

1-1-2009

# Understanding Masculinity: The Role of Father-Son Interaction

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UNDERSTANDING MASCULINITY: THE ROLE OF FATHER-SON INTERACTION  
ON MEN'S PERCEPTIONS OF MANHOOD

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A Dissertation  
Presented to  
the Faculty of Social Sciences  
University of Denver

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Philosophy

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By  
Clyde J. Remmo, Jr.  
August 2009  
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Title: UNDERSTANDING MASCULINITY: THE ROLE OF FATHER-SON INTERACTION ON MEN'S PERCEPTIONS OF MANHOOD

Advisor: Dr. Fran Dickson

Degree Date: August, 2009

## ABSTRACT

Although a significant amount of research has accounted for gender from a social constructionist perspective, research specifically examining the construction of masculinity is still a relatively new endeavor. Additionally, although gender is accounted for in various family communication theories, no theory specifically accounts for gender formation within the context of family interaction. The purpose of this study is to examine sons' narratives of their recollections of father-son interactions. Studying the father-son dyad in this way may help us to better understand how men constitute masculinity in particular familial relationships. Although the purpose was to examine the themes of father-son interactions, the themes of masculinity are also salient. Therefore, this study also illuminates common masculine themes as reported in men's stories of their fathers. Twenty-one men (age 18 or older) participated in semi-structured interviews that lasted 45-55 minutes. Qualitative data yielded 3 major themes and 26 sub-themes surrounding father-son interaction, as it pertains to men's ideas about masculinity. Discussion of 4 major findings and 3 secondary findings are presented. Finally, strengths and limitations of the study are explored and directions for future research are suggested.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the many people who assisted me in the journey of completing this dissertation and degree. First, to my advisor, Dr. Fran Dickson, I extend my gratitude for her assistance and patience through the entire duration of this project. I know I wasn't always the easiest to work with. I would also like to thank my committee members, Dr. Darin Hicks, Dr. Roy V. Wood, and Dr. Howard Markman for their helpful insights and suggestions. I thank my parents, especially my father, Clyde Sr., who was my *Hero* at a point in my life when I most needed him. From him, I first learned what it means to selflessly love and care for the other. I thank Em, for her love and support during this process. I thank my brothers, Andy and Matt. Aside from being great brothers, I appreciate how serious they take the role of fatherhood. I know that their sons will grow to be great men. I would like to thank Dan, Izzy, and Brian for their friendship and constant support. You are all great men and great friends. Finally, I would like to thank all of my study participants for giving their time and sharing their experiences about their fathers and their own families.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW.....	1
Statement of the Problem .....	1
Purpose of the Study .....	4
Literature Review.....	5
Social Construction as a Theoretical Framework.....	5
Social Construction of Gender.....	8
Conceptualization of Constructs.....	10
Masculine Identities.....	11
Masculine Roles.....	13
Displays of Masculinity.....	14
Masculine Ideals.....	18
Gender Stratification.....	20
Overview of Constructionist Masculinity.....	22
Influences on Masculinity.....	22
Media’s Influence.....	23
Peer Influence.....	27
The Mother’s Role.....	28
Father-son Interaction.....	30
Research Questions.....	39
Summary.....	41
CHAPTER 2: METHODS AND PROCEDURES.....	42
Study Participants.....	42
Data Collection.....	42
Interview Protocol.....	44
Demographic Data.....	46
Analysis.....	47
Summary.....	48
CHAPTER 3: RESULTS.....	49
Overriding Themes of Data.....	49
Research Question 1 Results.....	50
Perception of Self.....	50
Perception of Father.....	56
Father’s Interaction with Others.....	65
Interaction with Other Men.....	65
Interaction with Women.....	68
Father-son Interaction.....	73
Positive Interaction with Father.....	73
Negative Interaction with Father.....	78
Research Question 2 & 3 Results.....	84

Masculine Ideals, As a Man.....	85
Masculine Ideals, As a Father.....	90
Summary.....	97
CHAPTER 4: DISCUSSION, LIMITATIONS, AND DIRECTIONS	
FOR FUTURE RESEARCH.....	99
Discussion.....	99
Finding 1: Affectionate Communication Expressed by the Father Impacts	
the Son Profoundly .....	100
Finding 2: Moments of Negative Interaction Between Fathers and Sons	
Impact the Father-Son Relationship and Are Profound in	
Men’s Lives.....	102
Finding 3: Sons Often Explain their Identity & Masculine Ideals	
by Comparing Themselves to Their Fathers.....	105
Finding 4: Fathers’ Interactions With Women (Especially Mothers)	
Impacts a Son’s Perception of His Father.....	107
Finding 5: Interaction and Masculine Roles are Important to	
Perception of Self .....	109
Finding 6: “Acting Tough” is Often Demonstrated by and Learned	
From Fathers.....	111
Finding 7: The “Involved Father” Style is Found in Men’s Idealistic	
Descriptions of Fatherhood.....	113
Summary.....	114
Limitations.....	115
Strengths.....	116
Future Research.....	117
REFERENCES.....	121
APPENDIX A: Participant Recruitment Flyers.....	144
APPENDIX B: Demographic Questionnaire.....	145
APPENDIX C: Interview Protocol.....	146

LIST OF TABLES

TABLE 1: Categories of Study on Socially Constructed Masculinity.....22

TABLE 2: Perception of Self.....51

TABLE 3: Perception of Father.....57

TABLE 4: Father’s Interaction with Other Men.....66

TABLE 5: Father’s Interaction with Women.....69

TABLE 6: Positive Father-son Interaction.....74

TABLE 7: Negative Father-son Interaction.....78

TABLE 8: Masculine Ideals, As a Man.....86

TABLE 9: Masculine Ideals, As a Father.....91



## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

This study involved the assessment of the role that father-son interactions play in men's perceptions of masculinity. Although a significant amount of research has accounted for gender from a social constructionist perspective (Butler, 1990; Campbell, 1989; Cheesebro, 1997; Cheesebro, 2001; Formaniak-Turner, 2006; Gathorne-Hardy, 1998; Gingrich-Philbrook, 1998; Hantzis, 1998; Hofstede, 1998; King, 2000; Pearson & Davilla, 1993; Piller, 2006; Spitzack, 1998; Svajian, 2002; Tolman, 2006; Tracy & Scott, 2006; Twenge, 1997; West & Zimmerman, 1987), research specifically examining the construction of masculinity is still a relatively new endeavor (Cheesebro & Fuse, 2001). Additionally, although gender is accounted for in various family communication theories (Baxter & Montgomery, 1997; Bengston & Allen, 1993; Hernandez-Peck, Mackleprang, & Ray, 1996; Osmond & Thorne, 1993; Yerby, 1995), no theory specifically accounts for gender formation within the context of family interaction.

#### Statement of the Problem

When considering the role of father-son interactions on men's perceptions of masculinity, it is important to consider that men's roles in the family are continually changing. In the present day, roles that were traditionally gender-specific within the family unit are now being shared by men and women alike (Doucet, 2006; Kelly, 2007; Kugelberg, 2006; Matta & Knudson-Martin, 2006; Wall & Arnold, 2007). This

phenomenon may be due to the ever-increasing presence of two incomes in families today (Glauber, 2008; Halford, 2006; Johnson, 2005; Percheski & Wildeman, 2008; Sakka & Deliyanni-Kouimtzi, 2006). Given the current economic crisis, these changes toward more equitable roles are likely to continue. Reviews of scholarly literature on fatherhood (Golden, 2007; Henwood & Proctor, 2003; Hobson, 2002; Johansson & Klinth, 2008; Lamb, 2000; Marsiglio, Day & Lamb, 2000; Pittman, 1993; Robb, 2004; Schrodt, Ledbetter, & Ort, 2007; Silverstein, Auerbach, & Levant, 2002) reveal a common theme: the more a father is involved in the childrearing process, the greater the likelihood for positive outcomes in the marriage and for the children. However, there is no general consensus about what form this involvement should take.

In addition to fathers' roles changing, the transmission of gender roles and identity to sons (and daughters) may also be changing. Since the attitudes regarding gender roles and identity are likely transmitted by parents to their children (Kulik, 2002), these new roles adopted by fathers, as a result of their new attitudes, are likely passed along to children as well. Furthermore, fathers' attitudes toward gender roles and the attitudes of their sons are found to be highly similar (Kulik, 2004). The combination of changing fatherhood roles and the potential influence fathers have on attitudes about gender roles in their sons creates an imperative for further research on father-son interaction.

The formation of gender is often examined through the lens of five particular aspects: *gender identity*, *gender roles*, *gender displays*, *gender ideals*, and *gender stratification* (Cohen, 2001). A significant amount of research examines each aspect respectively, but research that examines the connections between individual aspects as

they relate to the constitution of masculinity is limited. Specifically, the connection between the masculine role of fatherhood and the formation of gender ideals in sons is understudied (Beatty & Zelle, 1994; Bertilson, 2004; Mazzarella, 2008; Rasheed & Johnson, 1995; Van Nijnatten, 2007). Moreover, the critical feminist examination of gender has granted immense opportunities for growth in masculine studies (Abbey, 2001; Anderson & Umberson, 2001; Balcome, 1998; Butler, 1990; Bird, 1996; Cohen, 2001; Cote & Deutsch, 2008; Dooley & Fedele, 2001; Edley & Wetherell, 1997; Forcey, 2001; Gingrich-Philbrook, 1998; Hannagan, 2008; Hantzis, 1998; Haessly, 2001; Hearn, 2004; Hofstede, 1998; Hopkins, 2000; Hurley, 2007; Kimmel, 2008, 1994, 1987; Lee & Williams, 2001; Lerner & Moore, 2006; McGuffey & Rich, 1996; O'Reilly, 2001; Osmond & Thorne, 1993; Pearson & VanHorn, 2004; Piller, 2006; Quina, 2002; Riley, 2001; Robeyns, 2007; Segal, 1990; Speer, 2001; Spitzack, 1998; Thomas, 2001; Toerien & Durrheim, 2001; Twenge, 1997; Wells, 2001; Wetherall & Edley, 1999), but the study of masculinity in general has not taken advantage of its largest resource: the voices of men (Hearn, 2004). Although much has been said of the societal influences on masculine ideals (Abbot, 1993; Cavender, Bond-Maupin, & Jurik, 1999; Cherry, 2002; Eveslage & Delaney, 1996; Forcey, 2001; Gardiner, 2000; Hanke, 1998; Harris, Dewar, Kwon & Clifton, 1998; Howard, 2001; Inselberg & Burke, 1973; Keddie & Churchill, 1999; Kennedy, 2000; Martino, 2000; Mazzarella, 2008; McGuffey & Rich, 1999; Messner, Dubar & Hunt, 2000; Nicholson & Antil, 1981; Plummer, 2001; Sabo & Panepinto, 2001; Scharrer, 2001a, 2001b; Schippers, 2000; Sparks, 1996; Swain, 2001; Vigorito & Curry, 1998), the influence of men on other men seems to have been understudied, especially within the context of fatherhood.

## Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the present research study is to examine sons' narratives of their recollections of father-son interactions. Studying the father-son dyad in this way may help us to better understand how men constitute masculinity in particular familial relationships. Although the purpose was to examine the themes of father-son interactions, the themes of masculinity are also salient. Therefore, this study also illuminates common masculine themes as reported in men's stories of their fathers. Additionally, this type of study may illuminate common masculine ideals of contemporary men. Examining men's ideals of masculinity in descriptive narrative form can provide better understanding of how men communicate in their close personal relationships. Such a study may also provide a point of departure for continued discussion of various aspects of masculinity, as well as improve understanding of the relationship between father-son interaction and men's development and perceptions of masculinity.

The use of narratives to examine the ways in which people communicate within the context of the family is well-documented (Arrington, 2005; Christian, 2005; Dickson, 1995; Hollihan & Riley, 1997; Ochs & Taylor, 1992; Possick, 2005; Vangelisti, Crumley, & Baker, 1999; Veroff, Sutherland, Chodia, & Ortega, 1993). However, no research has examined the ways in which men construct their views of masculinity through the use of narratives. Furthermore, no gender-specific research has examined sons' narratives about their fathers as a way of understanding the construction of masculine ideals.

Foundational models of narrative analysis began with the work of Labov and Waletzky

(1967). The authors postulated that an account becomes a narrative when one or more of the following are evident in a participant's response: (1) presence of ordering of events, (2) structural components such as *complicating*, *action*, and *resolution*, and (3) the expression of the narrator's point of view of the events, also know as *evaluation* (p. 13). The turn from account to narrative is especially important to the current study. The resulting evaluation in narratives may mark a potential meaning-making moment for the participants.

### Literature Review

This section examines the literature salient to the present study. Several issues are central to this research. The section first outlines social construction (Berger & Luckman, 1966), which is the primary theoretical framework that guided this study. The theoretical discussion moves next to the social construction of gender via the five aspects referenced in the introduction: *gender identity*, *gender roles*, *gender displays*, *gender ideals*, and *gender stratification* (Cohen, 2001). A social construction view of masculinity is then presented, focusing specifically on masculine ideals (Cheesebro & Fuse, 2001). Next, the review discusses literature involving various influences on masculine ideals, including the media, peers, mothers, and father-son interaction. This chapter concludes by setting forth the research questions.

#### *Social Construction as a Theoretical Framework*

The major theoretical assertions that support this study are derived from the well-documented work of Berger and Luckman (1966). The notion that reality is constructed and shared through interaction with others is paramount to the present study (p. 27). Since this study examined the father-son dyad, the meaning-making process of

interaction was a major focus. Berger and Luckman assert, “In the face-to-face situations, the other is appresented to me in a vivid present shared by both of us” (p. 28) With this statement, they specifically identify the meaning-making process as a shared event. Furthermore, the authors place great emphasis on societal influences in the meaning-making process. They wrote, “the self cannot be adequately understood apart from the particular social context in which they were shaped” (p. 48). Using Berger and Luckman’s theoretical foundation, although this study gives special emphasis to the father-son dyad and the interaction therein, it left room for other possible influences on men’s notions of masculinity. Such influences include but are not limited to the media, peer interaction, and the mother-son relationship. These possible influences on masculinity are detailed later in this chapter.

Berger and Luckman also provide a basis for understanding the roles that we “perform” (p. 67) within a variety of societal and institutional settings. The authors wrote, “By playing roles, the individual participates in a social world. By internalizing these roles, the same world becomes subjectively real to him” (p. 69). This is another critical notion that shaped the current research. Specifically, the present study examined the role of fatherhood; examining roles unique to men may help present a clearer picture of the “social world” in which men interact. And understanding that these roles are socially constructed allows this research study to examine critical moments of meaning making in interactions between men, but more specifically, between father and son. A complete discussion of masculine roles is detailed later in this chapter.

The last concept from Berger and Luckman that is salient to this study is the framework the authors created for understanding and examining identity formation. They

wrote, “Identity is, of course, a key element of subjective reality, and like all subjective reality, stands in dialectical relationship with society. Identity is formed by social processes” (p. 159). This idea is especially important in examining how men perceive themselves. This study specifically examined men’s perception of self, or their self-described identity. As discussed in Chapter 2, this study specifically attempted to gather stories that illustrate the process of identity formation through the use of open-ended interviewing. In particular, this study sought to understand the formation of gendered identities.

The use of social construction theory as a framework for research is not a new endeavor. Knudson-Martin and Mahoney (1998) examined a “language of equality” (p. 89) as a meaning-making process in new marriages. Hyde (2000) examined the ways in which the bodies and social roles of New Zealand women were socially constructed in the popular media prior to and during World War II. Wood and Fuentes (2003) focused on the social construction of gendered relationships in education, the media, and in family dynamics. Mackay (2003) examined the use of story telling as a shared event between family members as a way of coping with the affliction of Aphasia. Stewart (2004) applied the social construction of gender to examine gender-based division of labor and power relations embodied in the use of technology on family farms. Henwood (2004) examined the social construction of experience, identities, and relationships of adult parents and their children. Most recently, Pasupathi (2009) examined parent-child conversations as a way of understanding how identity is shaped through narrative interaction.

The common thread of all this research is the attention given to interaction as a meaning-making process. Because the family is at the core of most individuals' foundation for interaction, social construction easily lends itself to research involving the family. Additionally, issues of identity and gender are most accessible through the lens of social construction. Thus, the following section further details the social construction of gender.

### *The Social Construction of Gender*

As discussed in the previous section, identity is formed in and through interaction with others. The same is true of gender. Or rather, gender is a large part of one's identity, and it is formed in and through social interaction. Hurley (2007) wrote, "Gender...is a culturally constructed role; gender roles...are socially imposed. Sex is a matter of nature, gender of nurture" (p. 98). Stating it in even simpler terms, Pearson and VanHorn (2004) wrote, "Gender is a learned behavior" (p. 285). The authors went on to write, "Parents are the most influential socializing agents for their children...Although friends and role models may teach children different gender roles and expectations as they develop, many researchers agree that gender role development begins in the home" (p. 285).

Instead of an evolutionary psychoanalytical approach to understanding gender (Meissner, 2005), which asserts that gender identity is a function of biology, the present study emphasized and examined the perspective that gender is socially constructed. In fact, the social construction of gender is a pivotal assumption of this study. Therefore, this study specifically focused on the social construction of masculinity via father-son



interactions. A complete review of research involving the influence of father-son interaction is detailed later in this chapter.

In summary, the current study is directly influenced by a social constructionist perspective. The assumption that individuals live in and through a world of communication is paramount to this perspective. Thus, the meaning-making process—specifically with regard to the roles of man, son, father, and husband—was examined as a shared event. This study focused on how men make sense of their identity and masculine ideals based on their interaction with their fathers. Furthermore, this study is guided by the following assumptions of social construction: (1) Fathers and sons are actors interacting together to form, over time, *typifications*, or mental representations, of each other's actions; (2) These typifications eventually become *habitualized* into reciprocal *roles* played by the fathers and sons in relation to each other. Such roles include father, husband, son, and man; (3) When these roles become routinized, the typified reciprocal interactions are said to be *institutionalized*; (4) In the process of this institutionalization, *meaning* is embedded and institutionalized into individuals and society. In other words, knowledge and people's conception of (and therefore belief regarding) what reality “is” becomes embedded into the institutional fabric and structure of society, and social reality is therefore said to be socially constructed (Berger & Luckman, 1966). In the stories told by men about their fathers in the present study, reality becomes embedded into the structure of each of the respondents' lives.

This study utilized open-ended interview questions designed to elicit stories that would get at the crux of the meaning-making process shared by fathers and sons, while also examining the socially constructed implications of that process. To further

understand the social construction of gender, an organizational structure for understanding various gender concepts will be detailed in the following section.

### *Conceptualization of Constructs*

As a continuation of the discussion on the theoretical framework that guided this research, this section provides an organizational structure, which is comprised of five aspects by which gender can be understood. The aspects of gender that are detailed in this section are *gender identity*, *gender roles*, *gender displays*, *gender ideals*, and *gender stratification* (Cohen, 2001). These concepts are especially salient for the purpose of analyzing the transmission of the masculine gender identity in the data, because they allow us to examine specific ways in which fathers enact and talk about masculinity with their sons (a full description of the analysis procedures can be found in Chapter 2).

The social construction of gender consists of a number of concepts, which speak to the roles and expectations given to a particular sex. *Gender identity* is “the conception you have of yourself as male or female” (Cohen, 2001, p.4). In other words, people’s sense of self as male or female guides the way in which they see themselves, how they interact with others based upon the way they see themselves, and the attitudes and expectations they create.

On a more societal level, *gender roles* refer to the prescriptions, or ways to act, in given situations (Cohen, 2001). For instance, we follow certain guidelines of behavior for being a child, an adult, a student, a parent, or a spouse based upon our gender. Such expectations tell us which behaviors are “appropriate, acceptable, or anticipated” (p. 5) in the context of a given situation. *Gender display* refers to the ways in which a person communicates their fitting into masculine and feminine ideals. With regard to gender

display, it is important to understand communication as the basis for all behavior found in interaction. Thus, the ways in which we communicate often exemplify ideals of gender assigned by society.

On a broader level, *gender ideals* refer to shared beliefs, or models of gender, that society accepts as wholly masculine or feminine. For instance, phrases like “boys don’t cry” or “girls should act ladylike” reflect dominant notions of how boys and girls should behave. Lastly, gender is often understood in the political dimensions of *gender stratification*, which describes that ways in which men and women are afforded access to “desired rewards and resources such as occupations, prestige, wealth, or power” (p. 5).

This section heretofore has laid the groundwork for understanding the common aspects by which gender can generally be understood. The following section is structured utilizing this organization for understanding gender (Cohen, 2001) to examine masculinity in particular. Following this organization allows for precise division of the concepts involving masculinity. Thus, the following section reviews research that examines how masculinity is affected by and perpetuated in each of the five components listed above.

*Masculine identities.* Volumes of literature exist that are concerned identity formation of young males. The most abundant types of literature in this category of study are aimed at parenting practices needed to raise a male, and critical examinations of what it means to be a male (Abbot, 1993; Gurian, 1997; Gurian, 1999; Kindlon & Thompson, 1999; Newberger, 1999; Pollack & Shuster, 2000; Salisbury & Jackson, 1996; Weldon, 2008). An important book by Pollack and Shuster (2000) illuminates the complexity of boys’ gender identity formation by collecting stories from boys (ages 9–17). Topics

addressed in the boys' stories include the following: the development of two selves (macho with friends and society/ sensitive, creative, and caring at home); the need to persevere no matter what they are faced with (including being "bullied" and dealing with the loss of a loved one); trying to fit in (including the use of a "bad" boy image); the need to avoid crying (or displays of any emotion deemed "unmanly"); the internal struggle between wanting to stay young and becoming a man; and their understandings of a man's role in intimate relationships (Pollack & Shuster, 2000).

Pollack and Shuster's work illustrates a number of the "problems" that boys face in their own gender construction, and other scholarly work also aims to outline issues of identity that boys face. One such study, conducted by McGuffey and Rich (1999), examined young children at play as a way of understanding how gender boundaries are established. Results of an ethnography set at a summer camp indicated that boys spent a majority of their time trying to maintain current gender boundaries (p. 617), and that a group of "high-status" (p. 618) boys tended to police gendered activities. They often relied on hegemonic masculine traits to "identify social deviants" and label them as "outcasts"(p. 618). The results of this study seem noteworthy, especially since they seem to provide evidence of gendered identities at very early ages in childhood.

These studies provide insight into the issues salient to masculine gender construction; however, an apparent lack of connection to masculine ideology is present. For instance, in what ways do societal notions of manhood affect the ways in which males come to know themselves as "men"? Additionally, what communicative acts seem to perpetuate dominant masculine ideals? The following section induces similar questions in its examination of masculinity in terms of gender roles.

*Masculine roles.* Although the scope of research on masculine identity is limited, research has examined gender's influence on men in a variety of roles (Cohen & Durst, 2001; Cote & Deutsch, 2008; Harrell, 1990; Pasley & Minton, 2001; Sayers, & Baucom, 1991; Swain, 2001), including their roles as friends, spouses, fathers, and workers. In fact, an emergence of new scholarly work on men's roles is apparent, due in large part to intersections of issues surrounding masculine roles with issues of masculine ideals and gender stratification.

One such article, written by Gerstel and Gallagher (2001), examined the ways in which men expressed care in various roles, including friendships and family relationships. Results of in-depth interviews indicated that the social conditions and relationships that men develop throughout their lives affect their care giving tendencies. More specifically, the authors contend that "it is primarily the women in men's lives—their wives, daughters, and sisters—who shape the amount and types of care men provide" (p.211).

Literature seems to further suggest that masculine roles are best understood through interaction with females. Another study, conducted by Anderson and Umberson (2001), examined the construction of gender within men's accounts of domestic violence. Responses from interviews demonstrated a variety of strategies that were utilized by these men to present themselves as nonviolent and rational. Additionally, most of the men seemed to assign blame for the violence in their relationships to their female partners. This research builds upon the research in the previously discussed Gerstel and Gallagher (2001) article by noting men's inability to be effective in various interpersonal

relationships. Furthermore, the trend of attributing a lack of relational competence, and even abuse, to the masculine identities of men is pronounced.

Although this body of literature emphasizes the ways in which men “do” their masculine roles (often, illustrating a need for change), no connections are drawn to ideals of masculinity. How do notions of masculinity affect the ways in which males behave within their various roles as men? Clearly, society expects men to act in certain ways as a father, a husband, etc. Although it may be easy to point out how men “shouldn’t” act in such roles, no research clearly identifies the prescriptions that society endorses.

*Displays of masculinity.* Research involving displays of masculinity are closely related to the field of communication, since displays are considered to include any behavior central to the act of communication. Since we live in and through a world of communication, it stands to reason that research and literature on masculine displays cuts across a variety of contexts, such as those found in the media, in social groups, and individuals’ actions. (Bly, 1990; Carnes, 1989; Gregor, 1982; Kaufman, 1993; Messerschmidt, 2009; Raphael, 1988; Seale et al., 2008). The following is a brief glimpse of research involving displays of masculinity.

In research conducted by Sabo and Panepinto (2001), the context of football is examined. Results of in-depth interviews indicated many similarities between the football culture and primitive masculinity rites (p. 80). The most striking similarity involved the coach’s role in presiding over the players “becoming men.” Much like a tribal leader, the coach dictated the players’ behaviors including “curfews, exercise regimens, dietary and dating restrictions, study programs, and clothing restrictions” (p. 81). Other similarities to primitive masculine rites of passage included severe conformity and control, social

isolation from family and outside groups, a deference to male authority, and pain inflicted on initiates. Lastly, coaches reportedly attached meanings to football that perpetuated hegemonic masculinity; these meanings included “distinctions between boys and men, physical size and strength, avoidance of feminine activities and values, toughness, aggressiveness, violence, and emotional self-control” (p. 85). Such displays are probably extreme. Society often reflects the behaviors of dominance and overt displays of masculinity (although often extreme) found in football. It is also unclear if these behaviors are reinforced through interaction between father and son.

In another study (Speer, 2001), research turned to the ways in which men “talk” about their masculinity. Results of discursive analysis of semi-structured interviews revealed emergent themes in men’s descriptions of their masculinity. The first theme, masculinity as “extreme” (p. 115), involved men’s tendency to avoid descriptions of themselves as anything other than “normal,” often avoiding descriptions of themselves that may risk their seeming effeminate, while also avoiding hyper-masculine representations that may risk their seeming to conform to hegemonic masculine ideals. Another theme that arose was masculinity as “self-confidence” (p. 117), which deals with confidence in interaction with others, specifically interaction with potential intimates. It is interesting to note that “self-confidence,” a term that seems gender-neutral on the surface, is somehow equated to one’s ability to interact with a woman or avoid any portrayal of fallibility, and is, thus, equated to one’s manhood.

The third theme, masculinity as “inauthentic” (p. 119), refers to the ways in which men talk about masculinity based upon the cues that are given to them in interaction. (Speer, 2001) Results indicated that men responded to questions of hegemonic or

dominant forms of masculinity differently based on the cues given to them by the interviewer. If men felt that hegemony would be looked down upon by the interviewer, he tended to avoid those types of descriptions in his talk. Alternately, if room was given by the interviewer for hegemonic discourse via verbal cues, the man generally moved in that direction with his talk. Lastly, results indicated a theme of masculinity as a determined “mind-set” (p. 121). Responses indicated that men generally speak about manhood as “indoctrinated” and representative of things that he “must do.” The notion that we as humans are socialized through talk (Berger & Luckman, 1966) is most pertinent to these results. In other words, we come to know reality through interaction. As men continue to display their masculinity through talk, it becomes more and more apparent that their conceptualizations of masculinity are complex, even confused at times.

Yet another study illuminates the complexities that revolve around displays of masculinity. In an article by Quinn (2002), the practice of “girl watching” is analyzed. Results of interviews indicated a lack of realization that the behavior surrounding “girl watching” could be viewed as harassment. The author contends that “girl watching” in its most simple terms “operates as a targeted tactic of power” (p. 392). Additionally, the author suggests that such behavior “functions simultaneously as a form of play and as a potentially powerful site of gendered social action” (p. 394). Finally, Quinn states that the data suggest men’s refusal to see their behavior as harassing may be partially explained through the objectification and lack of empathy that the production of masculine identities may require (p. 400). It is also important to note the use of power in the interactions Quinn’s research details. Feminist research has examined power



differentials created in male-female interaction (Browne, 2007; Crompton, 2007; Kimmel, 2008; Lawson, 2007; Robeyns, 2007). This is particularly relevant to the present study, as it examined how the use of power might be learned through father-son interaction, and as a result perpetuates systems of domination. Further discussion on feminist theory and its relationship to masculinity can be found in the *Gender Stratification* section of this chapter.

Lastly, Morman & Floyd (1998) examined overt displays of affection between men. The authors conducted experimental procedures involving 140 male undergraduates and sought to determine whether the “unanimous empirical agreement that affection is less appropriate between men than in relationships involving a female” demonstrated any exceptions to the rule. Specifically, the authors hypothesized and the research supported that “affection between men was considered to be more appropriate (1) between brothers than among male friends, (2) in emotionally charged situations than in emotionally neutral situations, and (3) in public contexts than in private contexts” (p. 878). This study is particularly noteworthy, as it demonstrates the dynamic nature of masculine displays, that is, behavior that is acceptable as a man may be related to changes in environment or familial relationships. The present study specifically examines familial relationships, or more specifically, the father-son dyad, and its relationship to sons’ masculine displays.

Literature on masculine displays draws a clearer picture of a connection to masculine ideals. The ways in which men “act out” their masculinity seem to be tied to how they think they should “behave as a man.” Yet again, indications of how they came to know “how to behave as men” are unclear. As stated earlier in the chapter, social

construction provides a possible direction for understanding this process, but more research is needed to examine this possibility. The next section will specifically turn to masculine ideals, the fourth of Cohen's concepts for understanding gender as applied specifically to masculinity.

*Masculine ideals.* Perhaps the most widely covered of Cohen's aspects of gender, as it relates to masculinity, is the discussion of masculine ideals (Chapman, 1988; Donaldson, 1993; Edley & Wetherall, 1997; Kimmel, 1987; Martin, 1998; Segal, 1990; Skeggs, 2008; Speer, 2001; Wetherall & Edley, 1999). As stated earlier, ideals are the shared beliefs, or models, of men that most of society accepts. However, it is interesting to note that the study of ideals probably begins with some dissent from society. In other words, if such ideals were accepted by most of society, there would be no need to critically examine them. This section will follow the critical examination offered by such literature.

In an essay by Flannigan-Saint-Aubin (1994), metaphors of masculinity are examined. The author contends that the metaphor of "phallic genitality" (p. 239) is only partially complete and that masculine ideals can be more fully understood by including the testicles in the metaphoric discussion. He maintains that, all too often, masculine ideals center around the "aggressive, violent, penetrating, goal-direct, linear" (p. 239) aspects of manhood associated with the phallic metaphor. The author continues by stating that the inclusion of a "testicular" metaphor provides entirely different metaphor ideals, such as "passive, receptive, enclosing, stable, cyclic, among others—qualities that are lost when male equals penis" (p. 239). The author concludes with a discussion of how the inclusion of a testicular metaphor will move masculine ideals beyond the

patriarchal and hegemonic tendencies offered by solely phallic metaphorical representations (p. 255).

In an article written by Ciabattari (2001), the author examines historical and group processes' influences on men's conservative gender ideologies. Utilizing data taken from three distinctly different historical cohorts' responses to General Social Surveys, the author noted changes in men's attitudes toward gender roles in society (p. 582). Particularly noteworthy were the changes that began to occur within cohorts from the 1970's, which the author attributes to dramatic societal changes like the women's liberation movement. The author found that men, as a whole, had greater exposure to women in the workforce and changes in attitudes about men and women's roles in the family. The author concludes by contending that the decrease in overall conservative attitudes toward gender roles marks a trend that will continue to affect masculine and feminine ideologies for years to come (p. 588). As exciting as these findings are, other work demonstrates equally exciting trends.

In response to an apparent "crisis of masculinity," which poses two discourses of manhood—the "macho man" and the "new man"—against each other, a study by Toerien and Durrheim (2001) examined the ways in which men can overcome tensions between conflicting ideologies. Using a discourse analytic method to investigate representations of masculinity in issues of *Men's Health* magazine, the authors conceptualized representations of masculinity as discourses that fell into either one of the two aforementioned categories. The authors noted an emergent discourse of masculinity—the "real man"—which stemmed from the integration of the two dominant, yet opposing discourses prevalent in society. Finally, the authors concluded that the "real man"

ideology serves as an example of a “collective” resolution to the crisis of manhood, which might serve to “support, rather than undermine a feminist politics of change” (p. 52), and thus continue the process of change in masculine ideologies.

Even though much of the current research on masculine ideals is performing the important task of “critical” examination, conceptualizing existing ideals still seems problematic. While research is moving closer to understanding the ways it “ought to be,” studies like the previous one are just scratching the surface of the ways it “really is.” The next section details another aspect of understanding gender that has been afforded “critical” consideration.

*Gender stratification.* One of the basic tenets of feminism is that “gender relations are power relations, which implies that any improvement in the position of women must, in a sense, be ‘offset’ by a reduction of the power and influence wielded by men” (Edley & Wetherell, 2001, p. 439). This notion is central to the issue of gender stratification. Gender stratification describes the ways in which men and women are afforded access to power within societal structures. The contentions of feminist thought seem hard to deny, but men have struggled to fully accept them.

An article by Riley (2001) speaks to this struggle specifically. Interviews with men on the topics of feminism and feminists revealed negative notions of both. For instance, one respondent stated that the movement is “ready to undermine guys’ things and force...women’s lib and all that stuff on to society” (p. 63). Additionally, the author noted responses that seemed to position feminists as “aggressive and coercive rather than emancipatory or supporters of equality” (p. 63). Due to the overwhelming negative reaction to feminist thought, Riley outlines the reformulation of the approach: a gender-

neutral conception of the principles of feminism. The author points out that although neutralizing gender may allow for further adoption of said principles by men, it may also perpetuate hegemony by ignoring “contradictions between dominant and subordinate groups, presenting society as coherent” (p. 72). Riley concludes that incorporating aspects of feminist arguments in mainstream society may be difficult to do without producing “new sexism in everyday talk” (p. 74). In other words, if men adopt the principles of feminism, they still face the threat of undermining the goals of feminism through their actions and their talk.

Another author describes the difficulty men have accepting the concepts of feminism that clearly identify gender stratification in society, and he specifically describes how such a process affects the construction of masculinity. Kaufman (1994) states that “On an individual level, much of what we associate with masculinity hinges on a man’s capacity to exercise power and control” (p. 142), clearly describing why it may be difficult to integrate feminist ideals into society. He goes on to contend that the system which rewards power also creates pain for others—not just for women, but for men as well. The author continues by stating that recognition of the contradictory results of power for men allows us to “reach out to men with compassion” (p. 143), while remaining highly critical of dominant notions of masculinity.

Again, it seems that a notable point of departure for understanding gender stratification may lie in understanding dominant masculine ideology. Therefore, this study examined how sons learn masculinity from their fathers, and more specifically how fathers may contribute to the perpetuation of gender stratification in their sons’ behaviors.

### *Overview of Constructionist Masculinity*

Reviewing the relevant literature pertinent to social construction of masculinity is helpful in three ways. First, it offers us an opportunity to categorize the ways in which masculinity is studied from a social constructionist perspective (see Table 1). Secondly, it suggests the areas where further research is needed. Most importantly, the review seems to demonstrate how each aspect of the construction of masculinity may be directly connected to societal ideologies of masculinity. The next section specifically discusses various societal influences on these masculine ideologies.

Table 1

#### *Categories of Study on Socially Constructed Masculinity*

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<u>Category</u>	<u>Description</u>
Masculine Identities	Examines conceptions of maleness.
Masculine Roles	Examines prescriptions or guides to behavior in the context of a given situation.
Masculine Displays	Examines any communication that affirms or rejects dominant notions of masculine ideals.
Masculine Ideals	Examines shared beliefs about masculinity, most often on societal levels.
Gender Stratification	Seeks to describe the ways in which men are afforded access to power in society.

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#### *Influences on Masculinity*

According to social construction theory, we come to know reality in and through social interaction (Berger & Luckman, 1966), and, as such, the construction of gender ideals, specifically masculine ideals, is largely impacted by social interaction as well

(Connell, 1987; Goffman, 1963; Kimmel, 2008; Kimmel et al., 1999; Lerner & Moore, 2006; Pearson & VanHorn, 2004). This section discusses the relationship between various influences (interaction participants or variables) and the development of masculine ideals.

*Media's influence.* On the societal level, one source that may influence masculine ideology is the media. Literature in this realm is diverse and has provided many different glimpses of media's affect on masculinity.

One of the most commonly examined genres of media in relation to masculinity is televised sports. Although most of these studies seem to rely on similar methodology, namely content analysis, the particular themes that arise differ from study to study. For instance, Harris et al. (1998) examined televised broadcasts of NFL games from the '93/'94 season, finding themes that included the male body viewed as a tool, weapon or object of gaze, clothing that accentuated an "ideal" male physique, and story lines that followed striving to win, performance excellence, bodily excellence, rough physicality, violence, and pain. The most poignant implication this study offered was the apparent message that football programs send to young men, grown men and the women they strive to impress: that these qualities are what "make a man."

Cherry (2002) used textual analysis to examine professional wrestling's biggest event of the year—Wrestlemania, finding recurring themes of race, body image, violence, aggression, and sexuality to be portrayed in and through the television program. The author reminds us that such themes have the potential of shaping young male minds in a way that perpetuates gender stratification.

Two other studies looked at televised sport in general and the way it relates to the construction of masculinity (Kennedy, 2000; Messner et al., 2000). Kennedy (2000) found themes that supported the masculinization of the hero function in the narrative of TV sports. The author postulated that such themes perpetuated the notion that one's manhood is equated with their ability to be a hero. And Messner et al. (2000) examined 23 hours of sports programming and found such themes as (1) white males are the voice of authority; (2) sports is a man's world; (3) women are viewed as prizes; (4) aggressive players get the prize/nice guys finish last; (5) boys will be (violent) boys; (6) give up your body for the team; (7) sports is war; and (8) show some guts.

Although it seems that such research involving sports media may have identified themes from the genre that may perpetuate views of hegemonic masculinity, it is still unclear the extent to which such programs actually affect men's perceptions of masculinity. Other genres show similar patterns.

Moving the discussion to movies and television, Mazzarella (2008) examined the construction of relationships among different types of masculinity in the Discovery Channel's "docuswap" *American Chopper*. Focusing on the relationship between a father and his two sons on the show, this study argues that the "docuswap" genre allows for a unique way to examine "mediated constructions of masculinities" (p. 80). Keddie and Churchill (1999) found that gendered characterizations presented favorably in TV programs were found to be congruent with characterizations valued by adolescents. Another study, conducted by Scharrer (2001a), examined the potential for an individual's behavior to be affected by what they watch. Scharrer found that individuals who were exposed to violent and hypermasculine TV programming reported larger amounts of



aggression and hostility than those who were exposed to non-violent programs, highlighting the potentially powerful impact television may have on adolescent viewers. This is even more alarming when considered alongside other research that also outlines other messages being digested by viewers.

For example, research involving TV police dramas and reality crime TV (Cavender et al., 1999; Scharrer, 2001b) indicated themes that recreate portraits of hegemonic masculinity, subordinate images of women, and physical aggression due to hypermasculinity. Of course, such visual themes are not limited to television. Contemporary images of men in the movies support some of the same types of themes (Hanke, 1998; Sparks, 1996). In fact, Sparks (1996) found that films tend to dignify and celebrate the suffering and struggling of the leading men in film. The author suggested that such affirmations of rugged masculinity are in reaction to the instability of current notions of masculine gender identities.

Like sports programming, TV and film research has identified possible themes that may perpetuate hypermasculine conceptions of manhood. Furthermore, other research on TV and film demonstrates these genres' potential to affect behavior as well. Again, there is little indication, if any, of the extent to which men base their own perceptions of manhood on the media. Still other forms of media contribute to the perplexity of this problematic.

The portrayal of men in magazines provides interesting themes as well, but brings no clearer understanding of exactly how this or other media affect perceptions of masculine ideals. For example, Vigorito and Curry (1998) found that analysis of popular magazines indicated themes such as occupational portrayals of men, appearing mostly in

magazines with a male audience, and nurturing portrayals of men, mostly appearing in magazines with female audiences, again indicating confusion surrounding the construction of masculinity. Based on these conflicting portrayals, it would seem that men must draw their own conclusions on how to “do masculinity.” Women may want men to be caring and nurturing, but the dominant ideology may be for men to focus their attention on work. Such research reveals some inconsistency of messages directed toward each gender; however, there is still little evidence of the overall effect on men’s perceptions of masculine ideals.

In another study, conducted by Czernis and Clark-Jones (1998), results of the content analysis of popular magazines showed that presentations of men as fathers revealed hidden unease about masculinity, perhaps only further confusing men about their roles. Analyses of cartoons have also provided conflicting results about what masculinity is okay. In a study by Gardiner (2000), the popular cartoon *South Park* was analyzed. The author found that the new “market” masculinity portrayed on the cartoon emphasized masculinity as being simultaneously childish, creative, homoerotic, homophobic, racist, cynical, and paranoid. The author concluded that such portrayals only serve to heighten young men’s difficulties shaping their own masculinities. These studies again offer no indication of the extent to which such representations actually affect men’s perceptions of masculinity.

Lastly, one study involving alternative hard rock music revealed additional conflicting constructions of masculinity. Ethnographic in nature, Schippers’s (2000) study of the Chicago alternative rock scene demonstrated that members tended to “queer” their sexuality despite identifying as heterosexual, implying that overt displays of

heterosexual masculinity could hinder their success in the business. However, upon further analysis of the field notes, the author found some hegemonic gender relations to be present, including systematic uses of power between members of these bands and their women fans. This study, like some others, illustrates a conflict between the ideas about masculinity presented by society (in this case a media business culture), and the ways in which men actually perceive masculinity.

Although the review of literature pertaining to the media demonstrates many ways in which society views masculinity, the results of the various studies seem to be conflicting. Furthermore, little attempt has been made to assess the media's overall influence on the construction of masculinity for individual men. Moving from a broader social context to relational levels of interaction, the next section discusses peer influence on an individual's perception of masculinity.

*Peer influence.* As abundant as the literature involving media's influence on masculinity is, literature pertaining to peer influence seems scarce in comparison. Additionally, no research specifically examines peer influence on masculine ideology. Nicholson and Antill (1981) examined the relationship between the personal problems of adolescents and their relationship to peer acceptance, finding that peer acceptance was more important in younger adolescents, and pointing to a critical stage for adolescents' interaction with peers. Inselberg and Burke (1973) found that kindergarten-aged boys tended to regard their peers more favorably when they displayed dominant masculine traits, indicating a potential influence on an individual's perception of masculinity at a younger age than previously thought. Plummer (2001) found that prejudice against

homosexuals and homophobia was largely constructed through peer interaction, suggesting a potential influence on young men's perceptions of masculinity.

In fact, Martino (2000) noted that boys, ages 15–16, socially constructed “manly” behavior through peer-group relations at an all-boys Catholic School in Western Australia, again intimating a potential for peer influence. Sinclair (1999) found that male peer groups served to support, even endorse, sexual abuse, resulting in the legitimizing of preexisting sexually coercive ideologies. Bird (1996) found that men who attended men's clubs tended to interact with peers in a way that perpetuated hegemonic masculinity, even though most men individually identified the downfalls of hegemony, further illustrating the potential negative impact of male groupthink situations. Finally, Eveslage and Delaney (1996) investigated the ritual of “trash talk” on a high school boys' basketball team, finding that the ritual involved a tremendous amount of peer pressure to participate in this attempt to defend one's masculinity by attacking someone else's.

Although the influence of peer interaction on men's perceptions of masculinity certainly seems apparent, further research might provide better illustrations of how such influence actually accounts for men's perceptions of masculinity in relation to other sources of influence. The next section discusses the mother's role in men's perceptions of masculine ideology.

*The mother's role.* Many studies that involve the mother's role in their sons' masculine development have centered on coping with absent or passive fathers (Fransehn & Back-Wicklund, 2008; Freeman, 2008; Perlesz, 2004; Rhodes, 2000). For instance, Balcom (1998) studied the impact of a father's absence on his abandoned son's struggle with self-esteem and intimacy. Hopkins (2000) examined the “Big Brothers”

organization as a way of understanding how young men could come to know manhood despite the lack of a true father figure. Howard (2001) specifically discussed prescriptions for mothers raising sons by themselves. As important as such work may be, it seems to imply that mothers may have difficulty raising their sons without a father, particularly when it comes to masculine ideals. Another study, conducted by Imbesi (1997), noted that the impact of absent or passive fathers had a negative effect on a son's core gender identity, understanding of gender roles, and sexual partner orientation. Again, the father's impact is emphasized, and the mother's impact seems underappreciated.

Johnson (1975) stated that it is the father's, not the mother's role that clearly influences the quality of cross-sex relationships for children of both sexes, leaving one to wonder what influence mothers have on their sons. But Kurdek and Siesky (1980) noted that boys reared by their mothers in single-parent homes reported similar levels of masculine scores to boys reared in father-headed homes, alluding to at least some level of influence from mothers on their sons' masculinity. In agreement, a number of current feminist authors expand upon this notion (Abbey, 2001; Dooley & Fedele, 2001; Forcey, 2001; Haessly, 2001; Lee & Williams, 2001; O'Reilly, 2001a; Thomas, 2001; Wells, 2001). In fact, Doucet (2001), like many of her colleagues, examines the possibility of creating "a generation of men who can live in a world where women—feminist or not—will no longer put up with the old version of masculinity" (p. 163). To these authors, mothers are not only meeting the challenge of raising men, but also are aiming to "encourage an alternative and more positive style of masculinity" (O'Reilly, 2001, p. 11).

One study, conducted by Lem (2004), is also quite relevant to this discussion. Through the study of dialectical tensions in six mother-son dyads, the author found that a son's gender identity is a "complex phenomenon that emerges, at least in part, as a product of the early mother-son relationship" (p. 283). Additionally, the author found that the dialectic of mother-son separation/attachment was relevant to developmental phenomenon, including male gender identity. Counter to the study's preliminary assumptions, the author found that mothers were more likely to push for separation from their sons because of their own internal conflict regarding mother/son intimacy, as opposed to the influence of rigid cultural ideas about masculinity (p. 287).

Results of these studies give clear indications of a mother's role in the development of masculine ideals. Additionally, the role of the mother is paramount to a child's development (Blum & Vandewater, 1992). Further research is needed to more fully examine the mother's role in the development of masculinity in men.

*Father-son interaction.* A number of recent studies have examined the ever-changing role of father amidst societal changes, specifically changes occurring in the workforce (Halford, 2006; Glauber, 2008; Johnson, 2005; Kelly, 2007; Matta & Knudson-Martin, 2006; Percheski & Wildeman, 2008; Wall & Arnold, 2007). Men are now more likely than ever to shoulder the burden of childcare (Halford, 2006, p. 384). With fathers taking a more active role in their children's lives, studying the ways in which men "do fathering" has become increasingly important (Matta & Knudson-Martin, 2006, p. 22).

Much of what is studied about fathers falls under the category of masculine roles. Although studying the ways in which men "do fathering" is an endeavor essential to

men's studies, it is also important to examine how "fathering" plays into (1) the identities of their male children, (2) the ways in which their sons display their masculinity, (3) how sons come to know masculine ideals, (4) how all of the above contribute to gender stratification in society, and ultimately (5) how young sons learn to behave in a variety of roles. This section outlines research on fathering as it pertains to the construction of masculinity.

Speaking specifically to masculine displays, Floyd and Morman (2000) found that men with highly affectionate fathers tended to communicate higher levels of affection to their own sons than men with unaffectionate fathers (p. 358), strongly indicating a relationship between father-son interaction and men's performance of "fathering" in their own families. The authors contend that men with affectionate fathers are more likely to model their father's behavior than men of unaffectionate fathers are to compensate for the lack of affection (p. 358). Matthews (1996) found that men's perceptions of their father directly contributed to their relationship with their father (p. 4030). Furthermore, the author suggests that how a man's father performed the role of fathering directly influences how that man seeks to father his own children (p. 4031).

The implications of these studies are noteworthy. The expression of care and affection by fathers to their sons may have great impact on how men do "fathering" with their own sons. However, no connection is made to other masculine roles (i.e., as a husband, friend, sibling, etc.), leaving room for further research. Additionally, little emphasis is put on how such expression of affection translates into men's overall perceptions of masculinity.

Additional research done by Morman and Floyd (2002) focused specifically on father-son interaction. In an effort to observe differences in men's ideals about fatherhood across generations, 139 father-son dyads completed an Affectionate Communication Index and a relational satisfaction scale. Results indicated that fathers felt closer to their sons than to their own fathers. Additionally, men were more satisfied with the quality of their relationships with their sons. Lastly, results indicated that men expressed more verbal, nonverbal and supportive affection with their sons than with their own fathers (p. 402). These results beg the question of differences in perception between fathers and sons with respect to relational satisfaction. Is there an idealization of one's own ability to father compared to the reality of one's father's ability? What accounts for the gap in "closeness" felt between father and son?

Morman and Floyd (2003) additionally conducted studies, again involving affectionate communication between fathers and sons. The studies compared fathers' differences in expression of affection between biological and non-biological sons. Results indicated that "fathers are more inclined to share resources—emotional or otherwise—with their biological progeny than with those to whom they are not genetically related" (p. 605). These results are noteworthy for the present study. It seems that the nature of the relationship between father and son impacts the ways in which the father communicates with his son. If that communication is impacted, based on the relationship, how is the construction of masculinity affected? Are men who have little or no contact with their biological fathers less likely to understand affectionate communication between men as a normative behavior? Certainly, this could also be investigated.



In another study by Morman and Floyd (2005), the authors again compared fathers' and sons' reports of affection given by the father. This time, the authors compared affection reports with the sons' number of siblings. An "inverse relationship between sons' reports and their fathers' affectionate communication with them and the sons' number of siblings" (p. 104) was predicted and supported. In simpler terms, the more siblings a participant had, the less affection he reported from his father. Interestingly, the fathers' reports of the level of affection given to their sons did not vary according to number of children (p. 106).

These results indicate differences in the meaning-making process of affectionate communication for fathers and sons. Specifically, the authors contend that sons perceive siblings as competition for their fathers' affection; whereas, fathers' reports of affectionate communication were unaffected by the number of siblings. The notion that sons seek out (and possibly compete for) their fathers' affection even in adulthood was at the root of these findings. As reported earlier in this chapter, affectionate *displays* between men are more acceptable in the context of familial relationships. This seems especially true of the father-son dyad. If the father-son relationship has at least some impact on men's notions of masculinity, and affectionate communication between fathers and sons is accepted, why is it that affectionate displays of communication between men in general are "all but prohibited by normative expectancies" (Morman & Floyd, 1998, p. 872)? Further research is needed to examine these connections.

Lastly, Morman & Floyd (2006) examined the father-son dyad to obtain participants' perceptions of what makes a good father through the use of open-ended interviews. Results of the study indicated categories of descriptors, the most common of

which included “(1) love, (2) availability, (3) role model, (4) involvement, and (5) provider” (p. 122). Additionally, the authors interviewed 99 pairs of father and sons, finding similarities in the categories provided in part one of the study. Interestingly, “the fathers and sons had relatively strong agreement as to the nature of good fatherhood” (p. 129). Although no connection between fatherhood and masculinity is directly drawn, this study provides an excellent backdrop for the study of fatherhood from the perspective of both fathers and sons. Although the implications of this study may point to shifting beliefs regarding the ways in which men perform the masculine role of fathering, again no connection is made between such performance and the development of masculine identities, ideals, roles, and displays of sons.

A study by Masciadrelli et al. (2006) examined the linkages between the father’s effectiveness as a role model and fatherhood. Specifically, men were interviewed and asked a series of questions about other parents as role models. Sixty-two percent of respondents listed their own families as role models for their understanding of what it means to be a parent. Other influences listed by respondents included spouse, spouse’s parents, and peer parents. This study points to the influence of the family system on a man’s conceptions of fatherhood.

A study by Pope and Englar-Carlson (2001) provides another example of research in the category of masculine displays. Pope and Englar-Carlson were able to offer clear prescriptions for fathers for the prevention of violent behaviors in their sons. The authors write, “First, fathers can role model a diversity of male behaviors rather than only gender-specific behavior” (p. 370). Second, the authors suggest the possibility of a “violence-free time” where sons can feel free to share their opinions about fighting and violence

without the “mask of bravado” or worries about judgment from their fathers. Third, the authors suggest that fathers support a son’s “innate ability to empathize with others.” Last, the authors contend that parents should discuss violence in the media with their sons. Although this article gives weight to the notion that masculinity is constructed through a variety of influences, it places particular emphasis on the role of the family, especially on how the father can impact his son’s masculine displays. Additionally, this research provides a solid picture of how fathers may contribute to their sons’ understanding of what it means to be a man.

In a different area of research, Golden (2007) examined a “masculine concept of caregiving.” The investigator interviewed 12 married couples, first together, and then individually, in a series of three semi-structured, in-depth interviews. The interviews covered topics including managing work and family, helping with household responsibilities and childcare, and perceptions of interactions between parental and work roles. Through interpretive analysis of the themes that arose from these interviews, the author detailed some interesting findings. First, fathers framed childcare in terms of “work.” The author explains, “work is experienced, not only from the standpoint of *doing*, but from the standpoint of *enduring* and as meaningful sacrifice, even surrender” (p. 280).

Secondly, fathers framed childrearing as pure emotion and emotion as work. The author writes:

These men’s expressions of empathy for their children’s emotions, the emotional labor of suppressing impatience, and the sharing of domestic chores... are all frames for childrearing that blend technical and practical rationality—getting things done, while at the same time being sensitive to the subjectivity of another person and connecting with that subjectivity. (p. 280)

Previous assumptions of hegemonic masculinity in fathers' caregiving are challenged by this framework. Although "work" is clearly embedded in descriptions of relationships and childrearing, these descriptions are not void of emotion. And although emotion was often described as work, the data showed no evidence of men's refusal to participate. This study is important to the ways in which fatherhood can be examined. More important to the present study is the possibility that such notions of childcare can be passed from father to son.

Such frameworks are also described in a case study by Gavanas (2002), which outlined the Fatherhood Responsibility Movement in Europe. The author explained the major implications of the movement. First, the movement pushes for a redefinition of the father's role from mere financial supporter to emotionally involved nurturer. Secondly, the movement introduces men and fathers as a new focus in gender rights issues. Lastly, the movement recognizes and fosters the concept of difference among men in terms of fathering styles and cultural traditions (p. 229). With such shifts being recognized in Europe, and more recently in the U.S., changes in the social constructions of the role of fatherhood are given voice. Continued research and critical examinations of fatherhood can contribute to these trends in important ways.

Henwood and Proctor's (2003) research continues along the same path of examination. Their study consisted of interviews of thirty new fathers through the course of their partner's pregnancy, as well as after the child was born. All but one interviewee identified with the "involved father" ideal, which involves a turn

towards a new, attentive, caring or nurturing father who begins by being present at antenatal classes and at the birth, continues by actively participating

in the raising of his children, and generally shares with his domestic partner commitment to and responsibility for maintaining family life and the home. (p. 337)

The authors contend that the “involved father” ideology marks a shift in the way men think about the role of fatherhood, and that by changing the ways in which “fathering” is performed, men can strengthen “people’s confidence in the importance of fatherhood, and in their own self-perceptions as fathers” (p. 350). Further research would illustrate the extent to which the “involved father” ideology has been accepted among fathers throughout the world.

Johansson & Klinth (2008) recently interviewed 19 men in three separate focus group settings on the topic of the ideology of gender equality in parenting practices and fatherhood. Results of the data indicated clear identification with the ideal of gender equality in parenting for all of the focus groups. The authors wrote, “the notion that fathers should get involved with their children, stay at home, and help care for infants seems to be met with complete acceptance and is almost the predominant figure of thought” (p. 58). According to the authors, the results of this study demonstrate that ideals about fatherhood are changing.

A study by Reich (2008) generated pertinent themes for the present study. Analyzing the narrative accounts of abortion stories from twenty different men who would have been the father of the lost child, the author identified the following: (1) “men often conceptualize reproduction as a chance to reproduce themselves, to gain immortality, or to bring out their best qualities”(p.16); (2) men relied heavily on romanticized images of fatherhood, including playing sports with their children or being an authority in their children’s lives; (3) men reflected on their own fathers to construct

images of the kinds of fathers they wanted to be; and (4) men overwhelmingly communicated a desire to be the “head” of the household (p. 17). Even though the men interviewed were not fathers yet, these themes of fatherhood are noteworthy for the present study. First, they demonstrate that masculine ideologies about the *role* of father are socially constructed. Secondly, they indicate a relationship between men’s fathers and their own *ideals* about the role of father. Lastly, indications of “traditional” ideals of fatherhood that perpetuate *gender stratification* are present. Additional research may provide a clear picture of these connections.

Gerstel and Gallagher (2001) examined childcare as it relates to men’s roles in the family, and Curren and Abrams (2000) critically examined welfare reform as a way of understanding how the role of men as fathers is affected by gender stratification. Additionally, Kirkman, Rosenthal, and Feldman (2001) examined how certain masculine traits in fathers affect communication about sexuality with their adolescents. Walzer (2000) discussed changes in the division of childcare based on an increase of mothers entering the workforce, placing special emphasis on men’s role in the childcare. And Pasley and Minton (2001) described the role of fathers after the process of divorce. While these studies are helpful in creating awareness of possible issues surrounding the father-son relationship, very few studies have focused on the impact this relationship has on sons’ formations of identity and masculine ideal.

Van Nijnatten (2007) studied the therapeutic effects of writing a father’s biography, noting that dialogic processes “play a crucial role in identity development of the son’s” (p. 248). Another study demonstrated the effect of an absent father on this process. Khalid (1991) found that children whose father became absent before the age of

5 had significant interference with masculine identification in their identities, again pointing to the father's potential influence on gender identity formation. However, no research has specifically examined fathers' roles in the masculine identity formation of their sons. Additionally, no research has examined the effect of father-son interaction on men's perceptions of masculine ideals. The lack of understanding of the father's role in identity formation and perception of masculine ideology for his son leave room for additional research.

### Research Questions

A review of the literature indicates a number of important items to consider for this study. In terms of the development of their *masculine identities*, the literature indicates confusion in adolescent males. Additional research demonstrated various societal influences on young men's masculine identities. Regarding *masculine roles*, the theme of confusion was also present. Although one study indicated some influence by women on men's enactment of roles such as father and partner, other studies reported male hegemonic behavior by men in these roles. In other words, the research demonstrates that there is a lack of clarity in men's understanding of the roles of father and partner.

In *masculine displays*, hegemonic behavior was also demonstrated in the ways in which men interact with men and women alike, continuing the trend outlined in literature about masculine roles. Additionally, the ways in which men talked about their own masculinity demonstrated confusion. Even communicating affection with other men is often confounded by societal norms. Literature on *masculine ideals* illustrated that men cling to the notion of masculinity as being related to biological gender. Although a shift

in gender ideals began in the 1970's as a part of the feminist discourse, research indicates that men demonstrate confusion again, as they continue to make sense of how they should fit into those changes. Furthermore, examination of literature related to *gender stratification* reveals that men reported a general resistance to the concepts outlined by the feminist approach.

The literature that detailed influences on masculinity identified numerous sources, including the media, peer influence, mother-son interaction, and father-son interaction. Studies examining various media outlets helped to illustrate the potential confusion that may arise when men are bombarded by these influences. Peer influence literature noted distinct hegemonic themes in communication between male adolescent youths. According to the literature, the role of mother-son interaction on men's perceptions of masculinity is important yet still understudied (Fransehn & Back-Wicklund, 2008; Freeman, 2008; Perlesz, 2004; Rhodes, 2000). Finally, literature involving father-son interaction demonstrated that affection-based communicative behavior is often a trait passed down from fathers to their sons. Furthermore, it was noted that a son's perception of his father is directly related to how a son characterizes his relationship with his father. Additionally, sons' perceptions of their father's effectiveness in fathering directly influenced a son's desire to be effective in a fathering role (Abrams, 2000; Gerstel & Gallagher, 2001; Kirkman et al., 2001; Matthews, 1996; Morman & Floyd, 2002; Morman & Floyd, 2006). Lastly, the review noted a "shift" in prominent understandings of fatherhood and its implications for societal constructions of manhood and the role of "father".



For the purposes of the present study, father-son interaction is understood as a process that includes sons' conversations with their fathers, shared time between fathers and sons (or fathers avoiding interaction from their sons), and sons witnessing their fathers' interactions with others (including other men and women). These definitions of interaction are important to the formation of the research questions, as they provide a point at which to understand how men's perceptions are formed through interactions with their fathers. Furthermore, shifts to narrative form by participants are understood to be potential meaning-making moments.

Taking into consideration the extant research, the constructivist theoretical foundation, and the outlined parameters of father-son interaction discussed previously, the present research study proposed the following research questions:

RQ1: How do men's narratives about their fathers relate to the development of their masculine identity?

RQ2: How do men's narratives about their fathers' influence on them relate to the formation of their ideals about masculinity?

RQ3: How do men's narratives about their fathers' influence on them relate to the formation of their ideals on fatherhood?

### Summary

This chapter has detailed existing literature relevant to the discussion of the social construction of masculinity. Furthermore, it discussed the potential role father-son interaction plays in the development of masculine identity, roles, ideals, displays, and gender stratification. Finally, this chapter introduced three research questions that were examined in this study. The remaining sections of this dissertation are organized in the

following fashion: Chapter 2 discusses methods and procedures of the study. Chapter 3 presents the results of the study. Finally, Chapter 4 presents discussion, limitations, and directions for future research.

## CHAPTER TWO

### METHODS AND PROCEDURES

This study explored how sons' perceptions of their interaction with their fathers relate to their perceptions of their own masculinity. This chapter details the research design, including a review of the research objectives.

#### Study Participants

This study utilized a purposive convenience sample procedure designed to obtain participants from various demographic groups: single men, married men, and men with children. Recruiting participants from each demographic category allowed for a more expansive perspective of men with different experiences and perceptions of masculinity. Furthermore, recruiting participants from various life stages allows for a more complete understanding of how communicative change occurs over the life span (Nussbaum, 2007). Flyers asking for research participants were distributed at the University of Denver campus, the Columbia College campus (Aurora), and at three separate retirement centers (see Appendix A), and announcements were made in classrooms at the University of Denver and at Columbia College. Twenty-one men participated in this study and data saturation was achieved.

#### Data Collection

Sixty-six percent of participants ( $n = 14$ ) joined the study as a result of announcements made in classes at both the University of Denver and at Columbia

College. In these cases, participants spoke to the researcher directly following the announcement to sign up for the study. Participants filled out a contact information sheet, and they were contacted via phone within 24 hours to schedule the interview. Thirty-four percent of participants ( $n = 7$ ) came to the study via flyers that were distributed across both campuses. In these cases, participants directly contacted the primary researcher via phone, and interview times were scheduled during the initial phone call. The flyers posted at the three retirement centers did not yield any participants for the study.

In order to take part in the interview process, the participant had to be 18 years old or over and had to be male. The interviews were conducted only after informed consent was granted. The location of each interview varied, and interviews were conducted at sites convenient for the study participants. Most interviews ( $n = 15$ ) took place in an empty classroom, although some interviews ( $n = 6$ ) occurred in an office. Participants were asked to complete a demographic questionnaire prior to commencement of the interview protocol (see Appendix B). Completion of the demographic questionnaire took no longer than 5 minutes.

Interviews lasted no longer than 55 minutes, and participants were allowed to discontinue the interview at any time. Interviews were tape recorded, with the participants' approval, in order to assist in analysis procedures. Participants were informed that their responses would be kept confidential. Research participants were given the telephone numbers of the interviewer and the faculty advisor in the event that any questions arose following the interview.

## Interview Protocol

Pre-testing was conducted to establish the interview protocol. There were a total of eight study participants in the pre-testing phase. The mean age of participants in the pre-testing phase was 27.3 (ranging from 22 to 40). Twelve percent of participants in the pre-testing phase reported themselves as “single” ( $n = 1$ ); 62% reported that they were “married” ( $n = 5$ ); and 25% reported that they were divorced ( $n = 2$ ). Fifty percent of participants in the pre-testing phase reported themselves as fathers ( $n = 4$ ); 75% of the fathers reported themselves as “married” ( $n = 3$ ) and 25% as “divorced” ( $n = 1$ ). The average number of children from men in the pre-testing phase who reported themselves as fathers was 1.75 (ranging from 1 to 3 children). The age of children was not reported in the pre-testing phase. Also, the ethnic background of participants in the pre-testing phase was not accounted for.

The preliminary interview protocol was constructed by the researcher, and included a list of 40 research questions that were designed to elicit narratives told by men about their fathers. Questions were created in part based on a review of the literature (Bertilson, 2004; Diamond, 2006, 2007; Dumlao & Botta, 2000; Edley & Wetherell, 1997; Formaniak-Turner, 2006; Grobler, 2007; Kulik, 2002; Mormon & Floyd, 1998, 2000, 2002, 2003, 2005, 2006; Pearson & VanHorn, 2004; Pittman, 1993; Rhodes, 2000; Silverstein, Auerbach, & Levant, 2002), and focused on a number of topics related to the social construction of identity and masculinity including the following: (1) participants’ stories about their fathers’ interactions with men, women, and the sons (i.e., the participants); (2) participants’ stories about times their fathers were proud and angry with the sons (i.e., the participants); (3) participants’ stories about fathers’ discussions on what

it means to be a man; (4) participants' direct reports of their perceptions of what it means to be a man; and (5) participants' direct reports of their perceptions of what it means to be a father. Participants from the pre-testing phase were asked all applicable questions from the 40 research questions.

After the pre-testing phase, interview questions were examined according to their success in prompting stories from participants. Criteria for success included length of response from participants, as well as effectiveness of prompting narratives. A final interview protocol was established and consisted of only those questions that were most effective in encouraging research participants to tell stories about interaction with their fathers. Therefore, the final interview protocol contained a total of seven questions for men with no children, with 17 possible follow-up questions. The follow-up questions were only utilized when a participant's response to the primary question was short in length (see Appendix C). The protocol contained an additional five questions, for a total of 12, for men with children, with the same potential follow-up questions as for men with no children. Finally, five questions for men with grandchildren were included. As discussed earlier, no grandfathers participated in this study, so those questions were not used.

The interviewer began by asking participants to describe their overall ideas of what it means to be a man. By beginning with an open-ended question, the protocol sought to establish the tone of participant-driven story telling. Questioning then focused on men's reports of who or what was their biggest influence on what it means to be a man. Next, participants were asked to tell stories about their relationship with their fathers when they were growing up, and these were followed by questions about their

current relationship with their father. In these questions, special emphasis was placed on understanding the ways in which fathers and sons interacted. Questions were asked about times when their fathers were proud and times when they were angry with them, and were asked how their fathers communicated in these situations. Further, participants were asked to share stories dealing with how their fathers' expressed what it means to be a man. The interview then turned to questions about the participants as fathers, either currently or for those participants who wanted to be a father some day. Finally, the interview concluded by asking, "Is there anything else about the subjects of masculinity and fatherhood that you'd like to share?" The full interview protocol can be found in Appendix C.

#### Demographic Data

There were a total of 21 study participants. All participants were male. The mean age of the participants was 29.8 years (ranging from 18 to 51 years old). Sixty-six percent ( $n = 14$ ) of the participants identified themselves as "Caucasian"; 9% ( $n = 2$ ) of the participants identified themselves as "Hispanic"; 9% ( $n = 2$ ) identified themselves as "African American"; 9% ( $n = 2$ ) identified themselves as "Asian"; and 4% ( $n = 1$ ) identified themselves as "American Indian." Nine percent ( $n = 2$ ) listed their educational level as "high school graduate"; 57% ( $n = 12$ ) reported "some college" as their highest level of education; 23% ( $n = 5$ ) listed themselves as a "college graduate"; and 9% ( $n = 2$ ) listed their educational level as "post college."

Thirty-eight percent ( $n = 8$ ) of the participants listed their marital status as "single"; 52% ( $n = 11$ ) listed themselves as "married"; and 9% ( $n = 2$ ) reported that they were "divorced." Forty-seven percent ( $n = 10$ ) of the participants reported that they had

children; of the participants with children, 90% ( $n = 9$ ) reported themselves as married and 10% ( $n = 1$ ) reported as divorced. The average number of children from men who reported themselves as fathers was 2.5 (ranging from 2 to five children). The average age of children reported was 12.1 years old (ranging from 8 weeks to 25 years old). Seventy percent ( $n = 7$ ) of fathers reported at least one male child. Of all children reported, 56% ( $n = 14$ ) were female and 44% ( $n = 11$ ) were male.

### Analysis

This study utilized thematic analysis (Huberman & Miles, 1994) to describe emergent themes that arose from men's stories about interaction with their fathers. In the initial stage, all recorded data was transcribed by an independent transcriber. Having a single transcriber allowed for continuity in the complete data set. The data was then reviewed numerous times by the primary researcher to achieve an encompassing view of the data set. Following the methods established by Huberman and Miles (1994) for thematic analysis, the data was first organized into groups of responses that followed the same themes and patterns of response to the interview protocol. The data was then coded to reflect groupings of similar themes that occurred in the overall data set. As a result of examining the data in terms of "recurrence, repetition, and forcefulness of discourse" (Owen, 1984), the resulting initial groupings fell into three main categories: talk about self, stories about father, and talk about masculine ideals. *Recurrence* was noted when at least two parts of a single participant's interview responses had the same thread of meaning (p. 275). For the purposes of this study, recurrence was also noted within the entire data set. *Repetition* refers to the explicit repeated use of the same wording (p.275). Repetition was noted in individual responses, as well as in the entire data set. Finally,



*forcefulness* refers to any vocal quality or pause that served to stress particular words or phrases (p. 276). Forcefulness was observed and noted by the researcher during the interview process, and again while reviewing tape-recorded data and transcriptions. Words were italicized in the transcripts to account for extra emphasis placed. Forcefulness was a key indicator for two findings, and is discussed in Chapter 4. Special attention was also paid to those responses that were easily identified as narrative in nature (i.e. ordering of events, structural components, and evaluation) (Lavob & Waletsky, 1967). As noted by Arrington (2005), narratives can reveal how narrators reconstruct relationship identities and develop roles within the family context (p. 142).

Further coding revealed three central themes: *Perception of Self*, *Perception of Father*, and *Masculine Ideals*. The main categories were then partitioned into subsets of themes to describe in detail the differences within each main theme and sub-theme. Partitioning of variables in this manner allows for a more detailed description of the main categories (Owen, 1984), and a count of 26 unique sub-themes emerged. Noting relationships between these themes and sub-themes allowed for an in-depth examination of the proposed research questions.

### Summary

This chapter detailed the methods utilized in the present study. First, the main goal of the study was revisited. The enrollment of study participants and the interview procedures were then discussed. Additionally, this chapter provided the demographic information and outlined the participant base, which consisted of 21 participants. Lastly, the analysis procedures were detailed. The next chapter describes the results of the analysis.

## CHAPTER THREE

### RESULTS

The purpose of this chapter is to outline the results of the data analysis from the present study. The study utilized thematic analysis (Huberman & Miles, 1994; Owen, 1984) to identify and analyze emergent themes that arose from the data. This chapter discusses the resulting themes of narratives on masculinity. These themes are discussed in terms of the presented research questions, and they are further partitioned into subsets of themes. Chapter 4 presents further explication and the implications of the findings.

#### Overriding Themes of Data

The data were first examined to identify the major themes that arose in men's responses to the interview protocol (Huberman & Miles, 1994). Following prescriptions for thematic analysis as outlined by Owen (1984), the data were examined in terms of the presence of "recurrence, repetition, and forcefulness of discourse" (p. 275). The resulting initial groupings of responses fell into three main categories: talk about self, stories about fathers, and talk about definitions of masculinity. Following a social constructionist theoretical perspective, the details of interaction, as described by participants, are the basis for the construction of the following main themes: Perception of Self, Perception of Father, and Masculine Ideals. The themes that resulted from responses given by participants form the basis for answering the proposed research

questions. Furthermore, twenty-six unique sub-themes are identified in the discussion of the results.

### Research Question One Results

RQ1 asked how men's narratives about their fathers relate to the development of their masculine identity. Two of the three major themes are directly relevant to this research question: Perception of Self and Perception of Father. Men's perceptions of their fathers were further described through stories they told about how their fathers interacted with them, with other men, and with women. This section describes the details of these themes, as well as their emergent sub-themes, as illustrated by the men's stories.

#### *Perception of Self*

Past research has lacked a focused examination of a man's perception of self as it relates to his ideas about masculinity (King, 2001). In this study, participants were given the opportunity to directly explain how they perceived themselves as men. The most apparent groupings of sub-themes in the Perception of Self theme were *Family Man*, *Comparison to Father*, and *Unknown*. The first noteworthy finding of this study is present in these sub-themes. Both the *Family Man* and *Comparison to Father* sub-themes illustrate men's descriptions of themselves in relation to others. But when men indicate *Unknown*, their descriptions lack focused description of interaction with others.

Table 2 summarizes the most common Perception of Self sub-themes, definitions, and examples.

Table 2

*Perception of Self*

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Theme	Description
Family Man	Provides emotional and monetary support for their wife and children. For example, “I have gone out of my way to make sure that I’m there for my wife and children.”
Comparison to Father	Participants saying they are the exact opposite of or admit they possess some negative quality that their father does. For example, “I think I’m a better person (than him)” or “I would say that I probably have inherited some of his (bad) traits.”
Unknown	Participants are unsure of what kind of man they are, or describe their current condition as a stage in a process. For example, “I am still trying to figure that out,” or “I don’t know yet,” or “I’m constantly trying to improve.”

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*Family Man*

Nineteen percent of respondents ( $n = 4$ ) referred to themselves as “family men” in one fashion or another. The key descriptors for this category included providing for the family, both monetarily and with emotional support, and spending time with both children and their spouse. Recurrence of this theme was present in individuals’ descriptions of themselves, and was also noted across the entire data set. For example, a 24-year-old married father of two said:

I have a great relationship with my wife. I believe my wife highly respects me. I am the decision maker, kind of, I guess, most of the time. My wife respects my decisions. Can’t really say that my kids do, since they’re only 11 months old. But I believe I’ve grown up to be a leader, more by example than by vocal.

Similarly, a 42-year-old married father of three said:

I love my family and I think I'm a very strong man. I'm hard-working and I have spent 20 years in the Navy to support my family. . .In the Philippines, I was working prior to getting in the Navy to get here. And, uh, my main priority was my family, so that's that. I think I'm a generous father and I'm a good provider for my kids.

While the first two men spoke of earning and commanding respect as a family man, a 51-year-old married father of two spoke about "being there" and providing for his family. Note that even in talking about himself, it is difficult for him to avoid talking about his father.

So, one of the things that I've tried to do is really be there for my family. I have gone out of my way to make sure that I'm there for my children and my wife. Because to me it was the biggest bomb when I recognized that (my father) was being selfish and I'm absolutely committed to saying, "Look if I have a wife and children, I'm gonna put them first"...But the nut is that I'm not going fishing with the boys, I'm not going drinking.

Lastly, a 36-year-old father of two simply spoke of "providing" for his family as the main descriptor of who he is. Specific repetition of the word "provide" was noted when he said:

You know, just providing for the family... You provide for your family, and just financially support and take care of your family.

This theme is important to the present study's understanding of men. First, in every example, men describe themselves in terms of interaction with others. This is important because it reflects the theoretical framework of the study. Interaction is at the heart of the meaning-making process (Berger & Luckman, 1966). For these men, the roles of "father" and "husband" are understood and explained in relationship to others. This is not surprising, as father and husband are relational roles. But in choosing this

form of self-description—talking about their roles and their relationships—these men identified what they believe to be key components of their identities. It seems that the masculine roles of husband and father, and more specifically, the communication that occurs while enacting these roles, may be related to men’s ideals about masculinity.

Secondly, in talking about who they are as men, these stories were heavily laden with traditional understandings of the roles of fatherhood (i.e., “financial support,” “providing,” “decision making,” etc.). Very few indications of the “involved father” ideal (Gavanas, 2002; Henwood & Proctor, 2003) are given. Although descriptions of “being there” for wife and children certainly seems more emotive in nature, they still fall short of the “emotionally involved nurturer” as espoused by the Fatherhood Responsibility Movement. But are traditional understandings of what it means to be a “family man” perpetuated in practice and in talk? The next sub-theme illustrates that men directly compare themselves to other men, namely their fathers.

#### *Comparison to Father*

Twenty-eight percent of respondents ( $n = 6$ ) compared themselves with their fathers in some fashion. Specifically, men chose particular communication styles their father displayed upon which they tried to improve. Some identified success in differentiating from these patterns. For instance, a 19-year-old single man with no children demonstrated repetition of the *Comparison to Father* theme when he commented:

I would say that I am little bit opposite of him because always when we grew up, like when dinners with friends and stuff and always with him talking, I kind of like watched him and said like that doesn’t look too good, like he’s always talking and not really listening, like interrupting people sometimes...But I guess I sort of

grew up like a little bit of the opposite of him, especially because I don't like to interrupt people and I always listen.

This man identified a specific communicative behavior of his father that he tries to avoid.

Other men said that they were completely different from their fathers. Again repetition was present in the data, as illustrated by the following comment from a 39-year-old married father of four:

I think I'm a better person. Better man, better person. I have my flaws. Everybody has them. It's just the way you deal with them that makes you an adult.

Finally, some men offered that they attempted to overcome specific negative traits that they shared with their fathers with mixed results. For instance, a 41-year-old married father of five said:

I would say I probably inherited some of the same traits that he had...I think I have the same thing that my father had but I've learned over the years to turn it around. Those negative aspects that he—that I saw he had, it's ok. I've turned them around. It's not to say that they have just left me completely you know. They won't leave me completely, you know, but I've learned to deal with them and express that to other people.

The recurrence of comparisons to fathers within the data indicates that, at least for some men, identity is directly related to their father. Additionally, the repetition of specific words like "opposite" and "better" within specific accounts demonstrates ways in which men compare themselves to their fathers. Some men identified traits of their father that they possess, and others named behaviors of their father's that they've tried to overcome. Although men did not specifically refer to overall quality of their relationships with their fathers, it seems likely that specific qualities of a father-son relationship may contribute to a son's desire for differentiation. The following section describes men who are confused about their identity, or are in a state of flux. These

descriptions lack any indication of perception of self being related to interaction with others.

### *Unknown*

Supporting the research of Fomaniak-Turner (2006), the most frequently cited perception of self referred to an unfinished process. Forty-three percent of respondents ( $n = 9$ ) felt that they could not distinctly identify who they were in terms of their own masculinity. Respondents' descriptions in this sub-theme tended to illustrate that achieving manhood was a process they had yet to complete. Some indicated that they did not know what kind of man they were or that they were still trying to figure it out. For instance, a 22-year-old single man with no children said:

(I am) still trying to figure that out, man. Right now, I'm kind of lost in a world of chaos. I mean, balancing from working out to studying for a test, to taking that test, and then to just party my butt off.

Another 22-year-old single man with no children described reaching manhood as a process, but he seemed to point toward having a family someday as a factor that might help define himself when he stated:

I don't know yet. I don't know what kind of man I am yet. I mean I'm really sensitive to my family. I really love my family a lot and anytime someone says something about my family I get quite offended, and other than that, I think that I'm pretty strong when it comes to people and dealing with issues and dealing with sensitive subjects. I feel like I'm good with dealing with problems and I handle them well I try and solve them before they get blown out of proportion, but I really don't know. I don't think I'll find out until I have kids.

This example demonstrates a man indicating that he believes he will have a chance for understanding who he is once he has a family. But again, his confusion seems to be related to his inability to relate his perception of self to interaction with others. This is



not unique to single men, however. Even men who were married and had children said they had things to “work on.” For instance, a 39-year-old married father of two said:

You know, the hardest thing to do is evaluate yourself. I would say that I’m a man that is continually improving and I find more fault in myself than I do, you know, the good stuff. But I’m always trying to work on that and I think that may get in the way sometimes. Maybe I need to focus on the things that I do really well instead of trying to continually, you know, fix yourself, don’t be so critical.

This father’s comments support the overall theme of *Unknown* through the illustration of his inability to talk about himself in relationship to others. Additionally, the other stories in this sub-theme illustrate some men’s perceptions of self being specifically related to their perceptions of their father. This gets at the heart of RQ1, which asked how men’s stories about their fathers relate to perceptions of their own identity. The following section specifically describes men’s perception of their fathers, and includes stories about their father’s interaction with others.

#### Perception of Father

The Perception of Self theme indicated a possible connection between men’s ideas about their own manhood and their relationships with their fathers. In this study, participants were given the opportunity to directly describe their perceptions of their fathers; these descriptions provided the examples that make up the category Perception of Father. The most commonly occurring or sub-themes in this category were *Family man/Provider*, *Hard Worker*, *Hero/Villain*, and *Changed Man*. Table 3 previews the most common Perception of Father themes, definitions, and examples.

Table 3

*Perception of Father*

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Theme	Description
Family Man	The father is described as putting the needs of his children and wife first. For example, “He sees my mom as an equal, so they share whatever work they do,” or “I think he values his family more than himself.”
Hard Worker	The father is described as a hard worker who “puts food on the table” and provides whatever his family needs. For example, “He’s a hard worker.”
Hero/Villain	Participants provide descriptions of their father as someone to be worshiped or despised. For example, “My father is a bona fide hero,” or “My father was an alcoholic.”
Changed Man	Participants relate some negative aspect of their father that has changed over the years. For example, “He has had a transformation over the years,” or “I admire what he’s overcome.”

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*Family Man*

Thirty-eight percent of respondents ( $n = 8$ ) referred to their father as a family man. These respondents spoke about how their fathers would put the needs of their children and wives first. Recurrence is demonstrated between both the Perception of Self and Perception of Father main themes since versions of the *Family Man* sub-theme occur in both. Providing for the family, both monetarily and with emotional support, were again among the key descriptors for this category. A 22-year-old man stated:

I was such a bad kid growing up. I uh you know I did lots of drugs in high school...and almost failed out... and my parents did what was best for me and sent me away to Boston to where I could focus on hockey. Instead of getting new

cars, he'd send me to hockey tournaments and join hockey teams and buy me equipment for me. So, he's an unreal guy.

This man's perception of his father is directly related to how his father interacted with him. Specifically, the participant described his father's behavior as unselfish, giving, and as putting his child's needs first. A 20-year-old man identified other communicative behaviors as a way of describing his father when he said:

He's a quiet guy. He does what's expected of him. He's not abusive or anything like that. He's not in your face, he's just. . .almost kind of blends into the background, sometimes just raising us and helping my mom with the house and everything. He doesn't really follow any certain guidelines. He sees my mom as an equal, so they share whatever work they do.

Again the participant describes his father as someone who does what is expected of him around the house, and he describes his father in terms of his father's relationship with his wife. Similarly, a 43-year-old man spoke about his father putting him and his family first when he said:

Well he's a very strong man...he's very uh generous and he's also family-oriented man. He values his family. I think he values his family more than himself...he does a lot of sacrifices...

In all three examples, participants noted their fathers' willingness to put the needs of the family first. This became apparent in narratives that focused on their fathers' sacrifices and contributions to the family. This sub-theme is especially noteworthy, as it mirrors a theme from men's perception of themselves. It seems that this could be an indicator of the social construction of masculinity in general, and more specifically, the construction of the roles of "husband" and "father." It appears that some men do directly identify with the traits and behaviors of their fathers in a way that helps them make sense of their own identity.

However, in the *Comparison to Father* sub-theme described earlier in this chapter, men sometimes specifically attempted to differentiate themselves from their fathers. Does this combination of sub-themes in men's stories about themselves and their fathers indicate a trend in the ways in which men perceive themselves versus the ways they perceive their fathers? Perhaps a dialectical tension exists between a son's need to have some of his father's traits, while simultaneously needing to differentiate himself from his father. Further research could provide answers to these questions. The next sub-theme also focused on fathers' non-verbal behaviors.

#### *Hard Worker*

Twenty-four percent of respondents ( $n = 5$ ) identified their father singularly as a hard worker. Even though many men included descriptions of their father's work life along with other attributes of their fathers, this category is characterized completely by descriptions of their fathers as the stereotypical "working man." It is noteworthy that the shortest, most succinct descriptions of fathers came from this category. There is, perhaps not surprisingly, an overall lack of description of interaction with these fathers. Both recurrence and repetition were noted, however. For instance, a 19-year-old man said, "He's a hard worker. He's a business man." Similarly, a 23-year-old man said of his father, "He's a blue collar worker- just a hard worker uh he's pretty quiet, keeps to himself." Some men even indicated that their fathers help guide their career paths. A 45-year-old man inferred interaction with his father when he said his father was, "Hard-working. Smart. Fun. A moderate disciplinarian. He was a good teacher— everything from sports to academics to pointing me in the right directions for employment."

It is interesting that responses in this sub-theme focused on behaviors as opposed to communicative acts. In other words, perceptions of fathers were formed through observation as opposed to direct interaction. These responses indicate a trend of participants relying on traditional understandings of masculine ideals and the role of fatherhood. Use of these descriptors seems to replace interaction elements that may describe how a father relates to others. This sub-theme also runs counter to the “involved father” ideal described by Henwood and Proctor (2003), which describes a demonstratively affectionate, nurturing, ever-present father. These participants spoke of their fathers in terms of work first; there was little focus on characteristics that might illustrate the “involved father” ideal. Even in the example where some interaction is described, “hard-working” was predominant.

Similarly, Morman and Floyd (2006) also found “provider” to be one of the dominant themes that emerged from men’s descriptions of fatherhood, alluding to the role of the father in providing financial support. The participants in this study provide descriptions of their fathers that seem to fit the “provider” theme more than an ideal of an involved father. Hence, a gap seems to exist between the ways in which society wants men to “father” and the ways that they actually perform this role. The following sub-theme also provides understanding of how interaction sets the tone of men’s perceptions of their fathers, as well as how perceptions of fathers may guide identity formation.

### *Hero/Villain*

Forty-three percent of respondents ( $n = 9$ ) referred to their father as either a hero or as a villain. This section will examine the *Hero* element of this sub-theme first. In the hero element, participants’ descriptions includes lists of their father’s accomplishments,

obstacles that their fathers have had to overcome, and statements that indicated a sense of pride in their father. Interaction takes a secondary role, if any at all, in these descriptions. However, in men's narratives, meaning is attributed through the descriptions of a main character—in this case, participants' fathers. For example, a 34-year-old man said:

My father is um-my father is a bona fide hero. He's a decorated Vietnam War veteran um you know he served his country for 37 years, and . . . you know that there's something that may be troubling there with him too.

This respondent uses a simple description of his father's accomplishments to describe the kind of man he is. A 22-year-old man reported similar attributes of his father when he told a story about his father:

My father is a Vietnam Vet, graduated from Indiana University and right after that he went into OCS and became a fighter pilot for the Vietnam war, was there from 1969 to 1972 and after that he came back and worked in the reserves a little bit at Fort Carson and he became a fire fighter and uh he's been one of the top fire uh captains in (his hometown) for the last 30 years now and he's looking to retire and I respect what he's done...

In both examples, men are defining their fathers by their actions as opposed to explaining them through interaction episodes or through relationships with others, again demonstrating recurrence in the overall data set. Additionally, these examples provide a glimpse of the meaning-making process that can occur through the use of narratives. Unlike the Perception of Self category, the lack of interaction in descriptions does not indicate confusion. The participants' statements are clear and precise. This illustrates a difference when it comes to perceptions of self and perceptions of father. However, specific interaction with others and with sons is noted later in this section, which illustrates how interaction may drive perception of the father.

Moving to the *Villain* element of this sub-theme, men gave descriptions of their fathers that were characterized by disappointment. Stories of fathers emerge as fathers not living up to sons' expectations of the way their father should act, or things they found out about their fathers that lowered their opinion of them later in life. Interestingly, all stories in the *Villain* element of this sub-theme come from men who have children. It seems, at least for some men, that the role of fatherhood may impact their perceptions of their fathers. Again, these narratives illustrate a meaning-making process for participants. For instance, a 51-year-old married father of two said:

My father was an alcoholic...he wasn't there a lot of times on weekends or nights after work. And I was always under the impression that he was working. And later in life I realized what he was doing was drinking, and that he wasn't around, and that was his personal decision...as I got older and realized what it was, that he was just being selfish and doing his own thing, our relationship got worse is what happened...

Interaction is emphasized here, as in the hero element of this sub-theme. The man realizes later in life that the lack of interaction was somehow caused by his father's disease. Next, a 41-year-old married father of five notes negative communicative behavior when he said of his father:

He never showed emotion. The one thing that I really remember about him that I didn't like was he got in a fight with my mom and it was physical and all the kids were in the house and we was trying to stop the, you know, stop him from hitting her and, you know, so I felt like he was cold and distant.

Finally, for a 24-year-old married father of two, vilification occurs regarding the father's absence and lack of interaction:

My real dad, my parents divorced when I was six. For the first two years, I seen him every weekend. By the time I was 8 or 9, I saw him once a year. He was an alcoholic.

It is noteworthy that when men described their fathers as a hero, they defined them through family stories, not through actual interaction or observations. In these stories, it seems like the *Hero* tag supersedes communicative elements of the father-son interaction that usually help a son to form his perception of his father. On the other hand, for those men who vilified their fathers, negative interaction or a lack of interaction was prominent, and their perception was seemingly formed through their own experiences with their fathers. It seems as though lack of interaction, or negative interaction, can possibly sully a son's perception of his father. However, if a son is not the sole author of stories about his father—in other words, other family members helped co-create narratives about the father—interaction may not be a key element in his perception of his father. Further research might help to determine the extent to which interaction with a father will affect a son's perception of his father. The next sub-theme also illustrates the phenomenon of interaction shaping perception.

#### *Changed Man*

Nineteen percent ( $n = 4$ ) of respondents described their fathers as having changed over the years. These narratives are marked by apparent moments of change in the father-son relationship, either through changes in the ways fathers and sons interacted, or through changes in the ways sons perceived their fathers. One way this sub-theme was illustrated was through stories of the participants' fathers rising above a negative situation in life. Similar to the *Hero* element of the previous sub-theme, a 22-year-old man mentioned no interaction when he told the following story:

He came from a less wealthy portion of Philadelphia...I remember visiting that area and just being like "Wow, he came from here." Seeing where he came from



and where he ended up, I definitely respected it. He overcame a father that was ignorant to education, definitely didn't support him becoming a doctor.

Interaction was not specifically noted in this narrative, but elements of co-authorship in this story are apparent. In this story, the son explains his direct involvement in his father's story. Going home to see where his father grew up helps him contextualize his father's story and guides his perception of his father. Some responses in this category began with a description of their father in a negative light. A marked change is then described within the same story or statement. A 19-year-old man said of his father:

He has totally had this like almost transformation in the past couple years. All the time when I was growing up he was like in big business wearing a suit and high stress, high pay job. He would just come home and he would be totally unhappy and...stressed out and he would like yell at like everything, especially at my brother. One day...he's just like ahh there's something we got to tell you guys--I just quit my job last week. After that...he's totally like a chill guy. He started to read. I never had a conversation with him about religion before that. He started reading books on Buddhism and stuff...I just thought it was really cool.

Again, a man explains his direct involvement in his father's story. He is able to describe the "change" in terms of his father's interaction with him and his brother, as well as through observations about his general demeanor, culminating in a "change" for the father-son relationship in a positive way. In this sub-theme, men's perceptions of their fathers are directly related to their participation in their father's "change." It seems that sons' interaction with their fathers help to determine their perceptions of their father. Inclusion in the creation of a father's story, either through direct authorship or co-authorship, seems to create greater clarity for a son.

The narratives presented in this section illustrate that, similar to Perception of Self theme, the Perception of Father theme indicated that interaction may help guide men's

perceptions of their fathers. Although interaction was not always directly described, men's descriptions about their inclusion in their fathers' stories seemed to support this idea. Additionally, the *Hero/Villain* and *Changed Man* sub-themes of the Perception of Father theme were notable for participants' use of narratives that helped them to construct meaning about their fathers. To further understand the effects of interaction on a man's perception of his father, interview protocol asked questions specifically designed to elicit stories about men's fathers' interaction with others. The narratives that emerged in response to these questions make up more of the sub-themes under the Perception of Father main theme. The following section describes these results.

#### *Father's Interaction With Others*

Another sub-theme that emerged from the Perception of Father main theme is *Father's Interaction With Others*. In the men's stories about their fathers, it became apparent that their perceptions of their fathers were directly influenced by seeing their fathers interact with other men, and by the ways in which they interacted with women, including their mothers. The subsequent section provides narratives that detail interaction in each of these specific situations.

*Interaction with other men.* Men told stories about witnessing their father's interaction with other men. Interestingly enough, the forms of interaction between men fell into two categories: Acting Tough and Activities. Table 4 previews the most common *Interaction with Other Men* themes, definitions, and examples.

Table 4

*Fathers' Interaction With Other Men*

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Theme	Description
Activities	Participants described their fathers' interactions with other men as involving activities. For instance, "He would go off fishing and drinking with his buddies."
Acting Tough	Participants told stories about how their fathers would enact tough man rituals when they were around other men. For example, "He would cuss and roughhouse more when he was with his friends."

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*Activities.* The most commonly occurring statements in the *Interaction With Other Men* category of the *Father's Interaction With Others* sub-theme involved activities. Fifty-two percent of respondents ( $n = 11$ ) spoke about their fathers' interaction with other men consisting of activities. It is interesting to note that every participant chose to describe interactions with men in group settings as opposed to interpersonal, one-on-one communication. For instance, a 39-year-old man said:

He was in a country western band...And at my house, every Friday and Saturday night they were all together. They were just like kids, all those guys, in high school talking to each other on a bus or like they would talk...or you know, not how people in business talk to one another, it was nothing like that.

A 22-year-old man spoke about his interaction with his dad and other dads when he said:

When I was younger when he'd go out on the hockey trips with us with all the other hockey dads, with all of his buddies and they'd drink. He seemed to, you know, light up the room and bring a lot of comedy or joy to the room.

A 48-year-old man described the activities he participated in with his father and friends:

They like to play pool, billiards after work. They go out and play billiards. That's how I—at first I just started watching and all that stuff. Eventually I got in on the action, because they'd make bets while playing. Then when they drink sometimes they make bets too—who's to pay- to pay for the beers. They do that kind of stuff.

These stories illustrate men interacting through activities. This is noteworthy, as research has shown this to be a mode of interaction between men (Gibbons, Lynn & Stiles, 1997; Kiselica, 2005; Pittman, 1993). These stories from respondents who had observed their fathers' interaction with other men support previous findings. In addition to stories about activities, participants also told stories about their fathers "acting tough"; these narratives also fall into the *Interaction With Other Men* category.

Acting tough. Thirty-eight percent of respondents ( $n = 8$ ) told stories about their fathers "acting tough" when they were around other men. Recurrence within the entire data set was noted; specifically, behaviors such as cussing, physical play, and male ritualistic behavior were described. For instance, a 23-year-old man said:

Yeah. He's a little different...Like we were at a bar having a couple drinks and one of his buddies from work showed up just out of the blue and my dad's—he acted a little bit more like tough...he's really basically like me with my friends... how guys are when they go out. He wasn't the father, he became his friend's friend again. I don't know if he forgot I was there or just in his working environment...he changed a little bit.

A 39-year-old man talked about his dad's cussing around his friends:

You know everything was also, you know, if there's that stereotypical military guy—especially a Marine you know—very hard, every other word is a cuss word and then there's a lot of laughter and then there's some more anger. But, you know, when you overhear stuff when, you know, when the kids are back in one room playing, that's what you hear, you know, you would hear rough language, laughter, yelling with him and his friends.

The man continued by describing a very interesting male ritual in which his father and friends had participated:

We had just watched the Red Sox play and we had a great time. Afterward, we're in this bar. Well I gotta pee. So I go in—I go into this bathroom and there's like this trough thing. I'm like 11 years old and so there's water out in front of the trough so I don't want to stand in the water. So I'm standing maybe a foot back peeing into the trough. Well him and his buddy come in and see this...So they now are trying to see who can pee the furthest, you know...So I'm in this game, and now I end up moving much farther back than they could. That just became this big game—just male bonding stuff, who can pee the farthest...

This sub-theme also supports the existing literature surrounding the ways in which men interact with one another (Gough & Edwards, 1998; Pittman, 1993). It seems that these behaviors are not only learned by sons through interaction and observation, but also sometimes supported in clear and direct communication from fathers. If *acting tough* is a way that men relate to one another, and often times between fathers and sons, what implications might this have on the father-son relationship and the formation of a son's masculine identity? The next section presents men's recollections of how their fathers interact with women, making up the *Interaction With Women* category of the *Father's Interaction With Others* sub-theme.

*Interaction with women.* These stories included, but were not limited to, interaction with the participants' mothers. Forms of interaction with women fell into the following categories: Affection Seeking, Infidelity/Promiscuity and Subservience/Dominance. Table 5 previews the most common *Interaction with Women* themes, definitions, and examples.

Table 5

*Fathers' Interaction with Women*

Theme	Description
Flirting	Fathers interact with women in a way that is flirtatious and shows interest. For example, "My father is flirtatious with women."
Infidelity	Fathers are unfaithful or promiscuous. For example, "My dad cheated on my mother."
Dominance/Subservience	Fathers either demand or surrender power in relationships with women. For example, "My father treated my mother poorly because he never cared about what she wanted," or "My mom was the boss in the house."

*Flirting.* Thirty-three percent of participants ( $n = 7$ ) spoke of their fathers' interaction with women as flirting. For instance, a 23-year-old man seems to glorify his father's behavior when he says, "He's pretty flirtatious. He's a pretty cool guy...he treats women well...just good with his words. He's pretty cool." A 39-year-old man also described his father's flirting in a positive light when he said, "My father treats women, in general, he's a pretty charming guy. He's, you know, flirtatious and nice." However, a 24-year-old man acknowledges that his dad's interaction with women may not always be regarded as positively:

My dad's a bit of a flirt. He just enjoys the conversation. He's always relatively outgoing and flirty. It drives my mom crazy, even though it's the same whether my mom's there or not. It's humorous and consistent with all women.

Scholars have often argued that "flirting" or sexualized banter is indicative of "masculine" culture, and that it serves as a driver for the creation of masculine identity and power (MacKinnon, 1979; Spradley & Mann, 1975; Yount, 1991). Through men's

stories, they describe their fathers' flirting as a form of communication with women. However, as research indicates, flirting is often a form of identity formation and exercise of gendered power interactions. Even though flirting has been construed as an instrument of power, it is important to consider the context (Lerum, 2003). It is interesting that this behavior was generally viewed as positive by respondents. Men who told stories about their fathers' flirting clearly contextualized their fathers' behaviors in a positive light, as a way of understanding how they interact with women. Further research that examines differences in styles and interpretations of "flirting" could help determine if this form of communication has connotations of power. The next category presents narratives that illustrate clear negative interaction with women.

*Infidelity.* Fourteen percent of participants ( $n = 3$ ) spoke of their fathers' infidelity in their marriages. In this category, participants described their fathers' interaction as something negative, noting that their fathers had gone outside the marriage, developing relationships with other women. Changes in the father-son relationship are apparent. In some cases, the father stayed in the marital relationship after the indiscretion. For instance, a 22-year-old man said:

My father cheated on my mom one time, and uh, I just found that out about a year ago. And it took place when I was in high school, he had this affair. And my mother, she kind of removed herself from my father emotionally, so like I can empathize to some degree, but I don't like that he went outside the marriage.

Similarly, a 32-year-old man described his father's indiscretion:

My dad stepped outside the marriage one time when he was on a business trip. I only found out a few years ago. He told me all about it when I was having a hard time with my girlfriend. I'm convinced my dad loves my mom and would never do that again, but I was really, like, disappointed to learn this about my dad.

This story reveals how a father found his son mature enough to share details of a mistake he had made. It is noteworthy that details of his mistake came forward at point when the son was having difficulty in his relationship. Perhaps there are there certain moments in the father-son relationship where a father intentionally shows his fallibility to his son. If so, what purpose does that serve the father-son relationship? In this case, it seems to have only served to “disappoint” the son. In other cases, the father left the marital relationship to pursue another relationship. A 41-year-old man commented:

Well my mom and he were separated, and he moved in with another woman. I felt like my mom was struggling to raise [me] all of the kids and there were four of us in the house and she struggled but she stopped asking him for money and when she stopped asking him for money she started doing for herself. That man would give her like ten dollars here and there you know ten dollars to me is— that’s not—so I felt like he was wrong as a man for doing that.

Whether the marriage was dissolved or not, these examples provided a clear and lasting picture of the ways in which respondents perceived their fathers’ interaction with women. These witnessed moments of a father’s behavior with women may have served to negatively impact the father-son relationship. Furthermore, respondents’ descriptions of these behaviors as negative may provide a glimpse of the ways in which sons hope to be different from their fathers, especially when dealing with women. The next category is similar in this regard.

*Dominance/Subservience.* Twenty-four percent of participants ( $n = 5$ ) described their father’s interaction with women as either dominant or subservient in nature. In this category, men described their fathers as playing either a dominant role or a submissive role in their interactions with women. Both were reported in a negative light. For instance, a 32-year-old man said:



I don't think he respected them and it's not so much being physical its just the way you talk and conversate with them. You know words hurt worse than physical and you know my mom—obviously my mom and him did not have a very good relationship towards the end of my senior years. As a matter of fact I think my mom told me something like my father never treated her well and always wanted what he wanted and never cared what she wanted.

Conversely, a 19-year-old man described his father as taking a secondary role in the marital relationship:

Yeah, I witnessed how he treats my mom. Yeah I think he treats—I think he's like my mom is the boss in the house, so he doesn't really have any—like whatever she says. She's always right so he doesn't have a chance to treat her like bad or anything.

Similarly, a 39-year-old man said:

I don't think he was that good with women. Well, you know, he put her pretty much on a pedestal sometimes, which I didn't agree with because it gave her more power than she should've had.

In all three examples, recurrence of the sub-theme was apparent, and respondents indicated a power differential. Respondents did not view their parents' relationship as equal. And although the participants may not have directly referenced it, the examples seem to indicate that the respondents did not agree with the way their father interacted with their mothers.

The majority of respondents reported “positive” ways in which their fathers interacted with women, and some described “negative” ways of interacting with women; these reports provide a glimpse of the respondents' meaning-making process. Examples provided value statements, clarifying the respondent's view of these interactional behaviors, which possibly influence the ways in which they interact with women. It is also noteworthy that these narratives demonstrate a wide spectrum of opinion about the ways in which power is utilized in relationships between men and women. Based on

these narratives, one might argue that systems of domination and power difference may be perpetuated through the father-son relationship. Speculation aside, it is clear to see how these interactions helped to define how men perceived their fathers. The next section will entail direct father-son interaction that may help us to understand how men perceive their fathers.

*Father-Son Interaction.* The final sub-theme under the Perception of Father main theme is illustrated by narratives that describe men's perceptions of their fathers in terms of how their father interacted with them specifically. Narratives in this category provide descriptions of fathers in both positive and negative lights. In other words, participants talked about how their fathers treated them when they were either angry or proud of their sons.

*Positive interaction with father.* For the positive interaction category of the *Father-Son Interaction* sub-theme, the resulting categories were Affection, Expression of Pride to Others, and Time Spent With Son. Table 6 previews the most common *Positive Interaction with Father* themes, definitions, and examples.

Table 6

*Positive Interaction with Father*

Theme	Description
Affection	Participants told stories about how their fathers expressed affection to them. For example, “My dad cried when he was proud of me,” or “He gave me a big hug.”
Expression of Pride to Others	Participants described a time when their father was bragging about them specifically. For example, “My father told all his friends how proud he was of me.”
Time Together	Participants described their fathers spending time with them. For example, “We would watch movies together and hang out,” or “He would take time out of his day to come see me.”

*Affection.* Forty-three percent of respondents ( $n = 9$ ) reported that their fathers had shown them affection, especially during moments of pride in their sons. Affection took both verbal and nonverbal forms and appeared to be profound moments for the study participants. For example, a 20-year-old man recalled:

Well I guess the one example I can really remember was when I graduated high school and got to that point. My father wasn't exactly a really emotional man. When the ceremony was finished and I walked up to him, he was *actually* crying. I could tell that this was an *accomplishment* and that was something that he was proud of me for doing.

This story is the first reflection of notions of fatherhood, as described by the Fatherhood Responsibility Movement (Gavanas, 2002). The father is “emotionally involved” in the moment, and the son takes note. Additionally, forcefulness is apparent in this narrative. This man’s emphasis on specific words indicates how this moment was profound in his life. For the purposes of this study, profound moments are understood as those moments

in men's lives that were particularly meaningful. Furthermore, this response is given in narrative form, further demonstrating the potential for a meaning-making event. Even though the son draws no specific connections to what it means in terms of his own masculinity, it seems to be a major moment in his life. A 48-year-old man said something similar:

He was most proud of me when I was able to join the Navy. When I showed up at home, and when he found out I made it, he gave me a big hug. My dad is not good at this hugging thing and he gave me a big hug and he *doesn't* show emotion but I could see with the tears in his eyes it's almost like giving up the tears and stuff, he was *so* proud and we talked about all this stuff and then we had a lot of long talks.

Again, this narrative demonstrates forcefulness, which indicates how important the moment was to him. A 41-year-old man also talked about the power of his dad's hug:

I would have to say just the coming in the military. When he saw me—when he came up and gave me a hug—his hug was more like you could *feel* there was more emotion. I just *knew* he was proud.

Expanding upon tears as a sign of pride, these two men actually described their fathers' physical displays of hugs. The forcefulness that is present in these narratives indicates that these were profound moments in these men's lives. Furthermore, all three examples demonstrate recurrence in the overall data set through description of a demonstrative communication act. Whether it was a hug or tears of pride, the fathers communicated emotional directly with their sons. It would seem that these moments were particularly noteworthy to the sons because the communicative behavior was irregular for the father. The next form of communication describes fathers communicating pride in their sons through less direct means, that is, through expressions of pride.

Expressions of pride to others. Twenty-nine percent of participants ( $n = 6$ )

recalled a time when their father had told other people how proud they were of their son.

This category emerged from men's descriptions of how their fathers had shared with

other people their pride in their sons. For example, a 22-year-old man said:

I think the time I *really* knew my father was proud of me was when I got my scholarship and signed. He wrote letters, he called everyone, and I received calls from everyone. He told the whole town he was proud—proud of his son, and he was proud to brag about me and tell *everyone* that I had made it. So, I think *that* was the greatest moment.

A 45-year-old married man talked about a story his dad still tells:

Probably when I got into college. I think graduating college was a big deal to him...I graduated early, and paid for a good chunk of my own schooling, and he was pretty proud of that. He tells the story often of how I graduated in two and half years and he only had to pay for a year of that, and how he skated. You can tell he's proud when he tells the story even today.

Finally, a 19-year-old man talked about how his father expressed his pride to others when he said:

Yeah, it has to be one of my wins in tennis. I guess once when I when I went to Estonia and played a tournament there. It was not that—it was like 4 years ago or something. He was there the first day of the tournament and just watched when I played. I won easy, and kept winning, and won the whole tournament. After I won, he was talking to all the coaches a lot about me. He would say what good shape I was in and was really proud. Yeah, yeah I felt really, really good too that he was so happy with me.

In these examples, men either directly observed or heard secondhand the pride their fathers had in a particular accomplishment. It appears that the men in this study felt it was easier for their fathers to tell other people how proud they were of their sons than it was to tell their sons directly. This is interesting compared to research by Morman and Floyd (1998), which outlined particular situations where direct affectionate communication is considered more appropriate (i.e., between men who are related, in

emotionally charged situations, and in public contexts). It would seem that, for some men, expressing emotions and affection to their sons is still not an easy thing, even in situations that are deemed more acceptable by society. The next thematic element of *Positive Interactions With Father* also depicts direct interaction between father and son through stories about time together.

*Time Together.* Nineteen percent of respondents ( $n = 4$ ) told stories of how their fathers had spent time with them. This category involved increased time spent between father and son, either before or after a positive moment. For instance, a 39-year-old man talked about how his dad had never been to any of his events before:

I was going for the city title in wrestling back then and I was up against this really big guy...I tore him up. I looked around, and he was there. He took time off work. He'd never been to a wrestling match before. He congratulated me...I saw him in more of a different. . .more of an enlightenment...It made me like appreciate him more.

A 19-year-old single man talked about how his dad spent more time with him after a life-changing course of events:

Maybe he was most proud after I got in trouble. I got caught smoking pot and I had to like get away from my friends for a while and I totally took a break. I can't remember a specific moment where he's like "you did good kid," but I mean just in our relationship, just how good we were together at that time and how like happy we were. That's when we were watching movies and hanging out.

A 51-year-old man talked about the simple gesture of calling on the telephone when he said:

He was a salesman that would travel around New England...and I went to prep school in Maine...I had some successes as an athlete, and what would be phenomenal is when people would send him a clipped article that would tell him when I scored a goal or got a touchdown or won a wrestling meet or something and it was just huge to him. He'd call me up...I wouldn't hear from him for a month and all of the sudden...he'd call me up. He'd contact me. It was huge. It meant that he was proud of me.

In these examples, respondents reported increased interaction with their fathers. From a simple phone call to watching movies on a Friday night, increased time together was meaningful to the sons, and it seemed representative of expressions of love and affection. It seems as though the gift of time spent from a father to a son is profound to a son's experience of his father's love and affection. This seems to be a potential positive outcome of the "involved father" ideal set forth by Henwood and Proctor (2003). Sons may be more likely to feel their fathers' affection as more time is spent together. The next section describes negative communication between fathers and sons.

*Negative interaction with father.* The second category under the *Father-Son Interaction* sub-theme is *Negative Interaction With Father*. Stories in this category demonstrates themes of Emotional Abuse, Emotional Distance, and Physical Abuse. Table 7 previews the most common *Negative Interaction with Father* themes, definitions, and examples.

Table 7

*Negative Interaction with Father*

Theme	Description
Emotional Abuse	The participants describe their fathers' anger as an unsettling disappointment in them. For example, "I could just tell he was disappointed in me for what happened." This also took the form of yelling. For example, "He yelled at me and my friends."
Emotional Distance	Participants describe their fathers' anger coming through when they avoid the child completely or make them feel guilty. For example, "He just didn't talk to me," or "He tried to make me feel guilty."
Physical Abuse	The participants describe their fathers' anger manifesting in a violent way. For example, "He beat me black and blue."

Emotional abuse. This category emerged as the most common among participants. Twenty-nine percent of participants ( $n = 6$ ) discussed their fathers' unsettling disappointment in them. The mental abuse was marked by a father's negative emotion communicated through a variety of means. Some men reported that their fathers expressed disappointment in them. For example, a 22-year-old man described his father's reaction to his use of drugs when he said:

My father was *really* mad at me when I was growing marijuana in my room and he felt disappointed and let down as a father that his son could actually even do this and could *actually* even take that step towards drugs even after all he had taught me. He didn't talk to me much. He didn't seem as *interested* with me. I mean he disciplined me and let me know what I did was wrong. It just seemed to change; it seemed like he lost a lot of confidence and respect in me.

The forcefulness in this narrative demonstrates a potentially profound moment in this man's life. In this story, the son describes losing his father's "confidence" and "respect." It seems like this is the worst punishment he could receive from his father. Similarly, A 20-year-old man talked about the sound of disappointment in his father's voice when he said:

Well let's see, the only time I really known that was probably my sophomore year of high school I first started learning how to—first started from here to high school and for some reason I wasn't paying attention and I rear-ended this other car and when he heard about it, I could tell he was disappointed because you know he taught me to keep your eyes on the road. Well he was—he was at work and my mom wanted me to call him and I could just—there was just when I told him there was just this *sound* in his voice I could *tell* he was disappointed in what had happened.

A 26-year-old man talked about his father's quiet resolve in expressing his disappointment when he said:

I remember a time when I took off my jersey, when I was a senior in high school. I took off my jersey playing basketball and threw it at the coach. And my dad was waiting for me outside the locker room. And then I remember when I was



beating the crap out of my little brother, and he saw it and he was really disappointed in me. And mainly the two times I've seen my dad upset and disappointed in me is when I was disrespectful to authority figures, or when I was mean to my little brother. He expressed his anger with calmness, amazingly enough. A quiet *rage*. To the point where you knew he was *really* pissed. And to me, just that, that is *worse* than flying off the handle or whatever. He was just very calm in the way he got angry, and it always left an *uneasy* feeling around the family. It really made me feel disappointed in myself and made me feel like I didn't make my dad proud, and that I didn't live up to my dad's standards. And so it *always* made me want to do better.

Forcefulness is clearly demonstrated in this narrative as well. Research has demonstrated that men seek affection from their fathers (Morman & Floyd, 2005), but little research has examined what happens in the face of lost “respect” from a father. These are clearly a profound moments in the participants' lives. Additional research that examines how these moments affected the father-son relationship might expand understanding of this phenomenon.

Other men described emotional abuse that came about through the use of yelling. These episodes were characterized by a father's use of yelling as a means of expression. For instance, a 23-year-old man described an incident when his dad was really angry:

What I can remember I stayed out late with friends and I think I was grounded or something and I came—they they were dropping me off my friends and I got—I came out of the car and he came out of the door—out of the front door just *screaming* his head off, yelling man like I was like, “oh man, he yelled at my friends” and I was like, “oh *great* man,” going back to school and hanging out with my friends after he did that—so he was *really* upset and kinda took me aside and told me not to—if I wanted to live at his house and live under his rules I have to obey them basically—that's the way it goes.

A 25-year-old man talked about how his father reacted to his not doing what he was told and the resulting effect it had on their relationship:

Well, in the summer, when we were off of school, I would stay home and really not do anything. And I think when he went up working all day and came home, he would be upset. I can remember one instance where I think there was a flat tire

on my bike, and I hadn't fixed it, and he came home and wanted me to fix it. I hadn't done it yet, so he was pretty upset with me. He yelled at me, and told me to go out and fix it. Basically, that was it. He would come home and, I understand he was tired, but he yelled at me and told me to fix it, because he thought it should have already been done. That changed (our relationship) quite a bit. After that, I just did *whatever* I could to get away, didn't interact. Probably even when he said something, I'd be *specifically* defiant because of that.

In these examples, respondents reported specific types of communication at the core of the interaction. Whether it was a “quiet rage” or yelling, it created a significant cognitive reaction in the son. This sub-theme is important in a few ways: (1) It seems that a father's disappointment or “quiet rage” had at least as much effect as yelling on a son's understanding of the situation, (2) participants describe profound moments in men's lives, and (3) these moments seem to have the potential to directly impact the father/son relationship going forward. The next sub-category describes a more subtle style of communicating disappointment.

*Emotional distance.*

Nineteen percent of respondents ( $n = 4$ ) reported that their fathers either made them feel guilty through a variety of communication styles or just avoided them altogether. This category emerged from men's stories about how their fathers made them feel bad after a negative event. Some talked about shame, and others said that their fathers completely avoided them. A 51-year-old man spoke of his father and said:

He was not an emotional guy. You know, when he'd get mad, what he would do, he'd pull the *disappointment* thing. When something went wrong he'd just be disappointed. It was almost like, “why don't you just get mad and me and give me a week's suspension, take my license away for a week.” But he would never hit you, it was more of a scolding, Catholic-Church- type thing. *Guilt*. That's how he would deal. There were no punishments for being late or something like that. The penalty was the *disappointment*, it was the guilt thing. That's how he would deal with those situations.

A 19-year-old man told a story with similar themes:

Always when he's mad he says stuff that makes us want to feel bad like it's like a little kid, he like says something to us that makes us feel guilty like feel sorry for. I just remember that he's always upset because the house on the island like he always wants us to come there and like whenever I say that I want to stay home he gets—he just says like “you don't care about me” or “you don't want to be with your father” and stuff like that.

On the other hand, a 22-year-old man talked about his dad's complete avoidance of him following a negative event:

I would say this was around fifth or sixth grade, maybe even seventh. But I was playing a game or whatever, and just still trying to find myself with basketball. He was always on the sidelines, and he was a yeller type of guy. Throughout the games, I'd get so frustrated, when I wasn't doing well. This one game, he was just going crazy, and it was a small gym, and there was big crowd. Everyone knew it was my father yelling and acting crazy, and everyone knew he was completely disappointed in me. My brother came up to me after the game, and I was like, “I fucking hate dad, I want to tell you right now, I hate him, and I never want to deal with him.” And my brother went back and told my dad what I said. And my dad took that *very* seriously, and didn't speak to me for a month. If he went to one of my games, he would be totally quiet, and never say a thing. And so, just not talking to me for a month, *really* showed me how disappointed he was in me. And finally one day, it actually took me going up to him, after my mom came to me crying, asking me to apologize to him. So I was like “sorry dad, whatever.” And he wrote me this long, six-page letter just explaining where he came from and how like him yelling at me is out of love and stuff like that. That was probably the *most* he ever just completely removed himself from me. It was *totally* traumatizing to me as a kid, and I think that's why we're so distant right now.

These examples demonstrate specific emotionally abusive behaviors from fathers. Recurrence is present in the entire data set, and repetition is demonstrated within specific narratives as well. Whether it was avoidance or guilt creation, the respondents illustrated very strong reactions to their fathers' behavior. Furthermore, men's forcefulness in their narratives demonstrates the notion that these were profound moments in their lives. Emotionally abusive behavior seems to communicate to the son that he is not good enough. This is likely to impact the father-son relationship in adverse ways, as the final

narrative directly confirms. If a son cannot talk to his father, especially when things are really bad, it seems likely that the son will have to go to someone else. It seems as though the resulting impact on the father-son relationship could create lasting effects. Some research even suggests that sons model their fathers' conflict patterns (Dumlao & Botta, 2000). The authors found that communication patterns between fathers and sons were linked to conflict styles that college students reportedly use (p. 174).

Additionally, Shearman and Dumlao (2008) found that a preference for obliging and avoiding conflict strategies were more likely in young adults from families that primarily used these conflict strategies (p. 205). This is important for the present study, as it identifies specific moments in the father-son relationship where a communicative behavior may be learned, and possibly passed from father to son. The next section will describe non-verbal displays of disappointment.

*Physical abuse.*

Nineteen percent of respondents ( $n = 4$ ) reported that their fathers showed their anger physically. This category emerged from men's descriptions about how their fathers reacted physically to them. Their descriptions included everything from spanking to physical abuse. For instance, a 32-year-old man said:

Oh man, I was uh 12, 13 years old, riding a bike under the underpass and my grandmother was watching. She saw me and she ratted on me. I told the guys I was with "hey it's time for me to go," so he came down the street in his truck to put my bike in the back of it, took me home and I'm saying "I'm sorry" and this and that because I knew the worst was coming—he didn't want to hear it and he beat me black and blue and to the point where he asked my mother to look at me to make sure he didn't break anything—he was probably *pretty* mad. But that's just *another* thing that I'm not going to be.

A 41-year-old man told a similar story:

I left the house one morning uh... Well we left the house and was gonna ride around my hometown—we left the house at 10:00 in the morning, didn't get back till like 12:00, 1:00 in the morning. So I went to bed and as I was laying in bed... and then it was like who is this who just pulled the covers off me, it was my dad. He had a belt cause the belt was his discipline right there...that morning I got up and my mom talked to me about it. But you know she didn't sit there and have to explain it anymore 'cause I already explained it. I did something I wasn't supposed to do, and I had the bruises to show it.

These examples detail respondents' reactions to physical abuse from their fathers.

It is interesting to note the significant difference in meaning making between the two examples. In one case, the respondent uses the example as one more way he will differentiate himself from his father in terms of parenting. In the other, the physical abuse is regarded as “punishment that fits the crime.”

Having discussed both positive and negative interaction between fathers and sons, it is also very clear that these communicative events contribute to a son's overall perception of his father. RQ1 asked specifically how men's narratives about their fathers relate to the development of their masculine identity. Responses in the form of the narratives presented in this section indicated that a man's perception of himself may be related to the ways in which he perceives his father. Additionally, stories from respondents about the ways in which their fathers interacted with women, other men, and themselves were shown to be related to son's perceptions of their father.

#### Research Questions Two and Three Results

In the previous section, a possible relationship between a man's perception of himself and his perception of his father was discussed. Furthermore, possible influences on a man's perception of his father were identified. RQ2 asked how men's narratives about their fathers' influence relate to the formation of their ideals about masculinity. In

order to address this question, participants were asked what it means to be a man. Because fatherhood is so strongly linked to men's notions of masculinity, RQ3 asked how men's narratives about their fathers' influence relates to the formation of their ideals about fatherhood. To better understand this, participants were asked a series of questions designed to elicit stories about their fathers, advice for new fathers, and predictions about the kind of fathers they would be (see Appendix C). From the participants' narratives, Masculine Ideals emerged as the overarching main theme for both RQ2 and RQ3; therefore, the sub-themes associated with both research questions are discussed in the subsequent section.

### *Masculine Ideals*

Based on a thematic analysis of men's stories about their fathers, men's perceptions of themselves and their fathers seem to be related to the ways in which they idealize masculinity. In particular, these ideals were most frequently related to ideals on manhood and fatherhood.

#### *As a Man (RQ2)*

Previous research has failed to specifically examine men's definitions of masculinity. The "As a Man" sub-theme of the Masculine Ideals theme emerged in ways that demonstrated participants' definitions of masculinity. The most commonly occurring descriptors in this sub-theme were Responsibility, Family Leader, Gender Differences, and Ideals Not Clear. Table 8 previews the most common Masculine Ideals (*As a Man*) themes, definitions, and examples.

Table 8

*Masculine Ideals, As a Man*

Theme	Description
Responsibility	The participants define masculinity as fulfilling one's responsibility. For example, "Being a man is living up to your responsibilities."
Family Leader	The participants directly related masculinity to being a leader in the family. For example, "A man is someone who should be the leader of his family."
Gender Differences	The participants equate manhood to gender characteristics. For example, "Being a man is understanding our differences from women."
Ideals Not Clear	Participants fail to identify a specific definition for masculinity. For example, "I don't think you can define masculinity that way, because there are a lot of different ways to be a man."

*Responsibility.* Fifty-seven percent of respondents ( $n = 12$ ) referred to responsibility as an important part of being a man. This took such forms as financial responsibility, family responsibility, and general responsibilities. Repetition of the word *responsibility* occurred within individual responses and across the entire data set. Men who had not been married or had children definitely spoke about responsibility in all three areas. For example, a 19-year-old single man with no children said, "Like in the future to be a man I would say that I would have a responsibility like with a family to make some money." A 23-year-old single man with no children was more general when he said:

What I would think of being a man is all about growing up, going through the high school years learning how to deal with life—real life situations, going to

school, getting an education—higher education, college and then maintaining some sort of part time job and keeping your responsibilities.

Men who had been married and/or had children demonstrated a more precise definition of responsibility. For instance, a 32-year-old divorced father of one said:

Being a man is knowing your responsibilities and taking full action with your responsibilities. You have to, I don't know, you have to definitely respect others male or female. You should respect all things of life. I think that's part of being a man too. But being a man you have own up to your responsibilities good or bad, you don't run away from your responsibilities.

For a 39-year-old married father of four, living up to one's responsibilities related to his relationship with his spouse. He said:

Being a man, to me, would me keeping responsibilities, learning to control yourself. What I mean by that is if your married, being with one women. To take care of business overall—everything. You know what's right and wrong and if you don't know you're not really, I don't know, you need to find out. That's about it. Being responsible.

These examples illustrate men's definitions of what it means to be a man. They specifically define manhood as taking care of responsibilities. It is interesting to note that in these prescriptions for manhood, interaction is again not an integral part of what it means to be a man. The next thematic category of the *As a Man* sub-theme, *Family Leader*, is similar in this regard.

*Family leader.* Many references to family were present in the "Responsibility" category, yet more specific references to leading the family emerged to form a separate "Family Leader" category. Twenty-four percent of respondents ( $n = 5$ ) spoke about being a family leader. Recurrence across the entire data set was present when men discussed how being a man was related to decision making and giving direction to both the wife and the children. For instance, a 24-year-old married father of two stated:



As an adult, a man is someone who should be a leader in his family, should be confident in his decisions. He should not necessarily be the bread winner of the family, but should be the emotional leader-give direction to your wife and children.

Meanwhile, a 48-year-old married father of three equated his leadership to earning money when he said:

Being able to be the breadwinner in the family is very important. . . being a man you have to raise a family and you're the breadwinner and you command respect, not just from your children but friends and relatives that are younger than you.

Again, in these examples, men's ideals of what it means to be a man are related to their families, but they seem to have no interaction at the basis for understanding. So, although it is clear that men relate fatherhood to being a man, these prescriptions are void of interaction. The next category of the *As a Man* sub-theme, *Gender Differences*, continues the trend.

*Gender differences.* Nineteen percent of respondents ( $n = 4$ ) referred to differences between men and women when defining masculinity. This category demonstrated differences between men and women as the defining feature of what it means to be a man. For instance, a 24-year-old married father of two said, "Outside the family, I believe a man should be masculine, should have masculine traits." This first example again demonstrates a masculine ideal void of interactional prescriptions. However, in the next example, a 41 year-old married father of five actually lists a communicative behavior that is not acceptable when he states:

I think being a man is understanding—just our differences as opposed to women. . . such as a man is not supposed to show emotions. . .because that's not manly and I think once you get in touch with that, and you're able to express that then you'll start fulfilling what a man is supposed to be.

Examples in this category followed the trend of excluding interaction as a way of understanding what it means to be a man. Even though the second example prescribes a communicative behavior when talking about masculine ideals, it only serves to state what a man should not do. Narratives in the next category of the *As a Man* sub-theme, *Ideals not Clear*, further demonstrate the lack of interaction in men's ideals of masculinity.

*Ideals not clear.* Fourteen percent of respondents ( $n = 3$ ) stated that no exact definition of masculinity existed for them. This category demonstrated recurrence in men's sharing of some confusion about or no need for a set definition of manhood. It is interesting to note that the responses that demonstrated a lack of a definition came from younger participants. For instance, a 20-year-old single man with no children illustrated his confusion when he said:

I don't really think that there is really one way that you could describe what being a man is because there's a lot of different ways that you can approach that. There's the more kinda' masculine type where he thinks that the women should be in the kitchen or stay and home and then there's the kind that views them as being equal or that sort of thing. So in that sense I really don't think that there's a set way to describe a man because there's just really to me too many variables to consider.

A 19-year-old single man with no children also demonstrated his confusion when he said:

I don't know. I guess I definitely got these opposing ideas between what I've been taught and then you always want to be careful about that because there's this stigma about the chauvinist attitude. But I definitely have to go with something like a man's gotta' be courageous and he's gotta' take care of his own, take care of his family and be responsible for basically everyone he cares about.

These examples demonstrate outright confusion about what it means to be a man. As noted earlier in the Perception of Self category discussed in relation to RQ1, men's inability to describe themselves in relation to others, or more specifically, an inability to attribute meaning via interaction, creates confusion about their self-perceptions. By the

same token, it seems that participants also experience confusion about perceptions of self and ideals about masculinity when they do not describe interaction in their responses.

RQ2 specifically asked how men's narratives of their fathers' influence related to their ideals about what it means to be a man. A number of responses mentioned, if not specifically identified, fatherhood as a major component of what it means to be a man. The next section examines in further detail ideals about fatherhood; more specifically, RQ3 is address in terms of the second sub-theme under the Masculine Ideals main theme.

#### *As a Father (RQ3)*

The *As a Father* sub-theme of the Masculine Ideals theme emerged as participants' prototypical ideas of fatherhood. The most commonly occurring descriptors in this sub-theme were Supportive/Caring, Emotional Expressiveness, Gender Equality, and Dad's Opposite. Table 9 previews the most common Masculine Ideals (*As a Father*) themes, definitions, and examples.

Table 9

*Masculine Ideals, As a Father*

Theme	Description
Supportive/Caring	The participants described fatherhood as a supportive, caring involvement. For example, “You gotta’ love your children and you have to...put your children first before yourself.”
Emotional Expressiveness	The participants described the ideal father as one who is willing to express his emotions. For example, “I still hug my adolescent son, and he hugs me back.”
Gender Equality	The participants described the ideal father as treating children of both genders fairly and equally. Additionally, some men spoke of treating their wife as an equal partner in the parenting process. For example, “I would raise my children the same way, and treat my son and daughter the same,” or “You gotta’ put your wife first, and share in all facets of parenting.”
Dad’s Opposite	The participants specifically referred to the ideal father as the direct opposite of his father. For example, “I will try to do things differently than my father.”

*Supportive/Caring.* Fifty-seven percent of respondents ( $n = 12$ ) spoke about fatherhood as taking a supportive or caring role. In this category, men gave responses that demonstrated a general desire to be supportive and caring in their fathering attributes. “Being there” for their children, offering them help, being their friend, and putting their children first were recurrent descriptions in this category. For instance, a 22-year-old single man with no children said:

I'd like to become more involved in his life, as far as what he's doing socially. Like, I never told my dad what I was doing with girls, or with my friends. I'd definitely be more like that buddy type of father. But it's hard to balance that and have a behaved child.

Similarly, a 19-year-old single man with no children stated:

I would like, in early stages, to show my children that I'm a person they could really—that I can be like serious and talk to them about anything and tell them I know that problems come up and there's serious times when children need someone to talk to. I am going to make sure that they know that I'm one of those (kinds of fathers).

A 23-year old man with no kids talked about how he wanted to be just like his dad, saying:

I like the way he always has this positive attitude to him and he's always willing to help. I like that a lot and he tells us he loves us, too. Basically (he) tells us he cares about us—there's never a doubt in my mind he's there to support us.

And a 51-year-old father of two offered this advice to new fathers:

In order to be a great father, if you are gonna' put in a ton of effort into this thing, you're gonna' get a huge reward. If you really wanna' have a great relationship (with your kids), you gotta' spend time with it, and it's gotta' be sincere and honest. . . You gotta' say that this is the most important thing I can do. I think it's a bigger deal to have children than it is to get married. I think that you can get married and if it doesn't work out, you can both go your own way, and you can both still succeed. But as a little child, they don't have anyway to succeed unless someone provides for them. So I think the most important thing is to be committed and to recognize that the effort you put in, the development that you want to work at, the sacrifices you have to make are going to produce a more independent, successful, healthier child. That's the dad's responsibility.

These examples illustrate a significant difference between ideals of manhood and ideals of fatherhood. Interestingly, men's descriptions of what it means to be a father begin to detail actual communicative behavior. From hugging to expressing love and care through talk, these narratives illustrate interaction as a part of the meaning-making process. For these respondents, showing their children affection and "being present" in

their children's lives are important parts of what it "means" to be a father. Additionally, these narratives specifically reflect the "involved father" paradigm and the principles of the Fatherhood Responsibility Movement (Gavanoas, 2002; Henwood & Proctor, 2003). It is noteworthy that over half of the respondents indicated a commitment to these ideals for fatherhood. The next category of the *As a Father* sub-theme, *Emotional Expressiveness*, is similar in this regard.

*Emotional expressiveness.* Twenty-three percent of respondents ( $n = 5$ ) referred to fatherhood as the ability to express one's self emotionally. Respondents expressed the recurring idea that to be a good father, a man must be willing to share his emotions with his children. In this case, "sharing" came in the form of both verbal and nonverbal communication. In either case, the message was love. For instance, a 19-year-old single man with no children spoke about how he wanted to express himself to his kids when he said:

I want to be like (my father) in the way that (he was) really caring and make sure that I give them all love and hug them and cuddle them and just be—I want to be a very good father.

Interestingly, men who already had children shared similar ideas about fatherhood. A 36 year-old married father of two said:

I'm soft. I basically worship my son, and I'm proud of him in all facets, and he knows it, whether it's academically, sports, or anything else. Um, don't get me wrong, I get, you know, I'll get pissed at him over this or that or the other, just like any parent will. But, you know, I think where I was brought up to be, you know, a little more hard, I'm real soft now, more tender. My son's 15, and I still go up and hug him, he hugs me and I think growing up that was a sign of not being masculine if you did that with your son. But now, doing those things with my son, there's nothing that can make me feel more like a man than doing that.

Again, in these examples, men give clear representations of what it means to be a father. Interaction through sharing of emotions is at the core of the meaning-making process for these participants. Additionally, in both examples, men referred back to their fathers as a way of explaining their own ideals of fatherhood. Furthermore, the principles of the new paradigm of fatherhood (Gavanas, 2002; Henwood & Proctor, 2003) are also expressed in this category. In the next category of the *As a Father* sub-theme, *Gender Equality*, interaction is also present in men's descriptions of what it means to be a father.

*Gender equality.* Nineteen percent of respondents ( $n = 4$ ) spoke about the equality of gender as an important aspect of fatherhood. Specifically, they spoke of treating daughters and sons equally. For instance, a 22-year-old single man with no children said:

The one thing I think I'll do differently is probably just trying to treat the women—I mean if I have a son and a daughter—try and treat them with the same respect and make sure things are the same between both of them, take both of them out and do the same things you know. . . I would raise my kids the same way and you know treat my son and daughter the same way.

Other men spoke about teaching their sons how to treat women. A 20-year-old single man with no children said:

I'd probably take (my father's) lead and follow and you know teach my son or daughter more by example than just going in and doing it for them. You know, more helping them and teaching them how to treat the opposite sex. Like, if it's a boy, you know, don't hit girls, and you don't do that sort of thing. I think those are probably the two main things I'd take from my father.

Finally, men who were fathers spoke about gender equality, such as keeping things balanced in child-rearing duties and leading by example by treating their wives equally. For instance, a 31-year-old father of two spoke of his idea of the most important thing you can do as a father:

You need to respect your wife above all things, and your wife should come before anything, even your kids, because your marriage is. . . You know, I heard that the most important thing you can ever do for your kids is to have a strong marriage, and I firmly believe that. So, that's probably the biggest thing that I try to do for my boys.

Lastly, a 24-year-old married father of two said:

A new father, especially with babies, I would say help your wife out as much as possible raising kids. It gets stressful; just know that it's a phase, it does get easier. Just love your wife all the time. Not just some of the time. Be faithful to your family and your wife.

These examples again illustrate communicative components in men's ideals about fatherhood. From treating children equally to expressing equality through interaction with one's wife, communicative behavior is present in their descriptions of ideals of fatherhood. Again men refer back to their fathers as a starting point for understanding ideals of fatherhood. Notions asserted by Johansson & Klinth (2008) about gender equality in parenting practices and fatherhood are reflected in these narratives. The final category in the *As a Father* sub-theme, *Dad's Opposite*, illustrates fewer interactional elements, but is directly related to the father-son relationship.

*Dad's opposite.* Forty-three percent of respondents ( $n = 9$ ) referred to at least one thing their father did that they would try to do exactly the opposite. For instance, a 22-year-old single man with no children said:

"I used to joke with my roommates, saying like how I'll be that asshole father where nothing is good enough. But, I'll definitely try my hardest to be just kind of different from my father and the way he pushed me. . . I'd do all the sports things as often as my dad. But, I don't think I would find my identity in that like my dad does.



This participant describes his ideals about fatherhood in direct comparison to his own father. A 19-year-old single man with no children spoke about a particular communication trait his father has that he will try not to have:

Always when he's mad he says stuff that makes us want to feel bad. It's like a little kid. I would just say what's wrong and tell them what I think about it and just have a conversation to solve it out and tell them how I feel and they tell me how they feel instead of just saying something that makes them feel bad—that makes them feel sorry for you. That's not a good thing to do.

A 32-year-old divorced father of one spoke of how he tries to be different from his father when he stated:

I don't need to beat my child to that extent. . . That's one thing and another thing is I don't drink or swear or do all that in front of my child. She don't need to hear all that or when I play music, she don't need to hear all that—she's going to hear it, I—she don't stay in a glass house or a bubble, she's going to hear it. But it won't be from me and if that ever comes up, I'll handle it accordingly, but yeah, it's what not to do (like my father) versus what to do.

Even though meaning is not as freely attributed to interaction in these examples, they still illustrate specific communicative prescriptions of what it means to be a father. “I will talk with my kids when I'm upset,” or “I won't be physically abusive” seem to exemplify ideals about fatherhood quite clearly. And most narratives in this sub-theme of *As a Father* support the notion that men learn ideals about fatherhood through interaction and experiences with their own father.

RQ2 and RQ3 specifically asked how men's narratives about their fathers' influence relates to their ideals about manhood and fatherhood. Based on the stories told by respondents, a relationship seems to exist. Furthermore, similar to the Perception of Self main theme, the Masculine Ideals theme indicates that men's ideals about what it means to be a man and what it means to be a father are clearly understood and explained

through interaction. The stories from the Masculine Ideals theme indicate that men's ideals about fatherhood are mirroring the same shift in paradigm described in the literature (Gavanas, 2002; Henwood & Proctor, 2003; Johansson & Klinth, 2008).

### Summary

This chapter discussed the relationship between men's perceptions of themselves, men's perceptions of their fathers as family man, hard worker, hero/villain, changed man, and the influences on men's perceptions of their father: interaction with others and father-son interaction. Men's masculine ideals, including ideals about manhood and fatherhood, were also identified. The remainder of this chapter provides a summary of the results.

Perception of self is often explained and easier to understand through descriptions of interaction with others. Men with unclear perceptions of self have difficulty explaining their identity in terms of interaction. Men describe the roles of father and husband to help explain their own identity, and they tended to rely on traditional, hegemonic understandings of fatherhood when using the role of fatherhood to explain their identity. Finally, men's descriptions of self are often described in comparison to their fathers (either in similarity or difference).

Some men directly identify traits and behaviors of their fathers as a way to help them make sense of their own identity. Simultaneously, men seek to differentiate themselves from their fathers. A possible dialectical tension was identified as a future research direction. Men also experience and describe interaction with others to help make sense of their identity. Specifically, men examine their self-identity in relation to their fathers' interactions with men in terms of activities. Sons witness and are often included in these masculine displays. Because of this inclusion, men may learn and

perpetuate these behaviors as a result of interaction with their fathers. Additionally, acting tough is a ritualistic masculine display that is shared and learned through father-son interaction. Finally, a father's interaction with women (his wife in particular) clearly impacts a son's perception of his father.

Father-son interactions also provided context for men's meaning making. Some of men's profound moments in the father-son relationship involved affectionate communication expressed by the father, which may be due to the irregularity of this event. For some fathers, it is easier to express pride in their sons to others than it is to express it directly to the son. Time spent together is perceived as a gift, and a son's inclusion in his father's rituals of activities is often a form of affectionate communication between father and son. Conversely, moments of negative interaction between fathers and sons have the potential to directly impact the father son relationship and are profound moments in men's lives. Furthermore, a father's expressed disappointment in his son has at least as much impact as raising one's voice on a son's understanding of the situation. Emotionally abusive behavior is likely to affect the father-son relationship adversely; however, it is still unclear whether physical abuse will do the same.

The "involved father" paradigm is demonstrated in men's ideals about fatherhood. Ideas about being "present" for children, emotional availability and expressiveness, and gender equality were dominant in characterizations of fatherhood. Lastly, sons' idealizations about fatherhood are often derived from differentiation from their father.

Chapter 4 concludes this dissertation by presenting the major findings of the study, as well as discussing in greater detail how the findings address the research questions.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### DISCUSSION, LIMITATIONS, AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

#### Discussion

This chapter discusses the major findings of the present study. Discussion includes conclusions drawn from the major themes derived from the qualitative interview data. Specifically, there are three major themes: Perception of Self, Perception of Father, and Masculine Ideals. These three major themes, along with the twenty-six sub-themes, lead to four major findings. The major findings of the present research study are as follows:

1. Some of men's most profound moments in the father-son relationship involve affectionate communication expressed by the father.
2. Moments of negative interaction between fathers and sons have the potential to impact the father-son relationship and are profound moments in men's lives.
3. Sons often make sense of their own identity, as well as their ideals about manhood, by comparing themselves to their fathers.
4. Fathers' interactions with women (especially mothers) clearly impact sons' perceptions of their fathers.

In addition to these major findings, this study also identified three secondary findings:

5. Men's perceptions of self are often explained and understood through descriptions of interaction with others and through explanations of the roles of father and husband.
6. "Acting tough" is a ritualistic masculine display that is shared and learned through father-son interaction.
7. The "involved father" style (Gavanas, 2002; Henwood & Proctor, 2003) is demonstrated in men's descriptions of ideals about fatherhood.

*Finding 1: Affectionate Communication Expressed by the Father Impacts the Son  
Profoundly*

Some of men's most profound moments in the father-son relationship, as described by participants, involved affectionate communication expressed by the father. Men talked about how their fathers cried in front of them, gave them hugs, or even told them "I love you." In men's responses about affectionate communication from their fathers, forcefulness was present, emphasizing the importance of these moments. Additionally, responses in this sub-theme took a narrative turn, demonstrating participants' construction of meaning through these narratives. Narrative descriptions of these moments indicated that the moments were marked with clarity for the participants; in other words, they stood out in the minds of the participants. Research supports the hypothesis that the clarity of these situations may be due to the infrequency and novelty of these types of events. As Morman and Floyd (1998) reported, affectionate communication is not easily given between men. Additionally, society teaches men a complex set of rules surrounding affectionate displays with other men. Perhaps affectionate communication was so vividly important to participants because it stretched

the boundaries of typical cultural displays of masculine affection. Mormon and Floyd (2005) also reported that sons seek out their fathers' affection. Again, data from the present study signified this trend, as men detailed vivid descriptions of their fathers' affection.

A noteworthy sub-finding exists involving affection between fathers and sons. In the *Affection* sub-theme, men told narratives about their fathers' pride in them. In these narratives, affection and pride were used interchangeably. When men spoke of their fathers' pride in them, the evaluation, or attribution of meaning, always returned to describing their fathers' affection. This conflation may point to the possibility that men equate their fathers' pride and approval with affection. The implications of this sub-finding may include the following: (1) fathers express affection to their sons through expressions of pride, (2) it may be easier for men to tell their sons they are proud of them than it is to express feelings of love, (3) the use of expressions of pride may supplement or completely replace expressions of affection (i.e., with a hug or in place of a hug), (4) this conflation is not directly addressed but intuitively understood by fathers and sons, and (5) sons seek out their fathers' pride in order to feel their fathers' affection. This is a provocative sub-finding that warrants further examination.

Another interesting sub-finding was that for some fathers, it is easier to express positive feelings about their sons to others than it is to express these feelings *directly* to the son. In the *Expression of Pride* sub-category (of the Perception of Father theme), participants described their fathers' boasts to others about their sons' accomplishments. It may be that men indirectly express pride in their sons in order to avoid the complex rules involving affectionate communication between men (Mormon & Floyd, 1998).

Other behaviors described by participants explained different forms of expression of affection by fathers. The gift of time spent together and the inclusion in male ritualistic activities were often viewed as forms of affectionate communication. In the *Time Together* sub-category, men described times when their fathers bonded with them through activities, such as going to the movies or “hanging out.” Furthermore, it seems that the inclusion of sons in male ritualistic behavior by fathers may constitute one way that a father communicates affection to his son. It is unclear if this inclusion is solely about affection, or if it primarily signifies a rite of passage for the son recognized by the father.

*Finding 2: Moments of Negative Interaction Between Fathers and Sons Impact the Father-Son Relationship and Are Profound Moments in Men’s Lives.*

Participants’ stories of negative interaction between fathers and sons (in the Perception of Father theme), revealed the sub-categories *Emotional Abuse*, *Emotional Distance*, and *Physical Abuse*. As in Finding 1, narratives about fathers’ negative interaction with their sons were marked by forcefulness, which served to highlight the importance of these moments in participants’ lives. These narratives were also typified by moments of clarity and sadness for the participants (evaluation). It seems as though these specific moments of negative interaction helped to shape the ways in which the participants idealize masculinity, the way they view their fathers, and their own views of fatherhood. An interesting sub-finding involving negative interaction with fathers revealed that a father’s expression of disappointment in his son had at least as much impact as yelling on a son’s understanding of the situation. In the *Emotional Abuse* sub-category, men explained how their fathers’ “quiet rage” or “disappointment” had lasting

effects on them. Sons' reactions to their fathers' disappointment may include lower self-esteem, questions about their fathers love for them, and questions about their own masculinity.

In keeping with one of the sub-findings of Finding 1, in which sons equate fathers' pride as an expression of love, it seems that a father's disappointment in his son is often attributed to mean a loss of love from his father. "I'm proud of you; therefore, I love you" and "I'm disappointed in you; therefore, I love you less" seem to be important interpretations in men's understandings of their fathers' love and affection. If this true, it is imperative that fathers understand how their communication is understood by their sons.

Furthermore, emotionally distant behavior is likely to affect the father-son relationship adversely. Stories told by participants in the *Emotional Distance* sub-category seemed to leave similarly identifiable impressions. For instance, one man said, "That was probably the most he ever just completely removed himself from me. It was totally traumatizing to me as a kid, and I think that's why we're so distant right now." In this, and in the other examples, men describe direct connections between their fathers' emotional distance and the resulting effects on the relationship between father and son, including perpetuated distance in their relationship.

This particular finding is noteworthy and deserves attention in considering the significance of and implications associated with paternal absence or withdrawal from young men's lives. Do fathers comprehend the consequences and extent of suffering their emotional withdrawal has on their sons? If so, is the alternative of emotional expression and emotional availability so taboo that fathers choose distance over being



less of a man (perhaps being too feminine)? Do emotional availability and connection somehow signify weakness? Is it more “manly” to “suck it up” and move on? From participants’ stories, it seems the ideal father is the “involved father,” (Gavanas, 2002; Henwood & Proctor, 2003) that is, the father whose identity is grounded, solid enough to allow for emotional expression and connection. Golden (2007) reported that fathers often see emotion as “work”. Participants seemed to indicate that the ideal father should put in the time and effort to complete this valuable “work”.

Interestingly, stories about physical abuse did not garner the same kind of perceived detriment to the father-son relationship. In the *Physical Abuse* sub-category, men drew very few negative conclusions about physical punishment. In fact, participants had stronger reactions to emotional distance than they did to physical abuse.

Interestingly, many men reported the abuse they received as something they *deserved*. In the instance of this study, it seems that physical punishment is perceived as *less* damaging to the father-son relationship than a father distancing himself from his son. Men’s greater acceptance of physical abuse as a form of connection over intentional withdrawal from connection by the father is striking and speaks to the generally accepted roles of fathers as enforcers of rules, instead of providers of support and care. Clearly, however, based on what participants shared, there is a deep desire for connection that competes with this notion. The concept of the “involved father” arises again.

These findings regarding negative interaction between fathers and sons relate to previous research, which reported that sons often model their fathers’ conflict patterns (Dumlao & Botta, 2000). Additionally, Shearman and Dumlao (2008) found that young adults were more likely to engage in avoidant conflict strategies (like those listed in the

*Emotionally Distant* sub-category) if these strategies were employed in their families. Unfortunately, if sons are likely to model their fathers' conflict patterns, especially avoidant strategies, potentially traumatizing effects of emotionally distant fathers may be perpetuated.

*Finding 3: Sons Often Explain Their Identity & Masculine Ideals by Comparing Themselves to Their Fathers.*

Men often described their identity in direct comparison to their fathers (either in terms of similarity or difference). In the *Comparison to Father* sub-theme (of the Perception of Self theme), one man said, "I would say that I probably inherited some of the traits he had...", and another said, "I'm the opposite of my dad." These statements are consistent with previous research. Grobler (2007) reasoned that since sons learn and create masculine identity, at least in part, through interaction with their fathers, a guiding framework for fathers should be established. Additionally, a study by Diamond (2006) noted that a son's maleness is often founded on the interplay between himself and an adult male, again echoing the results of the present study.

Further, in men's descriptions of their identity, their narratives highlight the *differences* between sons and their fathers. In the *Comparison to Father* sub-theme, although men often explained how they tried to be like their father, they also clearly identified ways in which they were markedly different from their fathers. This finding may indicate a possible dialectical tension that exists in the father-son relationship. Dialectical tensions are opposing or contradictory forces that people experience in interpersonal relationships (Baxter & Montgomery, 1997). It seems as though men often form their identities both in terms of similarity to *and* difference from their fathers.

Examining the father-son relationship through the lens of dialectical tensions might provide additional insight on how perceived similarities and differences between father and son effect sons' identity formation. Several studies have examined the effects of dialectic tension in a variety of contexts (Johnson, Wittenberg, Villagran, Mazur & Villagran, 2003; Kramer, 2004; Prentice & Kramer, 2006). Additionally, a number of studies have examined familial relationships from a dialectical perspective (Baxter, 1990; Baxter & Erbert, 1999; Baxter & Montgomery, 1996; Brown, Werner, & Altman, 1998; Conville, 1998; Erbert, 2000; Prentice, 2009).

Further supporting the suggestion of dialectical tensions in men's stories, two of the categories of the *As a Father* sub-theme (of the Masculine Ideals theme)—*Dad's Opposite* and *Emotional Expressiveness*—contain stories that illustrate men describing themselves as both different from and similar to their fathers. For example, in stories from the *Dad's Opposite* category, men described their masculine *ideals* by specifically saying how they would be different from their fathers. For instance, one man said, "I will definitely try my hardest to be different from my father." They also identified behaviors in their fathers that they want to avoid with their kids. One man said, "I don't drink or swear or do all that in front of my child (like he did)." It is interesting that in stories from this sub-theme men focus completely on being different from their fathers.

This trend is supported by previous research. Reich (2008) found that young men often reflect on perceptions of their fathers to construct images of the kind of father they want to be. Additionally, Diamond (2007) discussed the father as "fallen hero" in examining the father-son relationship, and contends that this is common in middle-to-late life for men to see their father in a new light, causing them to examine the relationships

with their own sons, and possibly being a catalyst for change in the ways in which men do fathering. Clearly, some men establish ideals about the way to perform the role of fatherhood by committing to be different from their fathers.

However, in the *Emotional Expressiveness* category, men also often identified things they'd try to do just like their fathers. For instance, one man said, "I want to be like (my father) in the way that (he was) really caring." Stories like this clearly identify attributes of their fathers that the participants of this study would like to imitate. Thus, these stories about the masculine ideals of fatherhood indicate another example of the aforementioned dialectical tension in the father-son relationship. It is easy to understand how the father-son relationship provides clear and identifiable points of reference for sons. Right or wrong, a man's father is often his most accessible example of the role of father. It stands to reason that a son would learn about fatherhood from his father. Discovering these tensions in the father-son relationship is important. If it is known that men often form their identity and their ideals about the masculine role of fatherhood through comparisons to their fathers, and that men are able identify the positive traits and attempt to differentiate from the negative traits of their fathers, examining the ways in which fathers communicate with their sons becomes an essential endeavor.

*Finding 4: Fathers' Interactions With Women (Especially Mothers) Impacts a Son's Perception of His Father.*

Participants consistently told stories about their fathers' interactions with women (in the Perception of Father theme). These narratives were organized into sub-categories of *Flirting*, *Infidelity/Promiscuity*, and *Dominance/Subservience*. These categories are consistent with existing literature from the feminist approach. One study by Hannagan

(2008) expands upon existing feminist literature by addressing relations between men and women in an evolutionary framework. Postulating that men and women have often behaved in ways that promote survival and reproductive success, the author outlines the resulting power interactions that arise from conflicting reproductive strategies (p. 470). In the present study, *Flirting* and *Infidelity/Promiscuity* relate to the ways in which men seek out sex or sexual attention from women, and the category of *Dominance/Subservience* specifically relates to the power differential in these relationships. Although flirting was generally viewed in a positive light by participants, men looked less favorably upon fathers who were unfaithful or in unbalanced power relationships with their mother.

Additionally, men's stories about their ideals of manhood reveal implications toward the principles of feminist thought. Three sub-categories of masculine ideals were *Responsibility*, *Family Leader*, *Gender Differences*, and *Ideals Not Clear*, and these categories were typified by responses that fall under much of the criticisms offered by feminist theory. The responses fell directly in line with feminist assumptions that (1) the relationship between men and women is almost always unequal and oppressive, (2) patriarchy is present in almost every society, and (3) family units are often characterized by male dominance (Robeyns, 2007).

In men's descriptions of *Responsibility*, narratives heavily favored notions that the man should be "responsible" for completing tasks such as providing financially for the family. No descriptions in this sub-category spoke about gender equality in terms of responsibility. This finding is interesting especially since dual income families are more the norm than they are the exception in this day and age. Furthermore, *Family Leader*

narratives clearly described a patriarchal view of families, and descriptions of *Gender Differences* serve to demonstrate men's views of inequality. The majority of participants contributed narratives that demonstrated these surprising views of inequality. It is possible to theorize that when men explain their ideals about masculinity, they tend to rely heavily on traditional points of view. Research supports this notion. Reich (2008) found that men saw fatherhood as "head of the household". Mormon and Floyd (2006) found that men listed "provider" as a main quality for being a good father.

A fourth sub-category, *Ideals Not Clear*, consisted of the smallest percentage of responses and was solely comprised of responses from younger participants. Responses in this category included refusal to identify particular traits/characteristics that represent what it means to "be a man." This may be related to a trend of awareness involving the principles of feminist thought. One study (Houvouras & Carter, 2008) noted that the majority of college students express and see the value in feminist ideologies; however, very few openly self-identify as feminists (p. 240). One could reason that younger men are at least exposed to notions of gender equality and the discourse of power, even if they do not directly associate with feminist ideology. Furthermore, although these specific narratives do not directly suggest that young men identify and accept the principles of feminism, the ambiguity of their responses may suggest possible divergences from ideals that condone inequality and male dominance.

*Finding 5: Interaction and Masculine Roles are Important to Perception of Self*

The first secondary finding of the present study is that participants defined their perceptions of themselves in terms of interaction with their fathers and others, as well as through explanations of masculine roles. In the *Family Man* sub-theme (of the

Perception of Self theme), men explained who they were based on their relationships and interactions with their wives, their children, and even their friends. For instance, statements like, “I have a great relationship with my wife” and “I have gone out of my way to make sure that I’ve been there for my children and my wife” were given in response to questions about their identity. Findings such as these are consistent with the social constructivist perspective (Berger & Luckman, 1966), which suggests that identity is formed through interaction with others. Narratives such as those described in the *Family Man* sub-theme further support the social constructivist perspective and the finding that men’s interactions influence how they perceive themselves.

Furthermore, as seen in the examples in the previous paragraph, men describe the masculine roles of father and husband as a foundation for explaining their own identity. Again, the principles of social construction are present. Meaning is embedded within the socially constructed roles one plays (Berger & Luckman, 1966). The narratives support this notion by highlighting how men’s identities are often connected to their roles as father and husband. In the *Still Developing* sub-theme (of the Perception of Self theme), a few men reflected on how anticipation of future roles would impact their identity. For instance, one man said, “I guess I really won’t know (what kind of man I am) until I have a wife and kids some day.” It appears as though the role of fatherhood, or the anticipated role of father, directly impacts a man’s perception of self. Ladd (2000) reported that a man’s self concept and self-esteem are also frequently related to his perception of himself as a father (p. 5).

This leads to an interesting sub-finding. Participants tended to describe traditional, hegemonic styles of fatherhood when using the role of fatherhood to explain

their identity. Conversely, recent research has outlined and described societal changes in conceptions of fatherhood (Gavanas, 2002; Golden, 2007; Henwood & Proctor, 2003). The “involved father” paradigm suggests a shift in prescriptions of the role of fatherhood from traditional understandings of “provider” and “family leader” to new conceptions that involve emotional availability to wife and children. Interestingly, when men in the present study used the roles of husband and father to explain who they are, traditional understandings were reported. For instance, one man said, “I believe my wife highly respects me. I am the decision maker.” This sub-finding runs counter to the trends identified by the research (Gavanas, 2002; Golden, 2007; Henwood & Proctor, 2003), which pointed to changes in men’s ideals about fatherhood.

*Finding 6: “Acting Tough” Is Often Demonstrated by and Learned From Fathers.*

Men often described their fathers’ behavior as “acting tough” when telling stories about how their fathers interacted with other men. These behaviors included cussing, physical play, and male rituals. In the *Acting Tough* category (of the Perception of Father theme), one man said his father “acted a little bit more tough” when he was around other guys from work. Another man told a story of his father challenging his friends to physical competitions. Cussing and “peeing contests” were also described to further illustrate the ritual of acting tough. Sons not only witnessed this behavior, but also were often included.

Pittman (1993) wrote specifically about the type of behavior described by one of the participants, when he said, “We practice pissing off the porch, rolling in the mud, whatever we can think of that boys do and girls don’t” (p. 105). Similarly, Gough and Edwards (1998) described “beer drinking” and “tough talk” as behaviors associated with



men's interactions with other men (p. 410). The authors went on to say that these communicative behaviors might be a way of repressing "feminine" tendencies like expressing emotion and intimacy.

It is possible that men perform these ritualistic behaviors in order to differentiate from women and feminine tendencies. However, it seems more likely that men "act tough" because they witness other men, namely their fathers, behaving this way. Sons learn from their fathers that men cuss or compete or roughhouse as a way of interacting with other men. What does this behavior mean? It is clear that these behaviors have implications of power. Men often seek to control other men (Pittman, 1993). When men cuss at or compete with other men, they are attempting to establish dominance. What are the implications of this need for dominance? It is evident that this need has the potential to adversely affect relationships, particularly close personal relationships.

If sons are witnessing this behavior, one possible consequence may be the perpetuation of men defining themselves through dominance, or lack thereof. Men should be challenged to find more emotionally developed ways of defining themselves through interactions with other men. These developed ways of comparing themselves to other men could focus on the evolution of masculinity, as opposed to a drive to dominate and suppress. As Toerien and Durrheim (2001) contend, moving from the "macho" to the "real" might offer resolution to the crisis of manhood in a way that serves to support feminist ideals of change (p. 19).

*Finding 7: The “Involved Father” Style is Found in Men’s Idealistic Descriptions of Fatherhood.*

Johansson and Klinth (2008) noted that the ideals of fatherhood are changing. This was evident in participants narratives. The “involved father” style was demonstrated in men’s *ideals* about fatherhood. In the sub-categories of *Supportive/Caring, Emotional Expressiveness, and Gender Equality* (of the Masculine Ideals theme), ideas about being “present” for children, emotional availability and expressiveness, and gender equality were dominant. For instance, one man said, “I still hug my son, and he hugs me back,” demonstrating a clear willingness to affectionately communicate. Another man demonstrated emotional availability for his children when he said, “I will always try to be there for my children.” Finally, men demonstrated their notions of gender equality in raising children both by understanding and attending to the different needs of sons and daughters, and by actively and equally participating in the childrearing activities. As a whole, 90% of participants ( $n = 19$ ) spoke of fatherhood in a way that reflects the “involved father” style. This is particularly noteworthy, as it demonstrates a clear decision to possibly deviate from the traditional, more “acceptable” styles of fathering.

Research outlining a shift in the way men perform the role of father (Gavanoas, 2002; Henwood & Proctor, 2003; Mormon & Floyd, 2006; Johansson & Klinth, 2008) directly relates to the examples of ideals and behaviors listed by participants. It is still unclear why these characterizations are dominant in men’s *ideals* about fatherhood, when traditional characterizations of fatherhood were dominant when men spoke about the role of fatherhood to explain their *identity*. Perhaps in the light of being more available, more

involved, and more caring, men feel the need to reinforce their *identity* as provider, rule maker, head of the house, etc. In a way, they may be saying, “I can care. I can love. I can be available. And, I can still be the man of the house.” Advocating a more involved fathering style may require assurance that men and fathers can hold onto their masculinity and preserve their manhood, while still providing affection and care for their families.

### Summary

The present study attempted to use open-ended interview processes, story-telling, and thematic analysis to examine stories about father-son interaction as a way of understanding how men constitute masculinity. How a man views his relationship with his father may provide a new way of understanding how and why men form their masculine ideals, both as a man and as a father.

Specifically, this study found that (1) some of men’s most profound moments in the father-son relationship involve affectionate communication expressed by the father, (2) moments of negative interaction between fathers and sons have the potential to impact the father-son relationship and are profound moments in men’s lives, (3) sons often make sense of their own identity, as well as their ideals about manhood, by comparing themselves to their fathers, (4) fathers’ interactions with women (especially mothers) clearly impact sons’ perceptions of their fathers, (5) men’s perceptions of self are often explained and understood through descriptions of interaction with others and through explanations of the roles of father and husband, (6) “acting tough” is a ritualistic masculine display that is shared and learned through father-son interaction, and (7) the “involved father” style is demonstrated in men’s descriptions of ideals about fatherhood.

These findings contribute to the existing field of study concerning men's studies, father-son relationships, and the social construction of gender. Continued research on this topic will serve to better our understandings of masculinity and potentially improve the lives of men and the people in their lives.

### Limitations

Limitations in this research project need to be discussed. First, the size of the sample limits the generalizations of this study. A larger sample would assuredly provide an opportunity for more and different stories about men's recollections of interactions with their fathers. Even though data saturation was achieved, additional stories from men might further illustrate the themes and sub-themes that emerged in this study. Second, this study would have benefited from the perspective of older men. The oldest participant in this study was 51, and the mean age of participants was 29.8. As detailed in Chapter 2, no participants joined the study from either of the three retirement centers where recruiting flyers were placed. Although the stories and information received from participants were enlightening and interesting, the overall understanding of the process would have been expanded by another generation's perspective. Furthermore, including men from older generations would have created room for understanding how the role of "grandfather" impacts the social construction of masculinity. Perhaps the fact that no men from this generation volunteered for this study suggests something about a difference in later-life men's willingness to discuss topics of a personal nature. If so, this, too, could provide another avenue of future research.

Lastly, another possible limitation is the bias in the sample due to high levels of education. Nearly all those participating listed their education level to be "some college"

or more, and nearly all participants were recruited in a college setting. Therefore, participants for this study would be classified as “above average” for education level. Hence, it is more likely that participants in this study had been exposed to concepts of gender formation and discussions of fatherhood.

### Strengths

The strength of this research is its ability to add to the study of father-son interaction and male gender identity. Examining men’s recollections of interaction with their fathers, and examining how this interaction affects a man’s ideas of masculinity, affords better understanding about one possible influence on men’s masculine ideals. Specifically, this study supports the social construction of masculinity, which occurs via father-son interaction. Furthermore, this study identified the importance of how a man views his relationship with his father (in relation to how he views himself), how he views women, and his ideals about being a man and playing the role of father. By utilizing an open-ended interview process, this study succeeded in garnering in-depth storytelling from men. The strength of this study lies heavily in the participants’ stories.

It is the hope that this study can benefit scholars seeking to examine gender and masculinity, fatherhood, and communication between fathers and sons. Since fathers play some role in the ways in which sons come to understand masculinity, teaching men about effective and loving fatherhood becomes paramount. The ideals of the “involved father” paradigm (Henwood & Proctor, 2003), as described in the Fatherhood Responsibility Movement (Gavanas, 2000) are a step in the right direction. However, further research needs to explore the effect that these ideals have on the father-child relationship and the overall well-being of children.

## Future Research

The data and conclusions drawn from the present study provide several directions for future research. The first major finding indicated that some of men's most profound moments in the father-son relationship involve affectionate communication expressed by the father. Various forms of affection were also described. Additional research involving fathers' inclusion of sons in ritualistic behavior is also needed. Further research could determine if this inclusion is intended to be affectionate in nature or if it serves as recognition by a father of his son's movement toward manhood.

The second major finding revealed negative interaction between fathers and sons to be profound in men's lives. Negative interaction took different forms in men's descriptions. Future research needs to examine the differences in the relational impact of emotional and physical abuse perpetuated by fathers on sons. This study was not able to identify the conflict behaviors of the sons, nor was it able to identify whether conflict behaviors of sons are affected by the father's conflict strategies, as suggested by the research. Additional research specifically examining conflict tactics between fathers and sons would further explicate understanding of this phenomenon.

The third major finding indicated that men often make sense of their own identity, as well as form ideals about manhood by comparing themselves to their fathers. Future research needs to determine specific qualities of the father-son relationship that may lead to sons' idealizations in this manner. Furthermore, research that specifically compares the ideals of men with children to the ideals of men without children could illuminate the overall impact that becoming a father has on men's perceptions of masculinity and

fatherhood. Research should also examine how the role of fatherhood affects men's interaction with others.

The fourth major finding indicated that fathers' interactions with women greatly impact sons' perceptions of their fathers. Further research is needed to examine how unbalanced power relationships are perceived in the family context. Studying the ways in which men learn these behaviors from their fathers in further detail might help provide an understanding of how these behaviors are perpetuated within the context of the family unit. Research also needs to examine men's interaction with women to understand men's acceptance and implementation of feminist ideology. Additionally, future research should investigate fathers' influence on sons' interaction with women.

One secondary finding indicated that men often explain their sense of self through descriptions of interaction with others and through the roles of father and husband. The creation of a survey instrument that measures men's identity when compared to interaction and masculine roles could determine the overall significance in these possible relationships. The second finding also dealt with men's identity, and indicated that men identify communicative actions of their fathers as a way of making sense of their own identity while simultaneously attempting to differentiate from their fathers. Future research could seek to discover and describe more of the possible dialectical tensions that may exist in the father-son relationship. Furthermore, studying the father-son relationship solely through a dialectical approach would help to further expand on the ways in which men form ideals about masculinity and fatherhood based on their relationships with their fathers. Based another secondary finding, more research is

needed to examine how ritualistic displays of masculinity, like “acting tough,” are passed from father to son, and how these displays impact the formation of masculine ideals.

The final secondary finding revealed men’s identification with the “involved father” style of parenting. More research is needed to identify global perceptions of men regarding the ideals of the “involved father” shift. Research exploring variables in the father-son relationship that contribute to the formation of ideals about fatherhood would expand this understanding. Specifically, additional research is needed to (1) determine men’s true understandings of fatherhood, (2) account for the gap in men’s *ideals* and *identity* in relation to the role of fatherhood, and (3) understand the impact the father-son relationship plays in men’s understandings of fatherhood.

Generally speaking, although quantitative research is certainly needed to broaden the study’s horizon, similar qualitative research could identify and illustrate other influences on men’s perceptions of masculinity. For instance, interviewing fathers about their interactions with their sons could examine intentional strategies employed by men in child-rearing, as well as unintentional effects of these strategies. Also, joint storytelling from the father-son dyad would provide an interesting look at the process of fatherhood, as well as the social construction of masculinity. For that matter, multi-generational examinations would help identify changes in masculine ideals over long periods of time within the same family context.

Future research would also benefit from the added perspectives of partners and wives. Understanding how women view the masculinity of the men in their lives might provide an understanding of the impact of these relationships on men’s understandings of masculinity. All avenues of potential influence on men’s perceptions of masculinity need



to be sought out. Possibilities for such avenues include but are not limited to mother-son interaction, sibling interaction, peer-to-peer interaction, role model influence, and the media's influence. Additionally, to further understand all avenues of this topic, participation from all groups of men should be encouraged. Finally, research would certainly benefit from participation of men from all ethnic, religious, and socioeconomic groups, as well as from men of all sexual orientations.

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## **Attention!**

**If you are a male, over the age of 18. . .**

**You're invited to participate in an important study about masculinity.**

**You can help us to better understand masculinity, as it pertains to the lives of everyday men.**

**If you are interested in participating in this important study, please contact:**

**C. J. Remmo**  
**Dept. of Human Communication Studies**  
**303-863-8378**  
[cremmo@du.edu](mailto:cremmo@du.edu)

APPENDIX B: DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE

Age: \_\_\_\_\_

What is your *ethnic background* (please check all that apply)?

\_\_\_\_ African American      \_\_\_\_ Hispanic      \_\_\_\_ Asian  
\_\_\_\_ American Indian      \_\_\_\_ Caucasian      \_\_\_\_ Other \_\_\_\_\_

*Marital Status*

\_\_\_\_ Single      \_\_\_\_ Married      \_\_\_\_ Divorced      \_\_\_\_ Widowed

Length of *Marriage* \_\_\_\_\_

Do you have any *children*?    Yes    No

How many *children* do you have? \_\_\_\_\_

Please list all your children according to age and gender. (A number indicates the age, while M=male and F=female).

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Are you a *grandfather*? \_\_\_\_\_ Yes      \_\_\_\_\_ No

If yes, how long have you been a grandfather? \_\_\_\_\_

What is your *education level*? (Please checked highest level completed)

\_\_\_\_ some high school      \_\_\_\_ high school graduate      \_\_\_\_ technical training  
\_\_\_\_ some college      \_\_\_\_ college graduate      \_\_\_\_ post college

## APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Directions: Respondents will be asked a series of questions designed to elicit their stories of interaction with their fathers. This interview will be extremely open-ended. As such, the interviews will be tape-recorded upon approval of the respondent. Of course, respondents can stop at any time, or choose to skip a question at any time.

### **Introduction**

First of all, I want to thank you for agreeing to take part in this interview. I will be asking a series of question about interaction with your father. The questions are designed to get stories or narratives from you, so please feel free to expand upon your original answers. Response will be completely confidential, and you may choose to skip a question or stop at any time. Okay, we're about to start, but first, do you have any questions for me? Well, let's begin.

### **Interview Questions**

1. How would you describe what being a man is all about?
2. Who or what would you say has had the biggest influence on your ideas of what it means to be a man?
3. Tell me about your relationship with your father when you were growing up.  
What kinds of things did you two like to do together?  
Did you spend a lot of time together (just you and him)?  
How would you describe your father in terms of fathering ability?
4. Tell me about your relationship with your father now?  
Is it similar to how it was when you were growing up?  
How has it changed?  
What things would you change about your relationship with your father now?
5. Tell me about a time when your father was most proud of you.  
What did you do?  
Why was he proud?  
How did he express his pride in you?  
How did that event affect your relationship with your father?  
How did that event affect your behavior after that?
6. Tell me about an instance when your father was really mad at you.  
What did you do?  
How did your father react?  
How did that affect your relationship with your father?  
How did that affect your behavior?

7. Did you and your dad ever talk about what it means to be a man?  
Describe those conversations for me.  
What were some of the main things that you covered in those conversations?

**If he has children...**

8. When you first found out you were going to be a father, how did that change the way you thought of yourself?
9. How has becoming a father changed your views of masculinity?
10. Tell me about something you learned from your father about being a father.
11. How has fatherhood changed your thinking about your father?
12. How has being a father affected your relationship with your father?

**If he has grandchildren. . .**

13. Describe the time when you found out you were going to be a grandfather?
14. What have you learned about being a grandfather?
15. How has being a grandfather affected your relationship with your son?
16. What advice have you given to your son/son-in-law about being a father?
17. How has becoming a grandfather changed the way you think of yourself as a man.