relations should be examined to determine whether daughters' experiences of father parallel those of their brothers. The aspects of father experience common to both genders would help to isolate what from the sons' perspectives is about fathers per se and what is about themselves. The question of parallel experiences for girls of their fathers or with their mothers would be relevant knowledge for family therapists and counsellors.

v) Adolescence

The evidence obtained in this study that adolescence is a particularly crucial time for male development and that father relations undergo important changes at this period suggests that some of the research attention that has gone towards the father's role in involvement with infants could now be profitably spent examining in detail the impact which quality of father relationship has on older children. The question is what becomes of the various levels of attachment in child and father relations, as emotional bonds stretch and grow. An examination of what works well in families will help guide appropriate father participation
at this stage of family life, as well as provide direction for avoiding social pathology with varying family experiences.

D. **Conclusion**

Father is a critical figure for men as they mature into adulthood. He can inspire, provide a model or teach lessons on which sons can base their life or seek to make change. The relationship between fathers and sons progresses and evolves through identifiable stages and predictable issues arise and resolve according to a wide variety of influences including personal development, family milieu and social environment. Understanding the quality of that relation can help us to identify and assess the emotional health of men. Exploring the history of that relationship can help men re-write their story and begin to see themselves in a different light and so make change both more possible but also more propitious.

A myriad of difficulties presents potential obstacles towards fathers' satisfactory involvement in family life. Fathers often "look bad" because of the difficulties associated with their role and because they don't change as quickly as our societal expectations. This work has described many of the sources and dynamics of these problems and thus risks the appearance of taking a negative focus on an area which desperately needs positive attention. This writer believes that it is through increased understanding and awareness that change and growth occurs. In the final analysis, however, only with great determination to move towards health and loving connection, will we remove these obstacles to the process of sons becoming fathers becoming men.
References


References (cont.)


References (cont.)


____ (1992). "Developmental challenges across the generations", unpublished paper. Some ideas are also drawn from lectures given by Dr. Freeman at UBC School of Social Work.


References (cont.)


References (cont.)


References (cont.)


References (cont.)


References (cont.)


References (cont.)


References (cont.)


APPENDIX A:

RESEARCH ADVERTISEMENT

UBC ETHICAL CONSENT
INVESTIGATOR: Kruk, E.
UBC DEPT: Social Work
INSTITUTION: Choice of subjects
TITLE: The influence of father: adult sons look back
NUMBER: B91-407
CO-INVEST: Adam, B.
APPROVED: JAN 20 1992

The protocol describing the above-named project has been reviewed by the Committee and the experimental procedures were found to be acceptable on ethical grounds for research involving human subjects.

Dr. R.D. Spratley
Director, Research Services and Acting Chairman

THIS CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL IS VALID FOR THREE YEARS FROM THE ABOVE APPROVAL DATE PROVIDED THERE IS NO CHANGE IN THE EXPERIMENTAL PROCEDURES
FATHER and SON RESEARCH

HOW DOES THE SON'S RELATIONSHIP WITH FATHER INFLUENCE HIS LIFE CHOICES?

An investigation by a graduate student in Social Work into the nature of father and adult son relationships, is seeking men to assist his research.

The only requirement is that you are a man over the age of thirty-five who is willing to describe the history of your relationship with your father. Confidentiality is assured.

Time demands on participants will not exceed a once only commitment of approximately two hours, at your convenience.

A small gift will be offered in recompense.

If you are interested please contact:

Bodhi Adam at 737-7396.

or at the UBC School of Social Work

If not, please pass this on to someone who may be.

Bodhi Adam, a post-graduate student in the School of Social Work at University of B.C., is looking for men to interview about their relationships with their fathers. Adam is working on a master's thesis on father and son relationships. If you're interested, call 737-7396.

Province Feb. 23/92

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APPENDIX B:

INTRODUCTORY LETTER
Dear Participant,

Thank you for your interest in this project. The purpose of the research is to further our understanding of the nature of fathers' influences on their sons' lives. In particular, information is sought relating to how those influences change over the course of a man's life.

In order that you can consider ahead of time some of the issues covered in the interview here is a description of the basic questions to be asked. This does not mean that you need to prepare specific answers; rather that you have a chance to reflect on the general themes, at your own convenience, prior to our meeting.

What I will ask during the interview is that you tell us four stories which somehow signify or typify your relationship with your father. Each story or vignette should come from a different time in your life: one from early or pre-school days (up to age 7), one from 8 to 13, another from adolescence (14-19) and one which illustrates your current relationship with your father. The length and amount of details in each of your stories is not predetermined - they can be as short or long as it takes to give some indication of your relationship at the particular time. Stories may directly describe an actual interaction involving you and your father, or merely some other event or process which you experienced as being influenced by your father. Choose events which have meaning for you.

It is expected that the recounting of these stories will occupy the majority of the interview. You will be asked to supply some general demographic information and to fill out several brief pen and paper questionnaires, and a feedback form. The entire interview should take no more than two hours of your time. You may, of course, refuse to participate or withdraw at any time.

Thank you in advance for your cooperation in this work. I hope your participation will be enjoyable. If you have any questions at all, please don't hesitate to call Bodhi Adam, researcher ( ) or Ed Kruk, research supervisor.

signed
APPENDIX C:

INTERVIEW GUIDE:

a. Family Stories
b. Open Questions
c. Demographic Fact Sheet
Focused Interview

A. Family Stories

1. I want you to think about the time before you turned 8.
   a. Is there a particular incident which you remember well?
   b. What kinds of things did you and your father do together?
   c. How would you describe his presence around the home?
   d. What do you remember clearly about him?
   e. Overall, are memories from this time good ones? Why?

2. Now I want you to think about the years between 8 and 13.
   a. Is there an incident which you can describe from this time which is meaningful for you?
   b. What kinds of things did you and your father do together?
   c. How was going through puberty for you?
   d. How would you describe his presence around the home?
   e. Overall, are memories from this time good ones? Why?

3. Now I want you to think about your teen years 14 to 19.
   a. Is there an incident which you can describe from this time which is meaningful for you?
   b. What kinds of things did you and your father do together?
   c. How would you describe his presence around the home?
   d. How was leaving home for you?
   e. Overall, are memories from this time good ones? Why?

4. Now I'd like you to reflect on the current relationship between you and your father.
   a. Is there an incident which you can describe which typifies this relationship?
   b. What do you and your father do together?
   c. What do you learn from him, or receive from your relationship with him now?
Focused Interview (cont.)

B. Open ended questions

There are four categories of open ended questions each with about three or four items. They refer to your father, his influence, your family and yourself.

1. How would you describe your father?
   a. Is he successful?
   b. Does he have close male friends?
   c. How do you think he feels about you?
   d. What would you say is important to him?

2. How would you describe your family generally?
   a. What do you do together?
   b. Are you close to your siblings?
   c. Are you close to your mother?
   d. Who has power in the family?
   e. Would you go to your family for help? Who?

3. How do you feel about your life?
   a. Can you identify a sense of direction?
   b. How do you feel about your work?
   c. Do you have close male friends?
   d. How do you feel about relationships in your life?
   e. What do you look forward to in your days ahead?
      (what sort of things do you dream about?)
   f. What regrets do you have? What would you do over?

4. What influence are you aware of from your father?
   a. On your vocational choices? (or sense of competence)
   b. On your personal values and beliefs?
   c. On your personality or personal characteristics
      (or your family style – something a stranger may remark as connecting you to your father?)
FATHERS' INFLUENCE RESEARCH

Demographic Data Sheet

1. Name ___________________________  2. Age ______
3. Occupation ______________________ Income ______
4. Last year of education ______________________
5. Father's occupation ______________ Income ______
6. Father's last year of education ______________________
7. Your father's age at the time of your birth ______
8. Occupation of your father's father ______________________
9. Last year of education for father's father ______________________
10. Mother's occupation ______________ Income ______
11. City or town where you were raised ______________________
12. City/town/country where father raised ______________________
13. Size of your family ________ Number of boys ________
                                           Number of girls ________
14. Where in the birth order were you ______________________
15. Age you left home ________ Were you living with both parents at age 7 ______ 13 ______ 18 ______ 21 ______
16. Marital status: married _______ single _______
                                            divorced _______ separated _______
                                            For how long ______________________
17. Do you have children ________ How many __________
                                           Gender __________ Age(s) __________
                                           Do they live with you ______________
APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW SUMMARIES

1. Brent
2. Bruce
3. Dan
4. Dave
5. Frank
6. Gord
7. Kevin
8. Kyle
9. Marty
10. Marvin
11. Paul
12. Rick
Brent’s Summary

Brent’s family has been settled in Victoria for several generations. He remembers as a kid, meeting his very proper great grandmother, in a bow tie, perched on a wing back chair. He remembers as a 3 year old watching his dad fix and explain plumbing pipes to him. He also remembers his dad pushing him on his little plastic truck, in the house skidding around corners. One time he ploughed into the doorjamb with his head and he remembers his father, shocked and awkward, not knowing whether to pick up his crying kid. Mother came and did. Brent explains his dad’s lack of parenting skills with reference to his being an only kid raised by women and at boarding schools.

At 10 Brent remembers angrily trying to get a very reluctant dad to play soccer with him and his brothers. Dad always claimed to be busy and would tell the kids to get lost. Brent says he was always doing emergency work for others, for money. At 12 Brent remembers walking down the street holding his dad’s hand, feeling great, when a kid called out "fag" across the road. He dropped the hand but later heard through his mother how hurt his father was by that act. The relationship seemed to change about that time from camaraderie to angry alienation.

Dad also became very busy at that time with a development business. His renovation of their house dragged out for years and Brent couldn’t bring friends over. One good memory Brent has about his early teens is spending time at his grandmother’s cottage. He would help his dad install lights in the trees and build docks and enjoyed it a lot. Brent’s development was not normal and his dad noticed something was wrong but doctors didn’t pick it up for years. It was typical that dad didn’t push his parenting concerns - that was mom’s turf and he gladly deferred.

Brent didn’t feel respected by his dad. The only compliment he remembers getting was at 19 when he did some surveying work for his dad particularly well. He is aware of approval seeking behaviour he engages in now that he sees as related to his dad’s stinginess with compliments. Third party praise from a business-man about Brent’s work did impress his father.

Brent remembers telling his dad to fuck off when he was 19. This was as near to open rebellion that he came. His dad helped him find an apartment when he moved out later that year and was happy to be consulted on this. Brent cycled across Canada at 18.

Brent realized as spoke that he acts oddly and flamboyantly around his father out of nervousness of him. His dad does consult with him on certain business decisions now, but Brent, to his father’s disappointment, is the only one who didn’t go into construction; the youngest brother works with dad. His father expressed disapproval of Brent’s new beard recently.

Brent sees his father as unsuccessful but a nice man, with a good reputation but no close friends. Brent says mom has the power in the family but seldom uses it. He feels he has learned about working hard and wanting to create from his father, and believes that their relationship is beginning to improve.

Brent see his direction in life as about self awareness, has recently embarked on a new career, and has several close male friends. His recent marriage age has just come apart.
Bruce’s Summary

Bruce is a 43 year old graduate engineering student. He returned to school after struggling with accreditation in B.C. He was born in Montreal, where his divorced parents and brother live. He has been "out west" most of the past 20 years, but not continuously or in any particular place. He is not married.

The memories Bruce has of his early childhood contact with his father almost all take place outside of the home - on ski trips or family holidays. His father was an avid sports enthusiast and would take him skiing when he 6 years old. He would also take Bruce to see boats being launched which his company had built and explain to him technical details about ships and trains and bridges. Bruce’s father worked as a technical draughtsman and later as a salesman for the same company. Bruce worked hard as a teenager and had little social life, feeling crowded by his mother, and shamed for this lack by his father. He was gifted academically and achieved highly until he left home at 19. Soon after, he failed out of university.

Bruce’s mother and brother had strong impact on Bruce’s relationship with his father: he says that almost from the beginning, he was his mother’s "to mold". The younger brother was more like the father. His teenage relationship with his father grew increasingly stormy and conflictual, as did that between the parents. The mother slept on the couch for the last 7 years of the marriage. Bruce describes trying to prevent his father from being physically abusive with his mother and being himself shoved down the stairs, remembering vividly how long the bruises took to heal. He also remembers at 19 not being able to keep up with his father skiing and feeling shamed by this fact. His mother was "bitterly disappointed" when he left home. He negotiated the terms of the divorce on his mother’s behalf when the parents separated about a year after Bruce had moved out.

The father was a very physical man, who had been a boxer in his youth. Bruce felt his superior intellectually from about adolescence on and disparages his attitudes, aggressiveness and personal tastes. He claims to have different interests (more like his mother) and difficulty communicating with his father. The relationship with both the father and brother (who is just like dad) has remained highly conflictual over time. In his father’s presence Bruce still feels a seething kind of anger which occasionally erupts into violence. The last time Bruce saw his father was 2 years ago when he got into a physical fight with his brother and his father, who was 76 at the time, joined in against him.

Bruce reports feeling a lack of both personal and professional success in his life. He would like more intimate contact with a woman, although he has several good male friends. He is disturbed by a continuing conflictual pattern he finds himself in in work situations with bosses, and academically with professors. His current contact with a very healthy 78 year old father is limited to formal telephone conversations.
Dan's Summary

Dan is a 37 year old Sri Lankan graduate student. He has been in Canada since 1983, with his wife and 7 year old son. He is the oldest son in a family of 10 children. A previously born brother died at birth, a fact which Dan says influenced how his parents cared for him. His father has a grocery store attached to their home and with an acre of land, in a town of about 50,000. The rest of the family is still in Sri Lanka.

An early memory Dan has is of his father riding him on his bicycle and pointing out a group of doctors and stressing the importance of education, if one is to do well in life. He says his father didn’t "cuddle" much with him because it wasn’t expected of fathers in those days. Dan also says his father’s father died when he was 9 and so perhaps he didn’t know how to father properly. He remembers being slapped in punishment at about 7. From the time he was 10, Dan helped out in his father’s shop and by the time he was 15, would operate it when his father was not there. He worked very hard throughout this time and attributes some later social difficulties to a lack of opportunity as an adolescent.

In a family of 10, it is difficult to find indications of the particularities of Dan’s relationship. The children would help out the father in his vegetable garden and be in and out of the store. As eldest, Dan was aware of greater expectation of responsibility. He was envious of his brother’s social graces.

Dan left home at 19 to go university, an achievement in S.L. He tells of one time when he had no money to visit home because he had been reluctant to ask his father - as strong expectations would have accompanied the money. He felt very sad and lonely at this time and cried.

He married at 29, a "love marriage". This was not unusual in his generation, but his parents’ marriage was arranged. He had felt shy with girls and blames his parents, especially his mother, for not preparing him better to relate to the opposite sex.

Dan joined the army for three years after finishing his studies. His departure from Sri Lanka was partly out of concern for political turmoil and possible danger to his life. He came here telling his family he would be back after getting his Master’s degree in 2 years. That was 9 years ago. He is concerned that his father will die before he get back, something that would be a "great shock" for him. He feels guilty that his studies have taken so long but also doesn’t think he wants to go back. This has not been expressed to his family.

Dan describes his father as very honest, devoted to his family, hard working and setting a good example. His father would describe Dan as stubborn and rebellious. Dan says he is business oriented, like his dad but would go to his mother for financial help.

Dan sees his life as frustrated in accomplishing his goals - money, job, house - although his son is very important to him. School is a series of frustrations. He has no close friends and attributes this to his wife, with whom there is marital difficulty. He looks forward to the day when he can return home, that will be "the best day... the happiest time".
Dave’s Summary

Dave is a gay 30 year old editor from Saskatchewan who has been on the West Coast for most of the past 12 years. He was born and raised on a farm on the Prairies. His father was the youngest child and never moved, taking over the family farm, so that Dave’s home situation included his paternal grandparents when he was very young. His mother had been previously married and he has an older step sister and brother. His father married at 29 and Dave is his only biological child.

His earliest memory of father involves being slapped by him on the way to town in the truck when he 4 or 5. He’d deliberately ripped an iron-on transfer that came from a tractor dealer some time before and which they were going to town to have put on a T shirt. This was the only time his father hit him and Dave remembers being disappointed at himself for pushing too hard and in his father for losing control. Dave still has the T shirt. Dave’s mother normally did the physical disciplining.

Dave has some strong memories from his 13th summer, when his parents fought a lot. Dave and his sister hoped that they’d split up and would select ideal women in the community for dad. Late one night Dave left to a neighbour’s to avoid the fighting. His parents came to get him and in the scene that ensued he struck his mother to the ground. She berated the father about an alleged brief affair, all the way home, until he "confessed". Dave felt extremely disappointed in his father’s giving in to his very powerful mother, and sad knowing that he would never get away from her and the farm.

As a teenager, Dave did well and his father both encouraged and was proud of him. He won a place in an international program which began after high school. Going on this program was Dave’s leaving home. He said goodbye to his father but forgot something and returned to the house to find him weeping alone at the dining room table. It was the only powerful emotional expression Dave has seen from his father and still means much to him. He saw it as being about grief over his only son leaving home and the family farm, but also about his own trepidation at being alone now with the wife. Coming out at 18 felt safe in terms of Dave’s relationship with dad but was quite traumatic for mother.

The mother continues to play a large part in the relationship between Dave and his father. Several years ago his father declined to visit him in the north, Dave thinks, because his mother wouldn’t approve. Typically his time with his father alone is limited to visits home and time spent in the fields. Communication is limited by generational differences as well as mother’s influence. Dave says his father loves him - almost too much at times.

Dave is happy and excited about his work life although he wishes he had the confidence 10 years ago to do what he does now. His long term relationship has been up and down and is currently long distance but stable.
Frank's Summary

Frank is a 54 year old mechanic and owner of a busy gas station and garage. He worked with his three older brothers and his father at his father’s garage from the time he was 16 until he turned 44, when he set out on his own. His father gave the business to his four sons when he retired at age 70. The father’s business went broke once 40 years ago, an event that seemed to have imprinted itself strongly on Frank, although it later became a successful concern again. The father died in 1975 at age 73. Frank’s younger son (28) works for him and his elder son (32) has his own garage. Frank grew up and has spent his entire life in the neighbourhood where he does business; his father came out to the coast from the prairies in the early 1930’s and set up in business, originally with his brother. Frank married when he moved out of home at age 21 and has only had one intimate partner. He also has a daughter who is 30.

Frank is younger than his four siblings by a range of from 7 to 15 years and describes his early days of hanging around his father’s garage as always being the "boss's little kid". He describes his childhood as "really neat". He struggled in school and failed 3 grades before quitting at 16 to start work with his father and brothers. As a young boy his father gave him an expensive toy truck which is in "new condition" and which he has given to his sons. They also fished and boated together. His father referred to him specially as his little "leaning post". He worked for his dad as a teenager and went out with girls but had minimal sexual experience and no parental instruction. He left home when he got married. A year later his father gave him the money for a down payment on a house.

The most emotionally vivid picture of Frank’s relationship with his dad comes at his father’s death. In referring to Frank’s youngest family position he’d told him that he was glad that Frank had come along because he would be able to lean on him when he was older. When asked if that had been the case, Frank responded that no, he felt that he had failed his father at his hour of need in a "terrible" death by cancer, by not being able to stay with him during his pain in the hospital. He "just couldn’t handle it" and didn’t like to see his father like that because "he was a hero to me". Some years later he "adopted" an older German man as a father figure and had a similar opportunity to be there at his death. This time he "handled it". Frank also described the full church at the funeral, the feeling of pride for his father and also his own concern at "who would come to my funeral?". He also describes weeping afterwards, alone and appropriately, in his car.

Frank describes himself as a successful man with all the money he wants. He faces a lessened involvement and eventual retirement from work, but will "hang around" the garage as long as he enjoys it, like his father did. He consciously models life decisions on his father's experience and shares similar values (family, hard work) and 15 years later, still misses him, regrets not having known him longer and feels some envy for his older brothers who did.
Gord's Summary

Gord is a single 33 year old community worker involved in helping people who end up "on the street". He spent some time as a drug user and street person himself although he has also completed most of the requirements for a university degree. He aspires to be a writer. He was born in England, moved to Alberta at the age of three and to Vancouver Island when he was 7. He is the second son of 3 boys and 2 girls. His parents separated when he was 17. He remained in the family home with his mother and sister for about a year and then moved to town with his father.

Gord’s early memories are sparse. He paints a picture of his father in Alberta and later in Duncan as a respected high school teacher and community pillar and a diversely talented man. He states that his father picked his older brother as favourite and that his mother chose him in return. He remembers his father at his soccer games, apart from other fathers, but full of advice and criticism after the game. He remembers a lot happening in the time between about 10 and 14: father being busy and away, the family moving for a year, the parents becoming more conflictual, his older brother getting seriously into drugs. Gord was busy achieving in school and sports, attempting, he says, to gain a recognition from his father which never really came. He describes walking 17 miles home from school after his father forgot that he’d asked for a ride, and gone home without him. This happened a number of times. He says he was a manipulative child with his younger siblings and that his father didn’t really like him.

Gord was aware for a long time prior to the divorce that his parent’s relationship was unhappy - he felt disappointed in his father for taking "crap" for so long from his mother. He believes that appearances motivated his father’s decision to stay. At 14, his father showed him some scars from a suicide attempt which he blamed on the mother. The divorce was traumatic nonetheless. The family fell apart. Gord had to choose between dad, and finishing high school and all the involvements he had in the town. He was a championship level swimmer. A year or so later, after a violent fight with his mother, he moved in with father. He describes putting on his fighting boots one night, with his father, to go looking to defend the brother who was in trouble with drug dealers, and in and out of detention centers.

Gord’s last contact with his father was over a dinner prepared by the father’s new spouse - who looks just like mom - 2 years ago. He’d planned to get a lot off his chest, but the feelings became hostile. Gord is normally a good talker but his father intimidates him and makes him tongue tied. He claims his father’s loyalty is stronger to his new spouse and feels angered by that. He says he would think his father was a great guy if he wasn’t his father - but that there was no closeness possible with him as a son. He’s not sure any more if he wants that closeness himself. He sees his father as having abandoned his dreams.

Gord describes himself as a failure and his family as dysfunctional. He says he has decided to give up on his family.
Kevin’s Summary

Kevin is a 34 year old housepainter. He is single although he has a girlfriend. His father died several years ago in Ottawa. Kevin moved out west (Alberta) several times beginning at age 16 and has been settled in the Vancouver area for about 10 years. Has a younger sister and niece who is out here now.

Kevin describes his early days with his father as rocky but also enjoyable. The family moved around for several years until settling in Maryville. The father did shift work, drank a lot and coached boys’ sports teams in lacrosse, hockey and baseball. Playing on these teams was both frustrating and rewarding for Kevin, depending on how well they did. Kevin says his father related better to the kids than to the parents.

At 10, Kevin’s mother died by suicide and the family changed drastically. He says nothing was ever spoken by his father about his mom’s death. Kevin’s father hired a housekeeper whom he married when Kevin was 13. This was after sitting down with him and a bottle of rye to discuss the proposed marriage and to get Kevin’s blessing. He regrets giving it still - he says he hated the stepmother and had tremendous conflict with her. He saw his father as turning into a "spineless wimp" and the stepmom as dominating him and the family. He began to skip school and run away from home and the father’s discipline turned violent as he drank heavily himself.

At 14, Kevin fought back and "laid a licking" on his father one time he tried to physically discipline him after being out all night drinking. This was a "manhood" challenge for Kevin, although he felt bad about hurting his dad. Prior to this his father had disciplined him often: with a belt for going out with a Catholic girl, with a pool cue for skipping school. Kevin was asked by his father to leave home after an incident involving his stepmother slamming a door on his foot and he smashed the glass in the door. He was 15. He went eventually to Alberta because it was booming but also because his father said it would be a good place to go. His only grandmother was there and he visited once. Kevin’s father didn’t see his father for 23 years - until Kevin was 10. He feels that his father would have been glad he’d escaped that kind of life - doing shift work in a small town.

Contact with his dad was minimal for the next 15 years. When he would return to Maryville, he would avoid the stepmother. Four years ago the stepmom and dad came to Vancouver area to visit her inlaws. A day was arranged for Kevin to spend with his dad. When the time came it was cancelled, at the stepmother’s instigation. Kevin angrily denounced his father’s letting her run his life. They spoke once more 3 years later, again briefly and angrily. The next time Kevin heard of his father he’d had a heart attack from which he never recovered. He saw him in the hospital.

Kevin is working at breaking family patterns by doing anger workshops. He is wondering about having children himself, a prospect which is frightening to him. His sister is in ACOA. He works for an older man with whom he gets along well, he hopes to inherit the business. He loves his work. Kevin has many good men friends, some from his days in Ontario.
Kyle is a forty year old journalist of 17 years, who works independently producing radio documentaries. He’s been married 13 years and has 3 children including an adopted 21 year old son. He’s been in Vancouver several years, moving here from Alberta, which seems like a family base although there have been frequent moves. He is the 3rd of 4 boys. His father is now 78, his mother died 13 years ago and his grandfather was estranged from his dad.

Kyle’s early memories of father involve him in his role as provider for the family and the decisions to move the family in order to help the career. He’s not certain still to what extent father had a say in these moves, although dad painted himself as having no choice. Older brothers figure prominently in the memories. Father seldom played individually with or was a companion to his sons. Dad was peacemaker in the family, and disagreed with mother over her strictness with boys, although he was often away from the family.

Kyle’s next memory is of being physically punished by his father at age 8 or so, for petty theft of which he was innocent in deed but not reputation. He remembers his father’s intense anger at his denials. Several years later he clearly remembers a camping trip with dad and younger brother that mother and older brothers didn’t want to go on. They spent a memorable week together, hanging out, swimming. During high school dad was away travelling for work frequently and didn’t play a large role at home.

When Kyle left home to go to university he argued with his parents, especially mother over where to go to school - he wanted to go out of town and so leave home. He got his way and father smoothed things over with mother. When he was 21, Kyle got busted for drugs and spent 2 months in jail. His father visited regularly, never admonished him, got him a day job, and was generally very supportive.

The recent picture of the relationship is of some hurt in Kyle at his father’s reluctance to visit. He doesn’t understand this but chooses to believe that it is because visiting would bring his father pain, rather than that he is not interested in Kyle and his family. Father goes instead with his companion on holidays in the Caribbean. Kyle wants to see his dad. He likes who he is at 78, is basically proud of him, sees him as open and flexible, would “be happy to be like him”. He learns from his father’s life, although his achievements sound a little hollow.

Kyle believes his father is proud of him and his achievements. The older brothers have both struggled in their lives. Only the youngest has avoided troubles in his life. There is some family doubts about mother’s death by stroke 12 years ago, especially father questions what he could have done for her differently. She drank a lot before she died. Kyle misses her.

Kyle’s focus and self image is tied up with his professional life. He has made several decisions that his father didn’t - to quit "the company" in order to be his own boss and not have to move his family around. He does however travel a lot for his job. He loves his work and feels excited about its direction. He sees his personal and professional life as becoming more linked.
Marty’s Summary

Marty was born and lived in small town Ontario until he went off to college at 21 and again at 23. He left Ontario about 5 years ago, after his father died. He’s now 33.

He has been told that his left handed semi-pro baseball playing father spent hours making him use his left hand as a baby in the crib. He remembers as a kid of 7 being woken up to party with his parents and their friends, singing together all night: His father played guitar and was the life of the party. Marty has a book of songs that his father taught him, and a 12 string guitar from his mother on his 16th birthday. He remembers at 7 being woken by angry fights between his parents and crying himself back to sleep. His father was a "man’s man" and would play catch with him so hard it scared him. He was away a lot and drank a little. He had a harsh abusive father himself. Both Marty and his dad, as young men, brought their fathers home from the pub, drunk, on Saturday nights. Marty’s father worked at odd jobs, sales, and was unemployed.

When Marty was 12 his father had an aneurism and was in hospital for 3 months. Soon after he returned home, he had stroke and was hospitalized again, for 2 years. His mother had been on the verge of leaving him; now she was away a lot at the hospital. Marty worked before and after school and gave him his mother money. He didn’t miss his dad, who hadn’t been around much before, but he resented losing contact with his mother because of his father’s illness. As an adolescent he became rebellious. He felt his father didn’t love him. He played sport but one night went on a date rather than to practice. His father made him quit the ball team. Marty learned from his dad that women are a distraction from what you want to do. Even partially paralysed, his father was a physical disciplinary presence.

At 18, when Marty’s mother found a syringe he’d used for amphetamines in his clothes, his father suggested they call the RCMP. At 19 however, he heard, in his father’s voice, some pride in the habitual derision of Marty’s singing. This changed much for Marty. Praise only came from dad indirectly, through mother.

Marty got accepted to a theatre school in Toronto and his mother organized a surprise going away party. The "most poignant moment" was seeing in his father’s block printing on the large card that everyone had signed "do it, prove it, I know you can, love dad". They embraced emotionally, a very rare moment.

Marty failed out of school, returned home and worked in the factory where his mother worked. After a year, he went off to university and earned a degree. His father had several heart attacks. When Marty asked his father if he’d loved his grandfather he said: "no, but I didn’t hate him either. When he died I didn’t cry". Marty took his father to hospital on the Friday of his last weekend, then drove to Toronto to pick up his girlfriend at the airport. He missed his father’s death by several hours, but saw him before he was moved to the morgue.

Marty has written poetry and songs to his father, and claims he was a hero for him. He feels he was successful in not judging others and bringing them happiness. He sees his mother as never having accepted who his father was from the beginning.
Marvin was born in a small town in Quebec but his family moved back west when he was about 4. They moved into the 3rd oldest house in Surrey, a huge old ex hotel. He was 5th surviving kid, of 9 altogether. His father had been a policeman in Ontario, had a second hand store in Surrey, a gas station and store in Langley, was a prison guard in the valley and a professional foster parent in Mission. Both parents were orphans.

As a young boy, Marvin remembers setting up a shoe shine stand outside his father's store. He also remembers massaging his father after he came home from work, asking his father for payment and being told that some things you just do because you care. He says this had a big impact on him. Dad was a big man and it was a family rule that mother did the physical disciplining. The family style was intense and argumentative.

Marvin remembers around 8 or 10 when there was a bad car accident near their store and how his father took over the scene and tried to save the life of a woman. He also spoke of the time when a customer, who forgot to put the brake on his car which then rolled into a ravine, became so irate he entered the store threateningly. Marvin’s father shot a gun at the floor to scare him off. He used to spend time up with his dad, who worked nights in the store, helping do chores and talking. He worked in the store for about $5/week.

The store became too much for mom’s health and was sold when Marvin was 15 and the family moved up the valley. M. skipped school to visit friends at his former school. His oldest brother had become "the black sheep" by now. Marvin says his father was probably an alcoholic by now, although he was a pleasant drunk who never got angry or violent.

The family moved again at 17 but Marvin got his own place and stayed to finish high school. He worked before and after school and was on his own financially. Three years later he returned home, not being able to afford university, and lived with the family until his parents helped set him up in a carpet cleaning business at 26. His father, he says, was always very positive and supportive with his schemes to make work. He spoke to him "about man things" and was not judged by him. He did feel his parents were controlling and mentions physically fighting with his younger brother, breaking things in the house.

His father had a heart attack and got very difficult around the time Marvin left again. He may have been manic depressive. He lost weight and became quite unpredictable. He died a year ago, with all 9 children and 11 grandchildren present in the hospital. His death was painful but also a relief for Marvin. He thinks his father thought he was a good kid, but may not have had an independent relationship with him. He describes him as "too generous".

Marvin is currently back at school trying to upgrade his skill so he can work at what he loves rather than at what just gets him by. It is a bit of a struggle for him. He has a 4 1/2 year old son who was not mentioned in the interview, but he misses him and does visit weekly. He admits to having some trouble with relationships with people.
Paul’s Summary

Paul was born during the second world war, in colonial Jamaica. He was first born son in a family of 6 boys and 4 girls. His parents live here now and he sees them regularly. He’s been married 20 years, at the same job longer, and has 3 children himself. His entire family moved from Jamaica to Washington D.C when Paul was 14, Australia when he was 19 and Canada when he was 27. With the exception of working in remote camps in Australia in his 20's, he lived at home until he got married at 29.

Paul’s early memories are of tearing along in the back of his father’s truck to play with sibs on palm tree beaches. His father operated a dairy and a saw mill and worked a lot but was never far away either. Paul remembers once stopping a busy dad’s car by putting his hand over the exhaust. He also remembers his mom was always the one to "give the kids a licking" and his dad tried to intercede on their behalf. He was always trying to help people. He never hugged his sons for fear of them becoming gay.

He spent little time alone with his dad and repeatedly says the kids largely brought themselves up. The family often lived next to the mill where dad worked. He was "rooked" by a rich cousin in business. Paul lived with this man from 12 to 14, so as to be prepared for education. He remembers a number of stories involving his dad about physical bravery: pulling a knife at 14 on some bullies, hitting a large bully at a party with a beer bottle (and later becoming friends with him), leaping on a man who’d pulled a gun on him. Paul remembers his dad carrying a pistol for a while after firing a strong angry worker.

Dad left Jamaica out of concern for the future of the family. The strong large group helped each other handle the new country. Paul didn’t date in high school. He was caught once stealing wood for a tree house, but his father "let him learn from his mistake". The move to Australia was out of dad’s concern for the family. Paul worked there to support the family farm enterprise. Dad didn’t like Australia, they stayed 7 years.

Paul boarded at home until marriage. His only problem with his dad was being treated as a kid and not as a son who could think for himself. Sees dad as overprotective, in reaction to never having had a proper dad - left home and was on his own at 14. Tells great story of renegade, rich, university educated grandfather who partied too much. With friend shot policeman in hand. Got off due to cunning. Was "sentenced" by judge to call his son after him. Paul’s middle name is the same, as is his son.

Dad has rare marriage but no close friends. Paul sees them similiar in the sense of liking to think and trouble shoot. A friend says he’s spitting image - likes that notion. Learned from dad not to hit women, as did his dad learn. Argues a little over religion. Their relationship is good now thanks in part to Paul’s wife putting dad in his place.

Paul spends more time with his kids than did his dad - sports, lessons and cultural events. Hopes his son will make it to university. Looks forward to travelling with his wife.
Rick's Summary

Rick was born in Vancouver, the second son in a family of 3 boys. Due to dad's work, they travelled around the province for several years and then settled in the eastern part of the lower mainland. Parents are alive, together and still quite involved. Father is a retired municipal engineer. Mother taught school.

Early stories are about being scared of father's punishment - for breaking something in a mall, the chandelier while playing football inside on a Sat morning. He ran to mother in the mall, wondering "who was this scary man". Says dad had a tough life (parents split at 10) and could never show love. Rick remembers being driven to school by dad silently, resentfully, without affection. He was surprised to learn from his mother several years ago that he was his dad’s favourite. Dad was the "ogre of the house", would never play with the boys, doing things with the kids was a chore. Rick was afraid to ask for anything.

Rick played hockey but his dad wouldn’t watch. Only once he came; that was "the best day of my life" - he scored the winning goal. Dad took a picture but didn’t praise him. Dad didn’t allow Rick to swim in the BC summer games because the family was going on holiday to Alta, even though he had the fastest time in the province. He always tried to please dad but never got recognition and lost interest in sports by high school. He made things in shop classes for his father also. His father tried to help him with math but expected too much and got frustrated. His grades went up and down and he experimented with drugs in high school. He’s never communicated all this to his father.

By 14, Rick was no longer afraid of his father, but he "had an attitude". His father caught him masturbating once, but never said anything ("like a normal father would"). Rick had a great time acting in high school plays, but again felt he never got the support or push he wanted from his father. He mentioned Gretzky’s father, as an idealized example. Said, "if I had the balls, I would have challenged him", but never did. Says he’s still defensive, as if he’s 11 or 12.

Moved out twice at 19 and 20, the second time to live with a woman. Mother was hostile to all his girlfriends and to his wife but dad was very nice. No reaction to moving from dad, mom was disappointed. Generally dad doesn’t call enough, mother too much. Rick feels that his father loves him but can’t tell him that. He sees them as being similar, especially physically. He is more impulsive and has more involvement in church than his dad. He wishes his dad had given him more direction and support. He sees both his dad and brother as being too selfish in their relationships, saying they don’t understand women’s equality.

Rick is currently going through marital separation and feels his mother and (less so) father are meddling. When they met with parents about selling house, he couldn’t stand up to them. This was painful in front of his wife. He lets his wife deal with the money. Rick has been married less than 1 year and is planning to move to the Okanogan, believing he has to get away. He hopes his marriage will survive. He likes and is loyal to his job. He has some good friends, one of whom lives in the Okanogan.
APPENDIX E

FATHER AND SON STORIES: SUMMARIES

a. Introduction

b. Earliest memories: glimpses of the past

c. Ages 8 - 13: puberty and turmoil

d. Ages 14 - 19: preparing to leave

e. Adult stories: men and fathers
Appendix E.

FATHER AND SON STORIES

Introduction

Stories were defined to be narrations of incidents which occurred involving fathers and son. Stories are a literary form but they have received attention recently from family therapists for their ability to convey powerful messages about the teller and about the family involved. When passed between generations, they can become the vehicle for transmission of messages about wisdom, learning, identity and history. They may also serve as examples of possibility, helping family members to formulate life plans, and understand past events in a greater context. The very process of spending time talking about their father was very much like this for respondents: whether they had a wealth of elaborate detailed tales to tell or whether they had none, the interview created an environment in which the men reflected and observed, complained and paid homage and, in a sense, connected with their fathers.

Some subjects had very little recall of specific incidents in certain time periods in their life. Certainly the earliest memories were most hazy and the stories less frequent and less detailed. However, the age of subjects did not seem to greatly influence the extent of recall; some younger subjects had gaps in their recollections and several older respondents had precise accounts of early stories. A factor that influenced the clarity of the story was whether it had frequently been re-told previously. Several stories were obviously family favourites and had been related many times. Others appeared to have only just been recalled to memory during the interview. One subject hypothesized that his dearth of memories from a particular time period was a result of suppression of unpleasant events. Another hypothesized that he "didn't remember anything from that time because nothing bad happened". Both could of course be accurate. Several men had been in therapy and had obviously gained familiarity not only with the details of significant events, but also with an analysis of the meaning of those events.

One unforeseen result was the stories which were related involving the men's fathers before they were born. These were obviously anecdotes which had been told by their fathers to the sons. Paul told more detailed stories involving his father and even his grandfather as young men, than he told about himself. Frank told a story about how his mother "died" seven years before he was born. She was revived after his father saw her move on the hospital bed, long after the doctors had told him she was dead. It may be that these kinds of stories contain a different kind of influence than those which only involved the teller. They are more likely to remain constant, built into stability by their repetition and less affected by the changing perspectives of the tellers. They also belong to the families as a whole, although their meaning may vary amongst the individuals.

Knowing such stories seems to suggest that these sons held a perspective on their father which saw him and his experience well beyond their direct experience of him, that is they saw something of him outside of his role as their father. Such knowledge about father may be gained in relation to developmental challenges for men: it may indicate a particular stage in the relationship. Frequently references to a father’s parental behaviour were attributed to what was known about his own family experiences, especially with his own
father.

a. Earliest memories: glimpses of the past

The strongest theme from the collection of earliest stories is an emergent picture of young boys gaining a glimpse into a different reality, a man's world. It is as if some experiential quality of the father's life was suddenly revealed to them. Most often fathers are described doing things which would be fairly typical for them, but the sons in those moments more clearly experienced the world their father inhabited. For example, Bruce's father would take him down to see the construction of the St. Lawrence Seaway, in which his company was involved. Frank would visit his father and elder brothers at work fixing cars at their garage. Paul described putting his hand over the exhaust of his father's truck to try to prevent him leaving for work. Gord and Marty both remembered their parents partying - dancing or singing with other adults.

There is often an idyllic quality to the images from this time. Marty tells of hearing that his father, a left handed baseball star, spent hours sitting by the crib when he was small putting things into his left hand and taking them from his right. (Marty is primarily left handed today.) Brent remembers the Victorian formality of a visit to his father's grandmother's home when he was four; this was the house where his father was raised. Marvin spoke of setting up a table on which to sell his toys outside of his father’s second hand store, to play - and practice - at doing what his dad did for a living.

These types of memories seem be retained due to moments of clear perception or insight by the sons and are not apparently evoked by particular incidents. This would make their recall quite unpredictable. One common factor is that frequently these memories took place outside of the family home. In Dave's case, the interaction took place in his father's pick-up truck while for Bruce it came on a skiing trip involving only his father and himself. Dan remembered an incident while his father was riding him on his bicycle through their village in Sri Lanka, when he pointed out a group of doctors and told Dan about the importance of being well educated. Paul's father would take the small crowd of children that was their family to play on the beaches in Jamaica and would keep count of the children between waves. Rick remembers being dropped off at school by his father on his way to work. It seemed that images of father were seldom strongly pronounced within the daily domestic sphere and that fathers and children may not generally interact strongly within the home.

Bruce's recollection is one of the more vivid pictures from his early days:
"The youngest childhood memories are ski weekends. This would be in the mid fifties and I could not have been older than six. We would go to the railroad station in the north end of Montreal and a steam engine would pull the train out of the tunnel and stop and pick up the passengers on the platform and we would take about an hour long ride on that train up into the hills north of Montreal... And I remember really enjoying being in the woods, because they're very silent in the wintertime. It's very different in eastern Canada. The snow is puffy and light and it absorbs all sound... experiencing the real pleasure of the silence, of being in the woods, just in the company of my father, alone on the trail with him."
One of the earliest stories describes an incident which did occur inside the home and mother plays a role as well. It contains some unorthodox parental behaviour by Brent’s father which suggests a little about his character. The reaction to what happens, on the other hand, is stereotypically classic:

"The thing I enjoyed most around about the time I was 4 was I used to have this plastic truck that had wheels and it was a swivel thing like a tractor trailer. You sat on the body of it and were supposed to steer with your hands, but the wheel had broken off. He (my father’s) put a steel bar through the front of it, so I could steer it with my feet. And he had a forked stick and he was pushing me around the house. It was the type of house where you could drive down the wooden hallway and through the linoleum kitchen floor and back out onto the hallway again. I was doing 4 wheel skids around the corners, while he was pushing. I particularly remember one time when I hit the door jamb with my face, really hard, right down the old forehead. I felt like I’d been split in two. Dad was pretty shook up. He couldn’t decide whether to hug me or to touch me or what. He was just frozen there, going "oh, sorry Brent". It was mom who came and gave me a hug and checked me out. Dad was sort of standing there with his hands up going "what do I do". Then he stuck his hands in his pockets, being very awkward. It was like he just didn’t know what to do with himself..."

Perhaps predictably, there is a major subset of these earliest stories which is centered around a particularly powerful incident and the emotions which were evoked are often still quite clear. In fact, the emotions sometimes comes across more clearly than the details. Being disciplined was the most common of these situations. Several men pointed out that "it was mom who gave the lickings in our family" or who used the "strap", but three men mentioned vivid memories of being punished by their fathers: Dan was stung by a slap from his father which brought tears to his eyes; Rick remembers his father giving him the "beating of a lifetime" for breaking the chandelier while playing football in the living room with his brother on a Saturday morning; and Dave described this event and what led up to it. It was the only time his father physically punished him:

"The earliest remembrance I have of my dad and I being alone, there’s a real sense of disappointment on my part. That I disappointed him...I was this little golden child who was going to carry on my father’s name, and I was the only grandchild. I was named after my grandfather. Anyways, so the earliest memory I have of being alone and this sense of disappointment came from - I remember going to a Thrasher’s Parade in Maple (rural Saskatchewan) and A and P Motors, which is the John Deere Dealership in Maple, was giving out these emblems that you can iron onto a plain T shirt. I remember it was this piece of paper with this yellow iron-on on it, that was for me. And I remember my father encouraging me as this kid,
to go up and get it. And so I had this iron-on transfer.

I remember taking it home and being very proud of it. It sat on the fridge for what must have been an eternity and I wanted this thing on my shirt. I used to always check this thing and make sure it was ok. And being a kid at home, I wasn't yet at school. And it came to the point where we were going to get this thing put on a T shirt.

And I don't remember what the circumstances were, what I had done wrong, but I had obviously misbehaved. I was in the truck, standing beside my dad. There were no seat belts at that point, and I remember my father saying 'don't you dare rip that. I'll slap you if you do.' He'd never hit me to that point and did not hit me since, but I don't know if I did something or if he was having a bad day, or if there had been a conflict with mother, or if there was financial stress or what. But I remember standing beside him and ripping this transfer. [deliberately?] Deliberately. To test him, I suppose, to test him. He stopped the truck and he slapped me. I just remember the look of... the tears and the crying were not from being hurt - my father had not hit me that hard - it was the shock that 'holy cow, I really pushed that man over the limit'... I just remember being so disappointed, in him, in myself. And I don't know why but that T shirt is still at home somewhere. We were taking this damn transfer into town to get it put on in one of those shops."

It was not only the trauma of paternal disapproval however that left strong emotions imprinted on sons' memories. Marty remembers being awaken at night by the sound of his parents quarrelling, and then silently crying himself back to sleep. Kevin ran into his parent's room during one of their fights only to get cuffed himself and "sent packing". Kyle at 5 remembers his father coming home from work and in to see the boys in the living room to ask them if they would like to go on a ferry ride. It was his way of announcing that he had been transferred to Vancouver and the family would be moving again.

b. Ages 8 to 13: puberty and turmoil

Several of the stories from ages 8 or 9 seemed to be more thematically linked to the early stories. A more natural way to divide the stories may have been a little later, at around age 10, towards the end of the Freudian latency period. For example, Rick described an incident involving his father getting into a rage over an item which as a 9 year old, he'd broken while inside a mall store. The story was very similar to Dave's about ripping the transfer in the truck: confronted with his father's anger, Rick remembers thinking "who was this [raging] guy?". Similarly, Kyle was punished by his father for thieving at age 8 when a 2 dollar bill was found under his bed. He says he was innocent of this charge, but had been committing other thefts around the time, and so figured the punishment must have been somehow related to that guilt. He remembers how angry his father became at his denials. Father as disciplinarian will be discussed in more detail in theme 5. Another example of a story that still seemed to be part of a latency period was Gord's recollection of visiting his father in residence at a university and wetting the bed, every night until he was 10. One final story which also seems to belong in a category of early memories is that of 10 year old
Bruce, who described sitting on the bench for the whole of his team's soccer game, contentedly looking in the grass and even excitedly finding a 4 leaf clover. His father, meanwhile, got very irate and quite belligerent with his coach for not letting his son play.

Puberty is surely a time of intense transition and for many boys a source of rich recollections. In preparation for separation from family, the world begins to intrude on adolescent consciousness, and awareness grows that these idyllic encapsulated families of the fifties and sixties have to face pressures and strains from outside. Stories from the age of ten onwards seemed to take on characteristic teenage qualities - conflict, testing and passages - for example. Also the emotional content of the stories seemed to become much more intense. One respondent observed with interest that "man, a lot of things happened to me when I was anywhere from the age of 10 to about 14". Another noted that tension increased dramatically with his father at the age of 12 or 13. One classic example is illustrated by Brent in this story of loss of innocence.

"There was one time at 12. We were walking down the street in front of our house, and I was holding his hand. It felt really great, I felt really comfortable, and was having fun. And some kid looked across the street at me and called me a fag, or something like that. Or dad a fag, I wasn't really sure who he was calling at. But suddenly I felt very uncomfortable and I let go of his hand. Apparently - I found out from mom, dad never said a word - he was very hurt by this, by me letting go of his hand. And it was at that point that our relationship really changed: from, uh, I could go and see him and sometimes get him to do things with me, to being totally alienated from him. And it was from that point too, the kind of relationship I had with him [became] one loaded with anger, on both our parts... this age 12 keeps popping up in my mind as when things really changed".

If the earliest stories contain an almost idyllic quality of unbiased insight into the world of father, these stories were far more likely to contain strong judgement - praise or criticism - of father in the insight about him that these encounters provided. They seemed to indicate a fixing of the qualities of the emotional relationship within the dyad: the extent of ease with which the sons related to their fathers strongly predicted the type of stories which would be told.

Paul, Frank and Mel all told stories in which their fathers were heroic: Paul's father had to carry a pistol for a while after he'd had to fire a large and angry man from his sawmill in Jamaica; Frank's father always had lots of money, something which helped to balance his feeling of being an outsider with his peers due to being a Catholic; Mel's father, a former police officer, once pulled a gun on an angry customer who was threatening them in the convenience store that their family operated. Another time Mel was impressed with how his father took over the scene after a bad car accident near the store. As boys, these three as well as Dan and Dave, could all access their fathers at his place of work and get to know him there, a factor that may be important in light of the observation made earlier that sons appeared to experience their fathers more strongly outside the family. The question arises
then whether a link exists between these "heroic" views of father and this experience of him at work.

More commonly stories showed fathers in a poor light, where he had hurt or disappointed the sons in some profound way. Gord’s father taught at the same high school that Gord attended and several times forgot to give Gord a ride after school, so that he ended up walking the 17 miles home in the dark: Gord ruminated bitterly all this way over his disappointment and hurt that his father hadn’t even remembered him. Dave described his father as giving in to a bullying mother over an alleged affair and was "bitterly disappointed" in him. Bruce told of disagreeing with his father on the beach in PEI over the cause of tides, knowing that he was right and seeing his father as a blustering and ignorant man. He tells the story with eloquence:

"Ok. I remember when I was late pre-adolescent, maybe 12 or 13 - there was a much increased level of tension or intolerance between my father and me. I was doing really well in school and I was really quite an avid reader, I really liked the sciences and I was always reading about technical and scientific subjects. And we took - he bought his first car in 1961 because he needed it to do the travelling for the sales work that he was now engaged in - and the first holiday that we ever took was to P.E.I. We’d never had much of a holiday in the summer before because we had never been able to get away from the city.

Here we were on the Eastern seaboard and it was the first time I ever remember seeing the ocean. We were walking along the beach and the Prince Edward Island shore is quite amazing. Its quite bizarre. Its red, red rock, red sedimentary rock and the soil is red - tropical soils are like that too, bright red. And you can see from the rocks on the shoreline that they are carved by the ocean. You know, the waves come splashing in and carve the rock and left all kinds of caves and notches and slices through this rock.

And we’d be walking along there and we’d be walking over the tides ’cause you could walk at low tide but you couldn’t walk at high tide and so the tides were a really amazing thing to see, because I’d never seen them before. But I’d read enough about them that I said, "Yeah well the tides are caused by the influence of the moon and the sun pulling the water on the surface of the earth around. The earth’s water has a bulge that tracks the movement of the moon and it tracks the movement of the sun".

This was completely unacceptable, my father was unwilling to hear that I might know about how the tides were caused. He was convinced that when you got outside the earth’s atmosphere, there was no gravity. He’d understood this I guess, from some of the coverage of the sputniks and the satellites of the late fifties. There was no gravity outside the earth’s atmosphere and so it was impossible, impossible that you could ever have the moon pulling the earth’s oceans around, or the sun pulling the earth’s oceans around. Well I knew that this was not right, I knew that gravity was working whether you were inside or outside the earth’s atmosphere, gravity was what
was holding the solar system together, gravity was what held the galaxy together. Gravity was the transmission medium by which the moon and the sun attracted the moon and made the tides. I remember being very upset that I couldn't get this very elementary idea through to my father. He wouldn't accept that I had read up and had an understanding of the tides. This was a sign of the kind of tension, rivalry and stubbornness between us. And its an indicator to me that already I was very distant from him."

Rivalry is one aspect of the dynamic with father that seemed to appear for many of the boys as sexual maturation began. No stories contained any form of education for boys about relating to the opposite sex, except for the injunction from Paul’s father that a man doesn’t hit a female - even one’s sister. One of the few criticisms Frank made about his parenting was the lack of guidance of any sort about sexual matters. Similarly, Bruce bemoaned the fact that the only message he got about sex came from his mother suggesting that it was a frightening and unpleasant activity.

Parental conflict became an issue for several men in the stories from around the time of puberty. The incident with Dave and the affair was part of a "summer of horror", when his parents fought continually and he couldn’t wait until school began in the fall so he could escape from the house. Rick, Gord, Bruce and Marty all remembered wondering around this time why their parents didn’t split up. Marty said his mother had just come back from a visit to the priest, in which she advised him that she couldn’t stay with her husband, on the very night he had a brain aneurism. She took care of him for another 14 years before he died.

Again, activities that occurred outside of the family home were frequently described. Gord described a summer long family trip in a Volkswagen van. Brent’s only really enjoyable memories involving father at this time involved time spent at his grandparent’s lakeside cottage. Bruce, as we’ve seen, recalled a trip to P.E.I. Kyle remembers a camping trip that only he, his father and his younger brother attended:

"The family had always gone camping together in the summertime. We would go to a lake and set up for a week or we’d do a little tour. I guess my oldest brother had moved out of the house and my second oldest brother was old enough that he really didn’t want to go. And my mom had never liked camping anyways, so one summer my dad took me and my younger brother camping. And we had a week alone with him. We just went up to a campground on Georgian Bay and hung out. The weather was terrible. It wasn’t a particularly spectacular or wonderful vacation or anything but I remember it quite clearly. I remember swimming with him and my brother, and doing things in a closer manner than ever in all the time I was growing up."

The theme of passages is always prominent in discussions of adolescence. Several men experienced crucial family changes at this time of their lives. Kevin’s mother committed suicide when he was 10 years old, forcing him to grow up very quickly. Marty’s father, as we’ve seen, had an aneurism and a stroke when he 12 and spent 2 years in a hospital. Both men continue to struggle with the impact of these events. Gord, Dave, Marty, Brent and
Kevin all described events which marked significant developmental transitions. Kevin's is an interesting picture of a reluctant transition accelerated prematurely by the untimely death of his mother and his father's attempting to deal with that event:

"That was a really bad time in my life because my mom had committed suicide when I was 10. And it was pretty hard on the whole family, or the 3 of us anyhow. But I remember, this was when my sister and I were introduced to my step mother to be. At that point she was only the baby sitter. And uh, I guess just before I turned 13, he sat me down. This particular incident I always remember he sat me down at the kitchen table - man to man so to speak. Out came the bottle of rye, 2 little shot glasses. (I was 12 for sure, maybe 13.) He had asked my permission, what I thought about him re-marrying. I remember inside thinking no, I didn't want him to because he couldn't replace my mom. But I said yes, to make him happy. And I thought that was the right thing to do. So it happened. And God knows, I live to regret it today... I hated it. It was really the worse thing that ever happened in our family."

c. Ages 14-19: preparing to leave

Leaving home is a very significant time of passage and the way sons leave seems to be highly influenced by the nature of their connection with their father. It is a time which can be greatly facilitated by a positive relationship with father. If the puberty age stories were characterized by emotional reactions to father on a personal level, by this stage the perception of the sons becomes more public or global. How they see their own fathers in the world is a key now, as the sons begin to find their way. This perception is of course another layer which is built upon how well the two have managed to establish emotional connections and if problems in that have continued to impact the relationship, this will in turn distort the vision and expectations a man has of his father.

As we've seen, five men, Frank, Mel, Dave, Paul and Dan had fathers who were self employed in their own business or were easily accessible at their place of work by their sons - Dave's father is a farmer as was Paul's for a period. One suspects that for these men, leaving home was much less traumatic. Frank's leaving school was a pretty straightforward step on a fairly gentle path towards independence. Frank left home to get married at the age of 21:

"They wouldn't let me do any of the automotive stuff in the (school) shop. It was all English, and Social Studies and the whole ball of wax again. So, I came home one day and I said listen - this was November 1 - and I told my dad "I don't want to do this, I'm going nowhere". And I'd gone to school every day, I never cut classes. So he said, "ok, come on to work (at the garage)". And I went to work... I was 16."

Mel left home at 17 by staying behind to finish high school when his parents moved
about 30 miles away, although he moved back in with them six years later. Dan spent much
of his teen years working in his father's shop, but his leaving to go university was both a
proud first for his family and a little lonely for Dan.

The role of conflict in assisting the cutting of family ties is interesting: how overt this
becomes seems to be largely a function of the control father still holds. Clearly this age
period is a time of challenging and testing. Father, for some men, became the first obstacle
to overcome on their way out of the nest. He is one that several men never overcame.
Bruce, who is 43 was, until recently, still fighting - physically - with his brother and even
their father, who is now 78. He has never "defeated" this old man, and remembers as a 19
year old being humiliated by the fact that he couldn’t keep up to him skiing. That same year
he tried to intervene in a physical fight between his parents and was knocked down the stairs.
The bruises, he said significantly, took a long time to heal. Brent remembers with
satisfaction telling his father at 19 to "fuck off, dad". He moved out soon after, with his
father's blessings and assistance. Only the two eldest respondents moved from the family
home directly into their matrimonial homes: both of these men were born before the end of
the second world war.

At the opposite end of the spectrum of leaving home experiences was Kevin, who as
we’ve seen, had to grow up quickly after the premature death of his mother. His father
married his housekeeper three years later and Kevin "hated her (the stepmother) with a
passion". Conflict between them led to his leaving home at the age of 15:

"She was just giving me a hard time, and I pissed her off and she came at me
like she was gonna kill me and I ran for my life, scared...I ran out the back
door which was a wood door with a window in it. When I ran out, she
slammed the door on my ankle and had me pinned there. She wasn't a small
woman, and I couldn't get free. I was so angry, all I could see on the other
side of the window was her face and I smashed it out, and ended up tearing
up my arm pretty good. I had to go hospital and get a pile of stitches. When
I came home, dad had just got off the night shift and he says "you better back
your bags". I figured that was a pretty fair deal and that was the end of that.
So I left."

Interestingly, Kevin had also told a story of defeating his father in a physical fight (see
Violence theme) when he was 14 while both were under the influence of alcohol. One
wonders how much this event contributed to his father asking him to leave less than 6 months
later.

Stories of this age, then, frequently involved the first experiences the sons had of
drinking, sex, money, getting a license or buying the first car. Fathers’ role was occasionally
to facilitate these achievements, but more often it seemed to impede them or challenge sons.
How fathers chose to deal with these issues reveals something both about their own
experiences and about their wisdom. Two fathers introduced their sons to alcohol
deliberately, attempting to teach them a lesson about it. None instructed their sons about
sexuality. Rick’s father walked into his room once while Rick was masturbating. His
reaction was to back out and close the door, never broaching the topic with Rick ("like any normal father would"). Instead, for several days around the house, eye contact was avoided.

How fathers responded in times of crisis was also significant to the relationship with the sons. Paul was caught with some other boys, stealing wood from a construction site. His father's lack of reaction was impressive: he told Paul he knew he'd made a mistake and wouldn't do it again and so discipline was not necessary. Kyle told a similar story of understanding from his father when he was arrested for drugs and spent three months in jail. The personal support and lack of recriminations from his father is still important to him - it was an expression of trust - and the jail experience certainly straightened out his path: Kyle is now a successful radio producer.

Kyle's leaving home to go to university was facilitated by his father who helped to smooth things over with his mother: she'd had different plans. This was not uncommon in the way sons left home. Bruce's mother was "bitterly disappointed" when he moved out. Gord's parents divorced when he was 17: he stayed with his mother for a year, until a bitter fight drove him from there to his father's house. Rick says his mother "meddled" in his relationship with the woman he left home to move in with. On the other hand, fathers, even when they were problematic for the sons, tended to support them to move out, if they played a part at all.

Both Marty and Dave told of gaining acceptance into difficult and prestigious programs that required their leaving home. Their mothers facilitated these leavings and in both cases, emotionally poignant farewells with the fathers were experienced. Many of the themes involved in leaving home, particularly the emotional pushes and pulls that run through this experience, are pulled together by Dave into this story of him leaving home, father and the family farm:

"... I was accepted on an exchange program called Canada World Youth. At that time it was a year long exchange program. You spent half of your time in a community in Canada and 6 months in a developing country. And so I spent 6 months here in Revelstoke and I spent 6 months in Sri Lanka. And it was a difficult program to get into at that time. So there was a certain status. I think that my father was proud when I was accepted. It was a long application process. My senior year was spent applying for this, interviews and going through the medical. It was a fairly strenuous application process.

When I finally did get accepted, I remember getting the letter at school and I went in and drove to Maple to the school and got the letter and drove home. And the first person I showed it to was my mother and she was still asleep and was quite groggy, although was excited and shared in my enthusiasm. My dad, he was excited and pleased that I had been selected, but at the same time he asked me if I was sure that that was what I wanted, if I was sure that that was what I wanted to do. He pointed out that just because I had been accepted didn't mean I had to take it. I could still withdraw from the program. But I was committed to the program and I very much wanted to do it.

But again, through that whole process, now that I was accepted I had
to buy all this stuff. I had to get a backpack, and supplies and halazone tablets and all this stuff to take overseas. Mom was there to provide the sort of emotional support, the immediate support that I needed and dad did the background work that was needed and was dependable - you know go into town and pick up the backpack. He was very much hands on.

The program. My best friend Mark and I had applied for it together and the program was set up in such a way that there are 2 starting dates and I had been accepted for the first starting date and unfortunately my best friend Mark, who we lived together practically from the time we were in kindergarten, wasn't accepted. And so that was part of the concern that my dad had I suppose, was one of us was going off and how was the other one going to handle the rejection.

Mark came out the night before I left, I was going to drive to R. with my mother who was in the middle of seeding at that point - June, 78. My dad couldn't go with us to R. The plane left at 8 o'clock in the morning so we were up early and the car was packed. Again my dad had done all the practical stuff, he had gassed up the car, put oil in it, made sure we were gonna get there, you know, made the coffee, so that we could get an early start. And I remember Mark was coming to R. to wish me well and my mother was gonna drive us. And he made sure we had everything, my passport, this package of envelopes with stamps on it so I could write in Canada, that kind of stuff.

I remember us hugging goodbye and we drove off. And I saw my dad go back into the house and we had forgotten something. We had got maybe two miles from home and had to turn around and go back and get this. And I remember my dad ... we came in the back way which is quite sheltered, so you don't hear the car coming in, and I got out of the car and ran into the house so I could pick this stuff up in my room. And in order to get to my bedroom, I had to go through the dining room. And my father was sitting at the dining room table. And he was weeping. It was the only time that I had seen him express any kind of emotion. I didn't have to say anything. I just went up to him and said "it'd be ok, I'll be ok dad".

And its something that can still bring tears to my eyes, when I think about it now. It was the only time that he'd allowed this strong facade to break down. I watched him at his father's funeral and at his mother's funeral. His older brother Bob was killed in a farming accident and there wasn't that same kind of emotion, he wasn't able to express himself in that way. But I think he was scared for me. I think he was scared for himself because for the first time he and my mother would be alone in the house. I think he was mourning the loss - that his son would not come home to the farm as the same person. I think he knew that I was going and would not likely be back - in the same way. He was mourning his own adulthood, his children were gone now, he no longer had a child at home.
d. Adult stories: men and fathers

The amount of actual contact between people is a poor indicator of the quality of a relationship, but it can provide a crude measure of connection and suggest at least the possibility for flexibility, openness or change. Of the 12 men interviewed, only three, Paul, Rick and Brent, told stories about recent contact with their fathers and seemed to communicate regularly (more often than monthly) with their parental families. Paul is the most loyal of his parents’ 10 children and normally sees them every second week, although his wife’s busy life as a student has cut down on this visiting schedule.

Resolving issues which create tension - letting go of needing approval for example - is the work for many men well into their adult lives. Brent still wrestles with themes of approval from his father: the last time he saw him several weeks prior to the interview, his father expressed a dislike for Brent’s new beard. Rick had spoken to his father the same morning announcing his impending separation and intention to move to the Interior. It is a move that he hopes will help him start over, and he seems clear that he needs to make a break from his parents, who have remained intimately involved in his life. These three were the only subjects with fathers currently living in this province and despite the apparent difficulties in the relationships, these fathers were most available.

Three more subjects, Dave, Kyle and Dan had fathers living from 1000 to 10,000 miles away. These three all expressed the wish for more frequent contact with their fathers. All of them described some sadness or pain that they feel that their fathers are so far out of their lives. Dan, for example, who’s father lives in Sri Lanka, stated that “it would be a very great shock” were his 78 year old father to die before he returned there again. Kyle feels some pain that his 78 year old father spends much time holidaying with his second wife in the Caribbean and seems reluctant to visit Kyle and his family here on the west coast. Dave expressed the belief that as his parents reach retirement age, he could if he so chose, influence them to move out here to retire. He didn’t say whether that was what he would like to happen. He did communicate with them by telephone weekly for a time.

Interestingly, each of these three seem to romanticize their relationships with their fathers. Kyle says he would be "proud to be like my father", an active and alive 78 year old man. For Dan, the day when he can return home will be "the best day, the happiest time". Dave expresses great fondness for his father yet continues to allow his mother to influence the ways that he and his father find to connect with each other.

Two more respondents, Gord and Bruce, described arguments which had occurred at the time of the last contact with their fathers, both several years prior to the interview. Gord had gone to have dinner with his father and his second wife, prepared to ask a lot of questions about unresolved family issues and it did not go well. He has not spoken to his father since that time, and thinks he may be in Germany now. Bruce had gone home to Montreal, and was late arriving at his brother’s for Christmas. Both the brother and their father verbally and then physically attacked him, telling him they didn’t want to see him again. He has spoken only very formally to his father on the phone since.

The impending death of their fathers seemed to introduce new perspectives into the relationship and sometimes provided an opportunity or incentive to make improvements. Sometimes, death leaves a legacy of regrets of failings or painfully unresolved issues. At the time of being interviewed, four of the 12 men had experienced the death of their fathers,
often described as a vital moment in a man’s life (Osherson, 1990). Frank’s father died about 15 years ago and he was able to discuss both some of the failings he felt around that event and how he’s made peace with it. He then describes his reflections on the scene at his father’s funeral:

“I loved that guy so much but when he was in the hospital dying, I went in and I saw him and he was just, in great pain and you could see the agony in his eyes. And I said dad I can’t stay here, I can’t stand seeing you like this. And a couple days later, he was back home again. And then he stayed home for another week and he died. He died in his sleep. I saw him the night that he died. I just couldn’t handle it. I feel a lot of times that I let him down. I’m not a person who has a lot of outward emotion. I don’t cry a lot... but anyway, I left him. When he was in the funeral parlour, I went over to see him, he was lying in the casket. I said a few words to him and I was all alone. And my eyes got a little watered up, but I didn’t cry. I went and got in my car and I drove about a half a block. And then all of a sudden, I had to pull over, just, it came whoooaa, just this huge flush of tears, I was just sobbing, and I thought what was happening here. And I couldn’t hold it back. And I got into some real deep crying, I don’t know how long it lasted for 10 minutes, 20 minutes, I don’t know. When you’re in that state, there’s no time. And then I got myself together again, but I’ve often thought that, I’ve felt that I let him down there. So, then he died and that was the end of it.

“He was buried in St. A’s church, and for a guy with a grade 3 education and having a gas station, the church was full. I couldn’t believe it. When we were carrying him out, I turned and looked, and the church was full. It was full of people. And that’s an accomplishment. You know sometimes I think that if I drop dead tomorrow, who’ll turn up for my funeral? Anybody? Have I touched anybody’s life? ... It’s not how much money you have in the bank that counts, its did you contribute? ... And he did contribute, he did.

The other three men have experienced the death of their fathers in the last 7 years. Marty’s story was full of detail of the death and his part in it, but he was not sure what the death has meant in his life. Mel also seemed to be trying to make sense of his father’s death and how his life carries on without him, but he did have a good memory of his dad dying with all 9 children and other extended family present in the hospital room. Kevin’s last contact with his father completed a tragic family history which Kevin has tried his best to come to terms with recently. The last time he spoke with his father was in an argument on the phone:

“so I said the hell with you and hung up the phone. And I never spoke to him for 3 more years. Actually, I never talked to him. I tried to talk to him 3 years later on the phone and the same thing - we got into an argument in the first 60 seconds and I said the hell with it. And I never saw him until he was
in the hospital. He'd had a massive heart attack and I never did get the chance to make amends or say goodbye or those types of things."

In some ways the most recent stories about the fathers were the saddest ones, for many, their hopes had run out. Five of the twelve men mentioned the effects of their father's alcohol use on their family relationships, several labelling their fathers alcoholics. Marty spoke of picking his father up at the pub on a Saturday night because he was too drunk to make it home on his own. His father had done the very same with Marty's grandfather, 30 years previously. Perhaps because he never did get to "make amends", Kevin remains fearful about becoming a father himself, out of a concern that he would turn out to be the same kind as his father. More discussion of such multigenerational themes is found in chapter V.